



City of Westminster

PLEASE NOTE

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies and planning, building control and other legislation and regulations referred to in the text of this guide were current at the time of publication. Because this guidance is an electronic version of the printed guidance as approved and adopted, these references have NOT been changed. For ease of contact; names, telephone numbers and locations have been regarded as non-material editorial changes and have been updated.

As UDP policies and government legislation may have changed over time, before carrying out any work, it is recommended that you consult the current UDP

<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/planningandlicensing/udp/index.cfm> for policy revisions and you may wish to check with planning and/or building control officers about your proposals.

DESIGN MATTERS IN WESTMINSTER



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE ON THE CREATION OF GOOD CITY ARCHITECTURE

INTRODUCTION

This document re-states well-established planning practice and defines the City Council's expectations for new buildings, as positive and enduring additions to this unique urban landscape. It amplifies underlying principles in operation at both local and national level. It is intended to elucidate the relevant policies set out in the Westminster Unitary Development Plan and other related guidance and assist in their implementation.

While this guidance is primarily aimed at those who are engaged in commissioning and creating buildings, it is also intended to be of practical use to local community groups in Westminster, national amenity bodies, other interested parties and the wider public. Council members and officers will have regard to these design principles and they will be material to their assessment of the design of all new buildings in Westminster.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

'The City Council will continue actively to encourage the achievement of new buildings of an exemplary architectural standard.'



Westminster has a long and successful commitment to architectural excellence and best planning practice. Specialist design teams continue to spearhead the Council's continuing efforts to achieve good architecture through the observance of its enduring civic design philosophy. Accordingly, Westminster City Council recognises its duty to ensure that any new development is appropriate to the character of the locality; is in scale with its surroundings and pays due respect to any features of acknowledged importance, which it may affect.

(PPG1 Paras 17, 18 Annex A PPG15 Para 1.6, 2.14)

The City Council is also determined to maintain and steadily raise the 'threshold of acceptability' for the design and appearance of new architecture in Westminster. This reflects growing public expectations and interest in the new building projects. A sustained improvement in design can be fostered by the positive and well-informed operation of the Unitary Development Plan policies, this and other supplementary guidance, together with the continuing expert advice made available to applicants by Council officers with relevant specialist skills. This professional advice will continue to form the basis upon which Council Members make their planning decisions, especially those relating to the design of new buildings.

(PPG15 paras 1.6, 2.3)

The Historic Environment Review Steering Committee, under the auspices of English Heritage, has identified what it considers are key factors for the achievement of good architecture. In 'Power of Place', published in 2000, it stated: *'The role of the client is critical. Owners and developers need to draw up a*

careful and sensitive brief. They must appoint a professional team who have the skills and experience to respond effectively to the challenges of the site.'

Westminster City Council recognises the practical limitations on its ability to secure real excellence in new architecture. It does not generally produce site specific development briefs, neither does it select the professional team, including the architect, decide on the form of contract, nor select and supervise building contractors. All these factors, widely recognised as being so crucial to the achievement of the 'build quality', are the sole responsibility of the developer. Whereas, the only action at the sole discretion of a local planning authority is whether to grant permission or not, and this may be subject to the outcome of an appeal.

The City Council will continue actively to encourage the achievement of new buildings of an exemplary architectural standard. It is committed to ensuring that typical development is more than just acceptable. The crucial question that should be asked is whether a building is good enough to approve, rather than is it bad enough to refuse?



The recognised importance of Westminster's historic built environment and the value attached to it by the City Council and the people who live and work here can be gauged by the fact that the 76% of the City is covered by 52 designated conservation areas. It also contains an extraordinary and very special architectural and historic legacy, expressed by the wealth of over 11,000 buildings, listed for their special architectural or historic interest. They form a unique part of our national architectural inheritance. It also contains one of the United Kingdom's World Heritage Sites. It follows that the opportunities to create entirely new buildings are necessarily limited and will continue to be so. When the possibility does occur, this should be regarded as an exciting opportunity and privilege by all those involved. However, there are potential opportunities to create significant new, distinctive places of high urban design quality in areas of the City such as Victoria, Paddington and sections of Oxford Street for example.

(UDP DES2)

It is important to ensure that every one of these new additions to the townscape makes a significantly greater contribution to the ambience and visual quality of the locality than the building they replace. Every redevelopment site will be regarded as having the potential to intensify the well-established local character, wherever this is desirable. Additional guidance as to how this can best be achieved for individual cases will be given when development is proposed.

(PPG1 para 15)



The City Council is also determined to raise the general amenity and quality of those areas in Westminster, which do not warrant conservation area status. Well-designed, new development can play a vital role in their general environmental regeneration. The Council will continue to seek the achievement of a consistently high standard of good new design across the City and there will continue to be scope for responsible innovation in the design of contemporary new buildings, particularly in areas with mixed townscape character. *(UDP DES4) (PPG1 Para 19)*

Although Westminster forms the heart of an immense urban conurbation, it has the benefit of over seventy London Squares and twenty registered historic parks and gardens. Collectively, these spaces represent a very special part of the urban landscape and are an invaluable resource, essential to the health and well being of London as a whole. Their continued protection from encroachment will be secured by the rigorous assessment of any potential negative impact of new development proposals, including larger buildings some distance away. This will for an important material consideration when the City Council determines such applications.

(UDP DES1, DES3, DES12)

(Historic Parks and Gardens SPG)

(PPG1 para 18, PPG15 para 2.24)

(Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest: London Squares (Preservation) Act 1931)

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

amplify the relevant UDP policies, national policies and guidance currently in operation, to which all new buildings in Westminster will be expected to comply.

(PPG1 and PPG15)

'Westminster is distinguished by having a notable river frontage, including the sequence featuring the remarkable Palace of Westminster ensemble, now designated as a World Heritage Site.'



1. WIDER SETTING

Westminster is distinguished by having a notable river frontage, including the sequence featuring the remarkable Palace of Westminster ensemble, now designated as a World Heritage Site. Many views are best appreciated when crossing the bridges, or from numerous vantage points along the Queen Elizabeth River Walkway, which runs the length of the South Bank. These views are very sensitive. For example, the Marsham Street towers rise above the roofline of the Houses of Parliament when viewed from the south. Two tall buildings, Centre point and the Post Office Tower, sited a considerable distance away in the London Borough of Camden, also impinge on the World Heritage Site.

(UDP DES3, DES15, DES16, RIV2)

(PPG15 Paras 2.22, 2.23)

In addition, there are a number of strategic views relating to the City of Westminster. Views of the Palace of Westminster and St. Paul's Cathedral are protected by the 'viewing corridors', the 'wider setting' and the 'background consultation areas', as defined by central government. The City Council will continue to carefully scrutinise all new development proposals in relation to these important planning considerations where they may be likely to have an impact.

(DES14) (Strategic Views SPG)



The Royal parks also have notable views and skylines, which are particularly sensitive to even minor intrusions above the tree line. The City Council is aware that trees cannot be permanent features. Therefore, the fact that existing trees might initially screen a development proposals will not be accepted as a valid justification for non-compliance with UDP policies, this or any other supplementary planning guidance. While these spaces continue to convey a special sense of place, it is recognised that the setting, character and appearance of some City parks and gardens have suffered significant damage. This was mainly caused by a relatively small number of insensitive and controversial later twentieth century developments, usually the result of ministerial decisions. The Hilton Hotel, the Knightsbridge Barracks, the Royal Lancaster Hotel and the Home Office are notable examples.



They have effectively broken the spell, of a semi-rural landscape, right in the hear of town, so skilfully created by the original landscape architects. This is a characteristic of many other parts of the Royal Parks, gardens and other open spaces in Westminster, to which local residents and workers attach great value. A thorough assessment will be required where future development is likely to have an impact on these important open spaces.
(UDP DES12, DES15)
(PPG1 Para 18, PPG15 Para 2.24)

2. LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS

'The aim will be to achieve convincing new architecture of distinction, which has integrity and is entirely complementary to the locality and neighbouring buildings.'



Westminster has an underlying and subtle local distinctiveness. Parts of the City have a particular air of refinement, which distinguish them from other parts of the capital. This is largely derived from its symbolic national role as the seat of central government and as a world-renowned centre for financial, commercial and cultural activity. This is reflected by the architectural distinction, composition and outstanding quality of its many internationally famous areas and buildings. They convey a clearly discernible sense of metropolitan urbanity and sophistication, to be expected at the heart of a World City. This impression is heightened by the contrast with other areas of Westminster, which have retained an almost village-like atmosphere. This needs to be thoroughly understood and addressed by those responsible for the design and detailing of new buildings, if their work is to form a natural part of this complex City townscape.



This is an especially important issue for Westminster, which has a number of distinct quarters, with quite separate identities. East Marylebone, St. James's, Soho and Knightsbridge are some obvious examples. Their individual identity and localised cohesiveness, is often created and reinforced by a common building type or use, as specific style or period, or a grouping of buildings of similar scale and materials, with shared architectural motifs. Therefore, a pragmatic and sensitive design responsive to a varied set of site conditions will be required, particularly from those intending to build in areas with distinctive local character.

(PPG1 para 18)

In such instances, all new buildings will normally be expected to emulate the scale, architectural character and materials of neighbouring buildings. While designs employing traditional materials and methods of construction will usually be sought in such locations, this should not necessarily preclude responsible innovation contemporary design. The aim will be to achieve convincing new architecture of distinction, which has integrity and is entirely complementary to the locality and neighbouring buildings. To permit buildings of strong contrast, in such locations, would inevitably tend to dilute their localised character and distinctiveness, to which the City Council attaches great importance. Therefore, discordant, unsympathetic designs will be resisted vigorously.

(Demolition and Development in Conservation Areas SPG) (PPG1 para 17, Annex A1, PPG15 Para 2.14)



In exceptional circumstances, scholarly replica rebuilding will be sought. For example, in order to restore or complete an otherwise coherent, distinctive piece of townscape, or where a building of historic or townscape value has been lost. In each case, the design and execution will need to be of the highest quality, displaying a thorough understanding of the architectural language of the predominant pattern of development.

(UDP DES4(B) (PPG1 Para 18))

3. LOCAL CONTEXT



'Good architecture is not only about good design, but also about harmony with the surroundings.'



Good architecture is not only about good design, but is also about harmony with the surroundings. Subjective claims concerning either the reputation of individual architects, or the implicit merit of their designs for new buildings in Westminster will be treated with due caution. Such claims cannot be accepted as a valid justification for new buildings standing apart from their context, or for non-compliance with relevant UDP policies, this or any other City Council guidance.
(PPG15 Para 2.14, 3.19iii)

Two fundamental questions may be asked about the design of a building submitted as an application for planning permission. The first is whether the design is bad in itself, too dominant, ill proportioned, poorly detailed or just downright ugly. The second is whether, even if the design is not poor in itself when considered in isolation, it would be harmful on a particular site, out of scale with close neighbours, obtrusive in local views, or a jarring design in an otherwise harmonious scene.
(UDP DES1(A)(B), DES4, DES9(B)(E), DES15)
(PPG1 Para 17, PPG15 Paras 2.14, 4.18)

The latter point is still often overlooked and far too many buildings are designed as separate entities, without reference to their surroundings. The relationship between a new building and its context will generally be considered important by the City Council and will often be a crucial creation in the consideration of an application for planning permission.

Accordingly, new buildings will be expected to reinforce the particular sense of place, rather than diluting or diminishing it.
(PPG1 Annex A1, PPG15 para 2.14)



Unfortunately, there are a number of prominent 'blots' on the City townscape. These mainly date from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, when the prevailing opinion led to the promotion of a quiet

different set of planning objectives and values to those currently in operation, both locally and nationally. Therefore, Westminster City Council will continue to reject any assertions that the existence of such non-conforming buildings provides a valid precedent for comparable or related new buildings on sites within their vicinity. In all appropriate cases, it will seek to achieve the replacement of such structures by more acceptable and appropriate forms of development. These sites can often provide opportunities for imaginative, extensive new developments of innovative contemporary urban design, with scope to create new places of quality and points of interest. In so doing, it will be essential to ensure that they are well integrated with the established character of the surrounding townscape.

*(UDP DES1(A), DES2, DES4, DES9)
(PPG1 paras 14, 15, PPG15 Para 2.14)*

4. THE SITE

'Every site will have its own role in the local townscape determined by its location, plot size and orientation.'

Every site will have its own role in the local townscape determined by its location, plot size and orientation. It will be essential to analyse and respect this. While it is understandable that the creator of any new building may wish to enhance its visual prominence, this can be unacceptable, especially if achieved by an intrusive design, too tall for its site, constructed in an alien form, or of strikingly different materials, disturbing the urban grain, harmony and settled character of the area.

(PPG1 Para 17, PPG15 Paras 2.14, 2.16, 4.18)



Some sites will have natural prominence and may act as a visual termination in a local view, for instance. Other sites will be on street corners or at important intersections where they are likely to be significant in the local townscape and therefore will require particular attention. New buildings may also be prominent where they form part of the backdrop to an open space, a square, garden or park. In such situations, their design, especially roofscapes and skylines will always be regarded as significant. *(UDP DES1, DES4, DES12, DES9, DES15)*

The site boundary may diverge from the general building alignment for historic reasons. In such cases, it may be desirable to produce a self-effacing, subtle design, rather than exploiting such obvious exposure to the full. The appropriate architectural response, in each case, will be dependent upon a careful analysis of the surrounding context.

Some sites will form part of an established group of buildings. They may form part of a series, where each building is similar to the preceding one. These will often be located in areas built at about the same time, possibly as part of an overall plan and with a similar character. These locations may present some designers with a particular challenge, where there may be little scope for overt self expression.

*(UDP DES1, DES4, DES9)
(PPG15 Paras 2.14, 4.18)*

Alternatively, the street may comprise a collection of more varied structures with certain shared features which sit harmoniously together, yet exist as a grouping of individual architectural compositions. Such informal groupings will invariably have stronger and weaker elements, in either architectural or townscape terms. It will be essential to assess the relative contribution made by each individual building to the group as a whole, as well as that made by the present structure occupying the development site.

Some locations will present an opportunity to create new architecture of greater presence than the existing structure, in order to enhance the overall appearance of the group and surrounding area. In other situations, a newly designed building may need to continue its predecessor's supporting role, possibly in a notable adjoining building, in a local view, or as part of the skyline silhouette. *(UDP DES1(A), DES4, DES9B)(E), DES10(E), DES12, DES15)*
(PPG15 paras 2.16, 2.17)



The design of the existing building should always be considered, even where it does not have any intrinsic interest. It may possess architectural features, such as a corner turret, which works well in the street and therefore may be worth emulating.

5. BUILDING FUNCTION AND EXPRESSION

'Wherever appropriate, encouragement will be given to designers to produce distinctive new architecture reflecting its particular townscape role and function.'

A building may stand out from its surroundings because of its distinct function or the role of the occupier in the economic, social and cultural life of the City. Clearly, if the part it plays is significant, then it is appropriate that this should be expressed through its architecture.





There was a steady homogenisation of building design during the last half of the twentieth century, which led to different building types being virtually indistinguishable from each other. This general loss of legibility, richness and variety of expression has been to the considerable detriment of the appearance and architectural distinction of many City streets. Westminster, like other cities, has benefited from the tradition of celebrating different building types. For example, the design of banks, police and fire stations have been expressed by distinctive and recognisable architecture. The fact that most buildings are tenanted rather than being owner occupier has also led to the anonymous character of some new designs. Wherever appropriate, encouragement will be given to designers to produce distinctive new architecture reflecting its particular townscape role and function. The part played by the client will be crucial to the creation of more expressive and interesting City architecture.
(UDP DES1, DES4(A))

6. ELEVATIONAL DESIGN

'It is important that the design of new buildings should endeavour to attain an enduring quality...'



In Westminster, appropriate opportunities have often been found for architects to create notable buildings, which now form a valuable part of its unique architectural legacy. The City Council is concerned to ensure that this positive tradition is continued. In any period, the art of architecture normally reflects the predominant economic conditions, cultural values and preoccupations of the time. It has also been subject to fluctuations in fashion and taste and the twenty first century will be no exception.

It is important that the design of new buildings should endeavour to attain an enduring quality and thereby, contribute to the long-established overall impression of permanence and stability, which is so characteristic of the City of Westminster. Therefore, elevational designs will require particular care and will be one of the key determinants of acceptability. However, the City Council is not solely concerned about the design quality of street frontages, but will assess development proposals 'in the round'. For instance, rear or side elevations can have a significant impact on the character of gardens or other enclosed, semi-public spaces, as well as the amenities of neighbouring residents and occupiers.

6.1 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

Many of the sites available for new development will be set within a long established or historic pattern of intensive development. In such instances where infill development is proposed, the establishment of visual connections and close physical relationships with adjoining buildings will normally be essential.

Architectural features, such as stringcourses and cornices, used to define the base and top of the building can achieve effective linkages.

However, a strict or simplistic lining through of these elements is not advocated, except where the local context may require it.



It will always be important to respond creatively to the rhythms, articulation, fenestration pattern, proportions and specific features, such as windows and doors, on neighbouring buildings. The way in which the townscape is perceived is an important factor to be taken into account during the design process. In a typical street, the viewer first takes in a perspective view of a range of buildings. Then, from a moving viewpoint, focuses on individual buildings, examining each in turn. It is the relationship of architectural elements at their junctions, which either arrest the eye, or established an harmonious visual transition between one building and another. Unfortunately, even where new buildings may be of a similar scale, colour or height, they can, nonetheless, contribute to the visual fragmentation of the streetscape. (PPG1 Para 18, PPG15 para 4.18)

6.2 PROJECTIONS

Corridor street views are particularly sensitive to projections. There has been a recent trend to produce buildings with a distinct profile and identify their entrances by projecting bays, which often run the entire height of the building. These can appear dominant, particularly where they are not counterbalanced by other architectural elements. In more recent buildings, any modelling they display is often produced solely by projecting elements, which can give the disturbing impression of the building appearing to lean into the street. Care and skill is also required to ensure that projecting bays connect with the parent building in a meaningful manner, rather than appearing to be a weakly clipped-on addition.

6.3 BASES

The scale and height of the ground storey of a building is often a key element in an urban area. It is sometimes defined by a strongly projecting stringcourse or cornice between the ground and first floors. It will usually be important to ensure that the ground storey of new development relates to the established scale on adjoining buildings. There is a tendency to reduce the height of ground storeys, which often creates a mean appearance in comparison with existing buildings. Apparently random patterns of openings at ground floor level can also weaken the relationship of the upper storeys to the base of the building, forming a visually unstable base for the surmounting structure.



Where the provision of service entrances or off-street service bays is proposed, the treatment of the opening, including the design of gates should always be carefully considered in order to mitigate their potential adverse visual impact.

In certain situations, a suppressed ground floor is combined with a floor of accommodation above and this is expressed in the form of a double height base. This is not always successful as the resulting scale, especially for a modest site, can be overbearing and out of proportion with the overall composition, as well as with neighbouring buildings. In many cases, a separate retail or other use in commercial areas will occupy the ground floor. This provides an additional rationale to give the design of the base of the building particular attention, or a different, but complementary architectural expression, where this would be appropriate. Where an exceptionally tall ground storey is indicated by the context, this can be achieved by creating a mezzanine level set back from the frontage. Developers will be expected to provide an appropriate architectural framework of openings at street level within which high quality shopfronts and, where appropriate, blinds, canopies and signage can be successfully incorporated as part of the overall design of the new building.

*(UDP DES5(C) UDP DES8(A))
(Shopfront Sign and Blinds SPG)*

6.4 ROOFS



Another critical response which new architecture will be expected to make with adjoining buildings, is to establish a satisfactory visual relationship between their roof forms, cornices or other features, that define their apparent heights. These may be higher or lower, either of which will present a different design challenge. In a narrow street building bulk effectively disappears when viewed from ground level, provided further levels are adequately set back. However, this bulk will still be perceived from the upper levels of surrounding buildings.

In more exposed positions, it will be essential to ensure that the roof structure is in proportion to the facade below. Many new buildings exhibit a top-heavy appearance, with almost as much apparent bulk and mass above the defined street frontage, as below. This will normally be unacceptable and indicates that the overall height of the building should be reduced, or exceptionally, the cornice height should be increased. If there is an established pattern of prominent party walls, which give expression to individual building plots and scales, where appropriate, new designs will normally be expected to reflect this by incorporating comparable skyline features to produce articulated rooflines and silhouettes. Similarly, where rooflines of dynamic interest are a prominent feature in the local context, such as gables, cupolas or turrets, any new design will be expected to make an equal response. Alternatively, roofs may be concealed behind parapets, lending a simple outline to the architecture, new designs will be expected to respect and harmonise with this, where it is a common characteristic.

6.5 ELEVATIONAL HIERARCHY



Having established the appropriate scale for the base of the building and its overall height, it is also necessary to consider the design of the intervening levels. Standardised storey heights tend to be typical of current buildings, which can set them apart from their established neighbours. Inevitably, this can lead to a desire for standardised window openings, although where this is the case, there is no reason why the design of the street elevation and its fenestration should necessarily reflect this. However, flexibility of internal use need not defeat the skill of a good architect/designer to articulate the pattern and proportion of the external skin of a new building.

A variation in window size may be justified on purely functional grounds in order to provide adequate natural daylight and ventilation, especially in a densely developed area like Westminster. This is a matter of increasing importance so far as sustainability objectives are concerned. By varying the depth of the ceiling void or raised floors, it will still be possible to provide standardised accommodation within the development. Therefore, it should be possible to vary the size of windows to create modulation and articulation to a facade and introduce greater complexity and variety. The resulting flexibility will assist designers in creating individual, innovative work, as well as establishing satisfactory visual relationships with the prevailing pattern and spacing of window openings on surrounding buildings.

Entrances to buildings can properly be celebrated as providing a focal point for the facade and visual interest for passers-by at street level. Their architectural expression can also be used to indicate the point of entry, which is also a functional consideration. Entrances should be expressed in a proportionate way, related to the overall design. So while each entrance may be distinctive, it should not become too visually dominant. In certain locations, there is a distinct rhythm of entrance sin a street and this should be respected by a new building.



6.6 PLANT

'Where appropriate the scenic potential of roof plant structures should be exploited to assist the creation of imaginative roofscapes and memorable rooflines.'

The provision for mechanical plant should always be concentrated at basement level, wherever this is practicable in order to minimise its visual impact. When plant is located primarily at roof level, it can result in an overly bulky roof structure. This undesirable effect can be increased by the inclusion of safe and adequate access for maintenance, which can also result in a cluttered appearance caused by protective railings and access stairs.

The City Council acknowledges that mechanical plant is indispensable to the functioning of current buildings and therefore will expect such accommodation to be treated as an integral part of the composition in the design of any new building.



Decisions concerning the location of service cores, including lifts, should always be taken at an early stage in the design process, to ensure that they normally occur in the least obtrusive position when they emerge at roof level. However, where appropriate, the scenic potential of roof plant structures should be exploited to assist the creation of imaginative roofscapes and memorable rooflines. The requirement for window cleaning and maintenance access equipment should not be overlooked, or should the provision of discrete communication equipment, which should always be located and designed to minimise its visual prominence.

(Plant and Air conditioning equipment SPG; Satellite Dishes and Telecommunications equipment SPG)

There are too many instances where plant accommodation or new developments is added, or enlarged, during construction, or once the building is newly occupied. This is usually caused by an underestimation of the likely servicing requirements and can result in a demand for ameliorative, but inevitable unsightly, ad-hoc alterations to new buildings, which will detract from the City Council's efforts to protect and improve the environmental quality of Westminster. Unfortunately, a pristine, newly completed roof can be regarded as a soft option when the building it serves is fitted out to meet the requirements of incoming tenants. Therefore, it will be important to ensure that all new development incorporates adequate plant space, not only to meet current needs but also anticipated future expansion, within a well designed roof form, or enclosure or preferably within a deep basement.

(UDP DES5(B), DES6(B))

The City Council will make a working assumption that typically at least one complete floor should be allocated for plant for new buildings. There is likely to be future demand for highly serviced new accommodation in Westminster. Accordingly, it will apply this 'rule of thumb' to its assessment of the likely plant requirements for any development proposed, especially for commercial or other non-residential use.

While some plant may not be visible from the street, it is bound to be seen from the surrounding upper levels of surrounding buildings. High-level roof views may be the only aspect enjoyed by those residents or workers affected and accordingly the City Council is determined to protect their environment. It will endeavour to do so by the imposition of strict planning conditions. The use of Section 106 agreements may be considered in sensitive locations, where this would be justified in order to protect the visual or residential amenities of the locality.

7. BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND EXPRESSION

'Constructional methods have a crucial influence on detailed design and the visual quality of the resulting architecture.'

Now that a large majority of new buildings have a framed structure, their external faces are applied skins rather than being load-bearing, resulting in the rather insubstantial, flat and uninteresting character of some new architecture. Unfortunately, this characteristic tends to set them apart from their older, more intriguing neighbours. However, it should be remembered that a large number of familiar and much loved monumental City architecture is, in fact, supported on a steel framed structure. It is still possible to produce well-detailed, convincing designs of integrity and distinction.



An important characteristic of traditional buildings in many conservation areas is the subtle complexity and richness of street facades, sometimes represented by very subtle recessions and projections, by deep window reveals, channelling, rustication or other forms of architectural decoration. The resulting depth and grain contributes greatly to the special quality of Westminster's streets and will usually be sought through contemporary and convincing reinterpretation in new schemes. The City Council is committed to the achievement of well-detailed, soundly constructed buildings and is convinced that they more than earn their keep in the long run.

(UDP DES4(A) (PPG1 Para 15, PPG15 Para 1.5)

Constructional methods have a crucial influence on detailed design and the visual quality of the resulting architecture. They can also have a direct influence on the selection of materials. Current, prefabricated fast-track construction techniques can result in numerous movement joints being required as, typically, the building face does not represent a load-bearing wall. Although this affects stonework, it is perhaps most visible with brickwork. Designers will be expected to show such joints on drawings submitted for approval and to mitigate their potentially negative effect on the quality of the architecture. In certain instances, it will be desirable to employ techniques like the use of snapped headers in order to provide an appropriate visual load-bearing expression and solidity to external walls. In other situations, it may be appropriate to adopt a radically different architecture, where the structural frame is clearly expressed and the building envelope is formed by light infill-cladding materials.

8. SUSTAINABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Redevelopment is likely to be a feature of every period of the City's life, but this inherently disruptive process should not be accelerated by injudicious selection of construction, cladding and materials. Westminster City Council considers the practice of designing buildings for increasingly shorter-term economic life, at a concomitant environmental cost to the City's residents, workers and visitors to be

incompatible with its sustainability objectives. Therefore, it follows that if buildings are to be expected to have permanence, their inherent design quality, weathering and the specification of high quality, energy efficient construction and durable materials will become an increasingly important requirement. This is consistent with the responsible use of highly prized and non-renewable natural materials such as Portland and sandstone.



The City Council recognises the importance of achieving accessible new buildings that are welcoming and beneficial to all groups of users. This includes people with disabilities and it will seek inclusive designs, which represent their civil rights, both in their place of work and users of other buildings. Where appropriate, it will encourage the appointment of specialist access consultants to ensure that the design process is properly influenced by sensitivity to access considerations. If these requirements are seen as an integral, it will enable them to be accommodated with imagination and style, which can actually embrace the buildings aesthetic quality.

It is also essential that designers are aware of forthcoming implementation of changes to the British Standards and building regulations, for instance, as well as implications of other legislative developments on architecture. Therefore, designs should not only comply with current requirements, but should also anticipate further advances, in order to ensure that new buildings will be sustainable in the future.



9. MATERIALS, ART, CRAFT AND DECORATION

'Today, there has never been a greater variety of materials available to the designer and the selection of materials for a particular project should always be influenced by the local context.'

The governing principle, when initially considering the selection of materials to be used in a specific location in Westminster, will be to respect the established or indigenous materials to be found in the

locality. Rarely, there may be sound reasons for departing from this assumption, but it should always be the starting point. In certain situations, it will be necessary to source a precise match.

(UDP DES1(A) DES4(A5)

(PPG1 Annex A2, PPG15 Paras 2.14, 4.18)

In the past, there has been a discernible hierarchy expressed through the selection of facing materials. This lends legibility to the townscape and helps define the status of primary and secondary spaces. Therefore, it is important that new buildings should normally acknowledge this as a desirable characteristic. Not to do so would only add to the further homogenisation of the urban townscape, dilution of the unique sense of place and loss of local distinctiveness.

Brick, typically but not solely London Stocks, as the most common building material, came at the bottom of the scale. It was used in the construction of utilitarian structures such as mews and the more modest houses. Whereas, materials prized for their inherent weathering and working properties, scarcity and appearance like Portland Stone, usually have been reserved for the most prestigious and notable City architecture. In between these two, a variety of combination of materials have been employed. There are examples of brickwork with stone or stucco embellishments. In the Victorian period, other materials like terracotta and faience were introduced. The former is currently enjoying a revival although it tends to be featured as plant blocks, which fails to exploit the tremendous decorative potential of this material.



Today, there has never been a greater variety of materials available to the designer and the selection of materials for a particular project should always be influenced by the local context. When selecting materials, it may not be desirable to match the apparent tone of adjacent buildings precisely. They may have weathered and be subject to future cleaning, which can noticeably alter the appearance of the area.

In recent years, Westminster City Council has been under increasing pressure to permit the use of imported limestone as an acceptable alternative to Portland. Such stones have distinct commercial advantages over Portland, as they can be used in thinner slabs, due to their significantly lower porosity. However, they lack the visual characteristics and proven ability of our native stone to receive and sustain carved decoration, coupled with its excellent weathering performance and durability in the London environment. Therefore, when proposed for new buildings in significant or sensitive locations in Westminster, or where adjacent to existing traditional stone buildings, non-indigenous stone will usually be regarded as a facing material of unacceptable quality.

'There is considerable scope to commission sculptors and other artists to enrich buildings.....in a manner appropriate for our times.'

Westminster City Council is determined to ensure that buildings are well detailed to provide enduring quality. While some designers may eschew what they regard as redundant or archaic forms of architectural decoration, elements like cornices have a practical as well as aesthetic function. In fact, they can be essential to moderate and control the acceptable weathering of a facade, so that this process actually enhances the appearance and character of the building rather than defaces it. (PPG1 Annex A6) (PPG15 para 4.18)

The current specification and quality of external fittings to buildings such as doors, ironmongery and ground floor window framing, all of which are viewed at close quarters is often weak. In the past, the detailed design of windows and doors had modelling and profiled sections, such that further visual interest was created on the building. In addition, great care and attention was given to such craft items and many were commissioned for a particular building. This exacting attention to detail added another layer of interest, individually and enjoyment to the streetscape and served to exemplify quality. Too often, frontages are crudely finished and poorly detailed employing standardised elements with much mastic in evidence diminishing the final architectural product.



There is considerable scope to commission sculptors and other artists to enrich buildings, in a manner appropriate for our times. Such public art should always be conceived as an integral part of the building, not treated as just an individual element introduced to enliven an otherwise utilitarian structure. The City Council will continue to actively encourage the tremendous potential that art combined with architecture has for enriching the quality of life in the City, especially through the work of the Public Art Advisory Panel.

During the twentieth century there was a continuous debate as to whether architecture was an art or a science. In the twenty first century it would seem reasonable to believe that the developer, the architect and other members of the design team, could combine these two disciplines to produce an architecture worthy of Westminster and London as a whole. The City Council will continue to work proactively with developers, their architects and their agents to achieve this desired goal.

10. DESIGN PRESENTATION

'The accuracy and completeness of the visual information accompanying planning applications is a vital part of the process.'



10.1 DESIGN STATEMENTS

In accordance with government guidance, the City Council will expect planning applications to be accompanied by a written statement which sets out the design principles adopted for each new development.

(DES1(C) (PPG1 Para 16, Annex A4, PPG15 Para 4.18)

10.2 DRAWINGS

The way a design is illustrated is of importance in the consideration of planning applications. It will be necessary to illustrate the design in relation to its context and adjoining buildings should always be accurately shown. Drawings continue to be an indispensable method for conveying information. The accuracy and completeness of the visual information accompanying planning applications is a vital part of the process. This must be sufficient to enable Council officers to evaluate the proposals, local consultees and others affected to comment on all aspects of the proposals and for City Council Members to reach a decision based on the merits of the application and a thorough assessment of its likely impact. The prominence and visual impact of the plot areas must be clearly justified and illustrated as part of the planning submission.

The amount of information, the number and type of drawings, including view studies, will be dependent upon the circumstances of each case. Where appropriate, the Council will determine that development proposals with a significant effect shall be the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the 1999 Regulations issued by central government. Computer aided design is playing an increasingly important role in the design process. The facilities exist to create 'walk through' impressions of how the proposed building would be experienced from various locations.

It is vital that these are used as a creative tool in the discussions between architects and Council planning officers. They should also be readily available to the public when they are consulted on an application.

(PPG1 Annex A4, PPG15 para 4.18)

10.3 PHOTOMONTAGES

This method of illustration is increasingly common and is usually computer generated. It can have the great advantage of minimising the degree of subjective interpretation by providing the public and the City Council with a lifelike image. Where an assessment of a scheme with a wider impact is required, it is desirable that the images are produced or verified by an impartial third party. This should ensure that an accurate representation of the building is provided. A method statement regarding the production of the views should normally accompany the planning submission. It will be helpful for an applicant to agree the number and viewpoint location of such images with the Council at an early stage.

10.4 MODELS

These can provide an overview of the wider context in which a proposal is set. Architectural models alone, are not considered to provide an adequate representation of design proposals for development control purposes, or as an acceptable alternative to view studies or substitute for photomontages. However, larger-scaled, bay models can be beneficial by illustrating the character and quality of an architectural design, such as modelling and detailing, in a way that drawings cannot. Frequently, they are also indispensable to a full understanding of the geometric complexity of roof forms for instance. Rough working models are also helpful tools in the evolution of a three dimensional design, unlike highly rendered models which are extremely expensive to amend and often made at too small a scale.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following publications have been referred to during the presentation of this supplementary planning guidance:

Planning Policy Guidance Note: General Policy and Principles PPG1

Planning Policy Guidance Note: Development Plans, PPG12

Planning Policy Guidance Note: Planning and the Historic Environment, PPG15

Regional Planning Guidance Note: RPG3

The Value of Urban Design: DETR/CABE

Our towns and cities: the future Delivering in urban renaissance DETR

By Design: Urban Design in the planning system: towards better practice DETR/CABE

Development in the historic environment: An English Heritage guide to policy, procedure and good practice

Power of Place: The future of the historic environment, Historic Environment Review Steering Group

What Makes a Good Building? RFAC

Continuing Research: International Property Database

Ecohomes Assessment Method: Building Research Establishment

Westminster Unitary Development Plan as agreed for second deposit 15 October 2001 (Where a policy number is quoted in the text, it should be assumed that the whole policy is considered relevant; this is not the case where a specific part of the policy is referred to)

Westminster Supplementary Planning Guidance

Strategic Views in Westminster (MX245)

Development and Demolition in Conservation Areas (P157)

Historic Parks and Gardens in Westminster (P158)

Plant and Air Conditioning Equipment - Guidance Notes

Satellite Dishes and other Telecommunications Equipment

Shopfronts, Blinds and Signs (MXX130)

Public Art in Westminster (MXX246)

Making Townscape: a contextual approach to building in an urban setting Tugnutt and Robertson Mitchell

All buildings and projects illustrated in this guidance are located in the City of Westminster

Department of Planning and City Development, Development Planning Services, October 2001.