

World class places

The Government's strategy
for improving quality of place



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Ministerial foreword



The built environment can be a source of everyday joy or everyday misery. It is an important influence on crime, health, education, inclusion, community cohesion and well-being

The way places and buildings are planned, designed and looked after matters to all of us in countless ways. The built environment can be a source of everyday joy or everyday misery. It is an important influence on crime, health, education, inclusion, community cohesion and well-being. It can help attract or deter investment and job opportunities. Planning, conservation and design have a central part to play in our urgent drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect biodiversity.

That is why this Government is committed to improving quality of place as a priority. It can be tempting during these difficult economic times to put the built environment in a box marked 'pending – important but for another day'. That would be a mistake. Good quality of place should not be seen as a luxury but as a vital element in our drive to make Britain a safer, healthier, prosperous, more inclusive and sustainable place. We recognise that while the downturn brings some opportunities for developers and local planning authorities and public agencies, it brings many more challenges. As a Government we will do everything in our power not only to support the construction industry through the downturn, but to maintain and improve standards of development and the public realm. Good quality development does not have to be more expensive than poor quality – and in the longer term the savings will be significant.

We are fortunate in this country in having a very rich built heritage. Tourists travel from around the world to enjoy our beautiful cities, towns and villages, with their wonderful mix of historic styles, people-friendly streets and squares, trees and green spaces. However, for much of last century governments in Britain struggled to build on or make the best of this legacy. Cars came to dominate our streets and squares. New homes, shops and workplaces were separated from each other. New developments were built to low densities, rendering local shops and services unviable. Increased expenditure on welfare services was not matched by investment in the public realm and high quality public buildings. The art of creating humanising towns and cities went into decline.

Today the picture is very different. From the beginning this Government made a priority of improving quality of place. After decades of deterioration, our inner cities have undergone a renaissance. New icons – the London Eye, Sage Gateshead, the Imperial War Museum North, Manchester – or brilliantly renovated icons – St Pancras Station and Tate Modern, both in London, or St George's Hall, Liverpool – attract tourists from around the world and inspire pride in modern Britain. There has been a shift from greenfield to brownfield development. Thanks to the National Lottery, we have seen significant investment in our historic environment. Our parks are rejuvenated and better maintained and residential streets more pedestrian friendly. Unprecedented investment in public services has resulted in many superbly designed new public buildings, celebrated every year in the Prime Minister's Better Public Building Award, Royal Institute of British Architects' Stirling Prize, Housing Design Awards and many other prizes. Home Zones, cycle lanes and more attractive streets and parks are encouraging more people to walk and cycle. With the Olympics we are delivering one of the most ambitious design-led regeneration programmes in the world.

However, some old challenges persist and new challenges have arisen. For all the progress made over the last decade or so, most of Britain's cities still have some way to go before they are as attractive or green as the best in the world. Standards of new housing and public building remain patchy – it is vital that, as we continue to invest in new schools, colleges



Olympic legacy park © London Development Agency



We have to plan places and design and renovate buildings so they are more energy efficient and less carbon dependent

and healthcare facilities, and deliver on our commitment to create 3 million new homes by 2020, these are built to the very highest standards. We also need to make sure that we conserve and keep the best of our historic places in active use.

As our population ages, we need to make places more welcoming and inclusive, and ensure that they are designed for the convenience and the enjoyment of all age groups. In particular, without designing for older people, we risk condemning ever-growing numbers – our future selves – to isolation and indifference. Our aim should be to design in an inclusive way to make our cities, towns and neighbourhoods more welcoming and enjoyable for everyone.

In addition, the challenges of climate change demand that we fundamentally re-think the way we plan and design our built environment – both to mitigate climate change, by making a radical cut in carbon emissions, and to adapt, by preparing for more extreme weather. We have to plan places and design and renovate buildings so they are more energy efficient and less carbon dependent. We have to ensure that walking and cycling, not driving, become the norm, as they increasingly are in many European towns, cities and neighbourhoods. We have to do much more to boost the urban ‘green and blue infrastructure’ – trees, plants, absorbent surfaces, streams, ponds and rivers – that can play a vital role in bringing down temperatures, promoting biodiversity and preventing flooding.

The good news, however, is that the urgent obligation to create more sustainable places is also a great opportunity to improve the quality of these places for everyone. Cities and towns where most people travel by public transport, foot or cycle, with a good mix of homes, services and amenities and plenty of green space and green infrastructure will not just be more environmentally sustainable, they are also likely to be safer, healthier, more inclusive and enjoyable. This is the great argument for investing in quality of place: good places have multiple environmental, social and economic benefits.

Finally, as part of our broader drive to engage and empower local communities, we need to do more to engage people in making decisions about the place where they live, and empower them to shape places for themselves. Local people know best what they want from their local area; service users know best what they want from a service. Getting users engaged in improving a neighbourhood, maintaining a park or community centre, or running local services is a good way of achieving value for money and can also help build community bonds. It makes both economic and social sense.

The Government has already taken many steps to meet these new challenges. This strategy lays out how the Government will, over the next months and years, build on our record and do more to help create great places to live, work and bring up a family.

Hazel Blears
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Andy Burnham
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Endorsements



CABE

CABE is the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. We help the public sector create great places, and offer expert advice to developers and architects. We encourage policymakers to create places that work for people, and help local planners effectively apply national design policy. Advising, influencing and inspiring, our work is all about creating well designed places, so we welcome this strategy wholeheartedly. It is both the culmination of what has been learnt and achieved over the last ten years and the launch pad for helping thousands more communities across Britain enjoy world class places in the next decade.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage

The places people value most are those that reflect continuity and current vitality. Understanding and valuing our heritage helps us to achieve a blend of both that inspires and satisfies our desire for local distinctiveness and a sense of place. This requires sensitivity to context and an understanding of how places have developed over time. English Heritage welcomes this strategy's recognition of the centrality of the historic environment to quality of place and its commitment to protecting and re-invigorating our built heritage.



Environment Agency

The Environment Agency welcomes this strategy's commitment to the creation and development of green spaces and green infrastructure. These have an important contribution to make to tackling the effects of climate change and, at the same time, improving the quality of life.



Heritage Lottery Fund

We are delighted that this report recognises the potential of our rich heritage – from historic town centres to public parks – in creating safer, healthier, more inclusive and appealing places. Local heritage matters to people and investing in it will continue to bring economic and social benefits to many communities.



Homes and Communities Agency

The Homes and Communities Agency is passionately committed to the achievement of sustainable development through good design in existing and new places. Through our single conversations with local authorities we aim to be the broker of 'quality of place', supporting and enabling our partners to raise their aspirations, realise their ambitions and enhance people's quality of life by creating and regenerating communities where people want, and can afford, to live. We welcome this strategy and look forward to working with our partners to deliver on its commitments.



Natural England

Green infrastructure – trees, parks and playgrounds, green routes to work, lakes and waterways – should be at the heart of everyday life and present in everyday places. This strategy is a welcome step on the road to achieving that goal. Green infrastructure helps to break down the barriers between people and their natural environment and is an important aid in addressing climate change. Natural England has recently launched guidance on green infrastructure and is already delivering green infrastructure projects across the country. We look forward to working with our partners in promoting quality of place and ensuring that every place has ample, high quality green infrastructure.

1 Introduction and overview





Improving quality of place is vital if the Government is to deliver on its commitments and make this country a fairer, safer, healthier, more prosperous and sustainable place

This publication lays out the Government's approach to improving quality of place – the way the places where we live and work are planned, designed, developed and maintained – and the steps we will be taking to build on recent progress.* The analysis underpinning this publication, undertaken by the Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office, is published separately: www.strategy.gov.uk

1.1 Why quality of place matters

Quality of place matters in many ways. As we lay out in chapter 3, there are few things that we want for ourselves, our families or our country that are not affected by the built environment. Bad planning and design and careless maintenance encourage crime, contribute to poor health, undermine community cohesion, deter investment, spoil the environment and, over the long term, incur significant costs.

Poverty in this country is not just about poor education, unemployment or low wages, and lack of opportunity. It is typically associated with poor housing and poverty of place – badly designed housing estates or low quality neighbourhoods, with dysfunctionally designed, energy inefficient homes, unsafe passageways and poor public spaces. Addressing these problems and improving quality of place more generally can play an important part in reducing poverty and social exclusion.

In short, improving quality of place is vital if the Government is to deliver on its commitments and make this country a fairer, safer, healthier, more prosperous and sustainable place.

Surveys consistently show that people care about the way their areas are planned, designed and maintained, and want to see this improved. Asked what makes somewhere a good place to live, clean streets ranks third (below low crime and health services) and public transport, shopping facilities and parks and open space, rank sixth, seventh and eighth respectively.¹ However, while 32% of people identify crime and 17%, health services, as the things that most need improving in their local area, 33% identify street and pavement repairs.

While quality of place matters to everyone, it can have a particularly profound effect, for good or bad, on more vulnerable people. Older people, for instance, tend to spend more time in their neighbourhood, and are more reliant on its services and amenities. The same is true of people on low incomes.

Quality of place does not just matter for the here and now. The built environment, both good and bad, endures. Some 90% of existing developments will still be with us in 30 years' time.² Decisions made today will continue to have repercussions down the decades.

1.2 Recent progress

The Government has a proud track record when it comes to promoting good planning, urban design and architecture, and conserving and improving our historic environment and green spaces. As is laid out in chapter 4, it has created the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) with a mission to promote good standards of urban design, architecture and public space; set new standards for publicly funded buildings; overhauled the planning framework to make it more strategic and participatory; and of course increased investment in homes, public buildings, public transport, green spaces and the public realm. Most recently it has created the Homes and

*While the strategic approach and actions in this paper are specific to England, the challenges are relevant to all four countries of the United Kingdom. We will work closely with the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, recognising their particular and varying responsibilities. Each will consider the most appropriate arrangements in those areas for which they have devolved responsibility, to address the issues in ways that meet their own circumstances and needs.

Communities Agency (HCA), with a specific remit to promote sustainability and good design in neighbourhoods and homes. In line with our overarching commitment to have cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, all new buildings now have to meet demanding energy and sustainability requirements. The 2008 White Paper, *Communities in Control*³, and associated reforms have sought further to engage people in local decision-making and make local services more accountable. The Planning Act 2008 introduced an obligation on all planning authorities to promote sustainability and good design.

These policies and organisational reforms have helped improve – often radically improve – places up and down the country. We are building less on greenfield sites and instead investing in regenerating run-down brownfield areas. The design quality of our public buildings has improved. The centres of our older industrial cities, once a byword for decay, have undergone a renaissance and are once again sources of civic pride. Parks and open spaces are cleaner, safer and better looked-after.⁴ The long term rise in car use has come to an end, and people are beginning to walk and cycle more.⁵

1.3 The challenges we face

Although much has been achieved there is more to do. While central government has sponsored many outstanding public buildings, standards overall have not always been as high as they could be. The Government has encouraged local authorities and their partners to take a more active, across-the-board role in shaping their areas, and use the development process to attract investment and strengthen communities. Some local authorities have embraced this role by confidently regenerating their centres, improving streets and open spaces, or working with developers to create well designed urban extensions or finding sustainable and creative new uses for historic buildings. However, others have moved less surely. Too many people still feel alienated from the developments going on around them. The increase in obesity and other chronic health problems, an ageing population and, most importantly, climate change are just some of the pressures that require that we continue to rethink the way we develop places and design buildings and the public realm.

The centres of our older industrial cities, once a byword for decay, have undergone a renaissance and are once again sources of civic pride

1.4 Improving quality of place in tough economic times

More immediately the worldwide economic slowdown presents us with new challenges, but also opportunities. One consequence is that local authorities are receiving fewer planning applications. This should give them the chance to take a more active role in 'place-shaping' and strengthen their 'strategic' or plan-making capacity, and focus anew on planning and improving their localities, so when the upturn comes they are ready to make the most of it.

But we recognise these are difficult times for developers, those working in the built environment and construction sectors and for local government. We have seen a dramatic fall-off in development and construction across all sectors. There were an estimated 16,300 housing starts in England in the December quarter 2008, down 27% on the previous quarter and 58% lower than the December quarter 2007.⁶ Private sector contributions to quality of place are under threat with many developers reporting difficulties in delivering on Section 106 agreements on infrastructure, affordable housing and the public realm. Local authorities face pressure to approve poor quality schemes partly because of the short term investment and jobs they will bring.

The Government has already done much to support construction and development – by encouraging bank lending, helping people struggling





to keep up with their mortgage payments and by bringing forward capital spending to fund a new generation of homes, public buildings and infrastructure projects. But it is vitally important that we not only encourage development but also help ensure that it is of a universally high standard and helps create successful and sustainable places.

1.5 Our approach, vision and objectives

We recognise that we cannot improve quality of place alone. Indeed central government has relatively limited direct powers to shape and improve local places. Much depends on local government, professional bodies, private sector businesses, community groups and individuals. Nevertheless government has a central role. This strategy lays out the Government's understanding of the key opportunities and challenges it faces, the broad strategic objectives we have set ourselves in order to meet these challenges, and individual actions we will take, with partners, to improve quality of place.

Our vision is simple but ambitious: we want to ensure that all places are planned, designed and developed to provide everyone, including future generations, with a decent quality of life and fair chances. Our analysis of the challenges and opportunities we face suggests we need to achieve **seven strategic objectives** if we are going to realise this vision. They are listed below, along with examples of the actions we will be taking to meet these objectives.

- 1 **Strengthen leadership on quality of place at the national and regional level.** Actions include boosting the role of ministerial design champions.
- 2 **Encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place.** Actions include improving support and training on quality of place for civic leaders and planning committee members and developing options for measuring quality of place and establishing this measure as a local government indicator.
- 3 **Ensure relevant government policy, guidance and standards consistently promote quality of place and are user-friendly.** Actions include introducing new planning policy on the historic environment and green infrastructure.
- 4 **Put the public and community at the centre of place-shaping.** Actions include promoting and funding more user engagement in the design of new public buildings.
- 5 **Ensure all development for which central government is directly responsible is built to high design and sustainability standards and promotes quality of place.** Actions include establishing design thresholds for all new government funded building programmes.
- 6 **Encourage higher standards of market-led development.** Actions include developing and promoting the business case for investing in high quality development
- 7 **Strengthen quality of place skills, knowledge and capacity.** Actions include strengthening the Government's regional offer to local authorities, public services and developers.

Together the actions laid out in this strategy will make a real difference to the quality of the places where we live, work and visit, supporting high quality development through these difficult economic times and beyond.

This is the right time for a new strategy on improving quality of place.

Case study

Edinburgh New Town

A model of urban design, still evolving after two centuries

Planned and built two centuries ago, Edinburgh New Town remains a model of sustainable urban design. The original master-plan was created by 22 year old James Craig, who won the competition to create a new urban extension to Edinburgh in 1765.

The new suburb was laid out on a grid, with imposing neoclassical stone buildings fronting handsome, well-planted streets, garden squares and circuses. Though the New Town was built by many designers, developers and builders over more than a century, they worked within a series of design codes laid down by the city, covering things like heights and density. Buildings are generally three storeys high, though they rise to four storeys on corners and in the centre of large

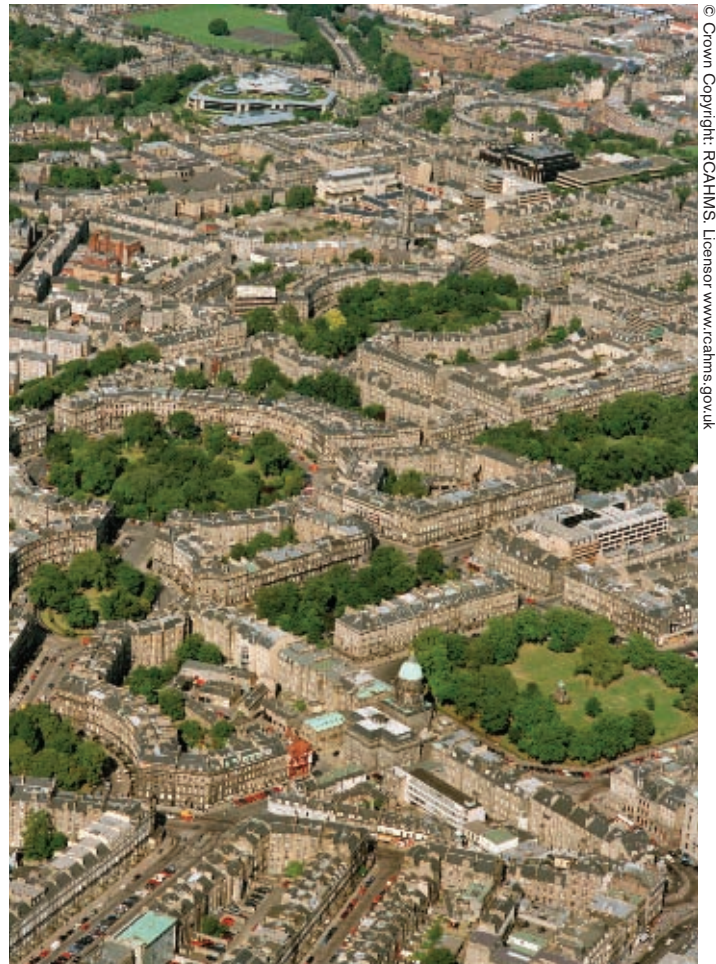
terraces, creating rhythm and variety. Although designed as a residential suburb, generous sized rooms and robust construction techniques have allowed many homes to be converted into shops, offices, studios and other uses, creating a sustainable mixed use neighbourhood. The pedestrian-friendly streets, a good range of services and amenities and large windows looking out over the streets help create a sense of safety and community.

The New Town remains a vibrant and evolving community. New architecture has been successfully woven into the urban fabric, and older dwellings adapted to modern technologies and living patterns. Shared gardens remain well maintained and well used and further promote community life.

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2 Understanding quality of place



There are many different ways of understanding quality of place, but as it is defined in this strategy, it is ‘the physical characteristics of a community – the way it is planned, designed, developed and maintained – that affect the quality of life of people living and working in it, and those visiting it, both now and into the future’.

Quality of place and quality of life

The places where people live have a profound effect on their quality of life and life chances. Places exercise this effect in a range of ways – through, for instance, crime levels, pollution levels, employment opportunities, social ties and opportunities for community engagement, and the range and quality of local services, transport links and green space. Quality of place can then be understood as that subset of factors that affect people’s quality of life and life chances through the way the environment is planned, designed, developed and maintained.

Local area factors contributing to good quality of life





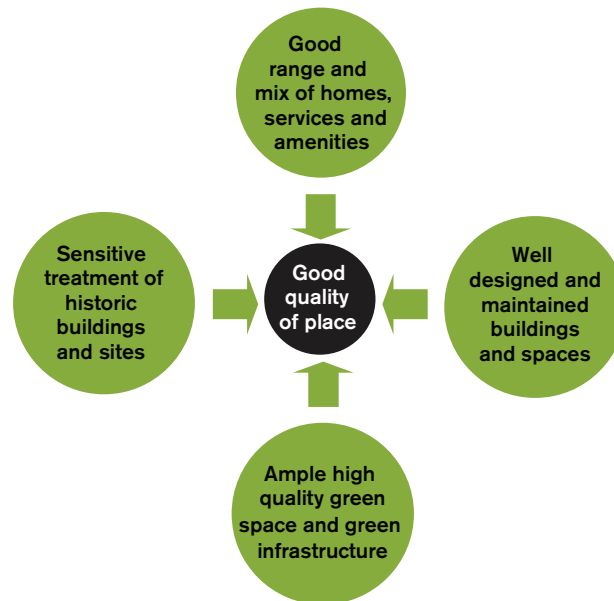
2.1 The four elements of quality of place

The factors that shape quality of place can be organised under four broad headings. These are the four 'elements' of quality of place:

- The range and mix of homes, services and amenities;
- Design and upkeep of buildings and spaces;
- Provision of green space and green infrastructure;
- Treatment of historic buildings and places.

High quality places tend to score well in terms of all four of the above elements. That is to say they have a good range and mix of homes, services and amenities, well designed and maintained buildings and spaces and good quality green space and green infrastructure. And they understand the value of and make the most of their historic environment – of the infrastructure and buildings that past generations have bequeathed them.

High quality places – the four elements of quality of place



2.2 The range and mix of homes, services and amenities

If asked what makes somewhere a good place to live, most people cite affordable homes and easy access to a good range of shops, pubs and restaurants, public services and transport links as important factors. Of course, a good supply of these homes, amenities and services is not just determined by the way communities are planned – but planning is particularly important. For instance, it has a key role in determining whether or not a new housing development has the mix of homes, shops, schools, cultural, sporting and healthcare facilities, and public transport that its residents will need. It is planners, among others, who determine whether the range and layout of homes and design of the public realm in a new development meets the needs and aspirations of local people, including

People have a right to homes, workplaces and public buildings that work well, are built to last and lift the spirit

families, people on low incomes and older and disabled people. Planners, urban designers, architects, landscape designers and conservation professionals can all help foster the local interactions and sense of community that people want from the places where they live.

As a general rule, the more densely settled an area the more viable these amenities and services become. That is one reason why the Government has encouraged higher density living. Some critics argue that most people would rather live in lower density areas and it is certainly important that areas are developed to offer a wide choice of neighbourhoods catering to different needs and aspirations. Families tend to want different things from a locality than, for example, students or 'empty nesters', and often need more space, such as play areas.

Good planning and design, along with investment in maintenance and management of places, can do much to prevent the problems sometimes associated with high density. It is quite possible, for instance, to design high density developments in a way that gives all residents generous internal living space and some private external space, while providing easy access to safe, supervised semi-public play space for children. Indeed some of the most attractive and sought-after neighbourhoods in Britain, such as Edinburgh New Town, or Kensington and Chelsea in London, are built to relatively high densities. High density does not have to mean high rise.

2.3 Design and upkeep of buildings and spaces

The design of the buildings that we live and work in, or merely walk past, is important in a variety of ways. Good design goes beyond the visual or aesthetic quality of a building, as important as this is. It is also about its durability, inclusivity, functionality and sustainability. The best tests are the simple ones. Is this an attractive building? Does it look like it belongs here? Is it cost effective to run and easy to maintain? Is it enjoyable to use? Will it last? People have a right to homes, workplaces and public buildings that work well, are built to last and lift the spirit.

The streets, roads and squares that connect buildings are just as important as the buildings themselves. These are not always thought of as being designed, but they are the result of human decision – and the decisions made are often profoundly important. The scale and shape of buildings, the layout of streets, squares and parks, the handling of materials and signs, accessibility for disabled and older people, all help to influence the feel of an area and the way it functions. People who live on busy, car-centred streets with narrow pavements and little green space are much less likely to spend time outside their houses, to know their neighbours, or let their children play outside or walk to school. On the other hand, streets and squares designed with pedestrians in mind will encourage social interaction, community cohesion and a sense of place. This, in turn, can discourage crime and anti-social behaviour, reduce concern about crime, promote walking and cycling and improve physical and mental health.

Finally, the upkeep of buildings and spaces is as important as the original design. Even the best planned and designed areas will have little allure if marred by cracked paving, scarred roads, vandalised or run-down buildings and neglected open spaces. The public attach particular importance to this aspect of quality of place. Surveys show that they view clean and well maintained streets as one of the most important things in making somewhere a good place to live.⁷



Case study

Tarporley, Cheshire

Village life strengthened through well designed development

Back in the 1990s, Tarporley in Cheshire faced challenges common to many rural villages. The building of a bypass had relieved the village of heavy traffic, but also threatened village centre shops and amenities. From the 1990s on, Vale Royal Council took the brave move of encouraging new development, including shops and 82 new homes in the village, despite some public resistance.

The Council worked with the Parish Council and local people to develop clear village design guidelines, and ensured that all

new development was of a high architectural standard and responded to local context. The new homes include small two bedroom flats, as well as larger detached houses. All this has helped attract people into the village, sustain local independent shops and strengthen village life. Bell Meadow, the developer responsible for most of the new homes and shops, won a Building for Life award for their work. A strong business alliance has formed, and the village has won 'Best kept village' in Cheshire.



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2.4 Green space and green infrastructure

Parks and green open spaces are both a highly valued and highly used feature of the built environment. Three out of four people visit a public green space at least once a month – more than a quarter do so at least three times a week.⁸ And a nearby local park can enhance the value of a property by at least 5-7%.⁹ Safe and attractive parks with good play and sports facilities and quiet areas, are particularly important to families with children, older people and those without gardens. Time spent in contact with nature has been shown to help mental well-being, with people reporting feeling much happier after a walk in a park than they do after a shopping trip.¹⁰ Parks also help foster community life and local involvement – through friends groups, community activities and volunteering.

Green space and green infrastructure have a vital role to play in tackling climate change and its effects. They also add greatly to people's enjoyment of a place

High quality places are not just marked out by safe, attractive and well managed parks and green play spaces. They will also have ample 'green infrastructure' – the 'nature' between, around and on buildings, streets and squares, including trees, waterways, ponds and lakes, paths, gardens, and green roofs and terraces. The last few years have seen a growing appreciation of the value of green infrastructure and the need to do more to protect and increase it. It has a vital role to play in combating climate change and tackling its effects in the form of higher temperatures and increased risk of flooding. It also adds greatly to people's enjoyment of a place and the way they behave and interact in it.

2.5 Treatment of historic buildings and places

The fourth and final element to quality of place is the way that the historic environment of an area is treated. There are of course many reasons for caring about our built heritage. Our historic environment is vital to our self-understanding, our sense of connectedness to the past and to the future, and is a valuable asset in creating a sense of place. Local people value it, as do tourists and investors – a pre-1919 house is worth on average 20% more than an equivalent house from the post-war era.¹¹ Renovating an historic building can often be cheaper and more environmentally sustainable than constructing a new one. Research in Manchester showed that a Victorian house was almost £10 per square metre cheaper per year to maintain (2003 values) than a property from the 1980s.¹²

We are fortunate in this country in having a particularly extensive and rich historic environment. Just over 50% of people in England state that they live in an 'historic area'¹³ and one in five of England's dwellings were built before 1919.¹⁴ The idea of 'heritage' might conjure up in many people's minds images of traditional buildings – castles, churches, stately homes, rustic cottages and elegant town houses – but it extends far beyond this, to encompass ancient ruins, industrial buildings, 20th century architectural masterpieces. It also encompasses historic infrastructure, including street networks, railways, historic parks and waterways. Heritage Lottery Fund research has found that nearly three quarters of local residents believe that investment in the historic environment makes local areas more attractive and 61% say it makes an area a better place to live.¹⁵

Case study

Hammarby Sjöstad, Stockholm

Large, ambitious urban extension rooted in environmental sustainability

Hammarby Sjöstad is a large brownfield urban extension to Stockholm, incorporating old industrial land and docklands. The development has been led by the City of Stockholm, who laid down clear design and environmental standards. The master-plan is based on the older city, inspired by its street dimensions, block lengths, building heights, density and mix of uses. The city invested heavily in sustainable transport and green infrastructure early on in the development, providing a tram system, a ferry service and extensive cycle routes and green spaces – including semi-public communal gardens.

The development is built from eco-friendly materials, and features green roofs, solar panels, and an underground waste collection system, which links waste to the local district heating plant, where it generates energy. Hammarby has been planned and designed with families, older people and disabled people in mind, with wide streets, plenty of green space, play space and local amenities, and accessible buildings and public transport. Residents have been heavily involved in shaping the development, including through the 'Glashuset', a community centre that showcases new environmental technologies and runs environmental workshops and community projects.

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3 The importance of quality of place



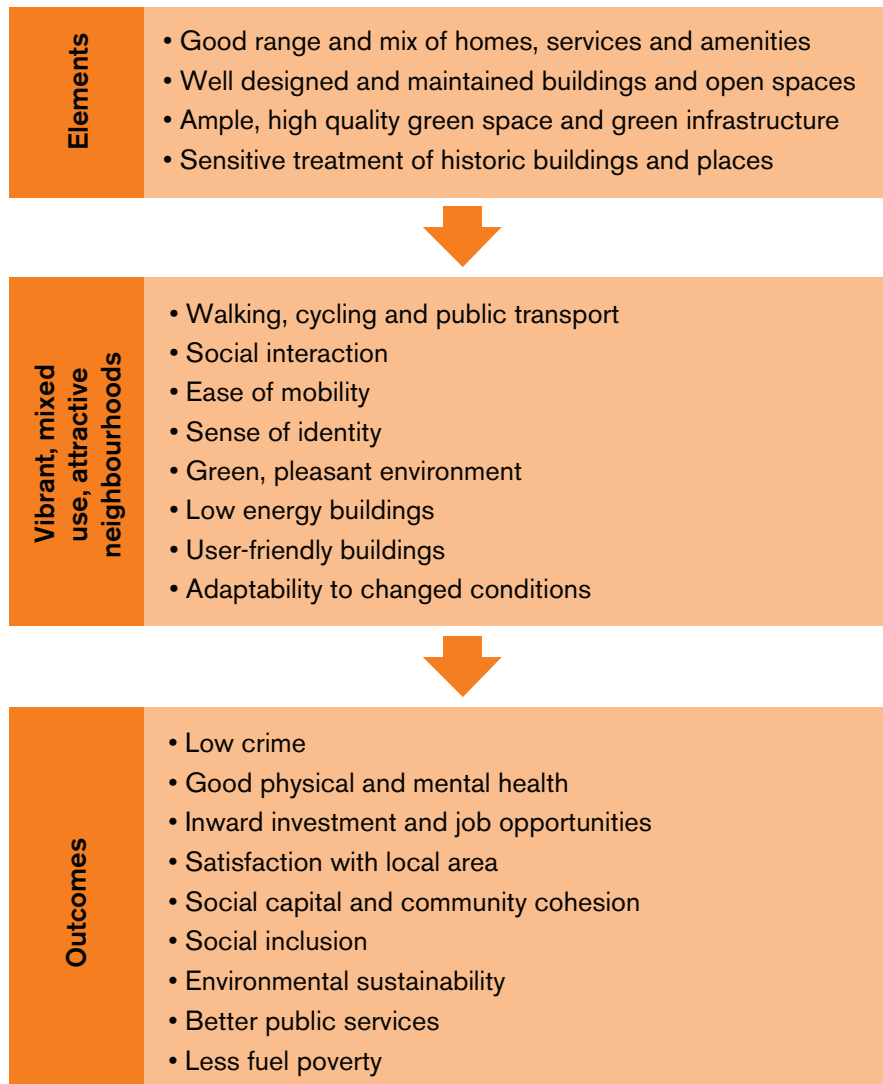


Well planned, designed and developed places tend to offer a range of economic, social and environmental benefits.

There is no simple one-to-one correlation between the elements that contribute to good quality of place and these benefits. Instead, each of the four elements of high quality places works in a similar way to foster benefits across the board. They each contribute to the creation of attractive and vibrant localities that have a strong sense of identity and community cohesion and encourage people to walk, cycle and spend time outdoors. Places with these characteristics, in turn, tend to encourage positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

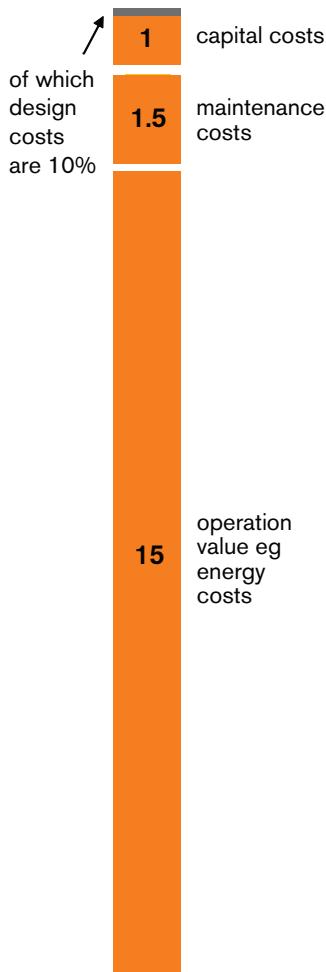
The rest of this chapter outlines the benefits that high quality places bring.

The contribution that high quality places make to achieving positive outcomes



3.1 Economic

3.1.1 Value and cost of good quality of place



Ratio of capital to maintenance and operating costs of a typical commercial building

We need to create places where people want to live and work – planning, conservation and design play an indispensable role in regeneration

There are very strong economic arguments for investment in quality of place. Well designed places tend to have greater financial value. For instance properties that overlook a park are on average around 5-7% more valuable than neighbouring properties¹⁶ and research suggests that well designed housing schemes have held their value better than less well designed ones over the last 18 months.¹⁷

Many quality of place decisions cost little or no more to get right than to get wrong. It is not necessarily more expensive to design streets that discourage crime and encourage walking and social interaction, use historically or locally appropriate material or reuse existing buildings. Research in North West England has shown that, on the basis of repair cost projections stretching over 30 years, the cost of repairing a typical Victorian terraced house was between 40 and 60% cheaper than replacing it with a new home.¹⁸

Even where improving quality does involve some additional upfront investment, this is usually justified by savings gained across the lifetime of a development. Design and construction costs of most developments are tiny compared to maintenance and running costs across their lifetimes. The ratio of capital to maintenance to operating costs of a typical commercial building is around 1 to 1.5 to 15.¹⁹ It follows that any investment in design and construction that reduces maintenance and running costs can lead to very significant long term savings.

If getting it right can save money, the cost of getting it wrong can be very high indeed. The Holly Street estate in Hackney is just one example. Completed in 1975, it proved so dysfunctional and unpopular that it had to be demolished and rebuilt in the 1990s. The demolition and reconstruction cost £92 million. The true ‘social costs’ – including costs to residents and public services – was much greater.²⁰

3.1.2 Regeneration and economic development

There is no single solution to attracting investment or regenerating run down areas. As the Government’s Regeneration Framework²¹ shows, regeneration needs to be focused on economic outcomes and worklessness. But to improve economic outcomes we also need to create places where people want to live and work. Therefore planning, conservation and design play an indispensable role in regeneration activity and this is truer today than ever before. Quality of life factors, including quality of place, appear increasingly important in attracting private sector investment and skilled workers.²² Britain’s reputation as a country with a rich historic environment and vibrant cities with striking new or rehabilitated buildings, such as Tate Modern and St Pancras Station in London, or the Baltic in Gateshead, are important factors in attracting tourists. Liverpool 08, European Capital of Culture, resulted in an £800m boost to the regional economy.

Case study

Design for Manufacture competition

Showing that good design does not have to be expensive

With the Design for Manufacture competition, the Homes and Communities Agency invited the development industry to design and build high-quality sustainable homes with a minimum size of 76.5m² and costing no more than £60,000 – or £784 per m². The competition will deliver over 1,000 homes to many different designs on ten sites across the country. All are required to meet the HCA's demanding Quality Standards, including construction, environmental and security standards and designing for

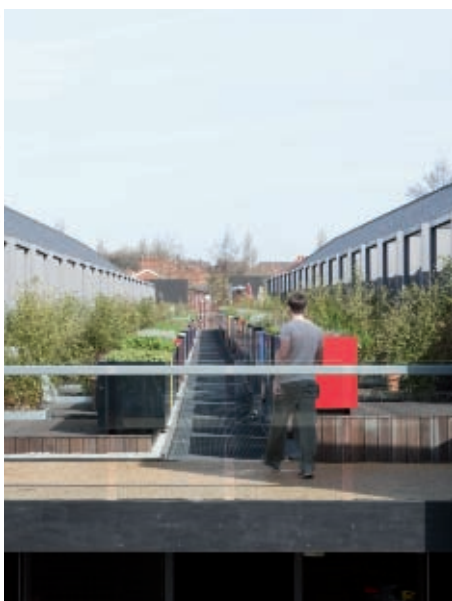
disabled and older people (Lifetime Homes).

Walls, floors, ceilings, stairs and heating and ventilation systems are often prefabricated in a controlled factory environment, reducing on-site construction costs, while ensuring the quality of the finished product. Homes are designed to maximise 'free' features such as volume and daylight. The competition has been welcomed by the successful developers and is now informing development more generally.



© HCA





Planning, urban design and architecture have a central role in helping older and disabled people live independent and fulfilling lives

3.2 Social benefits

3.2.1 Community safety

The way an environment is planned and designed has a major influence on levels of crime within it and concern about crime. First and most directly, good design will work to minimise the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour. For instance, designing spaces to ensure that they are overlooked, well used and 'owned' will help reduce crime – as, of course, will good street lighting. It is the same with buildings. Houses, for example, designed with visible windows and doors are more secure than those without. Young people are less likely to vandalise a place if they have been involved in designing and developing it and so identify with it. Finally, design can help build community cohesion, which is again strongly associated with lower crime and concern about crime. In Salford, the Seedley and Langworth Trust created enclosed communal spaces behind rows of houses to provide places where children could play safely and neighbours could interact. This in turn was associated with a reported increase in community spirit and reduced crime.²³

3.2.2 Health and well-being

Just as there are strong links between design and crime, so there are between design and well-being. Many health challenges – like reducing obesity, diabetes, heart disease and depression – can be, in part, addressed through promoting more active life-styles, including walking, cycling and jogging. Spending time outdoors has been shown to be good for mental and physical health. Finally strong social ties are closely linked with good health and well-being. Design in turn can help on all these fronts, through creating environments that encourage people to exercise and to spend time outside, and by facilitating interaction and encouraging the development of social ties and community cohesion. For instance, a recent study of three Bristol streets shows that people who live on quieter streets are much more likely to spend time outside and to know their neighbours, than those who live in streets with high traffic volumes.²⁴ Residential developments designed to include semi-public communal spaces – such as Coin Street in London or the prize-winning Accordia housing development in Cambridge – can help foster strong relations between neighbours who use and police these common spaces.

3.2.3 Inclusive communities

The way a place is planned and designed affects the extent to which people are alienated from or included in local life in a number of related ways. Quality of place can have a disproportionate effect on more vulnerable people. As a general rule, people on low incomes are more likely to live in lower quality areas.²⁵ Yet evidence suggests that people on low incomes are more likely to spend more time close to home, to be more reliant on local services and social ties and are less likely to move away.²⁶ So, low income groups will be particularly affected if services, facilities and opportunities are remote or of poor quality or if the design of their neighbourhood encourages crime and social isolation.

Planning, urban design and architecture have a central role in helping older and disabled people live independent and fulfilling lives – as laid out in the Government's *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods* strategy. These groups tend to be particularly dependent on their neighbourhoods – they tend to spend more time in them than younger, or non-disabled people and to make great use of local amenities, including health services, shops and

Children benefit both from outdoor play and from everyday interaction with nature. The built environment has a major impact on children and young people's quality of life and life chances

green spaces. When services are inaccessible or public spaces unwelcoming, older people can feel trapped in their own homes. Good planning, by contrast, can help ensure older and disabled people have the local amenities and services they need. Good urban design and environmental management can help empower them to move around safely and easily. Good architecture can help ensure that homes and other buildings are flexible, functional and meet the needs of all age groups. The need, in particular, to ensure that homes and communities are age-friendly is becoming ever more urgent as Britain's population gets older.²⁷

The Government's strategy for lifetime homes and neighbourhoods

In 2008 the Government published its strategy for promoting lifetime homes and neighbourhoods for an ageing society. This strategy set out a package of measures to ensure that older people live in high quality, warm environments that are suited to their needs – homes and neighbourhoods that help to make life easier, and to turn the challenges of ageing into opportunities. The strategy identified key practical features to promote accessibility and create lifetime neighbourhoods, including:

- Well designed paving and kerbs
- Access to public amenities
- Public toilets
- Street lighting
- Accessible public transport
- Appropriately located bus stops
- Disabled parking bays
- Green spaces and meeting places that promote inter-generational contact
- Information and advice for finding one's way

At the other end of the age spectrum, the built environment has a major impact on children and young people's quality of life and life chances. Children, for instance, benefit both from outdoor play and from everyday interaction with nature. But the way an area is planned and designed will shape whether children are encouraged outside, whether they are allowed to walk to school unaccompanied, and whether they have the chance to enjoy trees, flowers and other wildlife.²⁸ Fortunately, areas designed with the needs and aspirations of children in mind tend to meet the needs and aspirations of older people as well.

Buildings and places configured to make the most of natural light, heat and ventilation can help reduce carbon emissions, while cutting fuel bills and combating fuel poverty

Greenwich Millennium Village, London © HCA



3.2.4 Better public services

Well designed, attractive public buildings and spaces can enhance public services in a range of ways. For instance, good design can increase service-user numbers – two years after Peckham Library’s bright, high quality new building was opened in 2000, annual visits had increased from 171,000 to 500,000 and book loans had risen from 80,000 to 317,000.²⁹ Good design can also boost staff productivity and lessen staff turnover. Research suggests that the design of the workplace can affect staff performance by 5% for individuals and by 11% for teams.³⁰

Building good design into classrooms has a significant impact on pupil achievement and behaviour. A UK study of pupil performance found that capital investment in school buildings had a very strong influence on staff morale, pupil innovation and effective learning time.³¹ Studies on the relationship between pupil achievement and behaviour have found that test scores in well designed buildings were up to 11% higher than those in poorly designed buildings.³²

Patient recovery times can be reduced by well designed healthcare buildings while attractive, functional working environments help recruit and retain hospital staff. Eighty six per cent of directors of nursing say that hospital design is ‘important’ or ‘very important’ in relation to the performance of nurses.³³ Over 90% of nurses and all directors of nursing believe that a well designed environment is significantly linked to patient recovery rates.³⁴

3.3 Environmental benefits

3.3.1 Environmental sustainability

The way that a place is planned, designed, developed and maintained has a clear and obvious effect on its environmental sustainability. Places that are relatively dense and well served, with a good mix of facilities and services, attractive buildings, clean and pedestrian friendly streets and green spaces, will discourage car use and encourage walking and cycling. Furthermore, as a place becomes denser so public transport becomes ever more efficient and viable. High densities can benefit the environment in other ways: flats and terraced houses tend to be more economic to heat than detached houses. One recent study found that per capita greenhouse gas emissions for a Londoner in 2006 were the equivalent of 6.2 tonnes of CO₂, compared with 11.19 for the UK average.³⁵ The difference is largely due to London being built to a relatively high density.

Investing in heritage is, as already indicated, often a more environmentally friendly option than investing in new buildings. Green space can play an important part in protecting and promoting biodiversity, and reducing urban temperatures.³⁶

Finally, of course, the design of buildings contributes hugely to environmental objectives. Buildings and places configured to make the most of natural light, heat and ventilation can help reduce carbon emissions, while cutting fuel bills and combating fuel poverty.

Case study

Hanham Hall, near Bristol

A community trust managing a zero-carbon development

The proposed transformation of a former hospital site at Hanham Hall, Bristol, into an 'Eco-Village' will deliver the UK's first zero-carbon housing development. The new housing will be designed to meet level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes – the highest level. The site is the first to be brought forward under the Government's Carbon challenge initiative. Barratt Homes, working with HTA Architects and Arup, won the Challenge to create 195 homes and to renovate the historic, Grade II* listed Hanham Hall and Gardens.

The proposed scheme demonstrates how historic assets and the natural context can add value to the creative place-making process, and offers an imaginative solution to the regeneration of the Hall. Hanham Hall and Gardens will be the hub of the neighbourhood, acting as a flexible community centre that will include a Sustainable Living Centre, crèche and café and a base for a car club.

High environmental standards are evident in every element of the development. The new homes will be prefabricated from energy efficient materials, designed to very high insulation standards and orientated towards the sun to maximise passive solar heating. Materials from the present structures on the site will be recycled in the new development to reduce the carbon footprint. The landscape has been designed to accommodate and increase local wildlife; rainwater will be harvested for use in homes and gardens and stored in swales which are a visual focus of the public realm; and residents will have access to allotments and orchards to grow their own produce.

A community owned and run development trust will be responsible for day-to-day management of the entire neighbourhood, including building maintenance, car sharing and gardening clubs.



© HTA Architects

3.3.2 Climate resilience

The built environment does not only have a role to play in cutting energy use and greenhouse gases. It has just as vital a role in helping us adapt to climate change and making us more resilient to the extreme weather that climate change will bring with it. Parks and green infrastructure, in particular, have been shown to reduce the 'urban heat island effect' – the process by which urban areas become warmer than surrounding countryside – and lessen flooding. Work by Manchester University suggests that increasing green 'coverage' in high density urban areas by only 10% could mitigate temperature increases from global warming, possibly keeping temperatures at today's levels or below.³⁷ Vegetation, in the form of parks and gardens, but also green roofs and walls, can increase rainfall capture.

Of course, greener, more environmentally sustainable cities, towns and neighbourhoods will also be more attractive, enjoyable and healthier ones. In this respect climate change represents not just a threat but an opportunity – addressing it will help improve quality of life.

Vegetation, in the form of parks and gardens, but also green roofs and walls, can increase rainfall capture

Bath Circus © Matt Cardy/Getty Images



4 Progress and challenges



4.1 Progress

The last decade has seen enormous progress in the public sector's approach to quality of place and to the actual quality of real places. Increased investment in the public realm has gone hand-in-hand with new and demanding design and sustainability standards, strengthened policy and guidance, a more positive and strategic planning system and measures to encourage better public buildings and private development. More has also been done to promote a more constructive approach to built heritage, and foster greater public engagement in the planning process.

These policies have made a profound difference to the quality of place across the country.

Government policies to promote better quality of place

1999 Creation of **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)**, with remit to promote good standards of architecture, urban design and (later) public space

2000 Establishment of **Better Public Buildings programme**, including the creation of ministerial design champions, promotion of design champions throughout public services, and introduction of the Prime Minister's Better Public Building Award

2001 Publication of ***The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future*** which recognised that heritage is all around us and can contribute to achieving objectives across government

2003 Establishment of **Building for Life standards**, demanding sustainability and design standards for new homes and neighbourhoods

2004 Passing of **Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act**, giving planning authorities a more proactive role in planning development and shaping places, with emphasis on sustainable, inclusive and well designed development

2004 Publication of ***Safer Places: the Planning System and Crime Prevention***, emphasising the importance of designing out crime at the planning stage

2005 Issuing **Planning Policy Statement 1**, creating a positive obligation on all planning authorities to promote sustainable development and good design

2005 Creation of mandatory **Common Minimum Standards for Procurement of built environments in the public sector**, intended to ensure investment is cost effective across the whole life of the building and promotes sustainability and good design

2006 Introduction of '**Biodiversity Duty**' on all public bodies to promote conservation of biodiversity as part of developing distinctive sustainable communities

2006 Issuing of **Planning Policy Statement 3** (Housing), creating a positive obligation on all planning authorities to promote the achievement of high quality homes and neighbourhoods

2007 Publication of ***A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests***, recognising the need to help people engage with ownership, design, management, maintenance and use of their local trees and woodlands

2007 Publication of the ***Manual for streets***, emphasising the need to design residential streets as social spaces

2007 Publication of the White Paper ***Heritage Protection for the 21st Century***, setting out a more efficient, transparent and flexible approach to protecting our heritage

2008 Publication of ***Communities in Control*** White Paper, with proposals for increased promotion of public engagement in planning and design, including establishment of a '**duty to involve**' and creation of the Community Involvement in Planning Fund

2008 Creation of **Homes and Communities Agency**, with an explicit mission to promote good design

2008 Publication of ***Lifetime Homes and Lifetimes Neighbourhoods Strategy***, laying out how government will create homes and neighbourhoods for every age group including older people

2008 Passing of the **Planning Act**, placing all planning authorities under an explicit obligation to promote sustainability and good design

2009 Launch of the **Engaging Places** website, to support teaching and learning through the built environment, helping young people to see the value of well-designed places



In 2002 only around 120 Parks had secured a 'Green Flag' for quality, but by 2008 there were over 720 Green Flags awarded

4.1.1 More sustainable development

Government support for sustainable regeneration and development, including planning policy and centrally funded regeneration programmes, has led to an increase in the proportion of development taking place on brownfield sites, higher residential densities and less out of town development. The proportion of development on brownfield land has increased from 56% in 1997 to 77% in 2007.³⁸ Furthermore, the average density of new residential development has increased from 25 dwellings per hectare in 1997 to 44 in 2007.³⁹

The emphasis on creating communities that offer a wide range of facilities and services to residents and workers is also paying off. Surveys show that while there has been an increase in people reporting difficulty accessing post offices, fewer people now report difficulty accessing schools, shops or healthcare services – even without a car – than they did a decade ago.⁴⁰

4.1.2 Urban renaissance

Government policy has helped transform Britain's cities – especially city centres – over the last decade. The last decade has seen many examples of good urban design, sensitive renovation, great architecture and imaginative investment strategies working together to revitalise city centres. As a result many more people are choosing to live in the heart of our older cities – once a byword for decline. The residential population of Birmingham, for example, has increased by 10% and that of Bristol by 39% since 1991.⁴¹

4.1.3 Better public realm

Overall there has been a significant improvement in quality of the local environment. Objective assessments of the quality of local neighbourhoods undertaken annually by the environmental charity ENCAMS and encompassing 'condition and maintenance' of the public realm, as well as factors like litter and dog fouling, show that where in 2001/2 61% of neighbourhoods were rated unsatisfactory and 7% rated poor, these figures, more recently, had improved to 48% rated unsatisfactory and 5% rated poor.⁴²

Responding to consistent evidence showing that people value their local parks and wanted to see them improved, the Government and the Lottery funds have done much to strengthen the funding and management of green space. To date the total Lottery investment in parks is around £560m and more than 500 UK parks have been funded. Natural England promotes 'Accessible Natural Green Space Standards' and has recently published green infrastructure guidance for planners and developers. And the Government has earmarked £38m from the Growth Area Fund to support the provision of green infrastructure. This is resulting in real progress on the ground. Where in 2000 less than 44% of local green space managers believed the quality of their parks was stable or improving, this figure had risen to 84% by 2005.⁴³ In 2002 only around 120 parks had secured a 'Green Flag' for quality, but by 2008 there were over 720 Green Flags awarded.⁴⁴

Case study

Sheffield city centre

Transforming a city through better public space

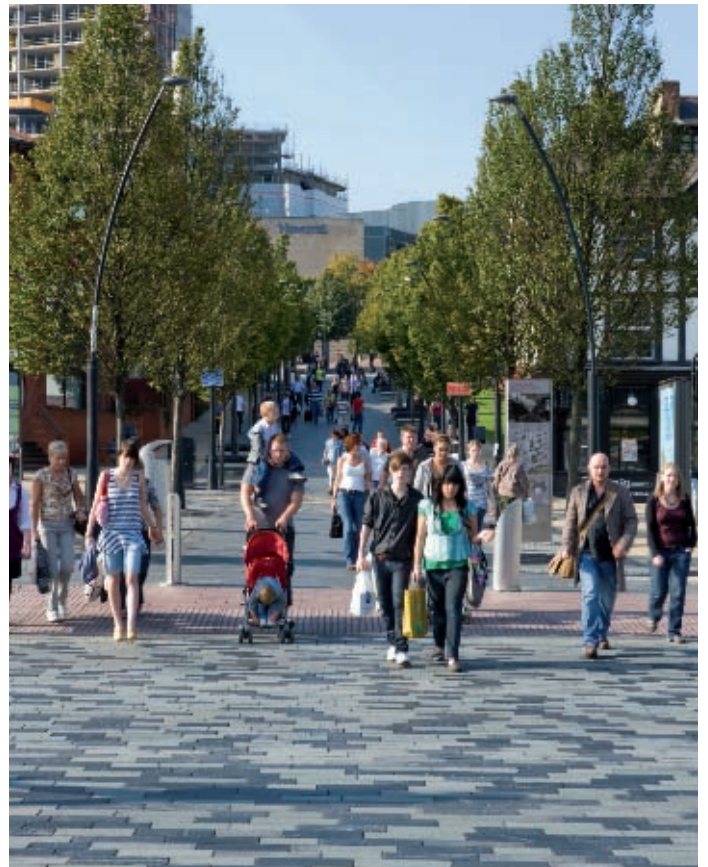
After several decades of economic and social decline, Sheffield has, over the last half-decade, re-invented itself. Arguing that improving quality of place was key both to improving residents' quality of life and attracting investment, the city has worked with the Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward), the Homes and Communities Agency and private sector developers to invest in the physical regeneration of the city.

In 2004 the city council launched the Sheffield City Centre Urban Design Compendium, which lays out urban design principles for the city, as well as specific guidance for the most important areas. The council has also set up an independently chaired Urban Design Review panel that assesses the quality of new schemes before they are submitted for planning

approval and suggests how they can be improved.

Particular emphasis has been placed on transforming the city centre, with new, carefully linked streets and spaces fronted by exciting high quality architecture. The newly created Peace Gardens act as the heart of the city. Shaped by a comprehensive public consultation exercise, the Gardens incorporate fountains, seating, lawns and planting. The sunken nature of the Gardens provide a sense of containment and protection, while ensuring the whole development is overlooked by passers-by. The city and private sector property owners have developed a joint approach to managing the public realm, including the introduction of a team of uniformed 'Ambassadors' who help police the city, keep it clean and assist visitors.

Sheffield Winter Gardens and Gold Route © CABE/David Millington Photography Ltd





In 2008, for the first time, the Stirling Prize was won by a residential development – Accordia in Cambridge

4.1.4 Better public buildings

With government investing significant sums in public buildings, such as schools, hospitals, stations, libraries and museums, it is important to ensure that these are attractive, functional and built to last. That is why we launched the Better Public Building initiative in 2000 and have introduced and promoted demanding standards governing the process of commissioning new public buildings – the Office of Government Commerce’s Common Minimum Standards. This has resulted in a real improvement in the quality of new public buildings, the best of which are recognised by the Prime Minister’s Award for Better Public Building (won in 2008 by the Royal Alexandra Children’s Hospital in Brighton). Three out of the four UK buildings on the shortlist for the 2008 Stirling Prize for architecture were public buildings.

4.1.5 Better homes and neighbourhoods

Just as the last decade has seen high levels of investment in public buildings, so government has also invested in affordable homes and associated infrastructure. Here too, there have been important steps taken to ensure that this money is well spent. The Government has introduced new and demanding design and sustainability standards on Government funded homes, including Building for Life, managed by CABI and the Homebuilders Federation (HBF). We supported pioneering experiments in new residential design, such as the Design for Manufacture competition. We have created the Homes and Communities Agency, with an explicit remit to promote good design. We have said that all publicly funded homes will be built to ‘Lifetime Homes’ standards by 2011 – a simple set of standards to ensure that all new homes are functional for all – and we expect all homes to meet Lifetime Homes standards by 2013.

In 2008, for the first time, the Stirling Prize was won by a residential development – Accordia in Cambridge.

4.1.6 Protecting and reviving the best of the past

The last few decades have seen a growing appreciation of the importance of the historic environment to quality of place. Government has responded with increased funding and guidance emphasising the value of making the most of the legacy that past generations have left us and integrating it into new development. Government investment moreover has been complemented by investment from the National Lottery, with the Heritage and Big Lottery Funds helping conserve and revitalise many historic townscapes, buildings and green spaces.

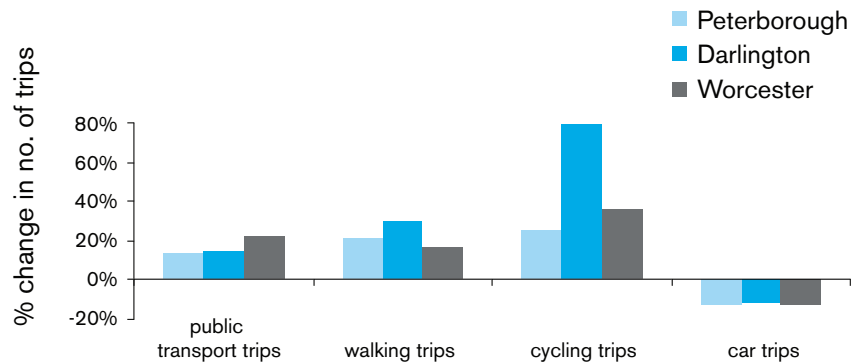
4.1.7 Better, more sustainable urban transport

Cars and other motor vehicles have their place in our cities and towns, but where they dominate they can create a hostile and unsafe environment. The Government has sought to promote more sustainable, pedestrian friendly forms of travel, by investing in public transport and cycle routes, and supporting local moves to create Home Zones, lower speed limits, and encourage more walking and cycling. Public action appears to be pushing things in the right direction and after many decades of rising car use, the average annual distance travelled per person by car has now levelled off. Over the last decade the average distance covered by walking has also remained stable, and the distance travelled by public transport has increased.⁴⁵

Sustainable Transport Demonstration Towns

In 2004 Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester became 'showcase' demonstration towns, with government funding to promote healthier and more sustainable modes of transport. This initiative showed how a concerted drive, including capital investment in public transport and improved infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, can promote a shift in travel patterns, so improving quality of place.

% change in number of trips by mode in the three demonstration towns



Department for Transport figures

Castleford footbridge © Tim Soar



4.1.8 Better public engagement

Users and citizens have a vital contribution to make to shaping and maintaining high quality places. Public engagement works best where it begins early on and evolves into a trusting and respectful relationship.

There is great public interest in quality of place. Some of this takes the form of people objecting to proposed developments – an important right. However, it can take other forms too. A very large number of people – perhaps larger proportionally than anywhere else in the world – play an active role in conservation as members of heritage organisations,⁴⁶ or in looking after urban parks and promoting urban flora and fauna. Most people report wanting a greater say in decisions that affect their local neighbourhoods.⁴⁷

The Government has done much to encourage greater involvement in planning, shaping and looking after the built environment. The landmark 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, for instance, is helping to create a more positive and strategic planning system, with community engagement at its heart. The 2008 empowerment White Paper, *Communities in Control*, announced a £4 million Community Involvement in Planning Fund to promote greater public participation in planning and designing places.

Helped by government policy, the public is getting more engaged and earlier on. In particular, there have been many cases where the use of deliberative methods of engagement, focused on specific sites, has helped build a local consensus.⁴⁸

Finally, through *Engaging Places*, a project to unlock the educational potential of the built environment, the Government has worked with CABI, English Heritage and others to promote interest and understanding among young people and to give them the confidence to shape the places around them. Most recently *Engaging Places* launched a major new online teaching resource – www.engagingplaces.org.uk – and is developing a network for providers and teachers.

4.2 Challenges and opportunities

Although much has been achieved already in terms of improving the quality of our cities, towns and neighbourhoods, progress has not been consistently strong. Our analysis identifies some remaining challenges.

4.2.1 Challenges

The design quality of new public buildings and standards of new homes and neighbourhoods, private and publicly funded, could be further improved.⁴⁹ CABE's audit of private sector housing found that 18% were good or excellent, 53% average and 29% poor. Particular weaknesses identified included:

- Public realm such as parks and squares was often insufficient for the scale of the scheme or ill-maintained
- New developments missed opportunities to take advantage of existing heritage including buildings and open spaces, with the result that too many new developments have a 'could be anywhere' quality about them
- New neighbourhoods were often difficult to access or move through, largely because street design primarily took into account the needs of vehicle users rather than seeking to accommodate the needs of the wider community such as pedestrians and cyclists

The recently published review of affordable housing also showed that standards are far from universally high.⁵⁰ Independent surveys of the quality of local environment, encompassing issues such as littering and dog fouling, as well as maintenance of roads and streets, show that although public satisfaction with the quality of local areas has improved over the last decade, this now remains steady at around 66%.⁵¹

English cities are not scoring as well as others on quality of life and sustainability criteria, according to international rankings. While there is no authoritative international ranking of cities for quality of place, as this is characterised here, the best known list, the Mercer list, ranks the world's top 50 cities in terms of quality of life. In 2008 this featured only one English city – London (London is ranked 38th, with Birmingham ranked 56th, jointly with Glasgow). This contrasts with, say, Switzerland and Germany, which each have three cities represented in the top ten.⁵²

We also know that while many areas are well endowed with good quality parks and other green space, this is not always the case – people in deprived areas are nearly six times less likely than those in affluent ones to describe their area as 'green'.⁵³ And one in six urban local authorities still say that their green space is in decline.⁵⁴

Added to this, new and emerging public policy concerns require fresh thinking. For example, the challenge of climate change necessitates a step-change in provision of 'green infrastructure'. The challenge of demographic change and an ageing society demands that built environments are designed to accommodate a diversity of needs. Furthermore, the need to address the rise of chronic, life-style related health problems also requires us to think differently about how best to design our neighbourhoods, towns and cities to encourage more active life-styles.



New and emerging public policy concerns – climate change, life-style related health problems, an ageing society – require fresh thinking

4.2.2 Opportunities for improvement

So why is progress not consistently strong? Our analysis identifies a number of opportunities for further improving quality of place.

Leadership on quality of place could be stronger. This is true at the national, regional and local levels. Elected leaders and public sector executives do not always prioritise quality of place and good design in their decision-making or appreciate its role in securing wider positive outcomes. Public sector performance regimes could do more to encourage investment in quality of place.

Relevant national policy, guidance and standards need to reflect new challenges and new thinking. Policies and guidance need to reflect, in particular, the importance of green infrastructure, public realm, better use of heritage and the need to design in a more inclusive way to accommodate the needs and aspirations of all social groups, including the growing number of older people.

Public and wider community engagement could be of higher quality, especially in the crucial, early stages of planning and design, when most important decisions are made and when the views of the community can add greatest value. There are opportunities to engage and empower the public in assessing their local environment and identifying how it could be improved and in managing local assets. And more could be done to engage service users and local communities in designing public buildings.

Government funds the development and upkeep of a wide range of public buildings and spaces, which in turn have an important impact on quality of place. **Central government procurement processes could attach more importance to good design.** Although there are very clear quality thresholds in place to guide the design and construction of some particular types of buildings, such as schools and affordable housing, these need to be rolled out across the board.

There are many examples showing that investing in design quality and quality of place brings a positive financial return through increased sale prices, quicker rates of sales and in building a positive reputation. **But there could be more buy-in from private sector developers to the case for investing in good design and quality of place.**

The planning policy framework now exists to enable local authorities and their partners to take an active lead in shaping development in their areas. **But some local leaders could be more ambitious in setting standards or demanding quality from local developers.** Where civic leaders are able to articulate a clear and ambitious vision of how they want their locality to develop and communicate this to developers, we are more likely to get high quality places. Articulating that vision requires planners, heritage officers, highways officers, designers and local leaders to come together early to agree how to make the most of a locality's or site's existing assets, including its historic and natural assets.

Finally, **there could be more widespread access by public sector bodies, and planning authorities in particular, to the full range of quality of place skills** – including planning, regeneration, conservation, heritage, urban design, green space and street design and transport engineering skills. Government has a role to play in encouraging more people to develop these skills. But there is also considerable scope for local authorities to better deploy skills, by drawing on external expertise and sharing their own expertise with others, for instance by developing joint services.



As important as it is to tackle issues presented by the downturn, we also need to ensure that we continue to plan and invest for the long term

4.3 The downturn and quality of place

The challenges identified above will require sustained attention over the medium to long term. In addition, the current economic conditions have also added newer, short term pressures and challenges. There has been a slowdown across private sector development – residential, office, retail, leisure and industrial. While this slowdown has been greatest in the Midlands and North of England, all regions are seriously affected. This slowdown is, in turn, affecting public sector regeneration strategies and projects. Developments in deprived areas are at particular risk because returns on investment tend to be lower. Developers are also reporting difficulties in delivering on Section 106 agreements to contribute towards development of infrastructure and affordable housing. Local authorities are coming under increasing pressure to cut budgets including planning, heritage and environment budgets.⁵⁵

Government has already taken steps to address these issues, including helping vulnerable individuals and families with mortgages and making funding available to help developers keep housebuilding projects moving and local authorities to deliver more social homes, prioritising schemes that meet high energy efficiency standards. And we will do more. But as important as it is to tackle issues presented by the downturn, we also need to ensure that we continue to plan and invest for the long term. The objective and actions laid out in this strategy aim to do just that.



Royal Festival Hall © HCA

Case study

Upton, Northampton

A high density urban extension, with good local engagement

The vision for Upton as a sustainable urban extension on the edge of Northampton was developed collaboratively through an 'enquiry by design' initiative, facilitated by the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment. This involved the local community, the Local Authority, the landowner – HCA – and statutory consultees. A week of intensive design workshops helped forge agreement on the basic approach and find solutions to issues like flooding, density, building heights and highway design. The development includes 1,400 energy efficient homes, a primary school, shops, offices, cafes, pub, nursery, playing fields and a country park.

The development process, started a decade ago, pioneered the reintroduction of design codes into British urban planning. The code encourages individual architectural expression and innovation, while laying down basic rules of massing, height

and density. The design code is overseen by a stakeholder group led by the local authority who monitor the quality of all proposals in advance of planning applications. This process has led to better designs, which in turn have helped to speed delivery – detailed applications taking only around eight weeks to be approved. A resident-run company will be responsible for the management of the public realm and communal courtyards once the project is completed.

Primary infrastructure, including a sustainable urban drainage system and the village square, has been delivered by HCA, encouraging investment and allowing it to demand high quality, public-minded development in return. Each phase of the development has been built to higher environmental standards, with the current phase being the first in the UK to achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 6.

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5 Building on success – next steps



We want to ensure that all places are planned, designed and developed to provide everyone, including future generations, with a decent quality of life and fair chances

So much for what has been achieved and the challenges we face. This chapter lays out the Government's strategy for building on past successes and tackling these challenges.

The approach taken here builds on the Government's existing priorities and policies. Since the landmark report of the Urban Task Force published exactly ten years ago, in 1999, for instance, and the *Our Towns and Cities* White Paper of 2000, the Government has been committed to promoting brownfield, mixed use, inclusive and sustainable forms of urban development, built around the needs of pedestrians as well as car owners.⁵⁶ This strategy sits squarely within this broad approach.

Similarly, over recent years the Government has sought to devolve power to the local level, while encouraging local government and services to play a more rounded and strategic 'place-shaping' role. We recognise that we cannot deliver better services or better places top-down. Our aim is to help empower and support local leaders, developers and local people to make improvements for themselves. The actions below are strongly in accordance with the devolutionary direction of government policy.

5.1 The Government's vision and strategic objectives for improving quality of place

The Government's vision for quality of place is simple. We want to ensure that all places are planned, designed and developed to provide everyone, including future generations, with a decent quality of life and fair chances. Put more concretely, we want to ensure that all places are planned, designed and developed so as to be attractive, prosperous, safe and sustainable, with a good mix of facilities, services and opportunities, a strong sense of local distinctiveness, ample green space, a lively public realm and good community life. We want to leave a positive legacy for future generations.

If Government is going to realise its vision for quality of place, addressing the challenges and making the most of opportunities set out in chapter 4 of this strategy, it needs to achieve seven strategic objectives:

- 1** Strengthen leadership on quality of place at the national and regional level
- 2** Encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place
- 3** Ensure relevant government policy, guidance and standards consistently promote quality of place and are user-friendly
- 4** Put the public and community at the centre of place-shaping
- 5** Ensure all development for which central government is directly responsible is built to high design and sustainability standards and promotes quality of place
- 6** Encourage higher standards of market-led development
- 7** Strengthen quality of place skills, knowledge and capacity

Specific actions under each of these seven strategic objectives are set out below.

Central government and our partners

Central government alone cannot create the sort of places we all want to see. A wide range of players, including businesses and developers, home-owners and landlords, community groups, service users and citizens, planners and designers, and regional and local government have a role in the development process and so shape quality of place.

Local government has a particularly important role. It is local government, after all, that sets the local policy framework – including the spatial plan and design standards and policy – within which development takes place, determines planning applications and enforces standards. More directly, local authorities are responsible for master-planning, designing and maintaining local areas, buildings and public spaces. The vast majority of planning applications in this country are determined at the local level, as are listed building and scheduled ancient monument consents. And the great majority of streets, parks and other public spaces are developed and managed locally.

If central government's capacity to 'deliver' better environments on its own is limited, it still has a vital contribution to make. The Government can help shape places in a number of ways:

- Indirectly, through its local government policy, especially local planning policy
- Directly, as a funder, developer and owner of the nation's public buildings and public land
- Contextually, through political leadership and narrative as well as through economic policy, skills policy and other broad policy approaches.

Central government alone cannot create the sort of places we all want to see. Local government has a particularly important role



Shirecliffe Community Hub, Southey Owlerton, Sheffield © CABE/David Millington Photography Ltd

Case study

Coin Street, London

A mixed use development with a good combination of private and public space

The Coin Street area of London's Bankside has evolved through various stages into a well designed, mixed use scheme. This includes housing, a public park, restaurants, shops, offices and workshops.

Local residents have had a leading role in developing and running the Coin Street development since the 1970s. Residents are represented in the organisations that develop and manage the area.

Commercial lettings are vetted to ensure quality and an appropriate mix of uses. Money made from these lettings is used to cross subsidise otherwise unviable activities and services. The main management company – Coin Street Community Builders – invests over £250,000 a year towards the maintenance of the parks and riverside walkways that it owns. All four Coin Street housing developments are run by co-operatives. Every adult tenant must become a member of the

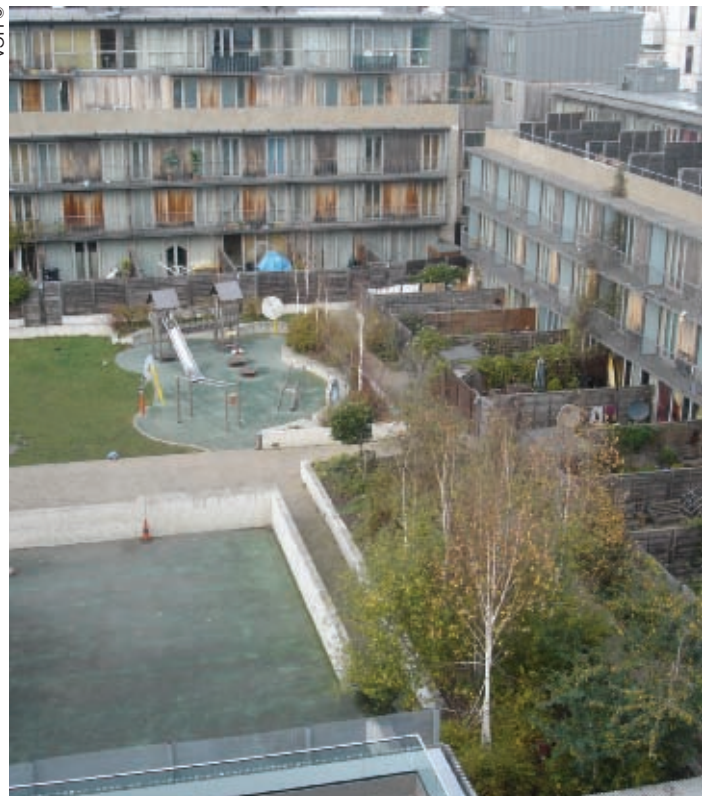
co-operative after completing a training programme and is expected to take an active part in running it.

The development has all the elements that make for a high quality place. A mix of homes, some suitable for families, some for older people, many affordable, are served by good public transport and a range of shops and services. Developments are well designed and built, with many of the homes having either private outside space or communal gardens. These private or semi-private spaces open onto well designed and managed public spaces, including public gardens and, of course, the Thames. The development has made excellent use of local built heritage, with the Oxo tower, once a deserted power station and warehouse, converted into a mixed use development including shops, workshops, 78 homes for Coin Street Secondary Housing Association and restaurants.

© HCA



© HCA



5.2 Achieving our strategic objectives

Walmers Castle, Kent © English Heritage



Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen leadership on quality of place at the national and regional level

Committed and engaged leadership is vital at every level of government if we are to deliver our vision for quality of place.

The Government has a good record when it comes to leadership. The establishment of CABE, of Ministerial Design Champions, the Better Public Buildings Initiative and the creation of the HCA are just some examples of leadership in this area. Communities and Local Government now has, for the first time, an explicit objective to increase the proportion of new homes that meet 'Building for Life' standards. And the HCA has a clear statutory objective to achieve good design and sustainability. Moving forward, we will take the following steps to further boost national and regional leadership on quality of place.

Action 1.1 – Bolstering the role of Ministerial Design Champions

Improving quality of place is a cross-government issue and it is important that this is recognised at the highest level in all relevant organisations. So the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, with CABE, will lead on

strengthening the role of Ministerial Design Champions. The aim will be that every key Department will have a designated Ministerial Design Champion, with the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport acting as the cabinet level cross-government design champion. Their role will include both supporting and challenging their own departments and agencies to be good clients and to promote publicly the benefits of good design and quality of place. The responsibilities of Ministerial Design Champions will be recognised in their wider ministerial remit and they will have the resources and support from within their departments that they need to play their role effectively and meet their commitments. CABE will support Ministerial Design Champions, and their officials, through training, case study visits and opportunities to showcase their departments' work.

Action 1.2 – Embedding quality of place objectives and targets in departmental strategic objectives

While all departments have a role to play in improving quality of place, some departments have an especially important contribution to make, either because they have lead place-shaping responsibilities (for example, CLG and DCMS) or because their activity can have a major influence on quality of place – generally through their ownership, control or influence over public buildings and land. Departmental strategic objectives (DSOs) provide a means of ensuring that these departments recognise quality of place as a major responsibility and make a positive contribution to it. The Government will consider whether and how DSOs can be revised to include explicit design and broader quality of place objectives at the next suitable opportunity.

Action 1.3 – Ensuring Regional Development Agencies work to improve quality of place

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) play a very important role in shaping quality of place. Legislation, currently before Parliament includes provision to give RDAs and Local Authority Leaders' Boards a duty to produce the new single regional strategies and in doing so to have regard to matters of design and sustainability. Should these provisions become law, the Government will ensure that the guidance for RDAs and Leaders' Boards on producing regional strategies will draw attention to the need to have regard to this duty. The guidance will build on current best practice within the RDAs and will encourage them to develop an appropriate performance management regime which reflects the importance of quality of place.

Action 1.4 – Publishing a statement of the Government's vision for the historic environment in England

The Government will publish a statement which sets out the guiding principles of its engagement with the historic environment in England. This statement will outline the many contributions that heritage can make to broader government objectives and confirm our commitment to protecting and promoting the historic environment through current and future policy-making. It will also set out the roles of our partners.

Academy of St Francis of Assisi, Liverpool © CABE/Dave Morris



Strategic Objective 2: Encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place

As already suggested, the quality of local places is largely determined at the local level. It follows that the Government's vision and ambitions for our built environment can only be realised in partnership with local leaders and local services. That is why we want and need to continue to support and encourage local leaders and local government to make a priority out of improving quality of place.

Action 2.1 – Developing better ways of assessing quality of place

Relations between central and local government have changed radically in recent years. Reducing the number of performance indicators set by central government, from around 1,200 to the current 188, demonstrated Government's commitment to its new relationship with local government.

The set of 188 National Indicators covers the national priority outcomes which local authorities will be responsible for delivering, either alone or in partnership with other public service providers. Targets in Local Area Agreements can only

be set against indicators within the National Indicator Set. Good quality of place has an important role in helping local government achieve many of these indicators. There are current National Indicators on housing, planning, transport and the environment that are directly related to aspects of quality of place, alongside citizen perception based indicators that measure attitudes towards the areas in which people live. However, collectively these do not yet reflect all the aspects of quality of place as defined in this strategy.

The Government will work with local government and other bodies including HCA, CABE and English Heritage to develop options for measuring quality of place as well as options for a new indicator/suite of indicators for inclusion in the National Indicator Set for future spending rounds. This will be done alongside work that is currently underway to develop a more outcome-focused, holistic way of measuring performance of the planning system and as part of the wider Government review of the National Indicator Set.

Action 2.2 – Ensuring that quality of place is reflected in the Comprehensive Area Assessment

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for local authorities and their partners will provide a robust independent assessment by the local public service inspectorates of how well local priorities are being delivered. It will include an assessment of performance and prospects for improvement in local areas against Local Area Agreement targets and the wider set of national indicators. CAA will consist of an area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people and how likely they are to improve in future, and organisational assessments of individual public

bodies. The inspectorates' recently published guidance advises those carrying out assessments to consider 'whether an area is a good and desirable place to live, work or visit'. The Government will ensure that the inspectorates understand how quality of place is reflected in the National Indicator Set as it develops.

Action 2.3 – Working with local authorities to achieve high quality development

Government departments have an interest in supporting local government in promoting quality of place. Government will explore with local authorities and other partners how Government investment in local areas is best used to help drive up standards of development and support local authorities to improve quality of place in a cost effective way.

Action 2.4 – Improving support and training on quality of place for civic leaders

To complement the diversity of skills, knowledge and experience that civic leaders bring to their role, it is vital that they are properly supported in learning about quality of place, its importance, and how it can be achieved. There is already a good range of training and support on offer, and many local authorities have appointed Design and/or Heritage champions. Government will ask the LGA to work with other bodies, including the HCA, CABE and English Heritage, to ensure that the offer for civic leaders is well coordinated, relevant, draws on a broad range of disciplines including planning, design, green skills and conservation, and is being consistently taken up.

Action 2.5 – Establishing an award scheme for high quality places

A number of award or accreditation schemes already exist, including the Blue Flag scheme for beaches and the Green Flag scheme for parks and open spaces. These have been shown to be very effective in encouraging investment in raising the quality of local environments. Government will explore with LGA and other bodies options for creating a similar scheme for built localities, linked to other relevant award schemes such as the new award and knowledge transfer scheme being developed jointly by the Government and the LGA to replace the Beacons Scheme.



The Collection, Lincoln © CABE/Michèle Turran

Strategic Objective 3: Ensure relevant government policy, guidance and standards consistently promote quality of place and are user-friendly

Guidance and standards issued or endorsed by the Government or its agencies provide a powerful means of promoting quality of place. They need to be uniformly well informed, up to date, clear and consistent. Over the last decade much has been done to strengthen policy, guidance and standards. Planning policy, issued by CLG to local planning authorities, is being streamlined, with a stronger emphasis on sustainability, social inclusion and good design. In 2007 the Government published the *Manual for streets*, emphasising the need to design residential streets as social spaces. New standards of efficiency, security and safety have been developed for all new development and the Government has promoted the Lifetime Homes and Neighbourhoods standards, so ensuring that homes are built to meet the needs and aspirations of an ageing society. Furthermore Building for Life, established in 2003, has set particularly demanding new standards for homes and neighbourhoods – including design standards.

Defra's development of noise action plans is assisting the management of environmental noise and preservation of 'quiet areas' in large urban areas. There is a continual need, however, to revise, rationalise and integrate guidance and standards, in light of new evidence and objectives.

Action 3.1 – Developing new planning policy on green space and green infrastructure

Existing planning guidance emphasises the important contribution that healthy functioning ecosystems make to a better quality of life and to people's sense of well-being (PPS9), and the vital functions that urban green spaces perform as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by acting as 'green lungs' (PPG17). Planning Guidance also stresses the important role of urban green spaces, sports and recreational facilities in promoting healthy living, and in improving people's sense of well-being in the place they live (PPG17).

While this guidance remains valid, there is now a better understanding of the important role that green 'spaces' or 'infrastructure' will also need to play in response to climate change – including urban cooling and sustainable urban drainage. CLG will therefore work with other departments to revise and consolidate this guidance to provide a clearer message to local authorities about the vital and multifunctional roles of green infrastructure and what is expected of them in its provision.

Action 3.2 – Developing new planning policy on the historic environment

Existing planning policy guidance already lays out the need for planning authorities to ensure that the historic environment is conserved and, where appropriate, enhanced (PPG15 and PPG16). It has little to say, however, about the

benefits of viewing heritage as an asset that can attract investment, encourage regeneration or promote sustainability. CLG is therefore working with DCMS and English Heritage to develop a new planning policy statement which revises and refines existing planning policy. This will emphasise the positive contribution of heritage assets to local character and sense of place and the importance, wherever possible, of keeping them in viable uses that are consistent with their conservation.

Action 3.3 – Extending the *Manual for streets*

The *Manual for streets*, guidance on the design of lightly trafficked residential streets, put place-making on the agenda of those responsible for designing new residential streets. *Streets for all* and *Traffic management and streetscape*, published by English Heritage and CABE, and the Department for Transport respectively, showed how to improve existing local streetscapes. Further guidance is needed, however, on the design of the full range of streets and roads, including high streets and town and city centres, with the aim of improving standards of all highway design, and ensuring that our streets and roads are attractive, encourage cycling, walking and social interaction and serve all social groups. The Department for Transport will work with others including CLG, CABE, English Heritage and the Institution of Highways and Transportation to develop further guidance extending the principles in the *Manual* to other streets.

Action 3.4 – Developing an integrated set of standards for homes and neighbourhoods

The creation of the HCA, bringing together funding for social housing and urban regeneration, provides a good opportunity to strengthen and integrate guidance and standards in designing homes and neighbourhoods. The Government will ask HCA to develop and promote a strengthened and integrated set of standards, incorporating and/or drawing on existing design principles, guidance and standards, including Building for Life, Secured by Design, Lifetime Homes and Neighbourhoods, CABE's Principles of Inclusive Design and the *Manual for streets*. The new standards will cover not only the design of buildings but the wider public realm, with a particular emphasis on ensuring developments take an inclusive approach to accommodating the needs of all social groups. The HCA will also work with other government bodies to develop options for wider adoption of these standards as they become more firmly established.



Strategic Objective 4: Put the public and community at the centre of place-shaping

Places and buildings work best where citizens and service users are engaged in shaping them. Public involvement is particularly effective when the public is engaged early on in the development process.

Action 4.1 – Encouraging public involvement in shaping the vision for their area and the design of individual schemes

As announced in the *Communities in Control* White Paper, the Government will make funds available to support local authorities and third sector organisations in involving communities in shaping the vision for their local areas and individual developments. The Government will continue to work with relevant organisations such as LGA, Planning Aid, the Prince's Foundation and CABI to promote innovative techniques for engaging the public and wider communities in influencing development in their local area. English Heritage will also consult widely over the coming year to establish the kinds of historic places people think it is most important to celebrate and protect through statutory designation.

Action 4.2 – Ensuring that citizens and service users are engaged in the design and development of public buildings

The Building Schools for the Future programme has been very successful at engaging and involving its key users, including schoolchildren and schools staff, in early discussions about the design of new school buildings and facilities. Consequently, the new facilities have a range of innovative features. There are opportunities to promote this approach within other government-led building programmes. The Government will therefore consider how best to encourage this, for example by ensuring that an element of funding within capital programmes is reserved to enable the public and service users to be involved in the early design of public buildings.

Action 4.3 – Encouraging community involvement in ownership and managing the upkeep of the public realm and community facilities

The *Communities in Control* White Paper set out the Government's commitment to working towards the vision that 'in 2020, in every locality, a proportion of public assets will be in the ownership or management of sustainable and energetic community organisations'. As part of its drive to realise this vision, the Government will continue to promote (through the Advancing Assets for Communities and Community Builders programmes) community ownership and management of public realm and community facilities. The Government will also explore opportunities for building skills within communities so that they can take on these responsibilities with confidence. For example, we will promote the use of the £20m transformation fund to support the development of innovation in adult learning as set out in *The Learning*

Revolution White Paper and by continuing to invest, through English Heritage, in developing the capacity of local groups to get involved in, and campaign for, improvements to their local heritage.

Action 4.4 – Promoting public engagement in creating new homes and neighbourhoods

It is important that as Government continues to fund development of new homes and neighbourhoods, the public are engaged in this process. The HCA will issue guidance on community engagement in the development process. Local communities will be consulted on and engaged in all HCA funded development, in accordance with the approach laid down in the guidance.



Strategic Objective 5: Ensure all development for which central government is directly responsible is built to high design and sustainability standards and promotes quality of place

Central Government funds the development and upkeep of a wide range of public buildings and spaces, which in turn have an important impact on quality of place. It also disposes of land to developers and so can influence place-making through its choice of developers and the conditions it attaches to development. It is important that Government ensures that centrally funded and controlled development advances quality of place. It is particularly important that, as the Government pushes forward ambitious public building and house building programmes, these are delivered to high design and sustainability standards.

Action 5.1 – Applying a design threshold to all new public building programmes

The Government continues to invest significantly in new capital programmes to deliver, for example, schools, healthcare facilities and transport infrastructure. The Government is committed to

ensuring that all the buildings delivered through these programmes are designed and built to the highest standards and improve the quality of life of their users and the local community. The DCSF, Partnerships for Schools and CABE have already worked together to ensure that all developments funded through the Building Schools for the Future capital programme will meet a demanding new minimum design standard or threshold before funding is released. Partnerships for Schools has also introduced rigorous Post Occupancy Evaluation for BSF schools to test user views of their new school environment. The Government will now work towards establishing and then applying a similar design threshold to all public building programmes, securing the best possible value from public expenditure on capital programmes. We will ask CABE to work with departments to develop an effective and proportionate way to set thresholds and measure performance against them.

Action 5.2 – Ensuring publicly funded homes and neighbourhoods meet high standards of design and construction

As action 3.4 lays out, the Government will ask the HCA to develop an integrated set of design quality standards for homes and neighbourhoods. We will also ask the HCA to ensure that the development that it funds meets these standards. Government will also seek to ensure that where it funds the development of new homes and communities through other routes that this development conforms to the new standards.

Action 5.3 – Attaching conditions to the disposal of public land to ensure high quality development

Government departments, local authorities and public agencies dispose of up to £6 billion worth

of public land and buildings every year.⁵⁷ It is already established policy that where public organisations dispose of public land to a private sector developer, who intends to use it to build homes, the public body disposing of the land should attach conditions to it ensuring that the development respects HCA quality standards. There is an opportunity to extend this policy to public sector land that is to be used for other types of development, beyond housing. The Government will explore the case for requiring public sector agencies to attach quality conditions to the disposal of public sector land for uses beyond housing, taking into account the evidence base, including the costs, benefits and impact.

Action 5.4 – Strengthening adherence to the Common Minimum Standards

The Office for Government Commerce’s (OGC) Common Minimum Standards, established by the Government in 2005, lay down mandatory standards for the procurement of buildings and spaces across central government, including departments, executive agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which they are responsible. These standards are widely recognised as being exemplary, but they are not consistently adhered to. The Government will review how to strengthen adherence to these standards and look at options for extending their reach or promoting similar standards throughout the wider public sector.

Action 5.5 – Updating and strengthening adherence to the Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate

Just as it is important that new centrally funded public buildings are designed and built to the highest standards, so it is vital that centrally

funded services continue to invest in their existing historic buildings and wider properties. Central government and its agencies own 1,100 listed buildings in England alone. In addition, Central Government has direct responsibility, as a landowner, for a significant part of our historic and natural environment. The Ministry of Defence, for instance, owns 174,500 hectares of land and over 610 scheduled monuments. The Forestry Commission owns 260,000 hectares and 650 scheduled monuments. In 2009 English Heritage will publish updated guidance for the care of the Government's historic estate, endorsed by DCMS and OGC.

Action 5.6 – Setting up or expanding public sector enabling teams to support first time and infrequent clients in capital programmes

Construction is a complex process and being a good 'client' is essential to getting good results. Clients who don't regularly procure buildings benefit from advice and support from experts. The Government will therefore consider how enabling services can best be made available to support first time and infrequent clients, for example by ensuring that an element of funding within capital programmes is reserved to fund an enabling team or through enabling support provided through CABE.

Northmoor housing, Manchester © CABE/David Willington Photography Ltd



Strategic Objective 6: Encourage higher standards of market-led development

The steps that the Government will be taking to improve the quality of government-led new development have already been laid out. But we also want to do more to encourage improvement in the design quality of market-led development, including housing. We have already seen, in recent years, an increase in the number of exemplary market-led schemes and we want to move to a position where this high standard becomes the norm.

Action 6.1 – Encourage local authorities to set clear quality of place ambitions in their local planning framework

It is important that as local authorities develop their local planning frameworks they take the opportunity to set clear quality of place ambitions as required by existing policies eg PPS1 (Sustainable Development) and PPS3 (Housing) and relevant forthcoming planning policy. There are existing sources of support for local authorities in doing this – for example, that provided by CABE and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). The Government will continue to support the provision of these

services and facilitate the promotion and sharing of good practice arising from this work.

Action 6.2 – Encouraging stronger joint working early in the development process

As identified by the recent Killian Pretty review of the planning application process⁵⁸, pre-application discussions between planning authorities and developers have many advantages – especially for major proposals. They can speed up the planning process, lessen the risk that a scheme will be denied planning permission and help deliver a better quality development.

The Government is already committed to encouraging the wider use of Planning Performance Agreements, and using a simpler approach where appropriate. The Government will ask the HCA's Advisory Team for Large Applications to work with CABE, English Heritage and other bodies, to ensure that Planning Performance Agreements promote good design and quality of place, alongside other positive outcomes.

Action 6.3 – Developing and promoting the business case for investing in achieving quality of place

Many private sector developers already accept the business case for investing in good design and quality of place – as is shown by the quality of their developments. But this is not the case for all developers. The Government will explore with the development industry, CABE, HCA and others, how best to strengthen the business case for investing in quality of place – for example through developing and promoting a series of case studies.



**Strategic Objective 7:
Strengthen quality of place
skills, knowledge and capacity**

At the heart of creating successful, high quality places is the bringing together, through effective team-working, of a wide range of skills and knowledge from both the public and private sector. These skills include planning, regeneration, conservation, heritage, urban design, green space, road design, transport engineering skills and others. It is vital that we continue to apply and refresh these important skills in innovative and creative ways so that we use them to best effect in improving quality of place.

Action 7.1 – Strengthening advisory support on design quality for local authorities, the wider public sector and developers

There is already an array of support services available at regional and sub-regional levels to help local authorities, developers and others improve design standards and improve quality of place. These services include regional design review – review of a development scheme by independent design experts – and enabling services: input from expert design and construction advisors into the design of a scheme. These

services are currently supported and provided by a number of bodies including Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) CABE and Architecture and Built Environment Centres, which also play an important role in engaging the public, including schoolchildren, in place-shaping. However, the full range of services is not available in all regions, and in the light of recent changes to the role of RDAs and the creation of the HCA, there is a need to ensure that good joined-up regional support continues to be available. The Government will work with RDAs, HCA, CABE, EH and other bodies to further develop the business case for regional support, and where it is shown to be cost-effective, to sustain regional support for quality of place.

Action 7.2 – Encouraging local authorities to share planning, design, conservation and related expertise

Recognising that not all local authorities are able to develop in-house capacity, not least because not all areas are subject to the same development pressures at the same time, there is a strong case for encouraging and supporting a ‘shared service’ model of conservation, design and planning expertise. Making the most of the opportunities this could provide becomes more important, as local authority planning and environmental budgets come under pressure. The Government will therefore ask sector-led improvement bodies including the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to explore how best to encourage greater pooling of local planning, design and historic environment expertise.

Action 7.3 – Ensuring that Councillors on planning committees have the skills and support they need

Planning committees, made up of democratically elected local councillors, are a valuable part of our local democracy. Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that committee members have the support and the training they need, so that they can exercise good judgement on design and quality of place matters, particularly in the light of the new requirements to achieve good design and sustainable development that were introduced in the Planning Act 2008. Therefore Government will work with the LGA and other bodies to establish whether the current training and guidance that is available for planning committees sufficiently covers the quality of place aspects of planning and to develop additional support if necessary.

5.3 Delivering this strategy

The Government is committed to delivering our strategic objectives and implementing the actions. We will publish by the end of summer 2009 an action plan laying out how we will deliver on each of the actions above. In 2010 we will publish an update on progress made in implementing this action plan.



Key to acronyms

CABE Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

CLG Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS Department for Culture, Media and Sport

HCA Homes and Communities Agency

DEFRA Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Endnotes

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The way places and buildings are planned, designed and looked after matters to all of us in countless ways. The built environment can be a source of everyday joy or everyday misery. Its quality is an important influence on crime, health, community cohesion and prosperity. It has a major impact on wildlife and climate change.

The Government is committed to improving the places where we live, whether they be villages or large cities. This strategy lays out why and how quality of place matters and the practical steps the Government will be taking to build on the achievements of recent years and do more to create prosperous, attractive, distinctive, inclusive and sustainable world class places. It is important reading for all those involved in designing and developing our built environment.



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