

Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire: Integrating High Quality Design Briefing Note No. 23-10

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Summary of the project

To ensure that Wiltshire's communities have early access to user-friendly, locally relevant, guidance on how to produce and integrate local design guidance into their draft Neighbourhood Plan or a Village Design Statement.

The reason for this project

'Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire: Integrating High Quality Design' (the "guide") has been produced to assist community groups to explore and consider all aspects of design as they begin to produce their own design policies and/or design guidance usually through a Neighbourhood Plan. It is not a supplementary planning document (SPD) but will sit below the Wiltshire Design Guide (WDG) as unadopted local guidance.

The guide will assist local communities (in particular those in Neighbourhood Planning Groups (NPGs)) to identify what is special about their area and to write their own guidance to help plan for change, with a particular regard to design outcomes. It will also assist them to consider creative options for wide and inclusive community engagement.

At present, the first opportunity for council design officers to support communities in this process is at the Regulation 14 stage, when they have already produced a draft Neighbourhood Plan. Due to the amount of time already invested by this point, a community's vision may already be 'fixed' and it can effectively be 'too late' to substantially influence their design policies and/or guidance. It is hoped that by making the information in this guide publicly available on Wiltshire's Neighbourhood Planning webpage and where needed as a hard copy, local residents can access and use it as they commence their projects and before they present a draft NP to the Local Planning Authority.

The draft Wiltshire Design Guide (which is currently in the process of being signed off for Statutory Public Consultation in the Summer) includes reference to this guide and explains how the two are intended to sit together.

Process and consultation

This project commenced in parallel to the production of the draft Wiltshire Design Guide, both of which have been produced in partnership with LDA design consultancy.

A stakeholder workshop event took place in April 2022, with approximately 12 representatives from different sized NPGs. Participants were invited to share their experience to date, to help understand how they have approached the topic of design, using policies or guidance.

We learned that particular concerns were;

- getting and sustaining community engagement;
- the challenge of producing guidance without professional assistance;
- recognising that achieving high quality design means thinking of the bigger picture over the next 15-20 years, and
- how to do character assessments in the largest settlements.

Based on this feedback, we produced a graphic guide aimed primarily at Neighbourhood Planning Groups which focuses on;

- setting out the context for local design guidance;
- being visionary;
- developing skills to understand the built environment; and
- providing toolkits for engaging inclusively with residents.

The draft, Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire: Integrating High Quality Design, was then shared with four of the NPGs who had attended the workshop and their further feedback was incorporated. A draft of the guide was also shared with other internal colleagues in Landscape, Spatial/Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainable Transport.

Conclusion

A final version of the guide has now been completed and is publicly available on the Wiltshire Council website, here: <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-neighbourhood-what>

[Home](#) > [Planning and building control](#) > [Neighbourhood planning](#)

What is Neighbourhood planning?

[Neighbourhood planning](#) gives communities more control over the future of their area by giving local people the chance to have their say on what happens where they live.



The proposals are founded on the principles of localism, which means more involvement by planning authorities, local people, businesses, house builders and developers rather than central government. The neighbourhood planning process has to be led by the town or parish council.



The reforms are outlined in the [Localism Act 2011](#), which seeks to:



- reduce the volume, complexity and number of applications the current system generates
- Make sure developments are more beneficial to the community, for example new homes are matched by jobs and investment



Overview +


Planning guidance +

 [Parish and town council guide \(PDF\), \[350KB\]](#) 

 [SEA Guidance note \(PDF\) \[524KB\]](#) 

 [SEA Guide \(PDF\), \[506KB\]](#) 

 [Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire - Integrating High Quality Design \(PDF\) \[20MB\]](#) 



Approaches to Neighbourhood Planning +

Hard copies have been produced and sent to libraries across the county, and a number will be stored within the council to be sent to communities upon request.

End

Appendix 1 - *Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire: Integrating High Quality Design*

Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire

Integrating
High Quality
Design



My Place, Your Place, Our Place

Wiltshire Council

Contents

The guide is set out in five parts:

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1. Setting the scene

So you're writing local design guidance for your local area

Who is the document for?

This guide is for all those preparing local design guidance to improve the quality of design in their area. This local design guidance might be included within a Neighbourhood Plan or a Village Design Statement. Within Wiltshire, good design is valued - it adds significant social, environmental and economic value to our communities and goes far beyond what a building looks like.

National planning policy is increasingly focused on improving the quality of design in new development, and local design guidance is seen at both a national and local level as an important tool in protecting and enhancing Wiltshire's unique character. Local design guidance will help to ensure that new development meets the aspirations of local communities, while also helping Wiltshire to tackle the big challenges of our times. This includes combating climate change; and creating healthy, green and sustainable communities while ensuring that we have decent homes and thriving towns and villages.

This guide will help you think about the future and enable you to plan for change within your local communities.

What is the document for?

Creating local design guidance within a Neighbourhood Plan or other document is a significant commitment. This guide aims to provide simple and practical ways to do so. It aims to help you find inspiration, to encourage visionary thinking and to create locally-led design principles which can steer future development.

The ambition is to bring together knowledge and ideas from the community, and to set this out so it is easily understandable for anyone preparing a planning application. This guide sets out how local design guidance can allow developers and applicants to quickly grasp the context and character within which they are designing and set expectations for their designs and how they can contribute positively to the local area.



Looking to the future - what is your ambition for your community?
What might it be like in 15 to 20 years from now?

“Neighbourhood Planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood Plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan.”

(Paragraph 29, National Planning Policy Framework)

What does 'design' mean?

It is easy to have a narrow view of what design is. In the Neighbourhood Plan context this might mean the focus ends up being on specifics such as brick colour or type of porch. While in some settlements these features may well be worth including in a section on design, it is important to also consider some of the broader aspects of design.

When thinking about design, it is helpful to consider the terms 'placemaking' and 'placeshaping'. In considering how we create or consider 'place', a much broader set of elements can be understood to be part of 'design' and these have a big impact on the day-to-day life of people.

While not exhaustive this could include:

- The relationship of one building to another
- Open spaces and places between buildings
- How we move about
- Existing natural and landscape features (e.g. topography and water)

- Important landmarks and wayfinding elements (finding one's way to a particular place)
- Heritage assets, and their contribution to present character
- Important views
- How a local area functions well and safely
- Accessibility and inclusivity
- Inclusion of nature and biodiversity
- Possibility for change over time – adaptability and resilience
- Enabling healthy lifestyles
- Enabling sustainable lifestyles (a lifestyle that attempts to reduce the use of Earth's natural resources)

Many of these elements overlap - often we hear the phrase 'a sense of place', or mention of the unique character of a place. This is often hard to define; the exercise of 'getting under the skin' of a place and analysing its unique qualities is however an important part of understanding an existing place in order to inform priorities going forward.

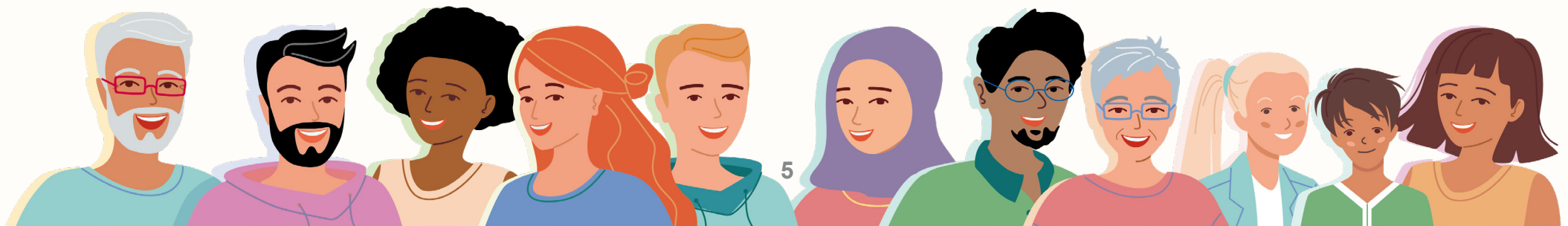




It's also important to note that place can be perceived differently by different people (e.g. age / ethnicity / cultural background) and therefore it is important that the wider community is always involved to get the best overall understanding of a place.

The overarching principles of placemaking that need to be encouraged through the development of designs are:

- Positive Processes - ones that encourage 'design thinking' and allow adequate time to design
- Positive Outcomes - a design process that is focussed on achieving positive outcomes (e.g. aesthetically, spatially, in terms of integration, social value, inclusivity, nature recovery, resilience, adaptability, adoption of ownership and maintenance)
- Responsibility and Accountability - a design process that considers its impact on future generations



Why is design important?

When we see design more widely through the lens of 'placemaking' it highlights how important it is to 'think big' when creating local guidance. Neighbourhood Plans and other local design guidance documents are completely tied into thinking about change, and while that can be challenging, it is also an opportunity to think about making a better place for future generations. 'Thinking big' is important because well-designed places (or conversely poorly designed places) impact on everyone going about their day-to-day lives.

First it is important to properly understand and appreciate the existing context and character of the local area, its positive aspects as well as any problems or challenges. Designing is the process of problem solving, and when we look at the

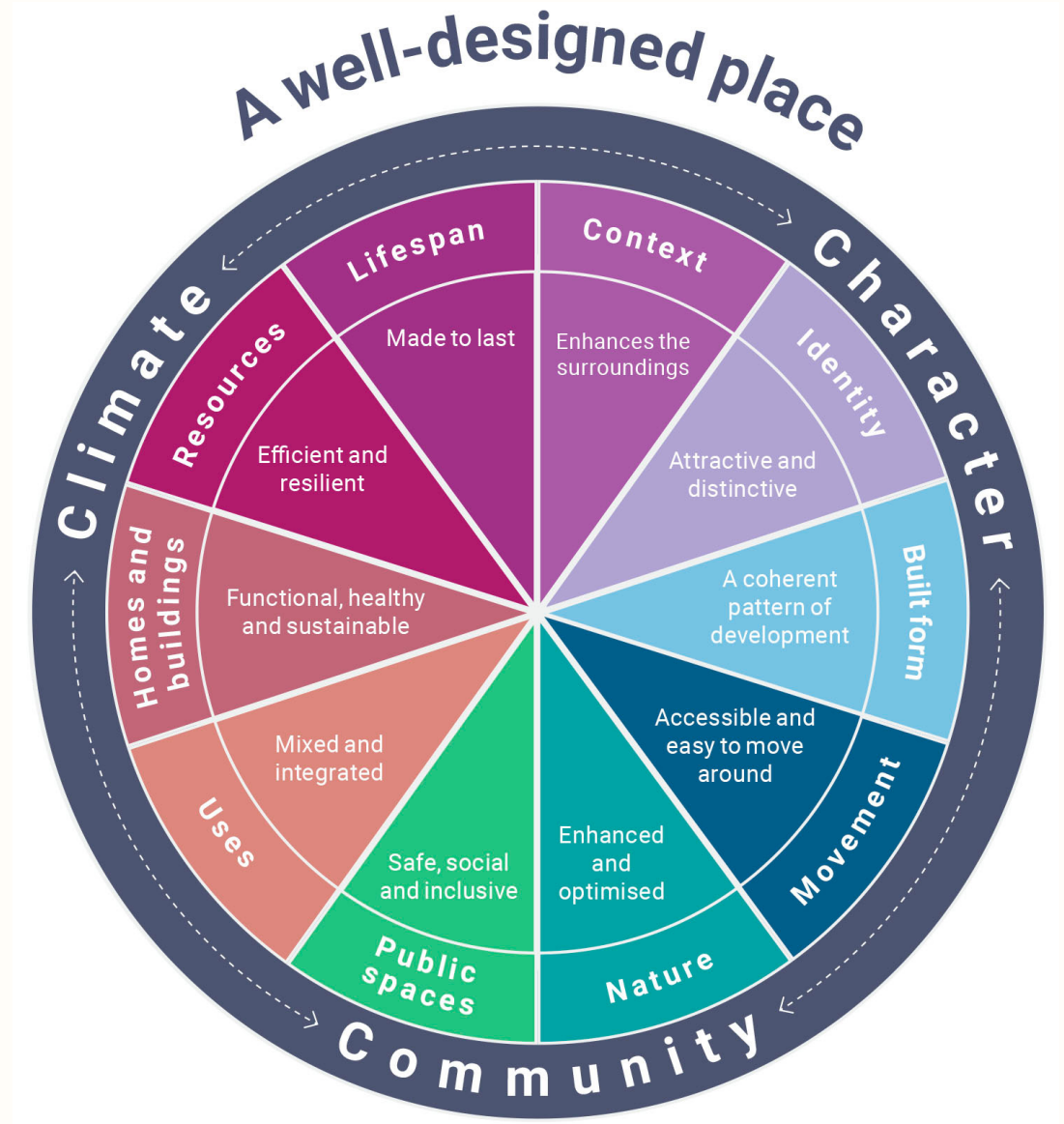
entirety of what 'placemaking' is we can see how important it is to get these things right. While it's often not a straight-forward process (and often a very long one), which will involve prioritising and compromise along the way, an ambition to make your local area the best it can be for the next generations is about as rewarding as it can get.

In the absence of local design guidance there is no 'steer' from the local community. Applicants, landowners and developers may then pursue their own vision instead, perhaps justifying this with reference to broad design guidance which is available. This could be positive or negative for the local area. This vision might simply be an ambition for maximum profit using ready-made designs and maximum site coverage, it could be all

affordable housing, a low density gated community of executive housing targeted at a non-local market or an eco village leaving a legacy to the community. This highlights the importance of setting out your own vision and expectation of design quality. This should be done through local design guidance.

While it is true that there can often be concerns about design being a subjective topic, with varying opinions on what is 'good' or 'in-keeping', national guidance on the subject has evolved to provide a really useful framework to consider - the ten characteristics of well-designed places which are included in the National Design Guide.

- Context** - enhances the surroundings.
- Identity** - attractive and distinctive.
- Built form** - a coherent pattern of development.
- Movement** - accessible and easy to move around.
- Nature** - enhanced and optimised.
- Public spaces** - safe, social and inclusive.
- Uses** - mixed and integrated.
- Homes and buildings** - functional, healthy and sustainable.
- Resources** - efficient and resilient.
- Lifespan** - made to last.



National Design Guide: The ten characteristics of well-designed places

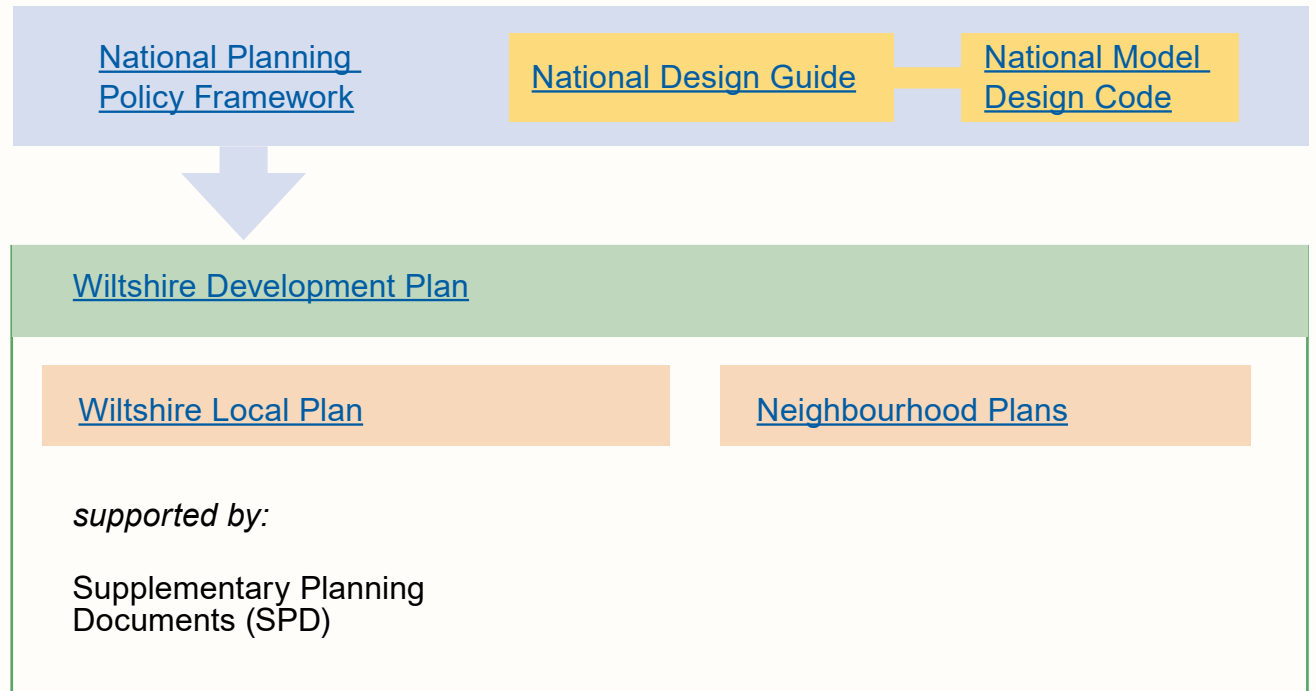
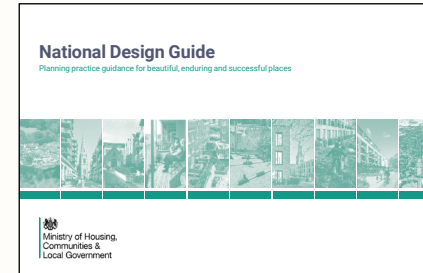
Policy - how does it fit?

The planning system and planning policy can appear as a maze of documentation to those unfamiliar with its organisation. A brief overview here sets out the hierarchy and interaction of the national and local part of policy and how the Neighbourhood Plan sits within this system, with a focus on design.

National

In 2021 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated to place a stronger emphasis on good design. A full chapter (Section 12) considers 'Achieving well designed places' and this now sets the tone, and ambition, for quality of design.

In support of this the government produced the National Design Guide, which addresses the question of how we recognise well-designed places, by outlining and illustrating the government's priorities for well-designed places in the form of 10 characteristics.



Additionally the recently published National Model Design Code provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide, which reflects the government's priorities and provides a common overarching framework for design.

Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that:

“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes.

Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.”

In the absence of local design guidance, local planning authorities will be expected to defer to the National Design Guide, National Model Design Code and Manual for Streets which can be used as material considerations in planning decisions.

So while national policy has become stronger, demanding better quality design, it also puts the emphasis on local communities to set their own requirements and design principles that will lead to well designed and beautiful places.

It is worth noting that Neighbourhood Planning Groups may choose to produce their own design codes or guides as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Local Plan

The Local Plan is developed by Wiltshire Council and alongside made Neighbourhood Plans, it forms the Development Plan for Wiltshire. It comprises a number of plans and is subject to periodic review to keep it up to date.

Local Plans must be compliant with the NPPF, be based on clear evidence and assessment of needs and are subject to public participation and engagement. This plan-led system places Wiltshire Council at the heart of decision making.

The Local Plan, as a key component of the Development Plan, will be the basis against which planning applications are determined and Neighbourhood Plans developed. It is a legally required document containing planning policies and site allocations to deliver the council's strategic priorities.

Drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community, the Local Plan provides a platform for local people to shape their future surroundings.

Wiltshire Design Guide

The Wiltshire Design Guide will provide information for any applicant or assessor of planning applications and design proposals. It is being taken forward as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which means it will be a material consideration in any planning decision.

The aim of this guide is to help ensure that the continued growth of the built environment in Wiltshire is always appropriate to the local context; planned and designed to be beautiful, well-functioning and sustainable, and with careful consideration given to public health impacts and the environmental impacts of decisions.

This guidance elaborates on the ten characteristics of design as recognised in the National Design Guide, and is structured around these characteristics. The intention is that this shall help ensure that due consideration and weight are given to local priorities on the design of new development.

The Wiltshire Design Guide includes numerous examples regarding expectations of 'good practice' across all these areas. This means that when local design guidance is produced, for example in a Neighbourhood Plan, it need not repeat this broader guidance, and may instead focus more specifically on local design issues and guidance.

Local Design Guidance

Local Guidance

Local design guidance can be included in a range of types of documents; for example Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements, Local Design Guides and Codes.

Historically settlement growth and housing design has rarely happened 'by accident', and has not always held the interests of the eventual occupants and community as the main priority.

Neighbourhood Planning provides a unique opportunity for local people to influence how and where new housing and other development is located, who it is for and how it is designed. Neighbourhood Plans were introduced as part of the UK government's 'localism' agenda introduced by the Localism Act in 2011. The intention was that it would empower local communities to have a say in important decisions about their local area.

Local design guidance can reinforce expectations about design quality at a local level and emphasise the importance of responding specifically to the local area and character.

More weight is given to design guidance that relates to a policy in a Neighbourhood Plan. Without a Neighbourhood Plan and a design policy it may not be possible to enforce full adherence, but it can still be beneficial to the community to set out clearly what local design expectations are - demonstrating consensus on the matter. This then gives applicants and assessors the best chance of responding to them positively rather than only discovering local design preferences long after applications have commenced.

'Where else to find information' on page 64 of this document gives some examples of documents that include local design guidance, for reference - including Neighbourhood Plans and Design Guides.

Wider impact

While the focus of this document is on providing tools that help when producing local design guidance to include in published documents, this is not its only use. Having undertaken the steps outlined within this document you will have gained valuable knowledge that can be used to inform other processes related to development and planning.

There will be value in using the work you have done (such as developing a vision and design principles) to inform discussions or collaboration with any prospective applicants or interested developers, ideally at an early stage in the design and planning process.

Overall your community will be better informed about your local area and design, and better equipped to engage in planning applications whenever they do come in, through usual public engagement procedures.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Planning can be taken forward by two types of body - town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums'. Neighbourhood forums are community groups that are designated to take forward Neighbourhood Planning in areas without parishes. Neighbourhood Planning in Wiltshire is generally undertaken by town and parish councils.

Neighbourhood Planning provides an opportunity to change attitudes towards development through positive engagement with local communities which enables local people to help influence the type and form of development that might occur, benefiting the place overall.

Put simply, a Neighbourhood Plan can:

- Establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a particular area.
- Plans can include local priorities, planning policies, proposals for improving an area or providing new facilities or infrastructure and allocation of sites for development.

Neighbourhood Planning is a tool to promote sustainable growth and will not be able to prevent development in an area.

Neighbourhood Plans can only include proposals for an equal (or greater) amount of growth than is set out in the local plan.

They must also accord with national planning policy (therefore accord with the NPPF).

A Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan.

Wiltshire Council supports communities in preparing their plans and provides advice to ensure Neighbourhood Plan policies fit with strategic policies of the Local Plan and national policy. It is important that communities work with Wiltshire Council when developing plans.

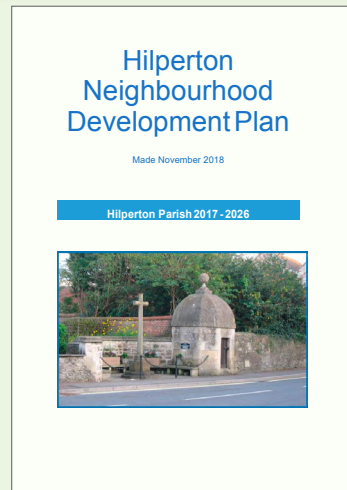
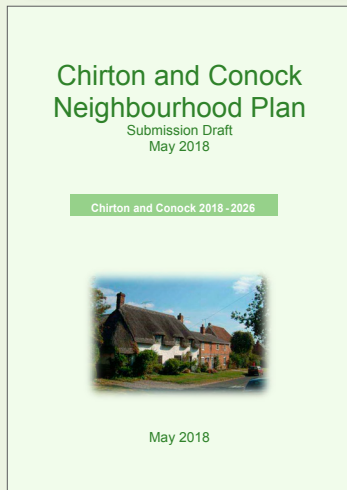
Typical Neighbourhood Plans would include:

- Context analysis
- Character area studies
- A future vision for the community
- Design principles
- Policies - identifying development sites and priority projects
- Engagement record

If you are unfamiliar with Neighbourhood Planning further information is available on Wiltshire Council's Neighbourhood Planning web pages.



These are a selection of front covers of Neighbourhood Plans from Wiltshire



2. Your pathway to the future

A vision of the future

It's important because it affects lives

Part 1 outlined the importance of thinking broadly and ambitiously about design. While thinking about this is exciting and full of opportunities, sometimes the reality of making it happen can just feel overwhelming. The potential of change, the reluctance for change, plus conflicting viewpoints or priorities and long timeframes can make this seem like an impossible task.

But as with any journey to somewhere new, what is of crucial importance as a group, is firstly to have agreed the destination, or 'the vision'. In this instance you are thinking about what your local area could be like in around 15-20 years' time. And while it certainly will take time and effort to agree on this vision, it will save time in the future by avoiding wandering round in circles or heading off in the wrong direction, by setting a clear focus on what you wish to achieve.

Every plan should start with a vision. It reminds everyone of what you're trying to achieve. It should tell the reader what is special about the place now, what will make it special in the future and why that's important to you as a group. A vision helps to keep everyone focused, even if circumstances change around you.



So how do you develop your vision?

Each vision will be unique because each place and community is unique. That's why it's important that:



Analysis

Time is spent to understand and analyse your local area, with lots of discussion / engagement around this and to identify what is important to everyone.

Analysis of local planning constraints, such as rights of way, conservation areas, listed buildings, etc. should be done and the key ones mapped out. [Wiltshire Council's Planning Explorer mapping tool](#) is a useful starting point for this.



Vision

There is permission to 'think big' about the vision; this could be thinking big spatially, in timescales and ambition.

A vision is a written statement that should cover:

- What's special about your local area
- What you'd like to change
- When these changes should happen



Design principles

It is quite 'high level'... it might include two or three big objectives for what is at the heart of the place in around 15-20 years. (e.g. 'we will be a town that provides opportunities for sustainable employment, we will encourage active travel (by foot, by bike, wheeling and scooting), we will significantly improve access to natural green space', we will be a thriving and vibrant village').

Some ideas on how to develop your vision in this way are provided as part of Toolkit A (How to develop your vision) included later in this document.

More information on the skills you need to firstly understand your local area (engagement, steps in the process, character analysis, developing Design Principles) follow in Section 3.



Engagement

You focus on the real 'end result' - it's primarily about people and how they would like to live their lives (it's easy to get distracted by thinking about buildings and spaces first).



Think big

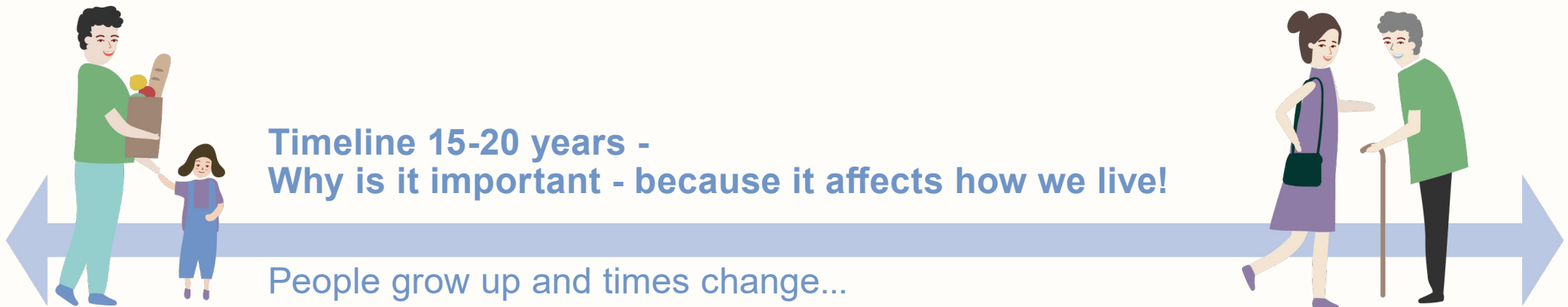


Visionary thinking allows us to 'think big'. Neighbourhoods cannot be seen as a 'snapshot' in time - there is huge benefit in thinking about how they have evolved over time - their local character and distinctiveness is connected to how they have developed. A neighbourhood is also impossible to consider in isolation - there's the need to consider the wider area within which it sits. Thinking about your place in this way will lead to questions such as:

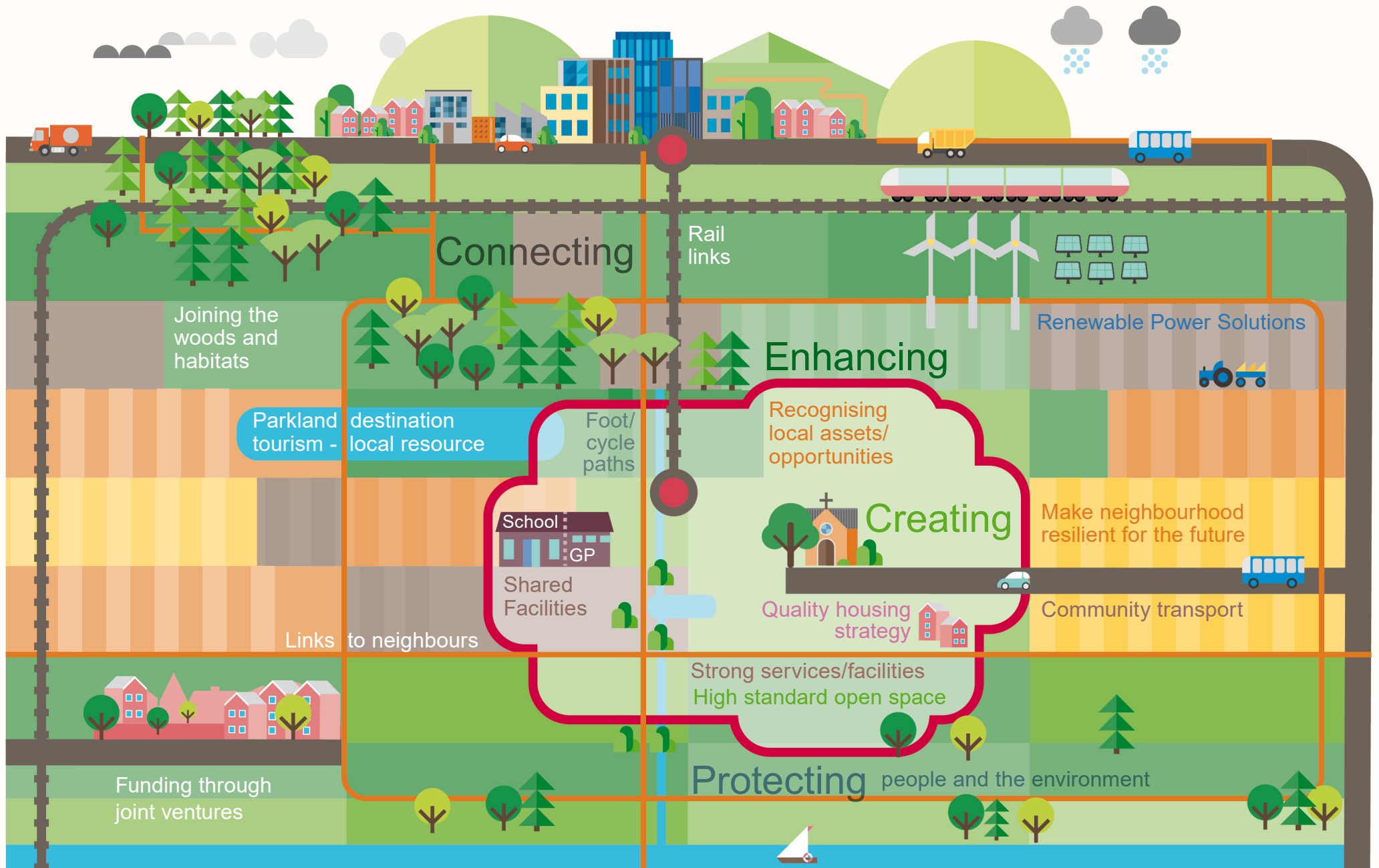
Longer timespan

- What would today's children like the neighbourhood to be like in the future?
- What legacy can be left for future generations?
- How might technologies change and the place adapt to this?
- How can the neighbourhood be protected from climate change?
- What's the experience like for people visiting your neighbourhood?

These type of questions are best considered by the community as a whole which is why it is important to gather everyone's views and understanding of the place they live in.



Integrating High Quality Design



Thinking Big: great ambitions, the wider area and longer timescales

How do we get there?

One step at a time

This document has shown how a vision is an important component in setting out what the future holds for communities which will set a direction of travel for your local area.

It has also emphasised the importance of engaging with as many in your community as possible in order to have a good understanding of the local area. It's really important to understand what is already special about the local area and its character, as well as what's not so great, as a starting point which will help to inform the vision.



Engagement

A useful tool at various points to work with the local community - e.g. to analyse your local area, develop a vision and create design principles



Analysis

Research to better understand the local area including its positives, negatives and character.



Define

Defining what is special about the local area.



Scope

Following analysis identifying if there are certain areas or elements that require specific guidance - perhaps through a design brief, masterplan or design code.



Vision

Further to understanding your place, developing a unique Vision for the local area, looking forward 15-20 years.



Design principles

Setting out Design Principles; key priorities or 'rules' for the local area going forward.



Submit for approval

For a Neighbourhood Plan the document is 'made' by Wiltshire Council and it forms part of the 'Development Plan'. Other documents may need council approval.



Assess and inform proposals

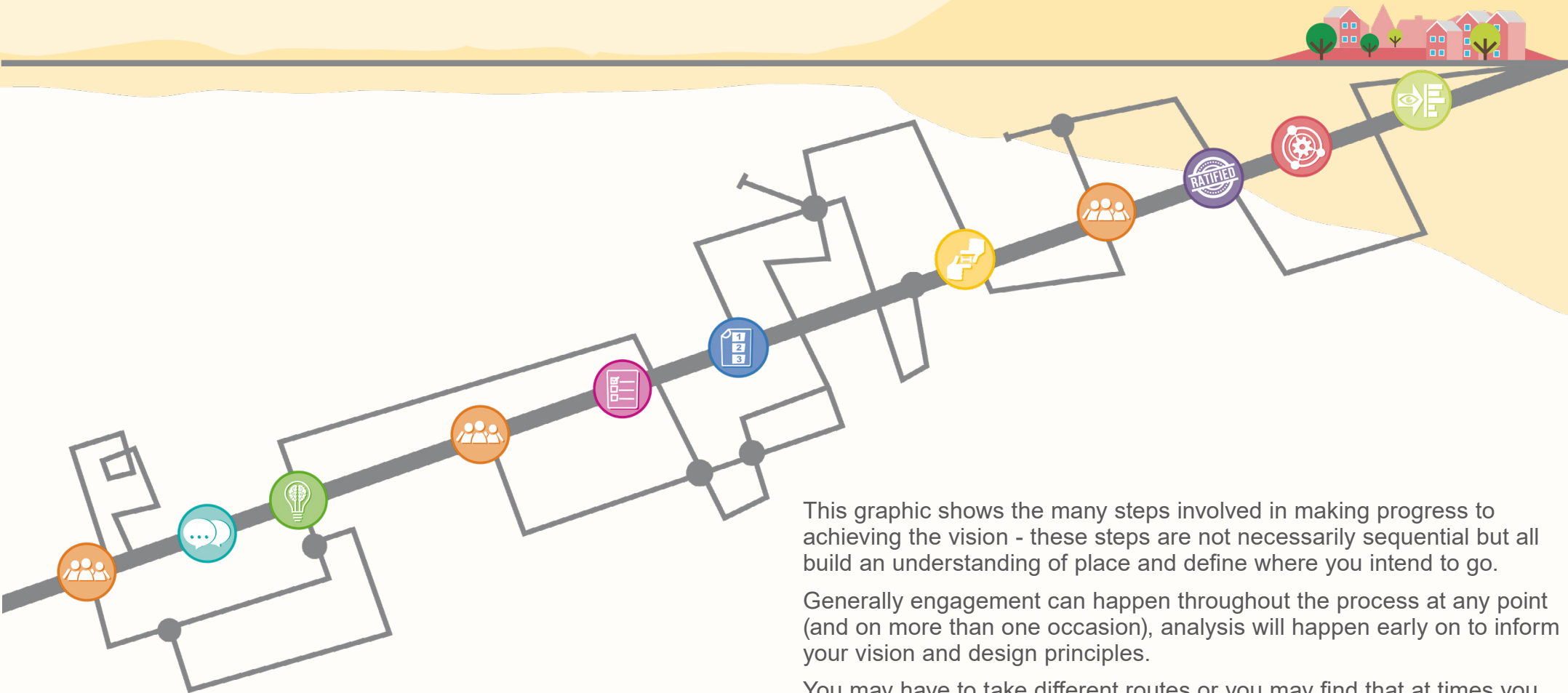
As planning applications come forward check if they meet with the Vision and Design Principles; and therefore if they are appropriate for the local area.



Achieve Vision

By taking this approach, all new development should align with the aspirations that the community set out as being important.

Vision - Horizon



This graphic shows the many steps involved in making progress to achieving the vision - these steps are not necessarily sequential but all build an understanding of place and define where you intend to go.

Generally engagement can happen throughout the process at any point (and on more than one occasion), analysis will happen early on to inform your vision and design principles.

You may have to take different routes or you may find that at times you re-evaluate the process and revisit a step, but throughout the process you should always be aiming towards the agreed vision.

3. The skills to understand your place



How do we get the whole community involved?

Why is it important for us to engage everyone and be inclusive?

Engagement is an opportunity to broaden everyone's thinking and be enlightened by other people's points of view. It's very easy to make assumptions, but people's perceptions of the places they live, what they like and dislike about them and for what reasons, are very personal. It is crucial to go above and beyond in giving a voice to everyone, because everyone's view is valid. This is important because the most successful places are those that take account of the broadest range of needs or the needs of everyone in the community.



It's key to think about how any engagement can be accessible in order to allow a voice to a wide audience. Does the typical evening meeting fit with the lifestyles of everyone in the community? Who might it be useful to have a view from who might not attend? Is a quick online questionnaire more suitable? From carefully understanding someone else's point of view we often get a completely new perspective on an issue which will help see it in its entirety.

It seems unlikely that people don't want to have their view heard – but they might not want to be inconvenienced in giving it or may well feel they are not properly heard. So as a host to an engagement event it is important to build trust and an environment in which people are comfortable and encouraged that their opinion matters.

Building a vision together can be a real opportunity to bring a community together.





How can we make it fun and engaging?

Engagement can be a useful tool for analysing your local area, developing a vision and creating design principles, but often the challenge can be to generate interest in being involved.

Often heard criticisms from residents are that engagement is:

- Irrelevant to them (not asking the right questions)
- Too much effort (make it easy to participate / ensure it's not out of their comfort zone / go to where people are rather than expect them to go out of their way to

come to an event / consider what local groups might host you)

- Doesn't have any affect anyway (be clear about how it will)
- They won't be concerned about my opinion (reassurance they will be heard)

To counter some of these concerns, and also to make engagement worthwhile and useful to both the Neighbourhood Planning Group and participants, it is useful to firstly be very clear about what you want to achieve from the exercise – what's the key information you want to get out of the session? This will help you to focus the engagement on getting that information.



Engagement doesn't need to be overly complicated – if there's a simple way to ask questions and get feedback, that is easy for you to deliver, that's the perfect solution. Some examples are given in the Toolkit B later on in the document.

Some of the criticisms may be waylaid by building relationships over time, whereby if residents see their views are being taken onboard at a first short event, they may well be interested to be involved in a longer workshop later.

What makes our place unique?



Defining what is special

When we talk about design as placemaking, there is also the challenge to somehow assess your local area as a place in its broadest sense. There is something intangible and instinctive about what we feel is special and it can be quite difficult to put this into words.

One of the positives of defining what is special as a group is that firstly the ideas that are proposed will be much broader in the first instance, which helps to capture the breadth of what is special, and secondly it spurs people into discussing these ideas and helping each other define or refine what they mean. This could cover a wide range of topic areas including buildings, landscape, nature, open spaces, routes, facilities, social character, community history, daily routines and much more.

Some quite simple exercises can begin the conversation, for example:

- It might be that the 'top ten words' exercise (see toolkit B later in document) opens a workshop –

with the most popular words being discussed further to define what exactly about these things make them special to people. There might also be the option to pick a contentious topic and to talk further about this.

- Or it could be that a group walk around the local area taking photos of what they consider special. This could be a standalone photo survey or after the walk they could regroup around a map, to mark on what they consider favourite places, key landmarks, pet hates, areas to improve.

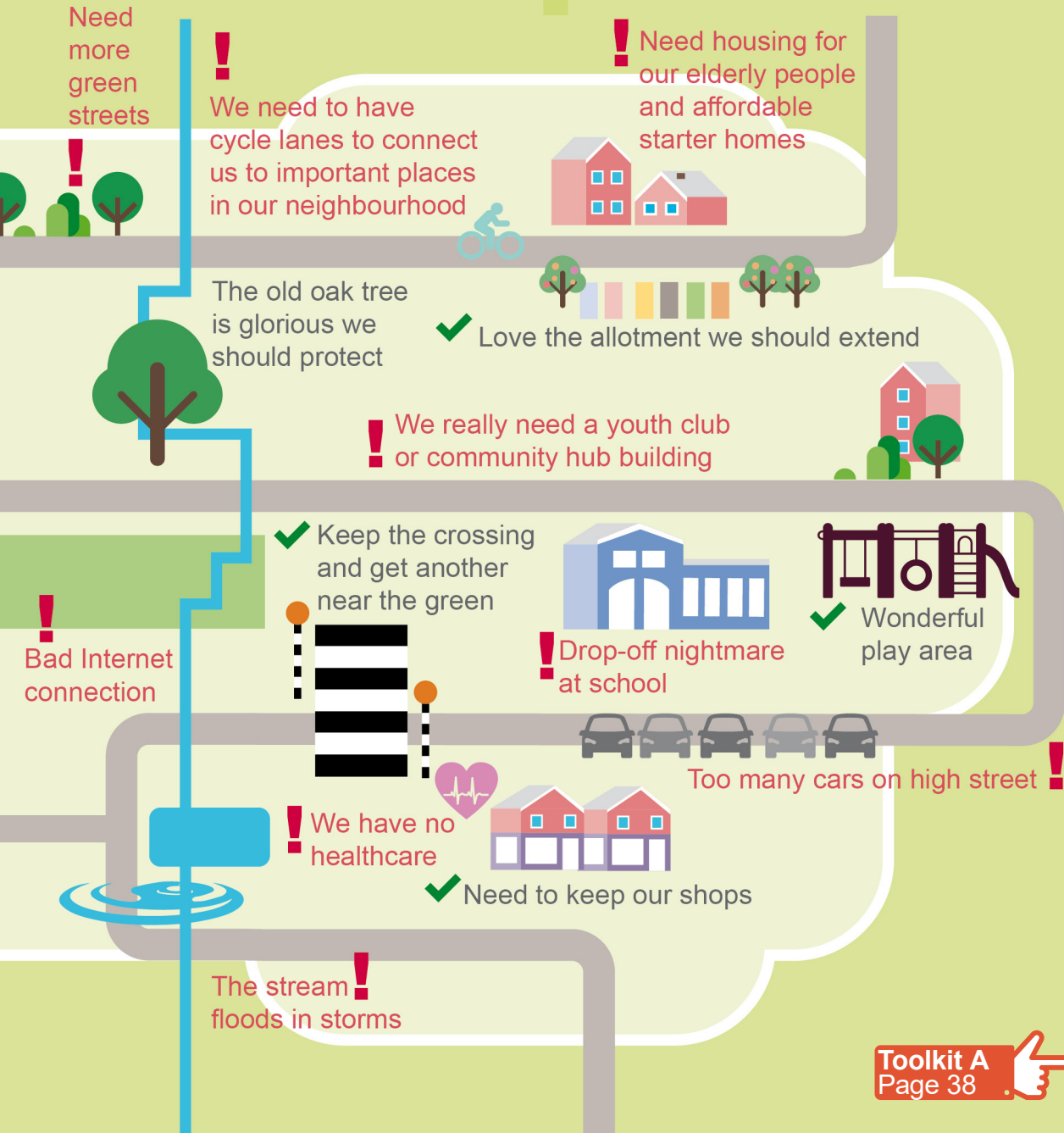
While often notes, photos or maps offer a good way to record what has been expressed – it doesn't need to be limited to this. The distinctiveness of a place may have been recorded in a painting or a poem and these creative works can be a great way to think about what is special.

The adjacent plan shows what is unique to your area, the things that you love and the things you worry about



Example

Integrating High Quality Design



Defining challenges and issues to address

It's useful to remember why you are defining what is distinct and special. Its purpose will be to communicate this to someone making a planning application; someone who may have little knowledge of the local area. While an initial workshop might cover vast ground, creating a succinct summary is valuable for this purpose.

Understanding this purpose is important because the next question to ask is 'so what?' You will have defined what is special, but what does this mean for the vision? Being clear about what is special and distinctive gives a firm foundation to what follows. Having understood your place it's time to develop your vision (or revisit it if you already have one as a starting point), help can be found in toolkit A later in this document.

If challenges arise in the process of understanding your local area, it is always best to address these. It might be that there is a lack of aspiration within the local area, a challenge of engaging people who have NIMBY views ("not in my back yard"), or perhaps disagreement on what facilities are needed or opposing views about where is best for new development. There is nothing to be gained from avoiding these difficult discussions.

The main aim is for there to be general consensus on the vision. There may be some disagreement on the details that follow, but by its nature the detail has to be flexible; many external factors may influence the detail over the longer term - for example changes in the economy or societal change.

Analysing and defining character



Mapping character

One way to begin to give clarity to some of the many things which make a place distinctive is to undertake a character study. The size of your local area will influence exactly what this might cover. This guidance covers appropriate ways to map character for both smaller and larger settlements, but you will need to consider what is best suited to your individual settlement.



Mapping character will involve analysing what is in your local area. A number of tools are suggested in this document that can help you with this task. You may decide this is a task that you will undertake as a Neighbourhood Plan Group – but it is also something you could consider getting a wider group of local residents involved with.

Often when undertaking this study you will observe that there are distinct areas within your local area with shared characteristics - we refer to these as Character Areas.

Smaller settlement (Village/small town)

In a smaller settlement these differences might be about the use of the buildings (perhaps residential and retail), they might be about their age (perhaps a conservation area, or an area of housing from a certain era), it could be their relationship to landscape (perhaps fronting onto a park or a river), or it might be the building form (are buildings taller / denser in the centre?).

If you live in a smaller community it might be that more detailed elements contribute to character – perhaps all houses in a street have similar front gardens or front boundaries, or a road has street trees, or all buildings are the same height with the same type of roof. Or perhaps one area really does look to have developed in a random fashion, with no sense of coordination and that is what gives it its distinct character. Once you have identified areas that your community identifies as having a similar character, these can be marked on a map.

Larger settlement (Large town/city)

In larger settlements a similar exercise can be undertaken, but to ensure the exercise is not onerous, some thought should be first given to suitable categories that define areas of the settlement.

An extreme categorisation might be 'within Conservation Area' and 'outside Conservation Area' - leading to just two categories, each of which could be clearly defined, described and given some design guidance. Another typical category might be 'predominant era of development' - and longer eras would equate to fewer character areas. While ensuring the exercise is achievable it is worth noting that the exercise should also produce mapping of character that will become a useful tool.

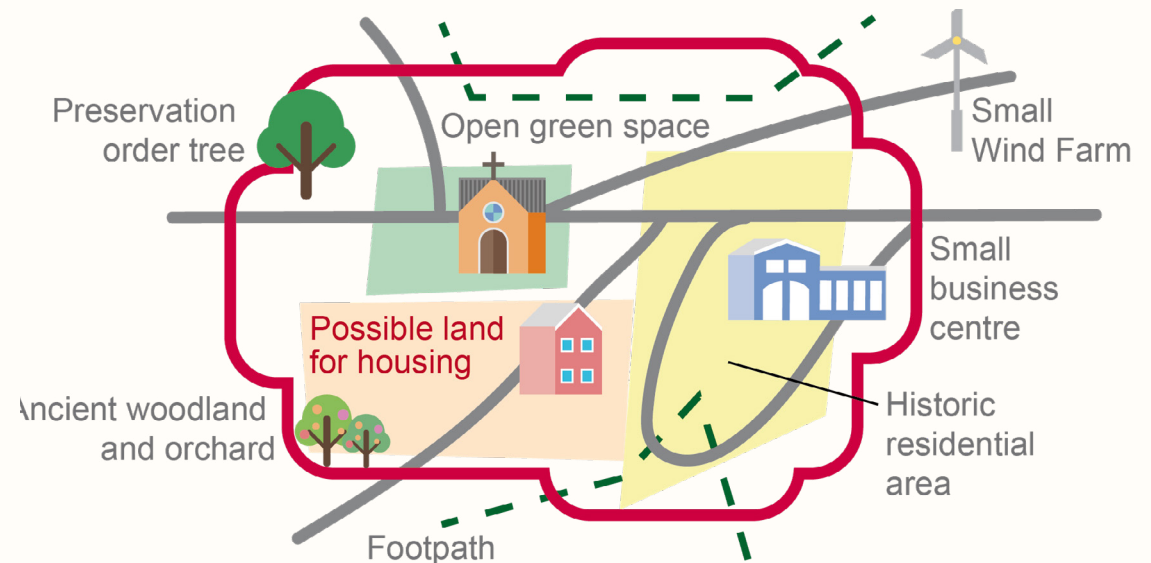
Adding to the map

Whilst the character areas are likely the most important thing to map, other elements that you identified as being special or distinct could be mapped (either on the same or another map) - perhaps the landmarks, or key landscape features, listed buildings or public rights of way.

The historic environment of an area has its own intrinsic value but also contributes to the character and identity of the wider area. Character assessments should explore the reasons why historic areas

developed in the way they did. This can help to better understand the context for historic growth patterns and compare these with the context and opportunities today.

Viewing OS maps and old Parish Council records at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, is a helpful way to gain a good historical context to the evolution of the local area, which might also inform what you wish to include on your map.



Purpose of the map

These maps are a useful tool that can be referred to by anyone proposing new development and communicate quickly your knowledge about the local area.

Understanding the patterns and reasons behind development and the character of your local area will provide a framework for thinking about new design - what will enhance or complement what is already there? How much change is possible before the special significance of the place is changed?

It could be that the proposals sit adjacent to a specific character area and it is logical that it has similar characteristics. Or the analysis may have identified a character area that you consider doesn't work well – perhaps the rear gardens

of lots of houses back onto a park meaning the park is not well overlooked and doesn't feel safe at night; so new proposals might be able to consider how to make improvements.

Together the definition of what is special about your local area and the character mapping exercise provide really useful information that will help guide and inform the process of developing a vision and design principles for the future.

Glossary (later in document: Part 5)

Sometimes the words and phrases architects and planners use to describe buildings and places can be quite technical. A tool is provided within this document that sets out an explanation of what key words mean.

Some examples of character studies are given in Toolkit C later on in the document.

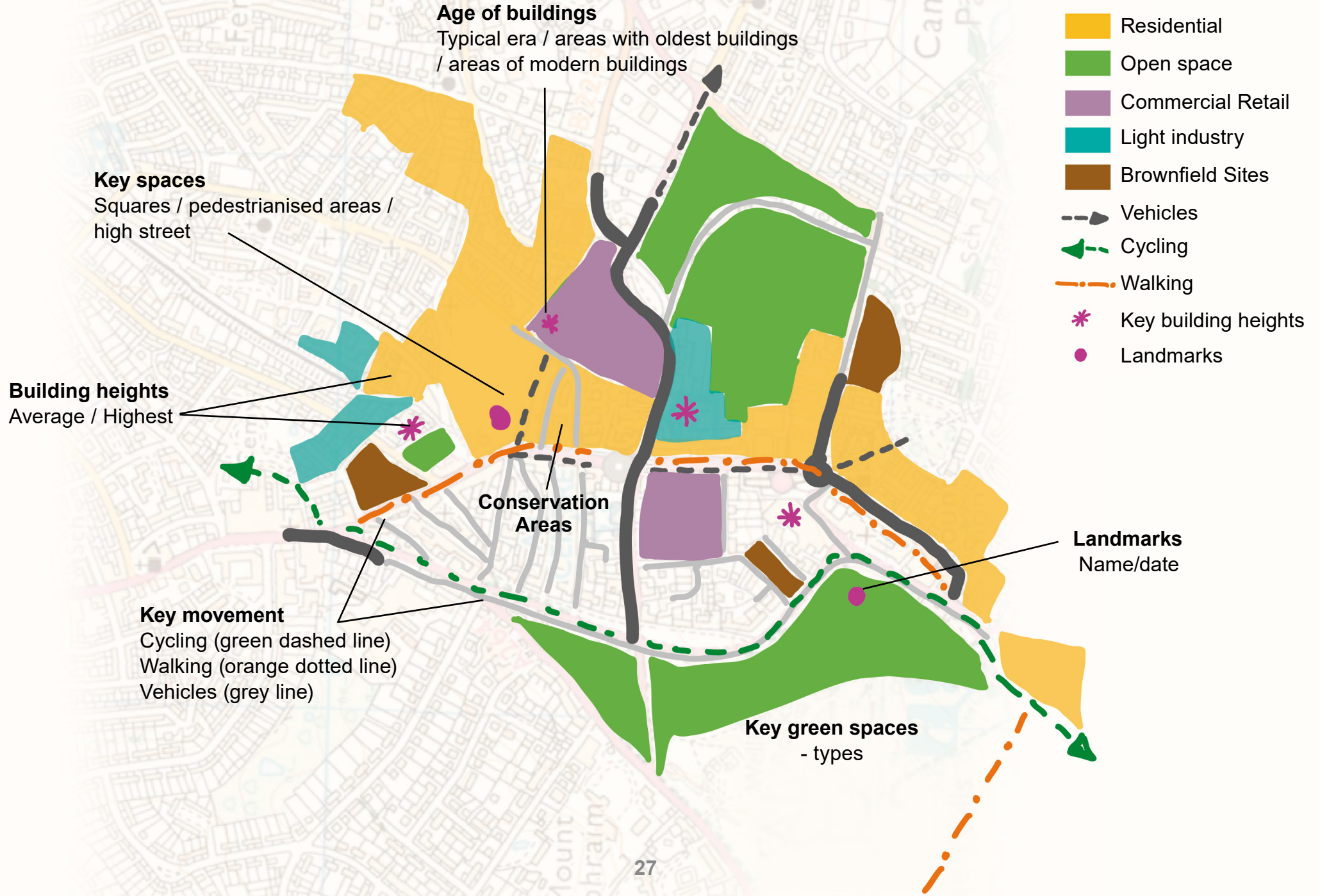


Create a map, use an OS map or printout one from the internet and trace over it marking up key information. Make sure you check any copyright requirements.

The map can be high level - it doesn't need to show each individual building - just the broader areas, to understand the bigger picture.

You could draw several maps to show different aspects on each.

Integrating High Quality Design



Design principles: thinking big

Your Place

The complementary part to the vision is the creation of design principles, this is simply a wish list for your neighbourhood. These are a step towards the more tangible things that you want to achieve - key priorities or rules that will need to be adhered to that will support you in achieving the vision.

This is another exercise where it is critical to understand, and prioritise, what is important to the community as a whole.

Some of these may be rooted in some big topics, examples of which are outlined on this page. Often these tally with the community's day-to-day concerns about the place they live and might inform your Design Principles.



Resilience

Ensuring plans have foresight, anticipating changes in infrastructure (basic systems and services) that could happen and planning for adaptation.

The big themes in your community



The big challenges the world faces often trickle down to concerns that local residents may have about their local area. There are opportunities to make a difference and tackle these challenges head on in the design of your local area. These themes are very general and already captured in national guidance - the opportunity within local guidance is to demonstrate their local relevance by referencing local objectives, in order to guide the design of new development.



Climate

Being prepared and protecting homes and communities in the context of more extreme weather.



Health & well-being

Opportunities to improve physical and mental health, at home and out and about.



Digital

Enabling reliable, high speed connections for everyone.



Carbon

Aiming to reach 'Net zero' - 'balancing' or cancelling out any carbon we produce.



Inclusive

Removing barriers and creating places everyone can use, allowing everyone to participate.



Facilities/services

Considering what is already provided and what could be improved on, particularly to encourage sustainable lifestyles.



Community

Providing ways in which different people and groups can have opportunities and space to meet and socialise.



Biodiversity

Seeking to improve the natural environment, leaving it in a measurably better state than before.



Homes and development

Providing homes that meet local needs, considering the wants and needs of all.



Environment

Considering the impact on the world around us e.g. green spaces, water use, air quality, shading.



Ageing

Considering the specific needs of older people, allowing us all to live happy and fulfilling lives.



Economics

Positively impacting the local economy, providing opportunities for local businesses to thrive.



Distinctiveness

Conserving and enhancing those aspects of our places which give them their particular character.

This guidance cannot cover every design topic, but instead the design principles should steer your Neighbourhood Planning Group to cover topics that are relevant for you. Your design principles may have a focus on nature; and so including advice on habitat creation is important. It's likely that the streets or buildings specifically contribute to the special qualities of the place, so topics such as building heights, material details, public realm details (e.g. surfaces, boundaries, planting and furniture) are covered.

It's important to note that more 'generic' design guidance is included in other documents (i.e. National Design Guide/Building for a Healthy Life/Manual for Streets), and local design guidance needn't duplicate this nor information from the Local Plan and Wiltshire Design Guide. Rather, local design guidance can be more specific about what exists and what is expected.

Design principles shouldn't stem just from analysis of what's there already, but also any specific aspirations; such as the creation of the types of public realm, (e.g. less conventional uses of open space for food growing or older adult recreation), or 'liveable streets' (designed to be public spaces for social interaction, rather than just for moving and parking vehicles). Looking forward to the future in your vision demands that you discuss change; it's likely therefore that topics such as climate change, demographic change and economic change (and their design consequences) will influence local design guidance.

Design principles: for your local community for 15-20 years



Engagement and consultation with the local community is a really useful tool that can also guide the development of design principles.

These examples show how listening to people can be a starting point from which to translate their ideas into expected outcomes. These expected outcomes or design principles start to flesh out what needs to be focussed on and set out specific aspirations for the local area.

The design principles don't necessarily resolve every issue, but as development comes forward it sets out expectations and gives something against which to assess proposals, so that progress is always towards the shared vision.

It is important that the design principles build on the analysis of your local area - asking 'so what?', particularly with regards to what this means for future growth. This should build a set of locally specific aspirations. Engagement needs to pose questions such as 'if there is development, what is it, where is it, and what from the analysis is important to consider?'



Aiden (Context Identity and Built form)

"I always see the same 'cookie cutter' houses – they could be from any part of the country. New houses should be natural stone so that they suit our village, quality of materials really matters. I love that the buildings sit well in the landscape – whether that is the small groups of cottages on the outskirts of the village, the agricultural barns or the more formal houses fronting the village green."

- **Example design principle:** All development should contribute positively to both the existing village character and the wider landscape; with materials chosen that match or complement the typical stone walls and slate roofs. New development on the edge of the village should contribute positively to long distance views of the village.

Aiden's priority design principles





Arthur (Context Identity and Built form)

“New development alongside the river all have very flat façades; that should be avoided in future by using bays and porches. That’s quite common in this area.”

- **Example design principle:** Features such as bay windows and porches are typical of the village and are considered important for inclusion on new dwellings.

Arthur’s priority design principles



Ellie and Dylan (Movement and Nature)

“I’d like to be able to scoot to school safely, the estates around here are from the 1970s and obviously designed for cars.”

“I love relaxing by walking every morning, seeing the views to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and hearing birdsong.”

Ellie and Dylan’s priority design principles



- **Example design principle:** Priority will be given to active travel routes (journeys made in physically active ways - like walking, wheeling, cycling or scooting), especially those connecting to the school and village centre. The potential development site beside the school should include wide tree-lined pavements leading directly to it, with pedestrian and cyclist priority where the route crosses roads.
- **Example design principle:** Public open spaces should include circular walks, on all weather paving with plenty of seating along these routes. A variety of trees should be included in public open spaces, including fruit and nut trees.



Frank (Context, Nature and Movement)

“I love the heritage of the old buildings in the village but get frustrated about the lack of transport links between the train station and my home.”

- **Example design principle:** All development improvements should respect the existing heritage features in the village centre.
- **Example design principle:** Improvements should be made to connect areas of housing to the station through the provision of new bus/cycle lanes on key routes.

Frank’s priority design principles



Gunda (Uses, Homes and Buildings)

“We’re looking ahead to when our kids need their own homes. Sadly there’s not many affordable options around here. We need to make opportunities for young families in this village. We need to think about what the modern family really needs from their home.”

- **Example design principle:** New family homes should include lots of space and natural light for homeworking, and be designed to reduce energy bills. There needs to be communal play spaces nearby. Semi-detached houses and townhouses could be used for larger households
- **Example design principle:** Not all new homes will be occupied by young families with children; some older couples want low-maintenance modern houses too, which are easy to access, and can be adapted easily, as they grow older. Apartments for downsizers should have good sized terraces or balconies that people can enjoy a meal on.

Gunda’s priority design principles





Farnaz (Public Spaces)

“The space for teenagers to hang out is always outside, there’s nowhere for me to spend time with friends on a rainy day.”

- **Example design principle:** A new community building should be provided for all age groups, all of whom will be consulted.

Farnaz’s priority design principles



Ivy (Resources)

“In other areas of my life I’m always following the mantra of reduce, reuse, recycle. I’d like the next place I live to have done the same - I’m really interested in the idea of passive houses.”

- **Example design principle:** Roofscapes should be designed to maximise south facing areas for solar panels. Housing should have rain gardens instead of standard front lawns.

Ivy’s priority design principles



Jacob (Public Spaces)

“All the play areas are just for toddlers, we need some for 4-10 year old children. As an adult, there’s no reason to go out and walk around near home - so I never meet my neighbours. The open space is boring and empty most of the time.”

- **Example design principle:** New public open spaces should be designed to deliver a wide range of uses for a range of ages and abilities - for example play areas, trim trails and allotments catering for all ages.

Jacob’s priority design principles



Design principles for your local area



At the local area scale a wide range of topics are likely to arise that are opportunities to consider what is really important to the future of the area.

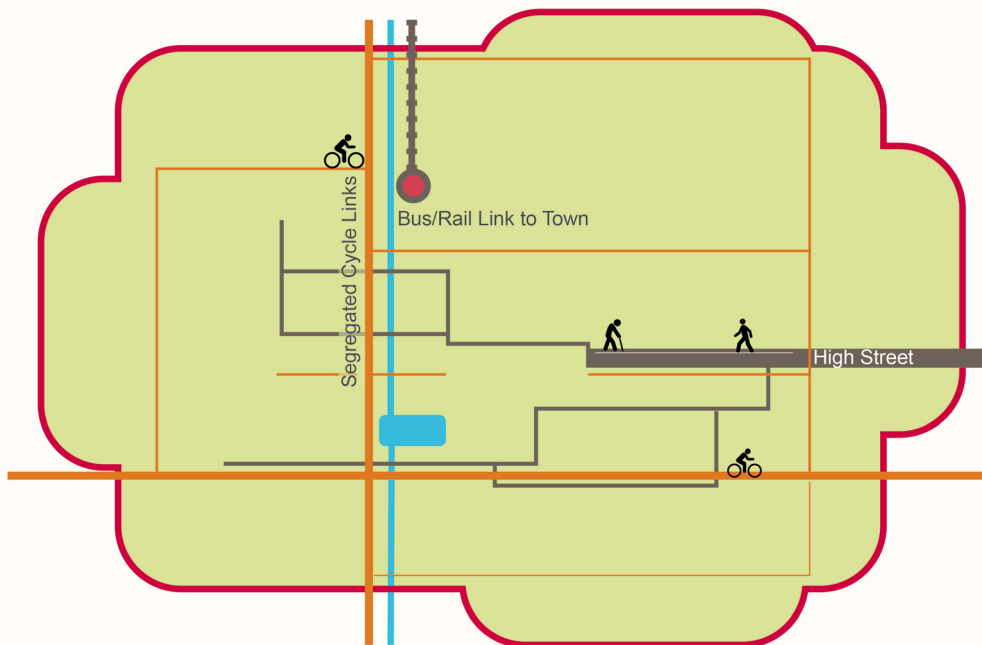
Once design principles have been developed it is important they are captured, so they can be shared - this is likely to be a written set of principles but might also be illustrated by a plan.

If someone is particularly creative you might like to illustrate the design principles as sketches or a 'cartoon' plan like this one.

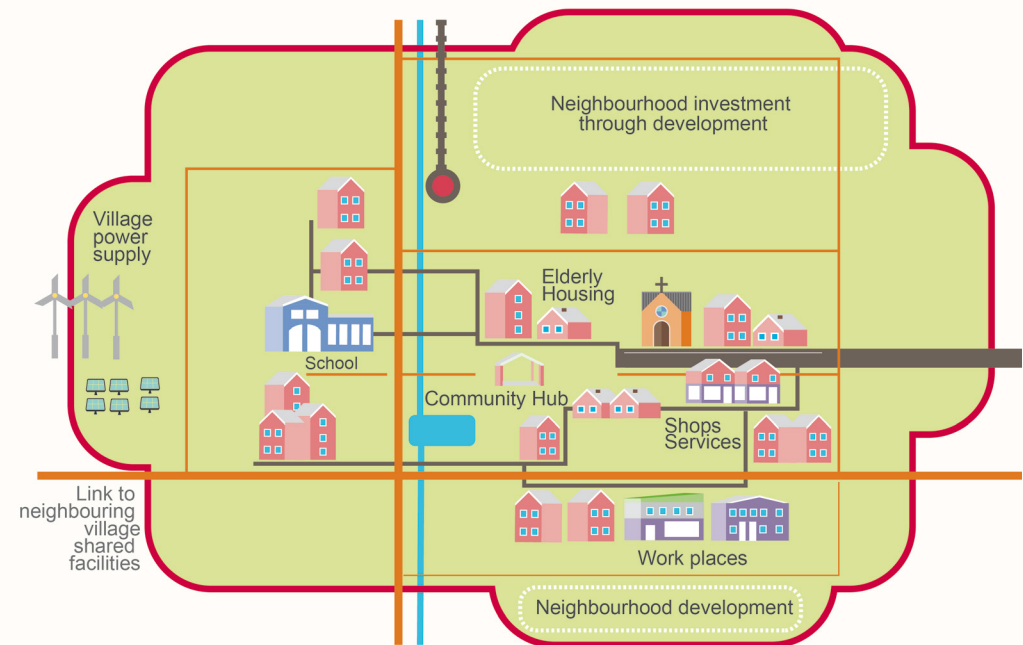
At it's simplest this can be a set of bullet points on the key topics.

This information can be included within your Neighbourhood Plan or other local guidance document.

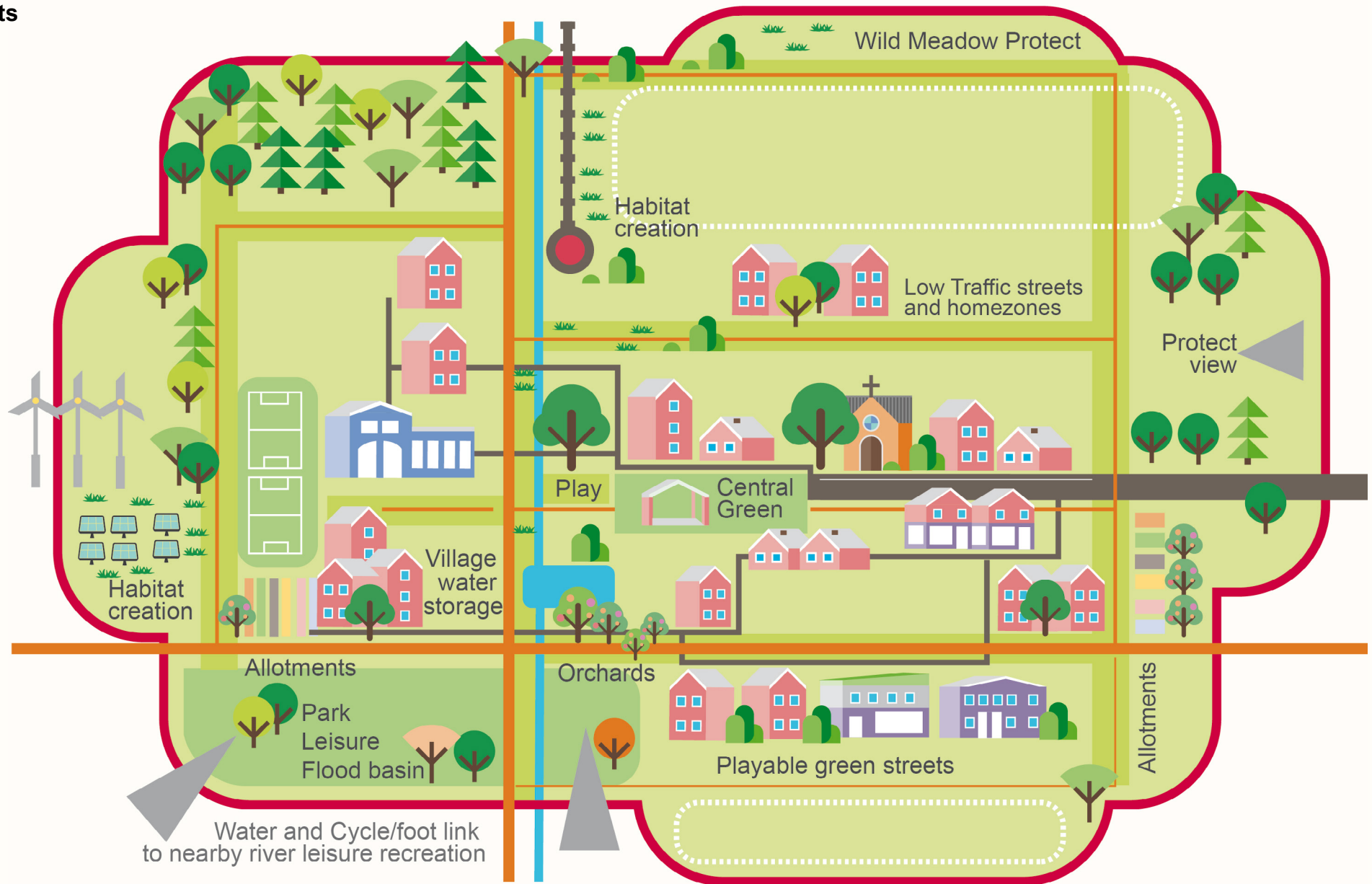
Connections - Access



Built Environment



Landscape/Open Space
Habitats



Approval of your local design guidance



Getting your Neighbourhood Plan made

If you are going down the route of creating a Neighbourhood Plan, once you have gathered the views of your neighbourhood and developed your draft Neighbourhood Plan there is a process to go through in order to get it made (i.e. adopted). This includes periods of consultation, finalising the plan, submitting it to Wiltshire Council, independent examination, modifications to plan following examination and a community referendum, before it can be 'Made' – when it becomes part of the Development Plan for Wiltshire. Wiltshire Council will be able to provide guidance to help you through these steps.



Other local design guidance

Other types of local design guidance, such as a Village Design Statement (VDS), will also need to be approved so as to be given weight within planning decisions regarding new development.

VDS's will be considered for approval by planning committee, following an officer appraisal which will include an assessment of the robustness of the consultation undertaken to inform its preparation.

Wiltshire Council will be able to provide guidance to help you through the process. Contact at an early stage will help ensure that officers are in a better position to recommend that the final VDS is approved as a material consideration in decision making.

Assessing proposals



You have now reached the point at which you will be able to use your local design guidance as a tool against which to assess and inform proposals. Congratulations!

As proposals come forward you will have a clear set of design principles against which to compare them. This allows you to comment positively on those that meet with your criteria and will take you a step towards your vision.

And where schemes fall short, you will have ready-made guidelines to help you respond constructively to those proposing development.

Further down the line, it's highly recommended that you visit the new developments, and compare them to what was both envisaged and approved. This can be another fun community activity, but monitoring the effectiveness of local policy and guidance will also be important for when you come to review your design guidance in future. If possible, speak open-mindedly with the developer and with those using or visiting the place about their views and experiences; there will almost certainly be interesting, valuable things to learn, which can help you become a more informed 'place shaper'. Good luck!



4. Toolkit A:

How to develop a vision

Aims

1. Encourage visionary thinking
2. Encourage long-term thinking
3. Encourage ambitious thinking

Format

Can be undertaken as a short workshop or completed at home, either individually or even better, in groups.

Method

- Explain that each participant should imagine their local area in 15-20 years time. They should think about: what has happened to the town, how has it changed, what positive things have happened through the intervening years. They should imagine that the local area is in the news, celebrating the amazing changes that have taken place in those 20 years.

- Participants should imagine the front cover of a newspaper reporting on a big event that symbolises the changes that have taken place – it might be the local newspaper reporting on an event, a new building or public space being opened, or perhaps something so significant has happened it's made the national news!
- People should think about the future of their local area, what they want it to be like in 20 years, what's the one big idea that will help to change the local area for the better and what is the problem it was responding to.
- Their task is to design the front page of the newspaper, which explains all the changes that have taken place in the last 20 years. Stress that they can be ambitious in their thinking. You should explain that they need to think about a newspaper name, a headline, find or draw an image to illustrate their

article and to include at least five key changes. These could be bullet points or short paragraphs. You can use a form like that opposite as a template.

- Once everyone has had time to complete their newspaper (whether in a workshop or at home), provide an opportunity for all the newspapers to be displayed. This could be on the wall at a workshop, or in a shop window or school hall if everyone has completed theirs at home.
- In a workshop give those who want to an opportunity to talk about their newspaper front page to share their ideas. See if there are any similar ideas in different newspapers. Try and agree with everyone the top five key themes that might become part of the vision.

- If the task has been completed at home, you could again look at which have similar ideas and display some 'conclusions' alongside the display of newspapers - or share this in a local magazine or web page.

Example form - draw up a simple outline of a newspaper front page

Alternatives

The toolkit can be adapted as you wish:

- You might like to do this activity at a local school and award a prize for the best headline.
- 'Wish you were here'. Instead of a newspaper you could design a postcard from the future – again imagining you are around 15-20 years in the future, visiting your local area and sending a postcard to relatives explaining what you've loved about your visit.
- You could imagine you are around 15-20 years in the future and design some instagram posts about specific places, people or events that are happening in your local area.

Newspaper Name		Date
Catchy Title		
Headline grabber		
Image		
Challenge	Solution overview	Impact

Examples:

Integrating High Quality Design

2037

Thursday 12th

Home | Sport | Social | Calendar

Welcome Local Gazette



Our school is back!
New purpose-built passive school

As well as delivering the passive school ready for September, we also have built 10 family homes - a joint development with our neighbouring village. We controlled the quality of the development through our Neighbourhood Plan. We also now have an Electric School Bus and together with the new road crossing all students are within a 15min walk to school, as voted for last year. **Click read more...**



Open Leisure Centre refurb.



Cycle hyperlink "wheelie good"



Village Green Expansion



New VR Doctor now installed



Flower Meadow in full bloom



Bat boxes go up: talk on 15th Oct



Volunteer pick-up organised



Fishing open - new stock added

Climate Neighbourhood Contract

Last weeks storms - we saw them off!

Our village commitment is working; the new streetside rain gardens and channels and 'no more hard driveways', plus our new village wide 'capture water for summer scheme' is a great success. New plans to build our own solar field and wind turbine to give our village electric is well underway **more...**



Ian_23
'Place'2037 >

⋮



SEPTEMBER 2037

523 likes

Ian_23 Love working from home but the Local workhub is great to catchup and do meetings at @'Place'2037

#business #digital5G #networking



Farnaz_019

⋮



SEPTEMBER 2037

489likes

Farnaz_019 Wonderful walk in village woodland with my husband, called in at neighbourhood run pub on way home@'place'2037

#green #environment #exploring

Try writing some Instagram posts from the future about specific places, people and events that are happening in your local area.

A tablet news paper. Think about the future and the positive news stories you would like to see happen. Be ambitious!

40



Wish you were here! Our New Community Hub Opening

It's been fantastic visiting!. The Community Hub opened yesterday and the whole village was here! The allotment and community garden, which are next door, opened last year so all the party food was grown locally.

The village's hyper-fast free internet means the hub is kitted out with small business pods. It also has bookable meeting rooms and a dedicated after school homework pod. There's a community officer overseeing these spaces. There's a coffee shop too which means its a brilliant meeting space for all ages.

There's also the new DOCTORPOD - a diagnostic service - you video call with a central NHS doctor server; everyone in our neighbourhood can walk to it within 15 minutes.

Imagine postcards or pictures from the future - what do you love about your local area in 2037?



4. Toolkit B:

How to engage with residents

Aims

1. Analyse your existing local area
2. Consider other viewpoints
3. Be fun and engaging
4. Explore what is distinctive about your local area
5. Explore what your vision is

Format

Undertaken as a short workshop. The intention is that each of the activities below is easy to organise, shouldn't put people outside of their comfort zone, is fun and generates some useful information about how your local area is viewed.

Methods

Day in the life

This involves thinking about your local area from someone else's perspective. This might be the perspective of a wheelchair user, a parent with a pushchair and a toddler or someone visually impaired. If you know someone who would have a different perspective on your local area, you might ask if they are willing to take others on a trip around the local area to highlight the difficulties they face. Or you could set a group off to undertake a number of tasks with a pushchair – helping them understand the difficulties of navigating without using stairs, or trying to use a small toilet cubicle, or getting through narrow doorways. Or you could cycle a route through your local area and identify where cycle links are missing. Afterwards you can regroup and discuss lessons learned and how you could make your local area more accommodating.



A different perspective

This involves taking the viewpoint of people who are not the 'typical resident'. To start with, as a group consider who this might be, perhaps:

- someone who is homeless
- someone who accidentally got off at the wrong bus stop and is lost
- a bus driver who has hours to wait until his next job
- someone who is passing through whilst running a marathon
- someone with bad intentions like a burglar

Once you have generated a list, split into small groups, with one of these people allocated to each group and consider their day in your local area. Jot down what they spend their time doing and what, in their eyes, is good and bad about the local area.

Visitor viewpoint

Often it's easy to see your local area from the perspective of residents. But what about visitors? Think about someone who comes for the day and someone who is on holiday for a week. Again jot down what they spend their time doing and what, in their eyes, is good and bad about the local area.



Photo study

Another way of engaging people is to set up a group walk, taking photos of what people consider special. This could be a standalone photo survey or after the walk they could regroup around a map, to mark on what they consider favourite places, key landmarks, pet hates, areas to improve.

Online surveys

Various options are available online. A commonly used option is Survey Monkey which can be used to easily create surveys and gather feedback. The free version is limited to 40 responses per survey and 10 questions per survey. Another option is Google Forms, which has no response limit. It is worth spending some time researching exactly which option best suits your needs. In some instances, if your requirements are particularly complex, you may want to engage a consultant to carry out a survey on your behalf.

Wishcart

A fun way to run this, if you know someone creative, is to create a 'cart' which can be wheeled around your local area to collect people's wishes. This can be adapted – it could be a wishing well, or a wishing bucket – but ideally something that moves, is big, bright and colourful (and perhaps noisy?) that will catch people's attention. It's helpful if it moves so you can go to where people are – perhaps at a local event, market or fair.

The intention is simply for people to record and share their wishes for your local area – these can be pinned to the cart so that everyone can share their ideas which can then be recorded to inform the vision for your local area.



4. Toolkit C

How to undertake a character area study

Aims

1. Analyse your existing local area
2. Create character area plan
3. Understand key terms

Format

Walkabout survey and group exercise to develop character area plan.

Introduction

Understanding your existing local area and creating a character area plan is a useful task both for your own understanding and also as a tool that enables developers to respond to local character. By including a character area map within your Neighbourhood Plan you can ask developers or planning applicants to preserve that character, or respond to it in a more creative, modern way whilst respecting certain defining features that make the place special.

Every community is different, and every neighbourhood, town or village is different, shaped by location, history and geography.

The toolkit provides a simple way to analyse a local area. The toolkit identifies seven 'Key Defining Features' of character

areas which could equally be applied to a small or large community.

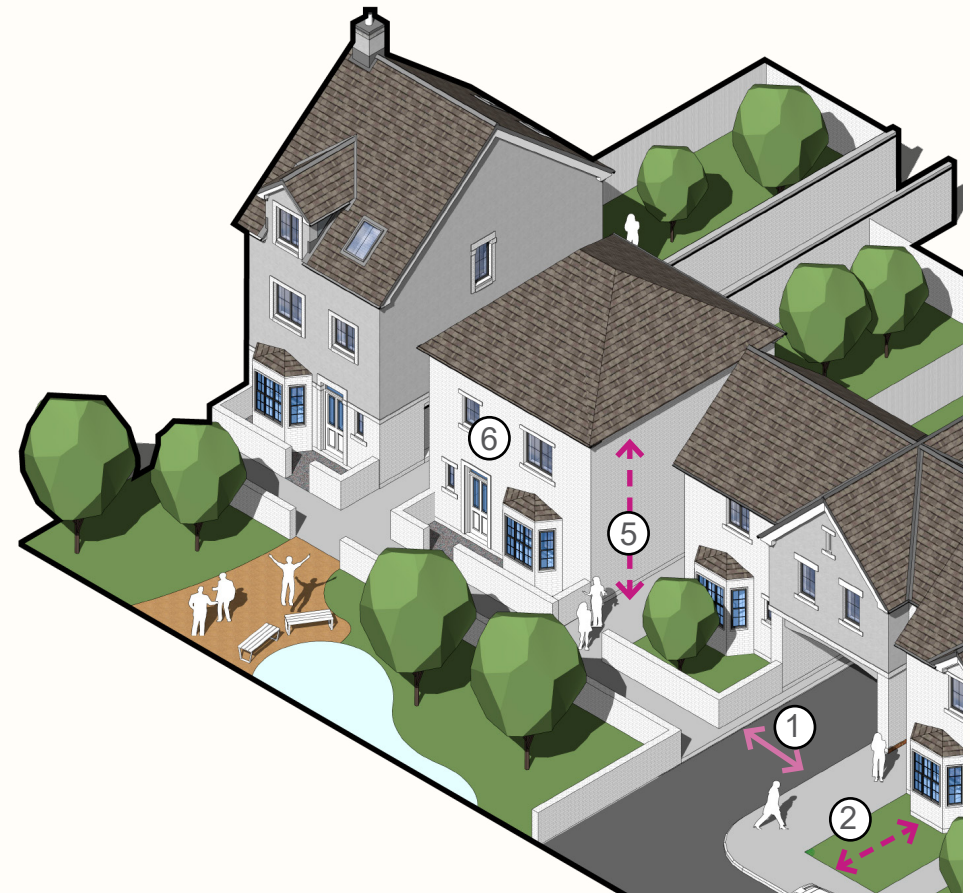
In a smaller settlement you may be identifying the differences between several streets or several key 'zones'. Even at this scale it is unlikely that you will need to record the detail of every individual building.

In a larger settlement it is unlikely that you wish to tackle the study on a street by street basis, but will take a broader approach by defining a small number of areas of broad similarity. For example this might include distinguishing areas by broad building age (e.g. Victorian terraces, 1960s urban extension, historic core), special status (e.g. Conservation Area) and perhaps some key land uses (e.g. predominantly retail, large green spaces).

Method

Steps to creating a character area plan.

- 1. Pre-assessment:** An initial decision will need to be made about how to identify different areas to analyse. In a small community this might be undertaken street by street. In larger areas it might be necessary to look at local maps or historic maps to make an initial assessment of which areas look likely to be distinct from each other in order to set out separate areas to survey.
- 2. Create form:** Once you have set out these areas you are ready to prepare forms (see p.51) for your local area. We suggest recording seven key defining features as a minimum to identifying differences. If you wish you can adapt the form to better suit your needs or to go into more detail.



Character Area Key Defining Features

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Road width | 3. Building style and age | 6. Dominant or typical building materials |
| 2. Building setback (distance between building and road/footpath) | 4. Building type (detached / semi / terrace) | 7. Land use (housing, industrial, employment, retail, mixed) |
| | 5. Building height / number of storeys | |

3. Walkabout:

Now you are ready to undertake your survey, with a walkabout of the local area to fill out the form. Depending on the size of the settlement you may want to split this task between different people so that each can focus on a different area. For a smaller settlement you may wish to cover the whole area as a group. The form gives an opportunity to include key photos and information about the settlement. The glossary (see p.38-40) will also help with this task.

4. Workshop:

This should be an opportunity to gather and reflect on what the forms have revealed. In a small settlement this might be fairly obvious, in a larger settlement it might take longer to assess the information. Through this process, as a group, you should begin to agree if the settlement has different character areas. These might align with the initial assessment you made, or might have revealed other areas that are distinct. The toolkit gives some ideas as to what might define a character area.

5. Development of character area plan:

Print out a plan of your settlement as big as possible. Place some tracing paper over the top of it. This will be a 'first draft' plan. Start to mark up where you think different character areas are – each in different colours. You might take a few attempts and lots of discussion but that's fine.

6. Name and describe character areas:

You could just number the character areas, but you might also like to give them a short name that reflects their character. In addition you might like to write a few sentences to describe the character area.

7. Mark on key landmarks:

As well as character areas you might like to mark on other key landmarks such as religious buildings, community facilities, pubs or parks on the plan.

8. Final character area plan:

After you have come to agreement on the character areas, create your 'final' version. This might be a neat hand mark-up, or if someone has the skills a plan created on a computer.



Meeting as a group for a Character Area workshop

Creating a form

You will need a form on which to collect information about the character of your local area. This is just a simple form with a set of questions on various topics. As each settlement might vary so vastly we suggest that you create your own form. We have set out here an example of a typical form suggesting some key topics you might like to cover. We would encourage you to devise your own, and to adapt as necessary to best suit your local area.

You might also consider if a photo survey - with photos annotated with key findings is a good method to survey your local area. Participants could simply print out their photos and annotate them with their key findings about the character of the place. These photos might have a focus - what are the best and worst bits of your local area, for example?

At its most simplistic, the form can just cover the Key Defining Features as a method by which to record and distinguish different areas from each other.

A 'title' section will be useful for future reference, noting which area was surveyed, when and by whom. Names are particularly important in case you want to find out a bit more about what was recorded.

Character Area Study Form

Date of survey: _____

Name of area surveyed: _____

Names of team: _____

Character Area - Key Defining Features

1. **Road width**
2. **Building setback** (distance between building and road/footpath)
3. **Building style and age**
4. **Building type** (detached / semi / terrace)
5. **Building height** / number of storeys
6. **Dominant or typical building materials**
7. **Land use** (mixed or mainly housing)

Character Area - Supplementary Information Settlement Form and Uses

Notable history: Include significant reasons behind it's development

Layout: Describe the relationship between buildings, spaces and routes and their arrangement (e.g. grid, linear, radial, irregular)

Block: Include information about block structure, building setback, building line, density and massing

Further information on main building typologies:

Key landmarks:

- These supplementary topics are an optional extra that could be included if you think they are appropriate and will result in useful information to about your local area. You will want to tailor this so the information is not time consuming to collect and so you end up with some useful information about key differences across different areas of the settlement.

Streets

Streets and routes: Describe typical vehicle, cycle and pedestrian routes, street surface materials

Street furniture

Street planting

Open Space

Function / role of spaces

Topography: Describe any notable features of the terrain / natural landscape

Public realm: Key spaces

Views: Key views (record location, direction, and extent of viewpoints)

Plot

Plot: Note if a typical or irregular shape, note typical width and length

Private amenity space: Describe if typically front and back gardens and any defensible space

Boundary: i.e. typically wall / fence / hedge / no boundary

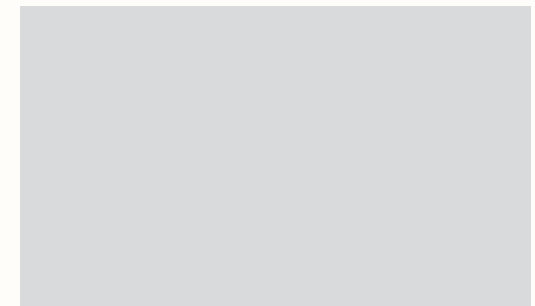
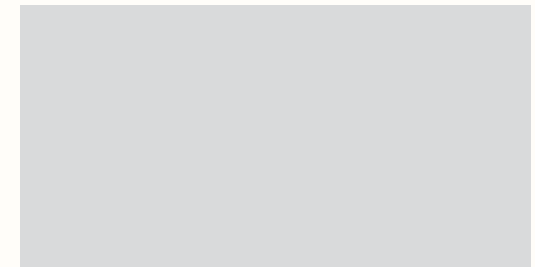
Buildings

Buildings: Include relevant information including typical architectural style, age of building, roof type, distinct architectural features

A section where participants can include an annotated photo record of the survey.

Photographs or sketches

Take photos or draw sketches to help show or describe any of the topics



Example - Smaller Settlement

Introduction

This gives an example of a character area study for a smaller settlement - this study is for a village of around 650 dwellings.

A coloured hand mark up of a map identifies the different areas of the village - the area that is mainly residential, the village centre and areas of distinct land uses - education and employment.

The map also highlights some key points of interest - woods, lakes and parks which contribute to its character.

In this instance the village is next to an A-road which is also marked on as an important feature.

Most groups will be fairly familiar with a settlement this size, and marking up a map like this is likely to be quite a straightforward exercise.

The following pages provide an indication of the type of information that should then be recorded about these character areas.

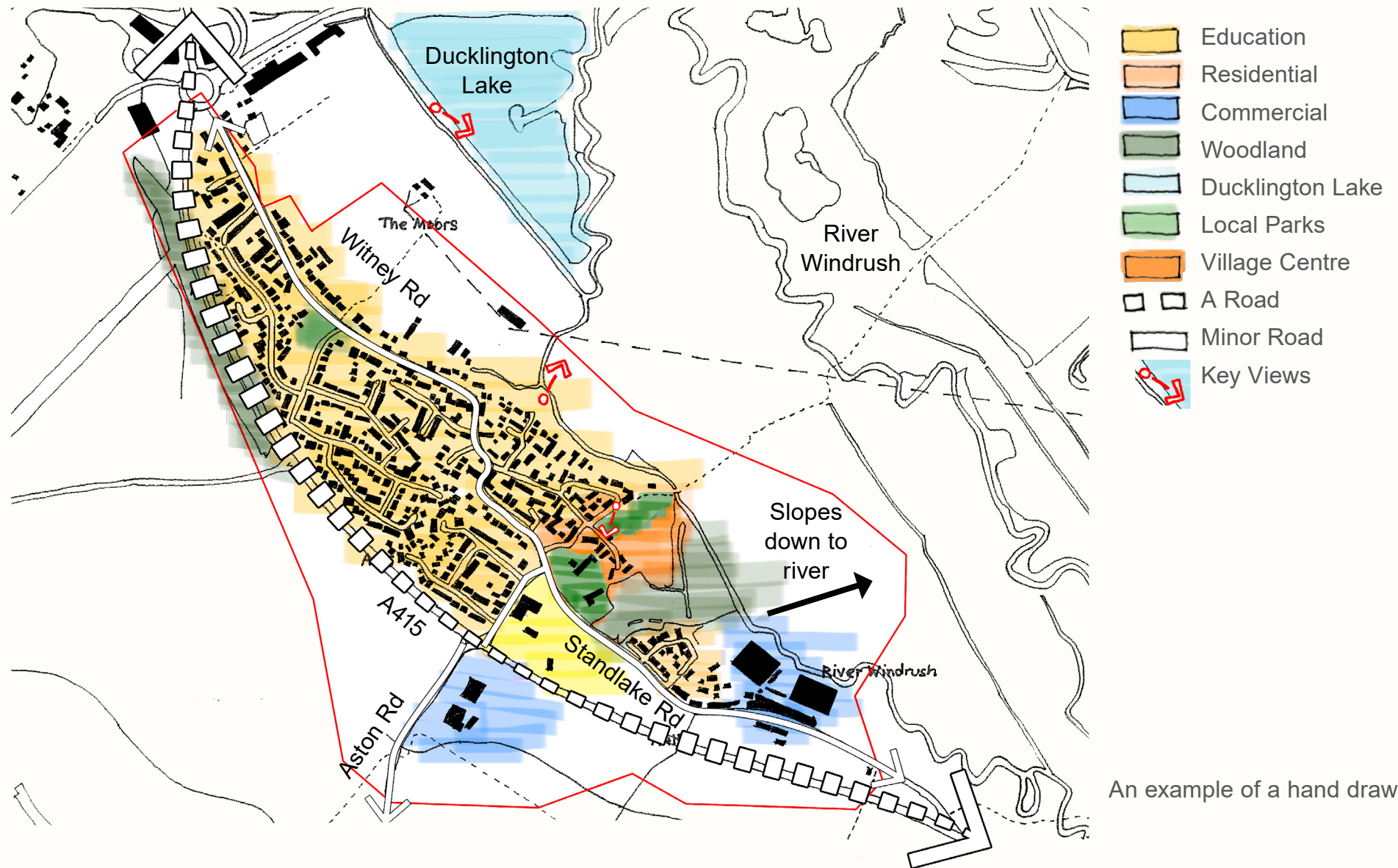
In this example the seven key defining features are used as a method to note down information about four of the areas identified - the residential area, the village centre and areas with education and commercial uses. This part of the exercise is best done by recording it on a form whilst on a walkabout of the settlement.

While throughout, the seven defining features are a useful starting point - you can see in this example that some additional information has been included in the village character area section. Additionally supplementary information has been added about open space which it was felt was important to the character of the village. You may be able to anticipate this when you are creating your form, or you might like to leave some space for 'additional comments'.

Once this information is collected steps 4-8 of the process outlined previously allow for reflection and agreement of the character analysis, developing the character area plan.

This level of information gives a good introduction to the distinct areas of the village to someone who is unfamiliar with the village and begins to pick up important distinctions which either might be important to reflect in new development proposals or highlights problems that should be avoided in the future.

Integrating High Quality Design



An example of a hand drawn plan.

Character Area Study Form

Name of area surveyed: Residential and Village Centre

Date of survey: 31.10.2022

Names of team: J. Smith

Residential

1. Road width

- The main road through the village is approx 5.6m wide, generally with 2 pavements. The residential network of roads are approx. 4.75m wide (generally cul-de-sacs and loop roads).

2. Building setback

- Majority of housing has a large setback from road - including a front garden and/or parking on plot.

3. Building style and age

- Older housing tends to be along the main road. The majority of more recent housing was built in the 1970s, and is located off of the main road.

4. Building type

- The 1970s housing is typically 1 and 2 storey semi-detached and detached 'suburban' housing developments

5. Building height / number of storeys

- Generally 1-2 storeys

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Buff brick, stone, render. Tiled roofs.

7. Land use

- Mainly housing.

Village Centre

1. Road width

- Village centre roads are narrow single carriage streets with on street parking
- Church St and Back Lane are the key streets within the village centre, around the church.
- Streets broaden out to form open space around the Duckpond

2. Building setback

- Strong variation in building setbacks, orientation and shape of plot, most buildings front directly onto the road or have a small grass verge

3. Building style and age

- A mixture of periods, older buildings mainly located at historic village centre close to the church

4. Building type

- Majority detached and semi-detached houses

5. Building height / number of storeys

- Generally 2 storeys

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Mainly stone and slates for older buildings, some red brick, some painted render, some thatch, some timber cladding, dormers and chimneys.

7. Land use

- Residential, commercial, retail, pubs, village hall, church.

Other

The village originated during the 10th century and is in a conservation area with a clearly defined centre at the junction of Sandle Road and Church Street.

Character Area Study Form

Name of area surveyed: Education and Commercial Zone and Supplementary

Date of survey: 31.10.2022

Names of team: J. Smith

Education

1. Road width

- Accessed off Aston Road - approx. 5.5m wide, generally with single pavement.

2. Building setback

- School buildings not prominent due to approx. 5m setback and boundary hedge/tree planting.

3. Building style and age

- Around 1970s, linked block building, flat roof.

4. Building type

- School building.

5. Building height / number of storeys

- Mainly 1 storey.

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Buff stone, white timber cladding, white uPVC windows.

7. Land use (mixed or mainly housing)

- Education (primary school) & sports field

Commercial Zone

1. Road width

Accessed off wider roads (Aston Rd/Standlake Rd).

2. Building setback

- Impact of larger building minimised by large setbacks and strong boundaries with tree planting providing screening.

3. Building style and age

- Agricultural / industrial type structure.

4. Building type

- Larger warehouses.

5. Building height / number of storeys

- 1/2 storey (n.b. larger buildings).

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Corrugated metal.

7. Land use (mixed or mainly housing)

- Business/industry.

Supplementary information: Open Space

Function / role

- Hundredway Lake & Country Park is situated towards the north of the village.
- The sports pavilion, public allotments and a cemetery are located near the village centre.

Natural features

- River Windrush bypasses the village on its northern perimeter.
- Fields surround the settlement.

Topography

- The settlement gently slopes down from the south-west towards River Windrush watercourse.

Views

- Views along the riverside paths overlooking the surrounding fields.
- View from Church Street overlooking the church and village hall.
- South-eastern view from the Hundredway Lake.

Example - Larger Settlement

Introduction

This gives an example of a character area study which focuses on the town centre of a settlement of around 50,000 people. Whilst the example focusses on the differences within the town centre, the process it follows could equally be applied to the whole settlement and distinguish differences between residential areas located beyond the town centre.

For a larger settlement it is possible you are working with a consultant - and this example shows a plan created on a computer. Otherwise a coloured hand mark up of a map (as shown for the smaller settlement example) will still be adequate to identify the different areas of the town. Here the areas shown are mainly related to land use or heritage status. For larger settlements often these broader categories can be helpful and make the analysis more manageable.

For a larger (or more complex) settlement it might be harder to mark up a map in the

first instance with easily defined character areas. This is where a review of historical mapping might be able to give you some guidance. Even if at this stage the areas are loosely defined, they can be reviewed and refined after having filled in the proformas.

The following pages provide an indication of the type of information that should then be recorded about the character areas.

In this example the seven key defining features are used as a method to note down information about the areas identified. Two examples are given on the following pages, looking at Character Areas 2 and 5. This part of the exercise is best done by recording information on a form whilst on a walkabout of the settlement.

As with the smaller character area study, once this information is collected steps 4-8 of the process outlined previously

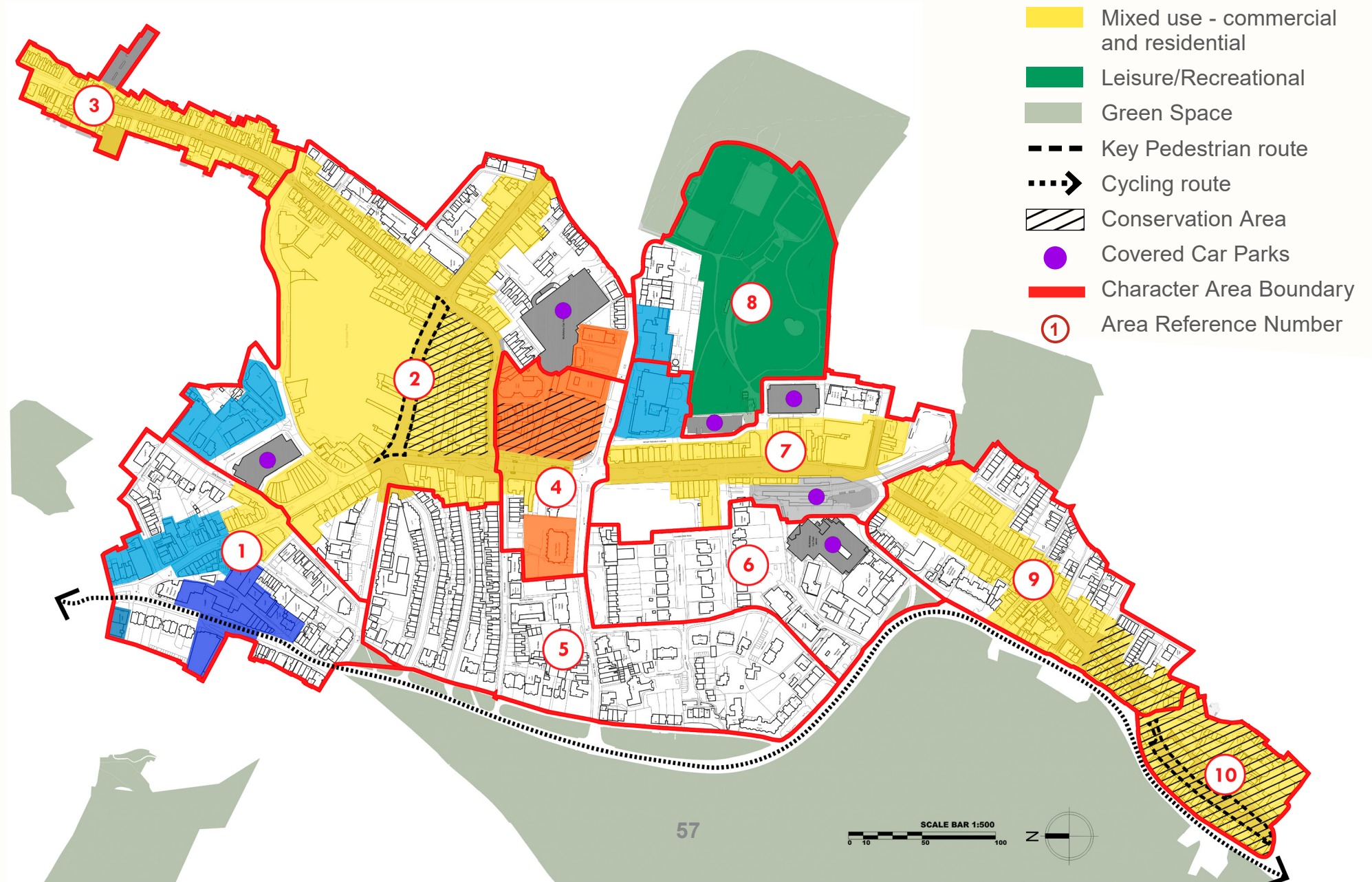
allow for reflection and agreement of the character analysis, developing the character area plan.

While the seven defining features are a useful starting point - you can see in the example for Character Area 5 that there are some distinctions discovered between the northern and southern part of the area marked on the map. This isn't necessarily problematic, you may reflect on this after and decide that broadly there are enough similarities across the north and south that this remains one character area. Alternatively you may agree collectively that it should be split into two areas.

This level of information gives a good introduction to the distinct areas of the town centre to someone who is unfamiliar with it and begins to pick up important distinctions which either might be important to reflect in new development proposals or highlights problems that should be avoided in the future.

Integrating High Quality Design

An example of a computer drawn plan.



Character Area Study Form

Date of survey: 22.10.2022

Name/number of area surveyed: Area 2

Names of team: J. Smith

Character Area Two

1. Road width

- Focus of area around pedestrianised shopping street, approx. 16m wide, with mature street trees, planting and seating.
- Other roads with fairly wide carriageways (around 6-8m) serving traffic around the town centre, with wide pavements, up to around 3.5m wide (generally both sides) serving shopping streets.
- Some measures to introduce traffic calming at key pedestrian crossings points.

2. Building setback

- Strong building frontage along streets, right up to 'back of pavement'.
- Retail with large windows / signage.

3. Building style and age

- Mix of ages and styles, though fairly good consistency maintained of building line and building height.
- Conservation area includes older buildings - e.g. Victorian terraces.

4. Building type

- Typical mix of town centre uses: large shopping centre and individual retail, cafe, banks etc.
- Some residential particularly within Conservation Area.

5. Building height / number of storeys

- Generally 2-4 storeys.
- More consistent (generally 3 storey, with some 4 story) along main shopping streets.

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Buildings generally brick (red or buff) or painted render. Some stone detailing, generally on older buildings.
- Mix of styles of shopfronts, large glazed shopfronts.
- Generally slate roofs, some red tiled.
- Distinctive red pavers to pavements.

7. Land use

- Predominantly retail and residential, some office and car parking located at periphery of area.

Character Area Study Form

Date of survey: 22.10.2022

Name/number of area surveyed: Area 5

Names of team: J.Smith

Character Area Five

1. Road width

- Terraced residential streets (to west of area), carriageway approx. 5.5m with narrow (around 1-1.5m) pavements. On street car parking dominates streets.
- Larger houses fronting park (to east of area) accessed from road, approx 5.5m wide) that runs parallel to A-road, adjacent to wide green grassed area. On street car parking dominates road.

2. Building setback

- Western area - generally setback of around 1-2m, either with small area of planting or void down to basement.
- Eastern area - typically detached or semi-detached houses within large plots and large setback of up to 20m including front garden/parking. Some variation with short rows of larger terraces setback 1-2m from pavement.

3. Building style and age

- Western area - predominantly Victorian and Georgian terraces, with variation in styles and some occasional more modern insertions.
- Eastern area - predominantly Victorian and Georgian 'mansion' houses with variation in styles. Often bay windows, prominent chimneys and occasional balconies.

4. Building type

- Predominantly residential with occasional conversion to other use (i.e. office, hotel).

5. Building height / number of storeys

- Western area - generally 2-3 storeys.
- Eastern area - 3-storey (with generous floor to ceiling heights).

6. Dominant or typical building materials

- Western area - painted render (in a variety of colours), occasional red or buff brick. Generally slate roofing.
- Eastern area - buildings generally red brick or painted render. Some stone detailing. Generally slate roofing, some red tile.

7. Land use

- Predominantly residential.

5. Glossary - Useful Terms

Terms relating to Layout

Density - Ratio of a particular type of development per given area of land.

Building typology - Set of buildings which have similarities in their type of function or form (e.g. terraced housing, high rise, civic buildings).

Block structure - A block is a group of buildings and enclosed private spaces that sit together and are surrounded by streets or other public space.

Building line - A frontage line for buildings in front of which no new buildings are erected.

Built form - Function, shape (height, volume and overall shape) and configuration of buildings as well as their relationship to streets and open space.

Massing - A term which relates the built form to its resulting aesthetics, generally in terms of size and perceived 'heaviness'.

Landmarks - Distinct and recognisable features e.g. churches, monuments, key buildings, statues, heritage & conservation areas.

Landuse - Grouping land by categories depending on what is built on it (e.g. residential, leisure and recreation, transport, commercial) employment, community).

Active Frontage - ground floors with windows and doors onto the street which create interest and activity.

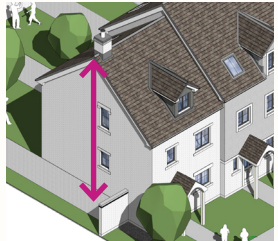
Green Infrastructure - a term used to describe the network of natural spaces and corridors in a given area.

Permeability - describes the extent to which urban forms permit (or restrict) movement of people or vehicles in different directions.

Turn the corner - term used to describe a plot/building on the corner of a block which has an active frontage on both sides.

Tenure Blind - when the design of houses and developments in general means that social and affordable houses and streets are not easily distinguishable from the private housing.

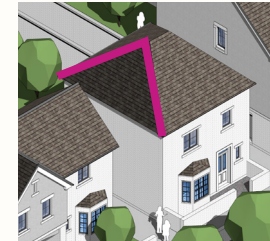
Terms relating to Building



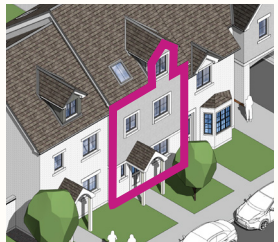
Building height - often stated in terms of number of storeys or in metres to the highest point of the roof. May refer to 'half storey' if rooms in the roof space.



Bay window - projects outward from the exterior walls of a building and forms a bay in the room.



Hip - a type of roof where all sides slope downwards to the walls.



Facade - an exterior wall of a building, generally the front part.



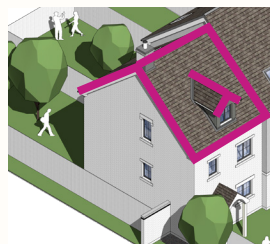
Fenestration - the arrangement of windows in a building.



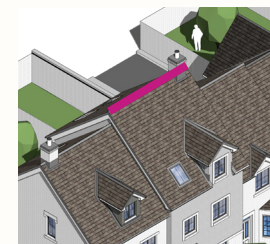
Eaves, fascias, soffits and bargeboards - component names for the visible detailing where a roof meets a wall.



Elevation - the front, back, or side of a building, or a drawing of one of these.



Half storey - a functional living space within the slope of the roof. Traditionally included dormer windows. Amend image as shown.



Ridge - the horizontal line running the length of the roof where the two sides of the roof meet.

Terms relating to Plot

- 1. Plot** - The piece of land on which a building is built.
- 2. Plot width** - The distance between the two boundaries of a property.
- 3. Private amenity space** - An area for the sole use of one household, often for relaxation or leisure, typically the garden or balcony of a property.
- 4. Boundary wall/fence** - Constructed to divide areas in different ownership and to provide privacy and security.
- 5. Defensible space** - Grounds around the home for private use of the resident; often understood as the area between the pavement and front door and typically separated with a boundary.

Terms relating to Street/Open Space

- 6. Public realm** - Any space that is free and open to anyone, including streets.
- 7. Natural Surveillance** - The placement of windows and open areas with clear lines of sight. It reduces criminal activity by making potential offenders more visible to the general public.
- 8. Public open space** - Area of land (green space or hard space) where there is public access. Does not include streets.
- 9. Street furniture** - Functional objects within the public realm (e.g. lighting, seating, bins and signage).

- 10. Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** - A method of controlling runoff and storm water, to slow it down and divert it into existing watercourses instead of sewers. Ideally is it designed to look like and mimic the different types of natural drainage.



Technical terms

Active Travel - making journeys in physically active ways - like walking, wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility aid), cycling, or scooting.

Character Areas - Character areas can be described as areas that have their own distinctive, individual character or 'sense of place'. They are areas which share a similar appearance and feel as each other.

Infrastructure - The basic systems and services, such as transport and power supplies, that a country or organisation uses in order to work effectively.

Local design guidance - prepared by local planning authorities and Neighbourhood Planning Groups to set out the general design principles and standards that development proposals should follow in the area, building on policies in the development plan.

Material consideration - A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision.

Placemaking - the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in

Urban / settlement grain - The pattern of the arrangement of street blocks, plots and their buildings in a settlement.

Where else to find information

Signposting

Other support and guidance

National Documents/Guides

[National Planning Policy Framework \(Gov\)](#)

[National Model Design Code \(Gov\)](#)

[National Design Guide \(Gov\)](#)

[Building for a Healthy Life \(Gov\)](#)

[Manual for Streets \(Gov\)](#)

[Building Regulations \(Gov\)](#)

[Secured by Design \(Police Crime Prevention Initiatives Limited\)](#)

[Sport England Active Design Principles \(Sport England\)](#)

[Cracking the Code \(RTPI\)](#)

[Beauty in my back yard \(The Prince's Foundation\)](#)

National Organisations

[Locality](#)

[Design Council](#)

[Historic England](#)

Wiltshire Council Documents/Guides

[Forthcoming Wiltshire Design Guide, due 2023](#)

[Wiltshire Local Plan](#)

Wiltshire Council Neighbourhood Planning Website

[Neighbourhood Planning home page](#)

[Wiltshire Planning Explore \(GIS Mapping website\)](#)

Wiltshire Council Neighbourhood Planning Email Contact

- neighbourhoodplanning@wiltshire.gov.uk

Example Neighbourhood Plans (Wiltshire and National)

- West Lavington Neighbourhood Plan - includes fairly detailed guidance for its allocated site, including a masterplan that was developed with the community.
- Walton Neighbourhood Development Plan - succinct, readable, undertakes some site testing.

Further Information

- Lewes Neighbourhood Plan - real sense of local character and engagement with local artists / street stories.

Example Design Guides

- Chute Design Guide - makes reference to 10 characteristics in National Design Guide. Sets out a Street Baseline & checklist.

Further information for those interested to read more on Design topics can be found at the following websites.

[Housing Design Awards website](#)

Website containing more than 1000 case studies of exemplar housing schemes, dating back to 1997 and more than 100 films and animations of winners.

[NHBC Foundation Homes through the decades, the making of modern housing Guide pdf](#)

Thought-provoking report on British Housing over the past two centuries, connecting it with the changes in society, politics, technology and culture.

[Place alliance organisation, national-housing audit information website](#)

Instrumental report which systematically evaluated the design of 142 large-scale housing-led development projects across England against seventeen design considerations.

[Building for a Healthy Life](#)

Building for a Healthy Life is a Design Code to help people improve the design of new and growing neighbourhoods. Its purpose? Its purpose is to offer a simple, 'traffic light' design code showing good and bad design, with lots of photographic examples. Some Neighbourhood Plans include policies which require compliance with it to be independently evaluated prior to submission of applications.

[West of England, reference website](#)

The 'Know your Place' website is a source of historic mapping for understanding how settlements have developed over time.

Checklist

The following checklist is an aid to ensure you have covered the key elements and followed the processes that are outlined through this document in your design guidance.

- Have you researched the planning constraints in the area, and looked at the Wiltshire Planning Explorer mapping? (Part 2 - p15 and Toolkit B - p45)
- Have you developed a vision? (Part 2 - p14)
- Have you engaged widely? (Part 3 - p20)
- Have you identified what is distinct? (Part 3 - p22)
- Have you identified different character areas? (Part 3 p24)
- Have you developed design principles? (Part 3 - p28)

Notes

Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire

Integrating High Quality Design

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