

GUIDANCE FOR DESIGN STATEMENTS FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The design statement should cover both the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed development and how issues relating to the design of the development have been dealt with and resolved.

The Design Statement

The Welsh Assembly Government and the Design Commission for Wales have issued advice on the process of producing a statement and what considerations are necessary (this can be downloaded from www.dcfw.org) The design element of the statement should explain how the proposal is appropriate in its **context** and how design principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal – these are the **use, amount, layout, scale, landscaping** and **appearance** of the development.

There is no set format for the design component. However, the most useful statements are likely to include written elements together with sketches, drawings and photographs. They will not only explain the submitted proposal, but tell the story of how particular solutions have been arrived at, this can even include rejected ideas and sketches which can be useful to justify selected options

The Process

A design and access statement must demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the **context** of the proposed development. It is important that an applicant should understand the context in which their proposal will sit, and use this understanding to draw up the application. To gain a good understanding of context and to use it appropriately applicants should follow a design process which includes:

- **Assessment** of the site's immediate and wider context in terms of physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies. This may include both a desk survey and on-site observations and access audit. The extent of the area to be surveyed will depend on the nature, scale and sensitivity of the development.
- **Involvement** of both community members and professionals undertaken or planned. This might include, for example, consultation with local community and access groups and planning, building control, conservation, design and access officers. The statement should indicate how the findings of any consultation have been taken into account for the proposed development and how this has affected the proposal.
- **Evaluation** of the information collected on the site's immediate and wider context, identifying opportunities and constraints and formulating design and access principles

for the development. Evaluation may involve balancing any potentially conflicting issues that have been identified.

- **Design** of the scheme using the assessment, involvement, and evaluation information collected. Understanding a development's context is vital to producing good design and inclusive access and applicants should avoid working retrospectively, trying to justify a pre-determined design through subsequent site assessment and evaluation.

In the light of this understanding of the context, a design and access statement should explain how this has been considered in relation to its proposed **use**. The use is the use or mix of uses proposed for land and buildings. Use cannot be reserved within an outline application. Design and access statements for both outline and detailed applications should explain the use or uses proposed, their distribution across the site, the appropriateness of the accessibility to and between them, and their inter-relationship to uses surrounding the site.

In addition, the statement should explain how this context has been considered in relation to the physical characteristics of the proposal, that is, the **amount, layout, scale, landscaping** and **appearance** of the development.

The **amount** of development is how much development is proposed. For residential development, this means the number of proposed units for residential use and for all other development; this means the proposed floor space for each proposed use.

The design and access statement for both outline and detailed applications should explain and justify the amount of development proposed for each use, how this will be distributed across the site, how the proposal relates to the site's surroundings, and what consideration is being given to ensure that accessibility for users to and between parts of the development is maximised. Where the application specifies a range of floor space for a particular use, the reasons for this should be explained clearly in the design and access statement.

The **layout** is the way in which buildings, routes, landscape structure and open spaces (both private and public) are provided, placed and orientated in relation to each other and buildings and spaces surrounding the development.

If layout is reserved at the outline stage, the outline planning application should provide information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces proposed. The design and access statement accompanying an outline application should explain and justify the principles behind the choice of development zones and blocks or building plots proposed and explain how these principles, including the need for appropriate access will inform the detailed layout. The use of illustrative diagrams is encouraged to assist in explaining this.

For detailed applications, and outline applications where layout is not reserved, the design and access statement should explain and justify the proposed layout in terms of the relationship between buildings and public and private spaces within and around the site, and how these relationships will help to create safe, vibrant and successful places. An indication should also be given of factors important to accessibility of the site for users, such as travel distances and gradients, and the orientation of block and units in relation to any site topography to afford optimum accessibility.

The Government makes it clear that a key objective for new developments should be that they create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion. Design and access statements for outline and detailed applications should therefore demonstrate how crime prevention measures have been considered in the design of the proposal and how the design reflects the attributes of safe, sustainable places set out in *Safer Places- the Planning System and Crime Prevention* (ODPM/Home Office, 2003).

Scale is the height, width and length of a building or buildings in relation to its surroundings.

If scale has been reserved at the outline stage, the application should still indicate parameters for the upper and lower limits of the height, width and length of each building proposed, to establish a 3-dimensional building envelope within which the detailed design of buildings will be constructed. In such cases the design component of the statement should explain and justify the principles behind these parameters and explain how these will inform the final scale of the buildings.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve scale, the design and access statement should explain and justify the scale of buildings proposed, including why particular heights have been settled upon, and how these relate to the site's surroundings and the relevant skyline. The statement should also explain and justify the size of building parts, particularly entrances and facades with regard to how they will relate to the human scale.

Landscape is a part of the design process which is frequently neglected or left to the end. It is however a vital part of most schemes. Many schemes will need to consider the wider landscape structure and how this can be drawn into the site – in such situations this will usually be the starting point of the design process. When this has been linked to other aspects of layout it will be possible to address the detailed hard or soft treatment of private and public spaces to enhance or protect the amenities of the site and the wider area and the use of landscape areas such as in traffic management and calming. Statements should also explain how landscaping will be maintained.

If landscaping is reserved at the outline stage, the outline application does not need to provide any specific landscaping information. However, the design and access statement should still explain and justify the principles that will inform any future landscaping scheme for the site.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve landscaping, the design and access statement should explain and justify the proposed landscaping scheme, explaining the purpose of landscaping private and public spaces and its relationship to the surrounding area. Where possible, a schedule of planting and proposed hard landscaping materials to be used is recommended.

Appearance is the aspect of a place or building that determines the visual impression it makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.

If appearance is reserved at the outline stage, the outline application does not need to provide any specific information on the issue. In such cases the design and access statement should explain and justify the principles behind the intended appearance and explain how these will inform the final design of the development.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve appearance, the design and access statement should explain and justify the appearance of the place or buildings proposed including how this will relate to the appearance and character of the development's surroundings. It should explain how the decisions taken about appearance have considered accessibility.

The choice of particular materials and textures will have a significant impact upon a development's accessibility. Judicious use of materials that contrast in tone and colour to define important features such as entrances, circulation routes or seating for example will greatly enhance access for everyone. Similarly early consideration of the location and levels of lighting will be critical to the standard of accessibility ultimately achieved.