

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

## DISTRICT ASSESSMENT



**Final report**  
**September 2007**



urban  
practitioners





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Kneesworth Street, Royston



Eastcheap, Letchworth Garden City Town Centre



## INTRODUCTION

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

North Hertfordshire District Council has commissioned Urban Practitioners to produce an Urban Design Assessment for the four towns of Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin, Royston and Baldock and the village of Knebworth. The reports will form a background paper as part of the evidence base to the Council's new Local Development Framework, and subsequent supplementary guidance to support the production of development briefs and assist in the consideration of planning applications.

### WHAT IS AN 'URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT'?

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has defined urban design 'as the art of making places for people. It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities' (from *By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System*, DETR/CABE, 2000). The Urban Design Assessment Criteria section of this report describes in greater detail the criteria Urban Practitioners has employed in assessing the towns and village of North Hertfordshire.

### STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report sets out the district-wide context for North Hertfordshire, providing an introduction to the individual towns and village urban design assessments (contained in separate reports) and setting out the urban design criteria against which the settlements of North Hertfordshire will be assessed.



Whitehorse Street, Baldock



Knebworth Village Hall, Park Lane, Knebworth



## URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Urban Design as defined by Jonathan Barnett, author of Introduction to Urban Design, is 'the process of giving physical design direction to urban growth, conservation and change. It is understood to include landscape as well as buildings, preservation and new construction, and rural areas as well as cities.' (*Introduction to Urban Design*)

The field has grown tremendously over the course of the last forty years as a result of a number of coinciding changes. Kevin Lynch noted that Urban Design 'blossomed in the wake of the city-planning field, which [is] moving from purely physical concerns to a focus on economic and social policy.' The development of new statistical modelling techniques for such issues as traffic flow meant less focus on the physical environment. Simultaneously there has been recognition of the importance of both historic and natural environments within urban and rural settings, triggering the demand for an interdisciplinary approach to developing the built environment.

The intention of this report is to understand the major urban design issues confronting each of the towns and village that will inform decisions relating to potential development, conservation and change. The criteria relevant to these decisions have been divided into five major categories, as set out in the following text. We have analysed each criteria through writing, photographic study, mapping and diagrams.

### MAKING PLACES (MP)

Each of the towns and village being assessed has its own distinct character, and the first set of criteria focuses on the key features that make each place unique. The criteria recognise that aspects of both the built and natural environment are significant in forming a town or village's identity and sense of place.

#### MP1 BUILDING TYPES

A photographic study of typical building types within the defined urban design zones for the settlement.

#### MP1 MATERIALS AND ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

A photographic study of distinctive and typical materials, textures and architectural styles.

#### MP3 LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

A map of listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

#### MP4 BUILDING HEIGHTS AND MASSING

A photographic study of building heights in terms of number of floors and analysis of massing in terms of the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings.

#### MP5 DENSITY

General observations on the broad building densities within each urban design zone based on building typologies, spacing between buildings, and garden size.

### MP6 TOPOGRAPHY

A contour plan across the settlements highlighting topographical changes.

### CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE (CE)

The key criteria within 'Continuity and Enclosure' consider the various ways in which the street network, building frontages, and open spaces contribute to coherence and vitality. This category stresses the interconnection between building, street, and street network design on street life.

#### CE1 MORPHOLOGY

A diagram showing the buildings only within the settlement to show the pattern of the arrangement and size of buildings and to clarify the level of permeability within each urban design zone.

#### CE2 BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS AND GAPS

A map based and photographic analysis of the line formed by the frontages of buildings along a street, the size and use of setbacks and any gap sites created by lack of built form, or the position of parking or service areas.

#### CE3 BUILDING ORIENTATION

A map based and photographic analysis of the positioning of the fronts, sides and backs of buildings in relation to the street, public realm or open/public space.



Whitehorse Street, Baldock

## URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

### CE4 PAVEMENTS

An assessment of the size, style and quality of the pavements within each urban design zone.

### CE5 OPEN SPACE

An analysis of the distribution of open space across the settlements, as well as an assessment of the quality and accessibility to the open spaces from surrounding residential areas.

### MAKING CONNECTIONS (MC)

The key criteria within 'Making Connections' explicitly analyses the movements within the towns/village and the ease with which this circulation occurs.

### MCI LAND USE

A description of the dominant land uses within each urban design zone, and a breakdown of the differing uses within the town/village centres.

### MC2 CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES

An analysis of pedestrian, cycle, public transport and vehicular movements. Considering the quality of provision, and the differing arrangements within each urban design zone. (Information gathered through both observation and mapping at the consultation events).

### MC3 PARKING

A photographic study of practices in off-street and on-street parking.

### QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM (QPR)

This assessment category considers the impact of streetscape elements on the overall coherence of the urban design zones, it also considers the sense of security within the towns/village.

#### QPR1 STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

An analysis of streetscape elements including benches, street lighting, bins, fences/railings, planting, street trees, shopfronts and paved surfaces. The style of streetscape furniture, quality, location and maintenance is also considered.

#### QPR2 SECURITY

An analysis of the sense of safety within the settlements considering CCTV provision, experiences of personal safety and security drawn from the consultation workshops and looking at good practice features of 'Secured by Design' including natural surveillance of streets and open spaces, and footpaths.

### SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA (SWC)

The 'Settlement-Wide Criteria' provides a more strategic assessment of the towns and village considering how each settlement relates to the wider circulation network, considering views into and within the settlements, and looking at overall legibility.

### SWC1 CIRCULATION

A diagram showing the wider circulation patterns in terms of the hierarchy of streets, bus routes, pedestrian and cycle paths, and highlighting some of the key destinations.

### SWC2 VIEWS

An assessment of the key views from beyond the urban boundary looking into the settlement and those from the built up area looking out towards the countryside. Views and view corridors (or vistas) towards key landmarks are also considered within the town and village centres.

### SWC3 LEGIBILITY

An analysis of the overall legibility of the settlements looking at landmarks or orientation points, key gateways into the settlement and gateways into the town and village centres. Considering current conditions in terms of the primary paths, and barriers, major edge conditions, signage and the overall image of the place.



Town sign, Broadway, Letchworth Garden City



## DISTRICT-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES - VILLAGE

The following tables provide general district-wide guidelines for the village of Knebworth and the four towns. The guidelines relate to each of the assessment criteria, more detailed guidelines relating to the individual settlements is provided within the separate place specific Urban Design Assessments.

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING PLACES	MP1: Building types	The application of local building typologies would generally flow from prevailing densities within each urban design zone, such as the use of flats and terraces for higher density areas, semi-detached for low-medium density areas and detached buildings for very low-low zones.
	MP2: Materials and architectural styles	The use of local materials and styles should be encouraged. Particular materials noted as local to North Hertfordshire villages include red brick, or rendered buildings, timber frames and plain clay tiled roofs. Many of the materials introduced from the 1950s onwards - such as wood or plastic cladding were unpopular with local residents.
	MP3: Listed buildings and Conservation Areas	The current listed buildings should be protected, in terms of their physical upkeep, the treatment of buildings and sites in their immediate vicinity and view corridors to them. Conservation Areas should strive for a consistency of character which extends to streetscape elements and furniture.
	MP3: Building heights and massing	The village of Knebworth should generally be constrained to less than three storeys, with the exception of special consideration sites that add to the legibility of the village. Low building heights are critical for maintaining village character.
	MP4: Density	The village should attempt to create a general gradient of density extending from a village centre zone (high) to an inner zone (medium to high) to a semi-rural zone (medium to low).
	MP5: Topography	Knebworth is positioned within gently undulating landform surrounded by open farmland. The slight valley formation particularly prominent on the west facing slope allows local views within the village. Development within the village should respect local variations in landform, as well as preserving views out of the urban area into the countryside.
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE1: Morphology	The railway line bisects the centre and creates a divide between the east and west sides. The strength and clarity of the morphology on the eastern side of the village should be encouraged on the western side with the use of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets minimised.
	CE2: Building lines, setbacks and gaps	Consistency in the building lines along each street should be emphasised. Generally, the village centre zone should have minimal setbacks, the inner zone and postwar suburban zone should have, depending on the given street, small or medium setbacks, and the semi-rural zone should have medium to large setbacks.
	CE3: Building orientation	Building entries should typically face the street, both to create an increased sense of security and added vitality to the public realm. New developments which result in the backs of houses onto primary or district distributor roads should be avoided.
	CE4: Pavements	Pavements should be well maintained, and free from obstruction. Grass verges, planting and shrubs are also an important element of the road and building plot edges particularly within the semi-rural zone.
	CE5: Open Space	Houses should have rear gardens that back onto other rear gardens as a means of maximising wildlife habitat, privacy and sunlight. New developments should consider the context when determining if front gardens are individual or communal (as individual front gardens are often critical to the character of an area). Strong footpath links into the public open spaces and the surrounding countryside should be encouraged.

## DISTRICT-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES - VILLAGE

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MCI: Land Use	Non-residential village centre land uses should be protected and enhanced where possible. The potential for flats above shops should be considered in the village centres.
	MC2: Circulation, demand and linkages	The street hierarchy should consider the primary distributor with its dual function as the Village Centre where the provision of safe pedestrian and cycle crossings should be given primacy. Secondary distributors should generally extend from the primary distributor providing connections to residential access roads. Footpaths represent important circulation paths in the village, and cycling routes should be encouraged.
	MC3: Parking	On-street parking should typically be avoided for primary and secondary distributors, although the on-street parking within the Village Centre should be retained and enhanced where possible. On-street parking on residential access roads should be permitted when street widths allow and it does not impede on the rural character. Newer developments may consider communal on-site parking, particularly if located off primary and secondary distributors.
QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM	QPR1: Streetscape elements	Streetscape elements should be used to reinforce the difference between the different urban design zones, the presence of a street hierarchy through traffic calming treatments, and the distinctiveness of Conservation Areas.
	QPR2: Security	Consistent long term maintenance and management of streetscape elements and lighting enhances the sense of safety and security. In particular footpaths and alleyways should be well lit and maintained. The principles of 'Secured by Design' should be incorporated as part of any new development including the orientation of buildings to encourage natural surveillance of streets, parking footpaths and open spaces, the provision of well designed public spaces etc.
SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA	SWC1: Views	Views into and from the surrounding countryside should be recognised and protected. View corridors along key routes toward key orientation points and landmarks should also be recognised and protected. Clear gateways into the villages should be established and marked by such features as gateway signage, key buildings and changes in streetscape treatment. .
	SWC2: Legibility	Development should respect existing landmarks and add new local landmarks particularly where opportunities arise within the Village Centre or where they occur at the focus of converging streets. Key nodes and gateways should be established through both the built form, and streetscape elements such as the paving treatment and through signage. A consistent and coordinated design of signage across the village should be encouraged. This should include pedestrian and cycle signage at specific nodal points.

## DISTRICT-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES - TOWNS

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING PLACES	MP1: Building types	The application of local building typologies would generally flow from prevailing densities within each urban design zone, such as the use of flats and terraces for higher density areas, semi-detached for low-medium density areas and detached buildings for very low-low zones.
	MP2: Materials and architectural styles	The use of local materials and styles should be encouraged. Particular materials noted as local to North Hertfordshire towns include red brick, stone, cream/white render and timber framed buildings and plain clay tiled roofs. There should be opportunities for high-quality modern materials and styles, particularly with regard to commercial and civic buildings within the town centres.
	MP2: Listed buildings and Conservation Areas	The current listed buildings should be protected, in terms of their physical upkeep, the treatment of buildings and sites in their immediate vicinity and view corridors to them. Conservation Areas should strive for a consistency of character which extends to streetscape elements and furniture.
	MP3: Building heights and massing	Building heights should respect the predominantly domestic scale and character of existing buildings, as such buildings should generally be constrained to four storeys or less. Over-large, out of scale buildings will be discouraged.
	MP4: Density	The North Hertfordshire towns should strive to create mixed use town centres creating high densities with good quality flats above shops. There are opportunities to increase densities on larger sites (over 0.35 hectares) which are in close proximity to shops, services or transport nodes and stops.
	MP5: Topography	Topography has had a significant impact on the morphology of the towns, creating distinct street patterns and key views. Development within the towns should continue to accentuate views from the valley sides into the town centres.
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE1: Morphology	The morphology should emphasise vehicular and pedestrian permeability within a clear street hierarchy (see circulation, demand and linkages). Perimeter blocks will be encouraged to provide continuity of active frontage to the street. Street design which establishes narrow 'blocks' which allow fronts onto access roads and force backs of houses onto primary or secondary distributors should be avoided. Cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads should be avoided.
	CE2: Building lines, setbacks and gaps	Consistency in the building lines along each street should be emphasised. Generally, the town centre zone should have no or minimal setbacks, the historic zone and postwar zone should have, depending on the given street, small or medium setbacks, the semi-rural and peripheral zones should have medium to large setbacks. Residential buildings along primary or district distributors many have increased setbacks to provide distance from through traffic.
	CE3: Building orientation	Building entries should typically face the street, both to create increased sense of security and added vitality to the public realm. New developments which result in the backs of houses onto primary or district distributor roads should be avoided. As described in the morphology guidelines, developments which result in fronts along access roads and backs along primary or district distributors should be avoided.
	CE4: Pavements	Pavements should be well maintained, and free from obstruction. Grass verges, street trees, planting and shrubs are also an important element of the road and building plot edges and these should be retained and enhanced where possible.
	CE5: Open space	Houses should have rear gardens that back onto other rear gardens as a means of maximising wildlife habitat, privacy and sunlight. New developments should consider the context when determining if front gardens are individual or communal (as individual front gardens are often critical to the character of an area).

## DISTRICT-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES - TOWNS

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MCI: Land Use	Mixed use town centres should be encouraged with residential uses within upper floors and as part of mixed use developments promoted. The local parades and convenience stores within the residential areas should be maintained where possible.
	MC2: Circulation, Demand and Linkages	The main shopping streets within the town centres should be prioritised for pedestrian activity. Primary distributors should provide vehicular connections across the towns. Secondary distributors should generally extend from the High Street and primary distributors. Residential access roads should generally branch off from the district distributors and not the High Street. Footpaths represent important circulation paths in the towns, and both pedestrian and cycling routes should be encouraged particularly to the town centres from surrounding residential areas, to open spaces and the surrounding countryside.
	MC3: Parking	On-street parking should typically be avoided for primary and secondary distributors and encouraged along residential access roads where street widths permit and it does not impede on the semi rural character. Newer developments may consider communal on-site parking, particularly if located off primary or secondary distributors.
QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM	QPR1: Streetscape Elements	Streetscape elements should be used to reinforce the difference between the different urban design zones, the presence of a street hierarchy through traffic calming treatments and the distinctiveness of Conservation Areas.
	QPR2: Security	Consistent long term maintenance and management of streetscape elements and lighting enhances the sense of safety and security. In particular footpaths and alleyways should be well lit and maintained. The principles of 'Secured by Design' should be incorporated as part of any new development including the orientation of buildings to encourage natural surveillance of streets, parking footpaths and open spaces, the provision of well designed public spaces etc.
SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA	SWC1: Views	Views into and from the countryside including Green Belt should be protected and a designated buffer along the Green Belt should be established to protect against a high-rise development. View corridors along the High Streets and toward key orientation points should be recognised and protected. Clear gateways into the town centres should be established and marked by gateway signage, key buildings and changes in streetscape treatments. Key viewpoints within the towns should be established and integrated into the design review process.
	SWC2: Legibility	Development should respect existing landmarks and add new local landmarks particularly where opportunities arise within the town centres or where they occur at the focus of converging streets. Key nodes and gateways should be established through both the built form, and streetscape elements such as the paving treatment and through signage.

## POLICY CONTEXT

This section sets out a review of the existing national, regional and local policy context, and has been used to inform the preparation of the urban design assessments. Policy specifically relating to the individual settlements will be incorporated into the town and village reports.

## NATIONAL GUIDANCE

Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) and their replacements Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) are prepared by the Government after public consultation to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. They also explain the relationship between planning policies and other policies that have an important bearing on issues of development and land use.

The issue of design is covered primarily in PPS1, though most PPGs provide some guidance on design:

### PPS1: GENERAL POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES (February 2005)

PPS1 sets out guidance on the role of design considerations in planning, emphasising that good design is a key aim. Planning policies should promote high quality design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. The PPS highlights how good design is integral to good planning in delivering safe, inclusive and successful communities.

In addition to outlining guidance on design, PPS1 sets out the Government's commitment to sustainable development, and recommends that development plans should ensure that sustainable development is pursued in an integrated manner, with community involvement forming an essential element in creating sustainable and safe communities.

Improving access for all to jobs, health, education, shops, leisure and community facilities, open space, sport and recreation is highlighted as a central goal of statutory planning policy. This can be addressed by ensuring that new development is located where everyone can access services or facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car.

### PPS3: HOUSING (November 2006)

PPS3 attempts to reflect the Government's commitment to improving the affordability and supply of housing in all communities, including those in rural areas, in which the Government is committed to providing high quality housing that contributes to the maintenance of sustainable rural communities.

The key housing policy goal is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, affordable home, in a location of choice. Other priorities identified within PPS3 underpin the Government's aim to promote more sustainable patterns of development and make better use of previously developed land. New housing and residential environments should be well designed

and should make a significant contribution to promoting urban renaissance and improving quality of life.

The Government believes that good design is integral to the development of high quality new housing. As a consequence, any proposals for development that fails to take opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area should be rejected. Local planning authorities should facilitate good design by identifying the distinctive features that define the character of a particular local area.

Careful attention to design is of particular importance where the chosen strategy is to intensify the existing urban fabric. Though more intensive development is not always appropriate, when well designed and constructed in the right location, it can enhance the character and quality of an area.

In Conservation Areas and other local areas of special character where, if proper attention is paid to achieving good design, fresh development opportunities can be undertaken without harming the existing character and appearance of the surrounding area.

To accord with PPS3, assessments of design quality should consider the extent to which a proposed development:

- Is easily accessible and well-connected to public transport
- Provides, or is within easy access of, open space
- Is well integrated with, and

- complements, neighbouring buildings and the local area
- Facilitates the efficient use of resources, and seeks to reduce the impact of climate change
- Takes a design led approach to the provision of car parking
- Creates or enhances a distinctive character that relates well to the surroundings and supports local pride and civic identity

The needs of children should also be considered, particularly where family housing is proposed. There should be adequate provision of recreational areas, including private gardens, play areas, and informal play space. These should be well-designed, safe, secure, and stimulating areas with safe pedestrian access.

The conversion of existing housing is regarded as an important source of new housing, and the Government encourages the development of policies that identify and bring into use empty housing and buildings.



## POLICY CONTEXT

New housing should be developed in suitable locations that offer a range of community facilities, with good access to jobs, key services, and infrastructure. The priority for development should be previously developed land, and in particular vacant and derelict sites and buildings.

30 dwellings per hectare should be seen as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making. However, the density of existing development should not dictate that of new housing, as imaginative design and layout of new development can lead to a more efficient use of land without compromising the existing quality of the local environment.

### PPS6: PLANNING FOR TOWN CENTRES (March 2005)

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres examines the networks and hierarchies of centres. The Statement requires local authorities to consider the pattern of provision of different centres and the roles, range of facilities and degree of specialisation in these centres, in order to understand a centre's position in the hierarchy. Planning authorities are expected to plan the distribution of growth and use this as an opportunity to rebalance the network of centres to ensure that an area is not dominated by the largest centres and to allow for a redistribution of facilities.

**Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools**  
Published alongside PPS6 as a supporting document this guidance suggests that

development should adhere to the following principles:

- Orientation of development so that it fronts on to the street
- Respect building lines of the existing urban environment
- Maximise the amount of active street frontage
- Avoid designs which are inward looking and which present blank frontages
- Provide level access from the public realm
- In the case of development in edge-of-centre locations, provide good pedestrian access to the centre.

When considering parking, the guidance recommends that car parking and service areas should be carefully located within a development using means that minimise visual impact.

### PPG13: TRANSPORT (March 2001)

PPG13 requires that new development should help to create places that connect with each other sustainably; the aim is to provide the right conditions to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport and to put people before traffic.

### PPG15: CONSERVATION AREAS AND LISTED BUILDINGS (September 1994)

Guidance regarding Conservation Areas is of particular importance to this urban design assessment as each of the five towns and village has at least one designated Conservation Area. PPG 15 encourages detailed control of the external appearance of buildings in

Conservation Areas, and emphasises the importance of the relationship between buildings and their surroundings and of the quality of townscape. The character and appearance of many Conservation Areas is not just reliant upon high quality and historic buildings but also dependent on the treatment of roads, pavements and other public spaces. When considering new development, it is most important that buildings should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole with a well-established character and appearance of its own, rather than directly imitating earlier styles.

## NATIONAL GUIDANCE: URBAN DESIGN GUIDES

### BY DESIGN URBAN DESIGN IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM: TOWARDS BETTER PRACTICE, DETR/CABE, 2001

By Design is a Government-sponsored guide that aids the understanding of urban design by describing its key objectives. The guide considers how people use buildings and open space and what they feel about the places they live, work and visit.

The guide considers that successful streets and places have certain characteristics in common. These can be distilled into objectives of good urban design:

- Character – a place with its own identity, that is memorable and easily appreciated

- Continuity and enclosure – a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished
- Quality of the public realm – a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas
- Ease of movement – a place that is easy to get to and move through
- Legibility – a place with a clear image that is easy to understand
- Adaptability – a place that can change easily
- Diversity – a place with variety and choice

The analysis of the physical form also draws on the following:

- Layout – urban structure and grain
- Landscape - the character and appearance of open space
- Density and mix – the amount of development and the range of uses
- Scale – height and massing
- Appearance – details and materials



## POLICY CONTEXT

### URBAN DESIGN GUIDANCE (URBAN DESIGN GROUP 2002)

The Urban Design Group, a membership organisation founded in 1978, aims to promote effective action in improving towns and cities. The Group produced its own advisory report for all those involved in commissioning, preparing or using guidance.

The report contains a checklist for site and context appraisal that expands the seven objectives set out in By Design:

- Character - natural features – landscape setting, land form, ecology, trees and hedgerows
- Human impact – historical development, settlement pattern, local history and place names
- Buildings and structures – colours and textures, building elements and fenestration, materials, rhythm and pattern
- Continuity and enclosure – building lines, setbacks, gaps, back views, active frontages
- Quality of the public realm – overlooking, hard landscaping, planting, street furniture, structures, safety and security, maintenance
- Ease of movement – access, public transport, roads, cycling, walking
- Legibility (ease of understanding) – image and perception, local views, strategic views, vistas, landmarks, skylines, roofscape, gateways, thresholds, boundaries and barriers, nodes
- Adaptability – aspects that contribute to an area's adaptability
- Diversity – aspects that contribute to

an area's diversity and mix of uses

### MANUAL FOR STREETS (2007)

Manual for Streets supersedes "Design Bulletin 32" and its companion document "Places, Streets and Movement", and will complement PPS3, when finalised. MfS is expected to be used predominantly as a guide to the design, construction, adoption and maintenance of new streets but it is also applicable to existing streets where they are subject to re-design.

Manual for Streets (MfS) is intended to help bring about a transformation in the way streets are designed and to show how street design considerations can help improve the local environment quality and contribute towards creating sustainable and mixed communities. It draws on different case studies and existing good practice guidance.

A number of significant changes to current practice are recommended within the document which may be relevant in the context of the Urban Design Assessment work. These include:

- Street designs and types should be developed on a location-specific basis, considering both the placemaking and movement functions of the particular streets serving an area.
- Designers should pay attention to the visual quality of street layouts and designs, alongside practical aspects such as providing for movement, road safety and maintenance considerations. Designing in three dimensions will help this process.

- Road safety audit should be replaced by a more broadly-based quality audit, which considers how well street designs have met the objectives that have been set. A documented review that a design meets its objectives is a better defence against liability than simple adherence to published standards.
- Research has confirmed that drivers modify their behaviour in response to their environment. As well as reduced sight lines, the presence of pedestrians and on street parking will tend to reduce traffic speeds. The concept of a fixed design speed that defines minimum sight distances which must be applied all circumstances is therefore no longer appropriate.
- Design stopping sight distances (SSD) associated with particular vehicle speeds have been revised downwards based on research and practice in other countries. For example, the revised design SSD for a vehicle speed of 50kph (31mph) is 43m (previously 70m).
- The recommended way in which visibility splays are measured has been changed.
- The viewpoint on the minor arm should generally be from a point 2.4m back from the give way line, and measured to a point 1m from the kerb line (or to the centre line to the left where overtaking is unlikely).

### HOUSING AUDIT: ASSESSING THE DESIGN QUALITY OF NEW HOMES CABE 2004

In October 2004, CABE published an audit of 100 recent housing

developments in London, the South East, and the East of England. Schemes were scored against a range of criteria including car parking and highways, architectural design and policy guidance and implementation.

The majority of buildings audited (61%) were assessed as 'average', a fifth (17%) were judged 'good or very good' and a similar figure were considered to be of 'poor' quality. The audit demonstrated that a number of urban design principles, including the appropriate use of scale, the creation of active frontages and the forging of identifiable relationships between public and private space are becoming standard, however, the dominance of highway infrastructure and limited use of bespoke design are also prevalent. The findings of the CABE audit will be used to contribute to the over-arching urban design policies for residential development in the district.



Market Place/Bucklersbry, Hitchin

## POLICY CONTEXT

### URBAN DESIGN COMPENDIUM (ENGLISH PARTNERSHIPS/THE HOUSING CORPORATION, 2000)

The Urban Design Compendium examines the factors that make neighbourhoods comfortable and safe. It aims to provide accessible advice to developers, funding agencies and partners on the achievement and assessment of the quality of urban design for the development and regeneration of urban areas. It is written to provide a source of good practice to all those involved in commissioning, designing or evaluating development projects.

The Compendium identifies key aspects of urban design:

- Places for people
- Enrich the qualities of the existing urban places
- Make connections
- Work with the landscape
- Mix uses and forms
- Manage the investment
- Design for change

The Compendium also includes a character appraisal inventory that covers substantially the same topics as those covered in By Design and the Urban Design Group Guidance. They will be used as a checklist in assembling the criteria for the North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment.

### GUIDANCE ON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS (ENGLISH HERITAGE, 2005)

This guidance offers advice to those undertaking, or commissioning, conservation area appraisals. The contents reflect recent practice on historic areas characterisation, pioneered in landscape and archeological survey work and increasingly being applied to smaller urban areas.

The guidance highlights the importance for local authorities of recognising the values which are ascribed by stakeholders to historic environments when preparing appraisals of the special character of conservation areas.

### REGIONAL GUIDANCE

In addition to national planning guidance, regional planning guidance is also relevant and important.

Under the new arrangements set out in PPS11 on Regional Planning, Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) are issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government following a public examination into a draft submitted by the regional planning body. This body, working with other regional stakeholders is now responsible for preparing the draft guidance. The more recent RSS have addressed design either by emphasising regionally important design issues to which local authorities should respond or by setting out a strategic framework for design policy.

### EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN: DRAFT REVISION TO THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS) FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND (DECEMBER 2004)

North Hertfordshire is situated within the East of England region within the London Arc sub-area. The vision for the East of England is to sustain and improve the quality of life for all people who live in, or visit the region, by developing a more sustainable, prosperous and outward-looking region, while respecting its diversity and enhancing its assets (para 3.2). One of the 14 stated objectives is to:

“Protect and enhance the built and historic environment and encourage good quality design and use of sustainable construction methods of all new development.” (para 3.3)

The East of England Plan states that new development in both urban and rural areas will be of a high quality, delivered through local development documents (policy SS16). New development should maximise its contribution to the attractiveness and character of the local area:

- Make efficient use of land
- Housing development should be built at the correct density and respect local building styles, character and identity
- Provide a mix of uses and building types where appropriate
- Have regard to the needs of all sectors of the community
- Address crime, community safety and public health

The region's cities, towns and villages are rich in character and may have a strong sense of local identity. Areas with distinctive local character may warrant local guidance setting out how new development can be sympathetic in form and layout to that which already exists (Para 4.82). Local Development Documents should also sensitively seek to exploit the traditional architecture of rural villages and market towns, on the quality and distinctiveness of the townscape and use of materials.





## POLICY CONTEXT

### LOCAL GUIDANCE

#### NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN

##### **Baldock**

Baldock is a town that retains much of its traditional market town character, despite having undergone rapid growth over the past ten years. It is one of five towns in Hertfordshire listed by the Council for British Archaeology as being of national importance, and hosts many fine buildings. The town centre constitutes the major part of the Conservation Area.

The important factors determining policy within the town are:

- The town's setting on gently rising ground with steeper and wooded slopes behind
- Many opportunities for views to and from several vantage points: A1 (M), railway line, Royston Road, and high ground to south east
- Physical constraints of the A1 (M) and railway line, on embankments and steep slopes as well as narrow gap between Baldock and Letchworth
- Areas of relatively dense development with dividing spaces, that are either playing fields or significant highways

##### **Residential accommodation:**

For the purposes of managing proposals for new housing development, twelve residential areas have been defined in the town. These are located either to the south of the town, in the narrow space between the A1 (M) and the town

centre, or to the east where many new homes have recently been developed, with a further three areas within the town centre.

Baldock's residential environment is of a higher density than in neighbouring Letchworth, and as a result, proposals will be considered in a different manner.

##### **Employment:**

Those employment areas in the town close to housing are regarded as unsuitable for certain industrial processes. This is particularly applicable at Bondor Business Centre, Holyroyd Crescent, and Icknield Way. Existing uses should not be removed, but new proposals should be within the BI Use Class.

##### **Leisure uses:**

Baldock is lacking in public and amenity space, though increases in provision in Letchworth would go some way to meeting the shortfall. Weston Woods also contributes to reducing the deficit, though it is a significant distance from the majority of the town's population.

##### **Landscape and open space patterns in towns:**

Open space and landscaped frontage should be retained on the High Street for the purposes of amenity and the 'open space pattern'.

##### **Baldock Town Centre:**

###### **Policy 42:**

Although Baldock is a historic market town, the town centre only performs a local shopping service to the local population in comparison with

neighbouring towns like Letchworth. Much of the existing commercial offer is mixed with other uses, ranging from restaurants to small businesses, and domestic dwellings. The Council's planning policies are aimed at retaining this mix of uses.

##### **Policy 43 - Shopping areas in town centre:**

This policy applies to five locations; the south side of Whitehorse Street, two islands of buildings in Whitehorse Street and High Street, Hitchin Street from its junction with High Street to the White Horse PH, and the east side of the High Street.

##### **Policy 44 - Other areas in the town centre:**

A large proportion of the town centre falls within the terms of this policy thanks to the diversity of land uses, which the Council is committed to maintaining.

##### **Car Parking:**

Car parking in the town centre is predominantly on street, which can affect the narrow streets around shopping areas like Church Street.

Parking provision needs to be managed around Whitehorse Street and High Street.

##### **Hitchin**

Hitchin is a traditional market town with medieval origins. Expansion has been outwards from the town centre, with the majority of later development taking place in the southeast of the town around Wymondley Park and St Michaels Mount. Further expansion is constrained

by the Green Belt.

The medieval street pattern has been retained, and as a consequence much of the town centre has been designated as a Conservation Area. However, there are pressures for new development to support the town's shopping and service roles, which need to be properly handled if the town's unique character is to be maintained.

##### **Green Belt:**

The Green Belt around Hitchin is drawn with reference to:

- Maintaining the separate identity of the town
- Preventing the spread of the built-up area into areas of good quality agricultural land and areas of landscape importance

##### **Landscape and open space patterns in towns:**

The key factors in Hitchin are:

- The river/valley network with high ground in between tributaries of River



Town Hall and Broadway Gardens, Letchworth  
Garden City

## POLICY CONTEXT

### Oughton

- The railway line which has influenced the location and character of employment and housing development
- The character of residential areas, with:
  - Older housing in the town centre
  - Older housing with substantial landscaped areas to the south
  - Large contemporary housing estates to the north
- Major open spaces associated with river valleys and recreation facilities
- Important views are limited to:
  - Towards the town from Wilbury Hill, Letchworth, Rosehill, Great Wymondley, Stevenage Road, Parkway (Priory Park), and the A505 (west)
  - From the town along the open spaces associated with the rivers, and towards Windmill Hill, Hollow Lane, and St Michael's Road

### Housing:

Housing in the town ranges from very old properties found in the town centre, to significant areas of 19th and early 20th century terraces, and more modern estates on the outskirts of the town.

### Employment:

There are limited opportunities for increasing the level of commercial land use in the town, although opportunities exist at Cadwell Lane.

### Leisure uses:

Areas like Walsworth Common, Oughtonhead Common, and Priory Park serve to enhance local environmental standards, though the overall quantity of

public open space is below the space standards recommended by the National Playing Fields Association. Open space is unevenly distributed around the town, leaving areas like Westmill with a particular deficit of open space.

### Shopping:

The growth of shopping floorspace has been restricted by the requirements of the historic environment, and by strategic policies that have sought to promote sub-regional centres at Stevenage and Luton. As a consequence, the Council will resist proposals for changes of use in the shopping core.

Proposals for additional shopping provision will be expected to add to the range and type of existing shops, and integrate well with the existing town centre in terms of scale and form.

### Hitchin Town Centre:

Hitchin is in possession of an attractive, historic, and commercially successful town centre, which has received national recognition. Though the Council are keen to attract new developments that will bolster the town centre, special attention will be paid to the ability of any new development to benefit the historic environment.

### Letchworth Garden City

The policies for Letchworth Garden City seek to retain the town's unique character as a Garden City with open countryside, to improve environmental quality where this falls short of the remainder of the town, and to support the revitalisation of the town centre.

### Pattern and character of North Herts:

In view of the town's Garden City origins, only those development styles that maintain and enhance Letchworth's original layout and design style will be permitted.

### Green Belt:

The Green Belt boundary is drawn around the town with reference to:

- Maintaining the separate identity of Letchworth with the villages of Norton and Willian from Hitchin, Baldock, and Stotfold
- Preventing encroachment into areas of good quality agricultural land
- Containing the urban environment within a rural belt, in line with the original Garden City principles

The Green Belt between Letchworth and Baldock is of particular importance, as it prevents the coalescence of the two towns. However, the urban edges between the two are overly stark and would benefit from environmental improvements.

### Conservation Areas:

Letchworth contains four Conservation Areas:

- Letchworth: includes substantial parts of the original pre-1918 masterplan
- Norton and Willian: historic villages that existed before Letchworth
- Croft Lane, Norton: early Garden City housing on the edge of Letchworth

Proposed development should contain an emphasis on the preservation and enhancement of the existing fabric to maintain continuity throughout the town, with the design, layout, scale,

materials, and colours all blending with the town's established character.

Low-density residential neighbourhoods, characterised by large single houses set within large gardens are a particular feature of many parts of the Letchworth Conservation Area. The Council will resist proposals that might jeopardise this character, with flats or the subdivision of plots.

### Landscape and open space patterns in towns:

The unique pattern of growth in Letchworth means that its masterplan plays a significant role in the town's landscape pattern.



St Mary's Church, Hitchin

## POLICY CONTEXT

The most important landscape features are:

- Established features of the original pre-1904 landscape, such as Norton Common, small copses, and the shallow valley of the Pix Brook
- Important views from vantage points both outside and within the town
- The characters of residential areas in the original masterplan, having various densities and 'typical' Letchworth architectural styles
- Amenity of open spaces throughout the town associated with the urban layout.

### Housing proposals:

The Council will expect new residential development to follow its 'Garden City Design Principles' guidelines so that it can reflect the character of the world's first Garden City.

### Employment provision:

Employment opportunities in Letchworth are concentrated in the town centre and five other, well-defined areas within the structure of the town. The environment within employment areas should generally be improved.

A number of areas are proposed as suitable only for BI Business Uses, where they would benefit adjoining residential neighbourhoods in Letchworth. These areas include Blackhorse Road, Pixmore Avenue, Ridge Road, and Birds Hill.

### Leisure uses:

Letchworth is generally adequately provided with leisure facilities in terms of National Playing Fields Association and

Sports Council standards. Open space and recreational facilities are well distributed across the town, giving reasonable levels of access to local people.

Howard Park and The Broadway Gardens are designated as Historic Gardens of National Importance.

### Transport:

The Local Plan safeguards land for road improvements at Blackhorse Road and Works Road. The Council will not permit development within these areas that would prejudice the proposed improvements.

### Letchworth Town Centre:

Though Letchworth town centre is an attractive shopping destination, it is clear that other centres and retail developments are exerting pressure which could undermine the town centre's future success and continued ability to meet the needs of local people. There are also opportunities to improve the pedestrian environment in Eastcheap and Leys Avenue.

### Shopping:

The Council hopes that environmental and access improvements will increase the likelihood of retail units becoming occupied by durable retailers, which are currently under-represented.

### Shopping areas and frontages:

In main shopping areas like Eastcheap, Leys Avenue, Commerce Way, Central Approach, Broadway, and Station Forecourt, the emphasis will remain on shopping and bringing life and visitors to

the town centre. There are policy commitments to improving the pedestrian environment, and links with secondary shopping areas and parking provision.

### Other areas in town centres:

Much of the town centre is outside of the specified main shopping areas, and Station Road and Norton Way South, whilst in the town centre, should retain a residential character.

### Other uses in the town centre:

Other existing uses may be acceptable, depending on their ability to support and diversify the town centre. Any opportunity to increase the level of parking provision will be carefully considered.

### Letchworth town centre environmental areas and proposals:

Pedestrian activity is concentrated around the main shopping streets of Eastcheap, Leys Avenue and Station Road. The aim is that peripheral roads bounding this central shopping area will take the majority of vehicles approaching the town centre.

Minor opportunities for environmental improvements, such as improving links between parking and shops, also exist.

### Royston

Royston lies in a shallow bowl within the East Anglian Heights chalk escarpment, and is bounded by the Cambridgeshire Plain to the North. The Council regards the protection and enhancement of this unique setting as a priority for the town and the wider landscape.

Limited opportunities for major new development exist within the town, and new development would need to adhere to the established structure and character of the town.

There are also opportunities to better integrate the new development that rapidly emerged since the mid 1960s into the structure of the town.

The town centre retains a medieval pattern around the cross roads of Icknield Way and Ermine Street. The existence of many historic buildings within the traditional street pattern means that the centre is subject to a Conservation Area designation.

### Landscape and open space patterns in towns:

The principle features that justify the pattern in Royston are:

- The dominating slopes around the south of the town
- The surrounding relatively flat and featureless topography which continues into the north of the town



## POLICY CONTEXT

and links with key landscaped areas and open spaces in the town

- The limits to development provided by the bypass to the north
- Views from high ground, from afar north of the town, or from the bypass and railway across the town, with some limited views along the main roads into the town centre.

### Urban environment:

Specific areas for environmental improvements in the town are listed in the Local Plan.

### Housing proposals:

Development in the town ranges from historic houses in the medieval town centre, to 1970s and 1980s estates on the peripheries of the town, and the more recent 1990s development at the junction of the A10/A505. The Local Plan identifies 15 residential areas outside the town centre, each with their own residential character. These are identified on the proposals map. Proposals for new development should acknowledge these definitions.

### Employment provision:

Employment opportunities in the town are concentrated in three main areas outside the town centre. Proposal sites for new development are shown on the Proposals Map.

The environment within employment areas should be safeguarded and enhanced, ensuring it makes a full contribution to the overall environmental quality of the town, and minimising any environmental disadvantages.

### Royston Town Centre:

The town centre is the main shopping location, hosts several social and cultural facilities, and is also a major employment area.

Growth in shopping space has not kept pace with the expansion in the town's population. The historic environment of the centre limits development opportunities, though there are relatively unattractive buildings that could be redeveloped to enhance both the retail offer and the wider urban environment. The Council believes that sensitive new development would realise valuable investment that would then make it easier to safeguard the historic environment.

The Council believes there is an urgent need to consolidate the town centre as an attractive shopping destination. This means that proposals for change of use away from retail use will be resisted, and where possible, new retail proposals will be supported. Other uses will also be considered, provided they add to the vibrancy of the town centre, and work within the historic environment.

The main shopping area is seen as High Street, routes through to Market Hill and Church Lane, Market Hill, Royston Cross, and Kneesworth Street. The Council supports the primacy of retail uses in these areas, though A3 food & drink uses will also be considered. Particular regard will be paid to any effects on pedestrian routes and the attractiveness of new proposals to shoppers.

Only retail uses will be allowed in the core of the town centre, with the main aim being to introduce more activity into the Market Hill/Fish Hill North area. However, much of the town centre falls outside of the defined main shopping area, and is therefore not subject to protective shopping policies.

A range of environmental improvements, aimed at enhancing the pedestrian environment, whilst easing service access to shops, are proposed throughout the town centre. These are detailed in the Local Plan. There are clear opportunities for planting on the two main axes – at Baldock Street/Melbourn Street, and High Street/Kneesworth Street.

### Knebworth

#### Conservation Areas:

There are two Conservation Areas in the village, at Stockens Green, and Deards End.



Town Hall, Melbourn Street, Royston

## POLICY CONTEXT

### TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIES

#### Hitchin

The Hitchin Town Centre Strategy was adopted in November 2004. The Strategy lays the foundations for future growth and development in Hitchin town centre. It has been prepared after extensive consultation, providing a comprehensive overview of the town centre while recognising its historic character, local distinctiveness and the needs of its local community.

One of the sites identified in the Strategy as appropriate for mixed use development is the Churchgate area. A revised Planning Brief was prepared for the Churchgate Development Area and adopted as the Council's Statement of Policy in November 2005.

#### Baldock

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan was adopted in January 2006 and provides a context for promoting integrated development and enhancement of the town centre over the next 10 years.

#### Letchworth Garden City

The Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was formally adopted in January 2007. The aim of the strategy is to provide a comprehensive framework to promote integrated development and enhancement of the Letchworth town centre over the next 15 years.

#### Royston

The Council has started work on the preparation of a Town Centre Strategy for Royston. The Council is in the process of working together with and seeking input from local businesses, organisations, key landowners and residents. This is through a series of workshops and a Town Centre Stakeholder Group. The intention is to prepare a draft Strategy for formal public consultation in autumn 2007.

### PARISH PLAN

#### Knebworth

The first edition of the Knebworth Parish Plan was released to the public in April 2007 and covers a five year period although some long term projects will extend beyond this period. The Plan seeks to represent the wishes and ideas of the community as identified through an extensive consultation exercise which included a Community Survey delivered to all homes in September 2004 and a the findings of a series of focus groups.



St Martin's Church, London Road, Knebworth

## POLICY CONTEXT

### NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE AND STEVENAGE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The Landscape Character Assessment was adopted by NHDC as the Council's agreed Landscape Character Assessment for the District. The information will be used for:

- Advising on development control matters;
- Policy development for future development plans;
- Providing a framework for other landscape planning; and
- Countryside conservation and management activities, access and recreation projects and support to grant applications.

The assessment outlines a number of general landscape features of North Hertfordshire:

#### Geology:

The key geological influence in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage is the lower cretaceous Chalk, an extensive strata which continues under the southeast of England.

#### Topography:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage occupy the upland area of the Chilterns scarp and chalk plateau. The scarp extends from the western boundary of the District, north of Luton running east to Royston and continuing eastwards beyond the District boundary.

A particular characteristic of the chalk landscape is the number of dry valleys,

some of which have been deeply incised and resulting in a locally undulating landform.

#### Buildings and Settlement:

The county does not possess good building stone and many historic buildings are constructed from brick, timber or flint with stone dressings. Many churches of the county utilise flint and freestone and have slender spires known as the 'Hertfordshire spire'.

The development of towns in the north of the county has been concentrated along the A1(M) and Great Northern Railway corridors. Of particular note are the early 20th century pioneering garden cities of Letchworth and Welwyn which explored new ideas in housing and urban design.

#### Transport Roads:

The prehistoric Icknield Way crosses the northern part of the county following the chalk spine on an east-west orientation.

The Romans constructed a network of roads connecting urban and commercial centres.

The Great North Road, now part of the A1(M), ran through Baldock and provided the first main halting stage between the capital and the north.

The UK's first roundabout was constructed in Letchworth around 1910.

#### Railways:

The railways developed in a radial

pattern from London. The Great Northern Railway was constructed in the mid-19th century running through Hitchin and connecting London with York.

The Landscape Character Assessment further divides the District into Landscape Character Areas based on local distinctiveness and provides the context for considering how new development might sustain locally distinctive characteristics in the relationship between building, settlements and the wider landscape. The distinctive landscape character areas surrounding each of the towns and village has informed the individual Urban Design Assessments for each of the settlements.



Town Hall, Baldock

## POLICY CONTEXT

### SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE 11-14: DESIGN GUIDE FOR A SHOPFRONT (January 1998)

Design guides exist for shopfronts in Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin, Baldock and Royston. The guide is to provide advice to people building new shops or who may be thinking of changing their existing shopfronts, and to explain the importance of new developments being in keeping with the character of the town centre and enhancing its appearance.

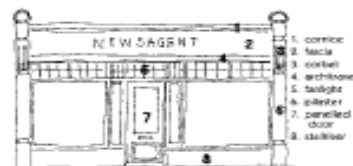
The guides are based on the following key principles:

#### Keep the best shopfronts

Preference should be given to the retention of properties already containing an original shopfront of quality.

#### Retain existing features

Original features should be retained where possible. Where a new shop is being created shopfront designers should aim to include at least some of the features illustrated in the diagrams below:



It should be remembered that period style shopfronts may be inappropriate in the context of some modern buildings.

In such cases the classic components can be successfully interpreted in a contemporary scheme as follows:



#### Design in Context

The design and materials used should be compatible with the character of the area as a whole.

Where possible, shopfronts in buildings designed as a group should be treated similarly and shared features retained or restored.

#### Pay attention to scale

Development should respect the domestic scale and character of existing buildings.

It is important to avoid over-large, out of scale components on the elevation through the preservation of vertical subdivisions, and individual fascia boards.

#### Materials

Materials should be compatible with the rest of the building and the immediate locality. Traditional materials such as stone, tiling or wood should be used wherever possible. The use of modern reflective materials is rarely appropriate. In locations where aluminium is selected, bronze or brown surface finishes are preferred.

#### Security

External steel roller shutters are generally unsuitable and traditional timber shuttered, laminated glass and internal chain link screens are modern alternatives.

Exceptionally, where external shutters may be considered, they must be sensitively designed in relation to the building and the street scene.

#### Shop signs and Advertisements

Aim for simple, well designed signs.

#### Fascia signs

A fascia depth of approximately one fifth of the shopfront height, with lettering of up to 60% of the fascia depth.

Original features should be retained where possible.

Materials and colour for the fascia should be compatible with the rest of the building. New fascia should line up with adjacent traditional or well designed ones.

#### Hanging signs

Hanging or projecting signs are desirable if neat and compact in design and sited at fascia level or first floor level in the case of public houses and hotels. The style of the sign should be simple, in keeping with the overall street scene. Projecting box signs are generally unsuitable.

#### Illuminated signs

Illuminated box signs will be resisted. Front lit fascia are welcome, illuminated either by swan neck lamps or concealed neon tubes.

#### Canopies

Canopies on Listed Buildings and in Conservation Areas can add an attractive feature to a shopfront if well designed. The traditional shop canopy is the straight, fabric, fully retractable type mounted on a roller.

#### Planting

Planting features such as window boxes, hanging baskets or boxes should be well maintained and avoid obstruction to pedestrians.

#### Corner Sites

The double aspect of shops on corner sites should be retained wherever possible.

#### Access

Entrances to shops should avoid steps, or a ramp should be constructed. Consideration should be given to the surface material to ensure it is not slippery or uneven.

## POLICY CONTEXT

### NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL CAR PARKING STRATEGY 2004 – 2009 (July 2004)

The Car Parking Strategy 2004 – 2009 for North Hertfordshire covers all aspects of parking, including the zonal approach subscribed for parking provision at new development. This is explained further within the SPG: Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development (see page 21).

The Strategy seeks to reduce the overall need to travel, reduce dependence on the private car and to enable the use of alternative modes of transport.

The Strategy comments specifically about the four main settlements:

#### Hitchin

There is just enough public parking provision to meet the town's current needs. It is considered essential that any redevelopment that entails a loss of publicly available spaces is replaced by additional provision from either developers or public provision.

Consultation revealed a need for additional parking:

- on the edge of the town
- at the rail station
- on the older residential estates
- for motor cycles
- for ambulant disabled

In the town centre other issues identified included:

- a need for better signage

- verge parking
- Park and Ride
- residents' parking schemes
- better quality car parks.

#### Letchworth

The main parking issues identified in the Strategy concern commuter parking, which is being dealt with using Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs). There is growing need to extend these as commuter parking disperses further from the station and town centre. The area visioning process highlighted issues concerned with:

- residential parking
- car parking charges
- a need for more parking serving the rail station
- a need for more short stay parking
- free parking for older people.

#### Baldock

Public parking provision in Baldock is thought to be reasonable overall although the supply is affected by the on-street market on Wednesdays and it is considered that there are conflicts between local business, residential, commuter and visitor parking in the town centre. The rail station has rather limited provision that is under increasing pressure from commuters.

It is thought that best use of the available provision would be achieved by limiting the duration of town centre parking to maximise the turnover of spaces. There also needs to be CPZs in residential areas within walking distance of the rail station.

#### Royston

The area visioning exercise highlighted issues concerned with:

- residential parking
- car parking charges
- a need for more rail station parking
- a need for more short stay parking
- free parking for older people.

The Strategy notes that similar problems are beginning to affect larger rural settlements, particularly Knebworth.

The Strategy sets out the process to be followed for addressing parking problems and assessing the implementation of CPZs. It sets objectives to help determine parking charges and guide the management of off-street car parks.

The potential benefits of Park and Ride are noted but short term opportunities are thought unlikely, due to a lack of suitable sites.

The Strategy refers to County Council-based parking standards, which should be adhered to in North Hertfordshire. It notes that these standards are maxima. These standards are set for all use classes, the residential standards are reproduced in the table above for ease of reference.



## POLICY CONTEXT

### SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: VEHICLE PARKING PROVISION AT NEW DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the SPD is to explain the Council's policy on vehicle parking provision at new development. The policy is based on a zonal approach to introduce parking restraint and reduce the rate of growth of private car parking spaces in town centres.

The zone types (1 to 4) are set out in the table below and refer to ranges of parking provision (expressed as percentages of the maximum-demand based standards set out by Hertfordshire County Council SPG25) and identify the degree of restraint to be applied to new development within each zone type. Within each range, the higher percentage represents the smallest

Zone type	ALLOWABLE CAR PARKING PROVISION	AREAS COVERED
1	0-25% of the County Council maximum parking standard (SPG25)	No areas in North Hertfordshire
2	25-50% of the County Council maximum parking standard (SPG25)	Core town centre areas
3	50-75% of the County Council maximum parking standard (SPG25)	Areas adjacent the town centre, along major transport corridors or adjacent stations
4	75-100% of the County Council maximum parking standard (SPG25)	Most of the district

Table 4.4: Car parking provision by zone type

acceptable reduction in provision and the lower percentage represents the greatest acceptable reduction in provision. There are no areas within North Hertfordshire with sufficient accessibility to warrant Zone 1 status.

In the non-residential restraint based zones Knebworth is covered by Zone 4, which implies it has a relatively low level of accessibility and therefore the highest levels of parking would be allowed. In the towns, the town centre cores are covered by Zone 2 which are considered to have good accessibility and therefore would only be allowed the low levels of parking. The areas adjacent to the town centres and railway stations are within Zone 3 where 50-75% of the County Council's maximum parking standards would be considered acceptable. The remainder of the settlements are covered by Zone 4.

In terms of residential restraint based zone types only the town centre cores of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston are covered by Zone 2 where reduced standards could apply.



## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

### METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

This section aims to provide an assessment of current policy in relation to the urban design criteria set out previously in this report in order to progress and inform an urban design methodology for the settlements of North Hertfordshire and to highlight any existing gaps in policies that can be addressed through the new LDF.

The assessment is based upon the policies contained within the Local Plan, Town Centre Strategies, Parish Plan, Conservation Character Statements and Supplementary Planning Guidance / Documents against the urban design criteria set out in this report. The existing policy relevant to each criterion is summarised, followed by a brief evaluation and description of any gaps in the policy directed toward that criteria, it has also been noted where the Urban Design Assessment has tried to fill an existing policy gap.

### MAKING PLACES

#### BUILDING TYPES

##### *Policy Summary*

No direct guidance on building type exists within the Local Plan.

The Letchworth Town Centre Strategy considers the types of buildings which would be acceptable as part of development within defined character areas for the town centre.

No such policy guidance exists within

the Hitchin or Baldock Town Centre Strategies, although in terms of residential land uses, a mix of dwelling types and sizes will be encouraged within the town centre (Policy 13 Hitchin Town Centre Strategy, Policy 15 Baldock Town Centre Strategy).

The Conservation Character Statement for the towns and village provides some detail on the prevailing building types and their contribution to the overall character of the Conservation Areas.

##### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Guidance on building types is limited to the town of Letchworth. The Conservation Character Statements provide a character appraisal rather than suggesting forward-looking options.

The Urban Design Assessment has suggested case studies for the settlements which propose particular typologies for the urban design zones. District wide guidance (i.e. covering all settlements within the district) would prove useful.

### MATERIALS / ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

##### *Policy Summary*

Policy 1 in the Local Plan states that development will not be permitted unless proposals show the highest standards of layout and design, and positively enhance the character and environment of the local area.

Policy 57 Residential Guidelines and Standards states that materials used should result in one or more consistent themes within a layout so long as the character of the surroundings is respected

when viewed from within and outside the site.

Policy 58 sets out more detailed design principles in relation Letchworth Garden City and provides a review of the principles developed by Raymond Unwin in relation to the use of good and harmonious materials including rough cast brickwork, rich red tiled roofs, and design features such as dormer windows, hips and gables.

Within both the Letchworth Town Centre Strategy (Policy 3) and the Conservation Area Character Statement for Baldock it suggests that new development within the town centre must respect the historic environment and reinforce local distinctiveness in terms of scale, form, height, and proportions of surrounding buildings and predominant local materials. This does not mean that new buildings have to replicate the precise appearance of historic ones, but they should be of a high standard of design and add to the architectural development and quality of the town.

In order to ensure that development proposals achieve appropriate architectural and urban design standards, which address the character of the surrounding built environment, detailed design statements should accompany such proposals.

The SPG Design Guides for shopfronts in Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin, Baldock and Royston provides guidance to shop owners and occupiers on the important characteristics of shopfronts

including the use of materials which should complement the individual character of buildings and the area in which they are situated.

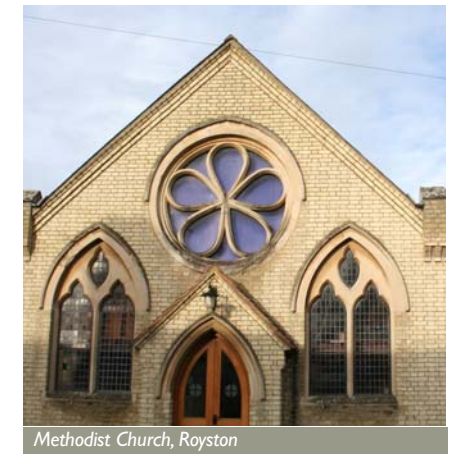
##### *Evaluation and Gaps*

It would prove beneficial to include an assessment of specific building materials as part of the character assessment for the character areas and then conclude with guidelines for materials which should be used in development, such materials may be modern or traditional. Additionally high quality, sustainable and durable materials should be encouraged while remaining sensitive to the character of the area.

### LISTED BUILDINGS / CONSERVATION AREAS

##### *Policy Summary*

Conservation Area Character Statements exist for each of the towns and provide a review of the quality of the Conservation Areas in its broadest sense and identifies the special interest, character and appearance.



Methodist Church, Royston

## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

The SPG Design Guide for shopfronts in Letchworth Garden City, Hitchin, Baldock and Royston suggests that many of the designs for shopfronts and advertisements, found in enclosed shopping centres and larger town centres, are not appropriate in the Conservation Areas. The guidance also outlines the requirement for Listed Building Consent if any material alteration to shopfronts and the fixing of signs is made to listed buildings.

### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Guidance on streetscape, shopfronts, signage and street furnishings in Conservation Areas should be strengthened to overcome the lack of co-ordination of streetscape elements by creating a new discrete policy dealing with street furniture, shopfronts, signage and streetscape, in all Conservation Areas specifically. It should be ensured that street furniture, shopfronts and signage located within Conservation Areas is of a high quality design, in keeping with and adding value to the character of the area. The preservation of historic street furniture should be encouraged.

### BUILDINGS HEIGHTS AND MASSING

#### *Policy Summary*

There is little guidance contained within the Local Plan in terms of building heights and massing except in reference to housing extensions in Policy 28, and some more specific guidelines for development proposals (page 73).

Policy 3 of the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy states that all

development within Letchworth Town Centre should respect Garden City design principles which includes restrained building heights. Within the defined character areas for the town centre specific urban design principles are established which includes prevailing building heights. More specifically, opportunity sites are identified (in Part III), where further guidance on appropriate building heights, building lines and massing are provided which aim to maintain or create the desired character.

Policy 2 of the Baldock Town Centre Strategy and Policy 44 of the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy states that 'the Council will refuse development proposals within the town centre that do not respect the historic layout, architectural character and the domestic scale including the heights and proportions of buildings which feature varied roofscape and narrow building frontages.'

### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Within North Hertfordshire there are a number of strong view corridors. There is a need to more forcefully regulate building heights and quality within these areas to protect these views (see topography for further information). We would recommend that specific viewpoints are identified and building applications are reviewed with these viewpoints considered. The Urban Design Assessment attempts to establish these viewpoints.

### DENSITY

#### *Policy Summary*

PPS3 Housing (2006) suggests that 30 dwellings per hectare should be seen as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making. However, the density of existing development should not dictate that of new housing, as imaginative design and layout of new development can lead to a more efficient use of land without compromising the existing quality of the local environment.

In the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards, Guideline 2 - Design and Layout suggests that for high density developments, permitted development rights may be removed when development is first permitted. Moreover, new residential areas adjacent to open agricultural land require careful consideration to ensure that the layout and design minimise any potential urban fringe problems and lessen any detrimental effects on adjacent open countryside and its land uses.

Guideline 8 - Play and Amenity Space suggests that for high density development such as small, terraced houses or flats, the Council would expect a higher amount of public amenity space.

Within Part 5 (Policies and Proposals) specific areas are highlighted as having a low density character which should be preserved, such as the Croft Lane Conservation Area.

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy suggests that the town has a number of

older residential properties, a significant number of which are listed, particularly in the central area, which have given over large gardens to higher density modern housing schemes. Opportunities for this type of development remain albeit in limited number.

### *Evaluation and Gaps*

A link should be made between high quality design and density as well as impact upon character and views.

As part of the Strategy Plan and Settlement Principles, the Urban Design Assessment has proposed potential increase density zones where opportunities for higher density development should be considered for example around railway stations. Protected density zones have also been defined at the urban fringe where lower density development should be considered to avoid presenting a hard edge to the open countryside.



Bucklersbry, Hitchin

## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

### TOPOGRAPHY

#### *Policy Summary*

The only reference to topography in the Local Plan is in Policy 57, Guideline 7 - Privacy and suggests that topography can affect layouts, and on sloping sites, a greater distance than 30 metres between the rears of dwellings will be required.

The surrounding topography of the towns has been assessed as part of the Landscape Character Assessment for North Hertfordshire.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

A topographical study should be undertaken and the results used to inform urban design policy. A regard for topography will also help to protect important views and area characteristics. The Urban Design Assessment has considered the impact of topography on the existing morphology and on viewpoints.

### CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE

### MORPHOLOGY

#### *Policy Summary*

There is no specific guidance which refers to morphology.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Guidance should be established which makes reference to morphology; this could be incorporated into an existing policy which makes reference to the character of the towns/village.

There has been significant development within North Hertfordshire over the last 20 years which has included cul-de-sac

developments which are out of character with rural roads, high streets and Victorian grids. Morphology should be given urban design consideration in the same way that other urban design criteria are considered.

### BUILDING LINES

#### *Policy Summary*

The use of variations in the building line to create accents is stated as an important part of the original Letchworth Garden City design principles in Policy 58 of the Local Plan.

Within the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy the character areas have specific policies applying to them, setting out urban design principles including appropriate building lines.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

There is no specific guidance for Hitchin, Baldock, Royston or Knebworth in relation to building lines. In cases where new development is built adjacent to existing settlements, policy should require that there is consistency in building line distance from the street. Policy should assert that new developments maintain a distance from the street in keeping with the area's character. The Urban Design Assessments have asserted general setback distances for the respective urban design zones in the towns and village.

### BUILDING ORIENTATION

#### *Policy Summary*

There is no specific guidance within the Local Plan with regard to building orientation i.e. the location of building

frontages in relation to the street.

In the Local Plan Policy 57, Guideline 6 - Orientation suggests that reasonable levels of sunlighting and daylighting should be achieved in the design and layout of dwellings.

Within the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy, Policy 3 Letchworth Garden City Town Centre – Urban Design Principles suggests that the strongly defined continuous street frontages, of parades and fine grained smaller shops, should be respected. These strong frontages are further defined through the character areas which make up the town centre.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Where new development is built adjacent to existing settlements policy should ensure that building orientation is consistent. Policy should assert that building orientation is in keeping with the character of the area. The Urban Design Assessment guidelines have assessed building orientation for the respective urban design zones in the towns and village.

### PAVEMENTS

#### *Policy Summary*

In the Local Plan Policy 57, Guideline 3 - Roads and Footpaths suggests that roads and footpaths must be safe, convenient and easily maintained routes for people and traffic to move around.

In significant new housing areas, cycleways should be included; these could in some circumstances be shared with footpaths depending upon safety.

Within the Letchworth Town Centre Strategy reference is made to the important sense of spaciousness provided by the wide pavements and tree lined avenues. (Guideline 3, pg. 35)

Within the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy it suggests that Hertfordshire County Council is identifying access routes, streets and pavements that require improvement thereby improving the accessibility for disabled people around the town.

Within the Baldock Town Centre Strategy Draft Action Plan 2005-2008 improvements to the pavement network and pedestrian crossings to strengthen and improve pedestrian links within and to the town centre will take place by 2009 as part of Enhancement Schemes and the HCC Integrated Works Programme (IWP).

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

It is suggested that the policy should require the mandatory provision of



Broadway Gardens, Letchworth Garden City

## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

pavements in all major development schemes particularly in rural areas and where possible design these to restrict parking on pavements. There could be additional guidance which informs developers of appropriate widths and distances from the street, depending on the area's character and the nature of the development proposed.

### OPEN SPACE

#### *Policy Summary*

Within the Local Plan the following policies are of relevance to open space:

Policy 19 - Historic Parks and Gardens For Historic Parks and Gardens. The Council will refuse development proposals which destroy or result in any loss of their value.

Policy 21 - Landscape and Open Space Patterns in Towns. In towns, the Council will maintain a general pattern of landscape features, and of public and private open spaces. In addition, the protection of the open countryside around towns should not lead to the loss of a town's character in terms of its landscape structure.

To achieve the necessary protection, general patterns of landscape and open space features in the towns have been defined.

Within Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards, Guideline 8 - Play and Amenity Space states that new housing areas should have play and amenity space for future residents' needs as part of an attractive layout. Where public open space can reasonably be expected, the

National Playing Fields Association standards will be used: 0.4 hectares/1000 population for informal open space; and between 0.6 and 0.8 hectare/1000 population for children's play space. As a minimum standard for say 50 houses, 500 square metres and 750 square metres will be required respectively.

Within the Letchworth Town Centre Strategy, Policy 32 states that open spaces in Letchworth Town Centre are protected as part of the broader open space pattern in Letchworth Garden City, and will be further enhanced, their openness maintained, and historic importance in the master planning of the town respected. In addition to the historic north-south axis of Broadway a network of east-west smaller hard surfaced public spaces and squares will be required as part of development opportunity sites LTC1, LTC2 and LTC3.

Open spaces are protected through Policy 5 in the Baldock Town Centre Strategy and through Policy 47 within the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy. Both policies state that the Council will seek to protect and enhance or improve public and semi-public open space and seek to create new spaces within new development proposals within the town centre that are accessible to all.

In the Knebworth Parish Plan states that efforts will be made to protect the sense of 'greenness' within the villages by resisting development of amenity land and open spaces and loss of trees, hedges and grass verges.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Policy should be strengthened to include linkages between areas of open space. Back-to-back gardens should be encouraged as a way of reinforcing privacy and maximising natural habitats. The Urban Design Assessment guidelines stress the importance of back-to-back gardens.

In terms of the quality of open space, the policies in the Local Plan set out the importance of the provision of open space and the standards to which it should be provided, however there is not enough reference to the quality of the space and how high quality open space could and should be achieved.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

### CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES

#### *Policy Summary*

The Northern Hertfordshire Area Transport Plan (Hertfordshire County Council, 2004) sets the framework for the production of future Town Transport Plans, which will consider the wider aims of national and regional guidance and set a vision and objectives for each town.

The Local Plan contains the Council's policy on transport for each of the towns under Part 5: Area Policies and Proposals.

#### *Cycle and Pedestrian*

Cycle routes, as an alternative to the busy road networks and pedestrian footpaths are also promoted through the Local Plan particularly between new

housing areas and local facilities.

Specific priorities for development proposals in relation to road, public transport, cycle and pedestrian improvements for each town is also provided within Part 5: Area Policies and Proposals.

Within Letchworth Town Centre Strategy Policy 13 sets out a Strategy for Linking up Letchworth Town Centre which seeks to bring forward the development of a series of retail and mixed use development sites over time, alongside substantial improvements to the public realm.

It states that new development and existing main shopping streets should provide a seamless and high quality pedestrian experience. These should be integrated with:

- i) an improved public transport network and facilities;
- ii) improved parking at the edges of the primary shopping area;
- iii) convenience shopping next to the parking, and



London Road, Knebworth

## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

iv) shoppers walking along a radically improved, unified and largely traffic free pedestrian and public realm. This would consist of a linked series of new and existing shopping streets and public spaces.

Within the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Section 3 - Themes and Policy Guidance, part 3.3 Accessibility (Policies 25-38) outline the Council's approach to ease travel to and from the town centre and movement around it by encouraging a choice of transport modes which are accessible to all.

Similarly, within the Baldock Town Centre Strategy Section 3 - Themes and Policy Guidance, part 3.7 Transport & Access (Policies 23-31) outlines the Council's approach to transport and access within the town centre.

In the Knebworth Parish Plan Section 4 provides guidance on Traffic, Transport and Parking within the village. Action Areas are defined and key priorities addressed based upon the following project action areas:

- Action Area 1 - The 'High Street' / London Road and surrounding area;
- Action Area 2 - The Railway Station and surrounding area;
- Action Area 3 - Safety, speeding and rat runs; and
- Action Area 4 - Public and community transport, walking and cycling.

### *Evaluation and Gaps*

The Urban Design Assessment guidelines assert that each town and village should have a clear street hierarchy based on

primary and secondary distributors, High Streets and residential access roads. Proposed hierarchies are given for each settlement. Provision of a network of safe and secure pedestrian routes which avoid busy roads should be emphasised.

The Settlement Strategy also defines key routes leading into and out of the settlements where emphasis should be given to their character, particularly as many of these routes provide the first impression of the towns and village. The consideration for the character of these routes should include principles such as signage, streetscape treatment, landscaping, setbacks, landmark buildings, key views etc.

### **PARKING**

#### *Policy Summary*

Minimum parking standards for certain land uses are set out in Policy 55 of the Local Plan, however, these standards and guidance are out of date as they do not comply with County Council adopted policy, and they are not the basis of current development control practice in North Hertfordshire, which is based on County Council/national guidance. Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards, Guideline 11 - Car parking and Garaging, states that space for cars to park is essential for residents and their visitors and should be provided in any housing proposal and sympathetic to the layout and design. Normally as parking spaces or garages, these should be close and convenient to the dwellings they will serve.

The District Council's Car Parking Strategy (2004), sets out the approach to

parking issues in North Hertfordshire over a five year period 2004-2009. The Strategy outlines the key parking issues within each of the towns and defines the zonal approach subscribed for parking provision at new development. This is explained further within the SPG 2: Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development. These documents have been reviewed in more detail in the Policy Context section of this report. The Council is presently undertaking a review of all on and off street car parking provision within the District.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

Special consideration should be given to parking at the stations and within the adjacent residential areas as this is a particular issue within almost all of the settlements.

Steps to reduce on-street parking, particularly as part of new development should be made. The potential parking congestion caused by the conversion of large residential properties into flats should be considered.

Street widths are often not sufficient for on street parking and two way traffic. Widths of streets should be considered as part of new developments with specific approaches to on street parking.

### **LAND USE**

#### *Policy Summary*

Within the Local Plan Part 3 - Development Policies indicate the Council's attitude to different land uses and development proposals.

Policy 1 states that the Council will seek

to enhance the character of existing land uses in urban and rural areas. Thus, planning permission will normally be given only when development proposals (which include changes of use of buildings or land) meet these aims and (i) show the highest standards of layout and design, and (ii) positively enhance the character and environment of the local area.

Within the Letchworth Town Centre Strategy the town centre has been divided into character areas with design principles for each, this includes an assessment of the broad character and primary use of different parts of the centre. The strategy also defines detailed guiding principles for a number of individual opportunity sites and reference is made to the mix of land uses which may be acceptable on these sites.

Within the Hitchin and Baldock Town Centre Strategies land use policies relate to the protection of the core shopping area of the town centre.



York Road, Hitchin

## METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

It is also suggested, that as part of the Local Development Framework process the Council will consider designating areas of the town centre core as either primary or secondary shopping frontages. Strict controls over loss of retail uses would apply, particularly in the primary shopping frontages.

### *Evaluation and Gaps*

There could be specific provisions made to protect non-residential uses in Knebworth village centre to maintain the important local community provision within the heart of the village.

Consideration should be given to the definition of town centre boundaries in particular the Urban Design Assessment recommends the expansion of Baldock Town Centre boundary to include Tesco given its land use, and importance in the town.

The Urban Design Assessment defines urban design zones for each of the settlements and provides an analysis of the predominant land use within each of these zones. However, a more detailed town centre character area assessment could be established for Hitchin as has been undertaken for Letchworth Garden City within the Town Centre Strategy. This will provide a clearer framework for future development proposals in the town centre.

## QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM

### STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

#### *Policy Summary*

In the Local Plan, Policy 46 - Advertisements states that the Council will grant consent for the display of new, or the retention of existing advertisements if they are (i) in keeping with the style or character of the area, building, mall or arcade; and (ii) not detrimental to visual amenity or highway safety because of the design, size, colour position and type or degree of lighting. More detailed guidance is provided for advertisements in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings. This is also addressed in SPDs 11-14: Design Guide for a Shopfront (1998), reviewed within the Policy Context earlier in this document.

Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards, Guideline 9 - Landscape states that attention to detail, using trees, shrubs and grass as 'soft' landscape features and walls, paving, road surfaces and street furniture as 'hard' landscape features, can create a sense of identity, avoiding visual and noise intrusion. Not only is the initial planting important in itself and early establishment essential, including replacement if necessary, but also attention must be paid to the continued growth of the plants and their maintenance in the particular situation. As such, a proposed landscape plan should be part of the overall design for new development.

The Conservation Area character statements provide an assessment of the existing streetscape elements where that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Areas.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

There is a need for coherent guidance to be provided within the Local Plan on streetscape elements for all settlements, not just Conservation Areas. This will help facilitate a cohesive and uncluttered streetscape which is harmonious and sensitive to the character of the surrounding area particularly at significant gateways.

### SECURITY

#### *Policy Summary*

Policy 57 - Residential Guidelines and Standards, Guideline 2 - Design and Layout states that the Council will take account of police advice and resist proposals which do not meet the criteria set out in "Secured by Design".

Within the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policy 41 states that the Council will promote best practice guidance to landowners and developers for designing out crime. Developers must demonstrate how through design, layout, usage, lighting and landscape of proposals, they will create a safe and accessible environment for all.

#### *Evaluation and Gaps*

More explicit design guidance on measures which could be adopted to improve security within residential areas should be provided within the Local Plan. Secured by Design principles need

to be in line with urban design principles (e.g. overlooking, permeability, building orientation).