

GUIDE FOR DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENTS (August 2006)



West Somerset Council is committed to improving the standard of design of new development within the District. The production of a **Design & Access Statement** as part of a planning application will help those involved in the design process to address the issues set out in the design policies contained within the West Somerset District Local Plan and the Somerset & Exmoor Joint Structure Plan Review.

What are Design & Access Statements?

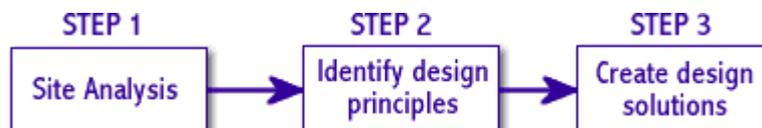
The Government has advised all local planning authorities that an Design & Access Statement should be submitted with planning applications; see Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPS1). The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Para 43 has made it a statutory requirement that an Access & Design Statement is submitted with every planning application. To further emphasise their importance the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) (England) Order 2006 The Planning (Applications for Planning Permission, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006 issued in April 2006 will make it a statutory requirement that all applications other than householder applications should not be registered unless they are accompanied by a Design & Access Statement. This new requirement was introduced on 10 August 2006.

A Design & Access Statement should include a site analysis; it will set out the design principles, produce design solutions and show how they respond to the context of the site. The format and level of detail required will depend on the scale and likely impact of the development proposed. There is a separate guide for Design & Access Statements for Householder Applications.

A good Statement will enable the local planning authority, consultees, neighbours and the general public to quickly understand the reasoning for a development and its design and help in early identification of any matters requiring clarification. Good quality Statements will also assist the Authority in making quicker decisions.

How to produce a Design & Access Statement

There are three essential steps to the production of a Design Statement and these are:



Good practice Assess site/area ----> identify design principles ----> select design solution

Bad practice Decide scheme ----> assess site and area ----> try to justify scheme

This guidance demonstrates what good practice means.

Design & Access Statement - A Checklist for Non-Householder Applications

This section provides a Design Statement checklist to run through to check you have followed the correct steps in drawing up your Design Statement.

Step 1. Site Analysis

Statements should begin with an analysis of the character of the area in which the development is proposed, and of the site itself, including any existing buildings to be retained. This section will, therefore, include an assessment of the following matters that will establish both the immediate and broader context into which the development is being introduced.

- Prevailing architectural character and development pattern of the area; important views and vistas
- Nature and character of adjoining buildings and spaces
- Slope and levels of the site which might affect visibility and overlooking
- Height, mass and orientation in relation to the sun of existing buildings
- Assessment of existing trees and other features worthy of retention including canopy spread
- Assessment of wildlife habitats
- Assessment of watercourses
- Buildings worthy of retention and existing heritage features
- Important views both of the site and from within the site
- North point and prevailing wind directions
- Scale of existing and adjoining buildings including block sizes, frontage widths
- Access points – including access for the disabled
- Spacing between buildings
- Boundary treatment e.g. walls, hedges, fences etc
- Roof forms
- Building and surfacing materials
- Specific building detail e.g. window style, dimension
- Plot sizes
- Building density
- Land uses
- Nodal/focal points

This is work that the designer should in any event be expected to carry out to translate the client's brief into a feasible development project. The client's brief should also be included in the Design Statement in order to demonstrate how the designer has interpreted the client's brief.

Step 2. The Design Approach

The Statement should outline the objectives and features of the development itself in terms of both the client's requirements and how the character of the area and other factors have been taken into account or safeguarded. This includes those factors identified from the site appraisal as opportunities/constraints.

The design principles will stem from a mixture of sources. The applicant's development objectives and market forces will need to be considered against the policy context and site analysis. This section should be seen as a way of structuring and informing the design process and may include some or all of the following:

- The national, strategic and local policy background including any constraints or designation in the Local Plan
- Development objectives, e.g. accommodation requirements, minimum floorspace/number of units
- The constraints and opportunities of the site, which will have been identified in the site analysis
- Impact on neighbours e.g. loss of light, overlooking, noise etc
- Public and private space
- Impact on travel patterns
- Position/siting of the development and associated facilities e.g. car parking
- Layout, density, and site coverage
- Trees/landscape features to retain and opportunities to improve/supplement
- Vehicular and pedestrian access, including opportunities to improve
- Scale, height, shape/proportions and massing of the building or extension
- Materials to be used, including details of finishes and colour
- The needs of those with disabilities, including access to the building and within it
- Sustainability, energy efficiency and energy conservation, including orientation to the sun for potential solar gain
- Access to public transport, footpaths and cycleway
- Opportunities to strengthen any existing green paths/soft edges which may be characteristic of the area
- Buildings and heritage features to retain and enhance
- Mass/scale of buildings
- Any nodal/focal points?
- Important views of the site and from within the site
- Landscape and townscape design opportunities e.g. enclosing a space or opening up a view
- Softening the visual impact of engineering requirements e.g. roads, servicing, car parking
- Development plan policy requirements
- Sustainability - energy efficiency, access to public transport, footpaths and cycleways
- Developer requirements
- Other relevant planning/design guidance

NB The site analysis (Step 1) will have revealed whether the site lies within a conservation area or affects the setting of a listed building. In such locations there is a need to demonstrate that the proposals will either preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area and will not adversely affect the setting of a listed building.

Step 3. The Proposed Design Solution

The design solution should reflect the findings of steps 1 and 2.

The Statement should provide an objective assessment of any impacts of the development on the character of the area including the way in which it has been taken into account in the design. This will include how adverse impacts on adjoining properties have been avoided and how the development has contributed to improving the character of the wider area. For example: Does the Statement include a summary of the site appraisal findings? Have you clearly identified the design principles using sketches and annotated plans? Have you clearly presented how your design solution fits the design principles identified in steps 1 and 2?

Content of the Design & Access Statement

A Statement is not a justification for a pre-determined design solution. Applicants are encouraged to discuss their preferred design solution after having prepared the Design Statement but before submitting the formal application.

The size and complexity of the Design Statement will reflect the size and nature of the site and the type and scale of development proposed. As well as including a written statement it may be illustrated by explanatory plans and elevations (these should extend some way beyond the site boundaries in order to show the relationship of the proposal to its surroundings); photographs of the site and its surroundings, and perspective drawings and annotated sketches.

If the site is particularly complex then it may be helpful (for your client's benefit as well as for the Local Planning Authority) to produce three-dimensional drawings (e.g. computer modelling) or an architectural model.

Where Can I Get Further Information?

By telephoning West Somerset Council Customer Services on 01643 703704 or via the Council's website www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk

OTHER USEFUL READING

"By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice" (DETR - May 2000)
Better Places to Live by Design" (DETR/CABE - Sep 2001)

The above two documents are both available on www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/advice

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENTS - HOUSEHOLDER APPLICATIONS

Introduction

The majority of all applications to this Local Planning Authority are householder applications.

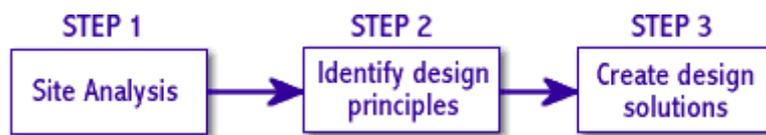
The Government's guidance produced in Planning Policy Statement No 1 Delivering Sustainable Development (Annexe A) states that 'applicants for planning permission should, as a minimum, provide a short written statement setting out the design principles adopted as well as illustrative material in plan and elevation'.

The Government has indicated that for straightforward or small scale proposals illustrative materials might simply comprise photographs of the development site and its surroundings, drawings of the proposed design itself and where appropriate plans of the proposal in relation to neighbouring development and uses.

Producing a Design Statement may appear to involve additional work and cost. However it will assist the Local Planning Authority to more speedily determine the application. Furthermore, the philosophy behind the design will in the majority of cases already have been resolved during the early stages of preparing the scheme.

There are good and bad methods to produce a Design Statement:

There are three essential steps to the production of a Design Statement and these are:



Good practice Assess site/area ----> identify design principles ----> select design solution.

Bad practice Decide scheme ----> Assess site and area ----> try to justify scheme.

This guidance demonstrates what good practice means. The work involves:

Step 1

Looking at the site and surroundings to identify those physical factors that make the site and local area distinctive e.g. the design of the existing and adjoining properties. The scale and layout of existing buildings and the spaces between buildings, the definition of boundaries - trees, hedges, walls, fences etc, the size, roof form, architectural style and materials of the existing building to be extended. Identifying these factors will influence the design of the extension.

Step 2

This will include some external physical factors of the site and surroundings as well as other factors such as the Local Plan policies and any Supplementary Planning Guidance. This list is the set of design principles. The application will be assessed against the policies of the Development and Local Plan. The most relevant policies are STR1 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and BD/3 of the West Somerset District Local Plan. The Local Planning Authority has adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance the 'Design Guidance for House Extensions'. The advice contained in the guidance note will be a significant material consideration in determining all planning applications for house extensions.

Step 3

Where the proposed development would be viewed from the street, a street elevation drawing should be submitted to include the adjacent buildings drawn to scale.

In other cases, plan and elevation drawings would be sufficient illustrative material to demonstrate the design principles in these instances.

Photographs of the site from various viewpoints can also be useful to demonstrate your design principles.

Finally, the Design Statement should explain how the proposed design fulfils the design principles that have been identified and to how it accords with the planning polices.

To summarise, a householder Design Statement should include:

- i. A brief written statement clearly identifying the factors that have led to the proposed design solution.
- ii. Plans and elevations of the proposal including details of adjoining buildings, spacing between buildings and a streetscene elevation where appropriate.
- iii. Photographs, where appropriate to illustrate the site and its surroundings.

Where Can I Get Further Information?

Further information and copies of the 'Design Guidance for House Extensions' are available on request from Customer Services on 01643 703704 or from the Council website www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk

OTHER USEFUL READING

"By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice" (DETR - May 2000)
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