Topic Paper 4: Design

Summary

Introduction

Planning policies should aim to create well-designed, vibrant places which function well, helping Knowsley's communities and businesses to thrive.

Context

High-quality design plays an important role in creating successful places, supporting healthy communities, adapting to climate change, protecting local character and helping to deliver sustainable growth. Good design is about more than the appearance of buildings. It influences how places function, how people move around, how safe and accessible an area feels, and how development responds to local history, landscape and environmental conditions.

Knowsley has a distinctive built and natural environment shaped by its landforms geology and waterways, and the towns, villages, industries, greenspaces, agricultural land and heritage assets found within the landscape. The built-up areas are heavily defined by suburban expansion and overspill from Liverpool, which were mostly constructed between the 1920s and 1970s. The borough also includes pockets of historic development, Prescot having a mediaeval layout and other towns also retaining a historic core. Farmsteads and cottages across the rural areas are often historic, with vernacular materials and details. Future development will need to respond positively to these varied characteristics, reinforcing local identity and heritage while supporting regeneration, investment and growth.

Many parts of the borough have benefited from significant regeneration and investment over recent decades. New housing, employment development, public realm improvements and town centre renewal have helped improve the quality of places across Knowsley. However, there remain opportunities to strengthen local character, improve the quality of the built and historic environment, create attractive public spaces, enhance biodiversity, and ensure development contributes positively to community wellbeing.

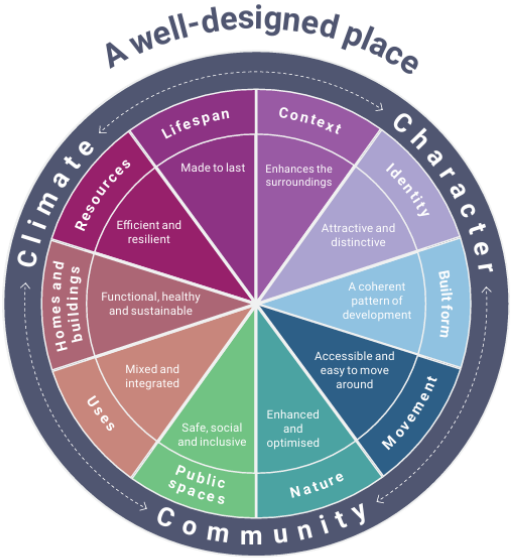
As Knowsley continues to grow and evolve, design will be central to delivering the Council's ambitions for sustainable development, inclusive growth and climate resilience. New development should create attractive, safe and accessible places, make efficient use of land, promote active travel, respond to local context and contribute to the creation of healthy, thriving communities.

Key policies, plans and strategies

The National Planning Policy Framework states that strategic policies should set out a clear strategy and vision for the pattern scale and design quality of places, whereas non-strategic policies should consist of more detailed guidance and focus on specific neighbourhoods or development types. The framework also discusses the role of design in promoting sustainable transport and lowering emissions through sustainable design. Furthermore, the Framework suggests that local authorities should prepare design codes to reflect local character and preferences. These can be prepared at a variety of scales, from borough-wide to site-specific, providing an important framework for well-designed places which respond to community preferences.

National Planning Practice Guidance on 'Design: process and tools' emphasises the need for development that does not adhere to the required design standards to be refused. The guidance also reinforces the role of planning policies in establishing design expectations and identifying the processes required to reach good design outcomes, highlighting the importance of Design Guides and Design Codes, while encouraging the use of strategic policies and other means to guide building design.

The National Design Guide (2021) supports the creation of high-quality buildings and places. The guidance sets out ten characteristics of a well-designed place that contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The National Model Design Code (2021) and the associated Guidance Notes provide a roadmap for the creation of design codes.



The ten characteristics of well-designed places

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy is being prepared, and it is likely to have policy on high-quality design to deliver well

designed and high-quality buildings and places that are attractive, inclusive, healthy, safe and environmentally sustainable.

Key issues to be addressed by the Local Plan

- An evaluation of Knowsley's existing characteristics and potential should be undertaken. This, together with community and stakeholder engagement should inform the strategy for design in Knowsley.
- Design policy should ensure new development respects local character and distinctiveness, for example through the use of vernacular materials and architectural features.
- The Local Plan should set out what design standards should apply to certain types of development, and consideration needs to be given to what tools should be used to convey these standards (e.g. design codes, design guides, masterplans)
- Any design codes or design guidance should support high-quality new development across the borough, with clear design requirements which are specific to the particular places within Knowsley. These should be prepared in line with the National Design Guide, National Model Design Code and Guidance Notes.
- The NPPF policy DP3 highlights 7 principles which should be considered when assessing planning proposals. Similarly, the National Design Guide gives 10 characteristics of a well-designed place. The Local Plan could seek to clarify what these mean in a local context for different places across Knowsley.
- Consideration should be given to what existing design tools should be used, and in what circumstances (e.g. Design Review, Building for a healthy Life, Nationally Described Space Standard etc.)
- Design policies could be used to require certain features to be included within certain categories of new development to mitigate the impact of climate change and/or support biodiversity.
- In new development, infrastructure improvements for walking, cycling and public transport should be prioritised, ensuring a choice of safe and convenient transport connections are available, including to local services and greenspaces. This is particularly important in the parts of Knowsley which are currently not well-served.
- National guidance encourages densification of certain types of areas, where appropriate. The local plan should identify if this would be appropriate in any parts of Knowsley. If so, appropriate design policies or guidance would need to be put into place to manage changes.
- Crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour are important issues in Knowsley. Policies about the design, location and layout of new development can help to address these issues.