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Design Guidelines for Conservation Areas

INTRODUCTION

- S6.1 Conservation areas have been designated in order to preserve and enhance the character of a whole area. The special architectural or historical interest of a conservation area lies in the unique combination of a number of elements such as building style, street pattern and open space.
- S6.2 The special nature of conservation areas means that they are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of insensitive development. Therefore any development, including new buildings and extensions or other alterations should be carried out in a way that does not harm the character they possess.
- S6.3 However it should be remembered that conservation area are not museums; they need to change and evolve over time just as they have always done. Carefully designed new buildings can make a positive contribution to character and there are situations where the sensitive redevelopment of an eyesore can enhance the quality of an area.
- S6.4 The advice contain in these guidelines is not intended to be prescriptive. There is little value in modern architecture acting as a pastiche of all the building styles that have gone before. Good design in conservation areas leans towards a “traditional” approach to development; whereby appropriate materials and building forms are used to creating a modern reflection of the vernacular architecture rather than a slavish copy.
- S6.5 The success of the guidance advice relies on skilful interpreted by a designer in relation to a particular site. The application of rigid, quantitative standards often results in stilted development in terms of imagination and designs of a mediocre standard. The selection of a suitable designer is a vital initial step and it is suggested that advice be sought from relevant professional bodies such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).
- S6.6 Early contact with the Planning Department prior to the submission of applications is strongly advised.

POLICY BACKGROUND

- S6.7 This Supplementary Planning Guidance note amplifies the criteria set out in policy BC1 of the Local Plan and provides detailed advice on all aspects of development in conservation areas.
- S6.8 The guidance builds on provisions within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to preserve and enhance conservation areas. Account has been taken of PPG1 General Policy and Principles (1997) and PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)
- S6.9 Proposals for the development of land adjacent to conservation areas and other sensitive areas will also be considered against the design advice of this guidance note. However it should be borne in mind that higher standards would normally apply to development relating to listed buildings.

DESIGN GUIDANCE - GENERAL

S6.10 In order for new development to fit within the overall framework of a conservation area it should reflect the local characteristics of the neighbourhood. When designing a new building the starting point should be to consider the context of the site and the existing built environment. It is often desirable to make an assessment not only of the built form, materials and detailing, but also of the character of the spaces between the buildings and the appearance of the street scene. The following section outlines the principle points of consideration.

Scale

S6.11 Scale must reflect that of the surrounding buildings and be proportional to the setting of the area. The mass of a new building should not dominate or conflict with the adjoining properties. Within the settlement areas of Rochford District the scale is primarily that of two-storey domestic architecture

S6.12 Traditionally the horizontal scale of urban frontages is long and narrow and therefore the amalgamation of more than one plot to form larger sites is not desirable.

S6.13 In some areas uniform building height is the character of the street and it would not be appropriate to introduce variations in the general roofline or eaves line, while in other locations irregular building height might be norm. It is worth remembering that in terms of height vernacular architecture was closely related to the size of a person.

Form

S6.14 The individual elements of a new development should related proportionally to each other. In addition the form should be appropriate to its immediate neighbours and any important features on surrounding buildings.

S6.15 The traditional building form in the District is that of two-storey pitched roofs with the roof generally spanning a width of 5 to 6 metres. Additionally there is the limited occurrence of three storey buildings in town centres that are more commercial/public building in character.

S6.16 Where extension are carried out they should produce additive rather than subtractive forms.

Materials

S6.17 Prior to transport improvements in the nineteenth century builders were largely restricted to the range of materials found in their locality. This has resulted in the creation of buildings that have a certain local distinctiveness and level of cohesiveness. Often new development is disappointing because although the overall design is suitable it is poorly detailed and the choice of materials inappropriate. Ensuring that the correct detail and materials are specified requires time and care.

S6.18 In the district a wide range of traditional building materials has been employed. For walls brick (both red and stock), smooth plaster render and featheredged

weatherboarding on timber frames have all been used. Traditional roofing materials include clay plain tiles and pantiles, natural slate and on occasion thatch.

S6.19 The width of buildings and the resulting roof pitch dictates the type of covering that should be used. Peg tile roofs are steeply pitched normally between 35° and 45°, while slate and pantiles have a lower pitch of between 25° and 35°. It should be noted that pantiles are rarely used for the main roofs of buildings, they are usually found as subordinate roofs, or on single storey agricultural buildings or other outbuildings.

S6.20 The plain tiles or pantiles found on older buildings are traditionally hand-made, resulting in a roof that exhibits a particularly attractive uneven appearance due to the small differences between individual tiles. New hand-made tiles are available and are preferable in many situations to the uniformity of those that have been machine-made.

S6.21 The richness of a building lies in the texture, colour and durability of its materials and the way they have been used. It is often forgotten that time and the elements are important effects. The weathering of natural materials results in an appearance that improves with age and therefore modern artificial alternatives are not generally acceptable.

Siting and Townscape

S6.22 The importance of the setting of a building is often forgotten. It is derived not only from the relationship to other buildings, but also by the spaces created between buildings. Therefore the siting of a new building in an existing settlement must take account of the impact it makes on existing spaces: whether this is enclosed or open.

S6.23 Generally, tightly knitted townscape should be sought, although in rural locations a more open character may be appropriate. The scale and height of existing buildings will influence the townscape character and in certain commercial areas a more significant scale for a new building may be appropriate.

S6.24 Development should respect the alignment of the street of which it is part. This usually means building to the same frontage as the existing and keeping any angles, which may reflect earlier subdivisions. Extensions may be set back from the main building line to allow a clear visual break between existing and new work.

DESIGN GUIDANCE – SPECIFIC DESIGN DETAILS

General

S6.25 Success development depends on the quality of the detailing. A great deal of the development that has taken place in the last five decades has been disappointing and architecturally unconvincing due to incorrect usage or lack of attention. Standard pattern book “styles” tend to devalue the merits of genuine historic buildings and to blur the local identity of an area. The following notes highlight some specific areas that should be considered.

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Roof

- S6.26 The roof is nearly always a dominant architectural feature; style, covering, ridge detailing, chimneys, eaves detailing, rainwater goods and verge details are all-important visual and decorative elements. As always, it is advisable to follow local tradition and relate to the best of existing roof details.
- S6.27 On tiled roofs simple verges with undercloaks will normally be appropriate. Verges formed by the use of bargeboards should be generally avoided unless the building is rendered or weatherboarded. Where barges are used "boots" at the base should be avoided. Verges that are finish against a protective parapet are sometimes appropriate in higher status buildings.
- S6.28 There is wide range of decorative features found on historic roofs. The use of red ridge tiles, crested ridges and terminal features will be encouraged. Ridges may be protected with half or third round clay ridge tiles or, as is usual on lower pitched slate roofs, a lead roll ridge. Raised ridge tiles used to provide extra ventilation are to be avoided. It is possible to obtain hand-made ridge tiles capable of providing ventilation, but still maintaining an unbroken ridge height along the length of the roof.
- S6.29 The form of the eaves gives the opportunity for a variety of detailed design elements. Both open eaves with exposed rafter feet and closed eaves with overhangs are appropriate. Overhangs supported on brick corbels and the use of dentil courses are suitable types of finishing.
- S6.30 Bonnet hips are not appropriate in Rochford District
- S6.31 On occasion thatch is considered to be an appropriate roofing material in a rural situation. The traditional material is long-straw, not reed and the detailing should be simple and in keeping with the local vernacular.

Chimneys

- S6.32 Chimneystacks are both formal and functional features of the roofspace and the construction of stacks will be encouraged. The use of corbel courses and decorative pots can enliven the silhouette and roofscape. Modern stacks tend to have a squat appearance and this is not appropriate in the conservation area situation, where a more imposing presence is desirable.

Plumbing and Rainwater Goods

- S6.33 External plumbing should always be avoided for practical as well as aesthetic reason and should not disturb or break through any mouldings or decorative features. Every opportunity should be taken to seek to rationalised and simplify the design of disposal pipes.
- S6.34 Where possible cast iron for gutters and downpipes is the first choice for new buildings in a conservation area. Generally metal is appropriate but plastic should be avoided. All rainwater goods should be painted black.
- S6.35 Gutters are functional and rarely prominent elements in the appearance of a building. On most buildings half round gutters are suitable with round downpipes, although gutters that are moulded or ogee in section may be more in keeping for a building which has an eighteenth or nineteenth century character.

Walls

- S6.36 Walls form the main structural fabric of a building and the choice of material has a major effect on appearance. Brick, render and weatherboarding are all suitable finishes. Both red and stock bricks were used locally and either would be appropriate depending on the situation.
- S6.37 Too often in the past little attention has been given to the selection of the appropriate type of brick. The delight of traditional brickwork lies in the nature of the brick, the type of bond and the pointing (where colour and type of joint can enhance the character of the brick). Brickwork should always be built in Flemish or English bond.
- S6.38 The primary feature of a wall is the building material itself and the pointing should normally be visually subservient to it. The choice of colour depends on the colour of the bricks. A good mortar will always be weaker than the fabric of the wall will and at least as porous. If the mortar is the correct strength any cracking will occur along the joints and not in the walling fabric. Hard cement pointing should be avoided, as moisture will be forced to evaporate through the face of the brick only, rather than through the whole surface of the wall. This will lead to frost damage where the hard top layer of the brick flakes off exposing the softer surface below to erosion. To finish, pointing should be "*flush*" or "*ironed*" rather than "*struck*".
- S6.39 Smooth rendering is traditional. Hard cement should be avoided and instead soft lime plaster finished with a wood float, colour washed white or cream should be used. There are good reasons for preferring soft lime plaster to hard cement in terms of its ability to accept movement without cracking and its absorbent nature which allows it to dry out externally. On timber framed buildings this difference is vital to the preservation of the building. The likely exposure to weathering and porosity must all taken into account when determining the strength of rendering. A good all round plaster mix would be 1:2:9 - cement: white lime: sand. Pargetting is not appropriate for this part of the country, though simple panelling may occasionally be employed.
- S6.40 In brick walls proper arches should be formed over openings. Coursed brickwork or brick-on-end soldier courses are considered to be unsuitable. Cambered or flat arches should be formed using special voussoir (wedge-shaped) bricks.
- S6.41 Weatherboarding must always be featheredge not shiplap and generally painted white or cream. On secondary buildings or side and rear walls boarding it was frequently tarred. The use of stains is not considered to be appropriate.

Floorscape

- S6.42 Consideration should be given to the treatment of both the front boundary and entrances gates as well as adjoining buildings. Too often modern materials, including tarmac, have been used for the surfacing of pavements, roadways and courtyard areas and this has detracted from the appearance of many well planned and executed schemes. The use of traditional paving and setts will be expected as a fundamental part of the overall appearance of any new development or redevelopment scheme.

Windows

- S6.43 Of all the detailing to new buildings (and existing buildings in the case of replacement) windows are one of the most prominent and abused features. They are an integral part of a building's character and require very careful consideration

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The fenestration (arrangement of windows), window style (including lintel and sill detailing), materials, colour and means of opening will all need thought.

- S6.44 The widespread use of double glazed units, normally made in thick sections of UPVC, supposedly in imitation of sash has been an unwelcome visual intrusion to the appearance of buildings, particularly within conservation areas.
- S6.45 Traditional window patterns comprise designs which are symmetrically balanced about both the horizontal and vertical axes. Opening types are commonly either vertical sliding double hung sashes or side hung casements. Occasionally, horizontal sliding (Yorkshire) sashes may be suitable. Top hung, bottom hung or pivoted openings are all unsuitable for use in conservation areas. Night vents are a 20th Century innovation and also not appropriate in most cases.
- S6.46 Within the broad window types such as sash or casement there is a wide variation of detail according to date, function and region. The thickness and moulding of glazing bars, the size and arrangement of panes and other details should be appropriate to the type/style of the building. Standardisation to one pattern found in many new "Georgian" type sashes should be avoided.
- S6.47 Dormer windows were used for to light attic rooms, which were considered to be of secondary importance to the main part of the house. They were therefore very simply detailed. New dormers, if absolutely necessary, should be carefully designed to match the character of the surrounding buildings and should be appropriately detailed. They should appear as an incident in the roof space and should not proliferate or be set close together. In design flat roofed dormers should be lead covered whilst pitched roof types should have plain tiles at a 50° pitch. The side panels, or cheeks, should be thin rather than wide.
- S6.48 Dormer windows are vastly preferable to in-plane rooflights but in cases where the latter may be used the traditional 19th Century pattern should be followed
- S6.49 All windows and other external joinery should be painted and not stained. The staining of external joinery is a modern phenomenon which disguises the intricacy of the joinery and gives a dull uninteresting appearance. Paint is usually the correct finish for timber windows, staining is not a traditional finish and should not normally be used.
- S6.50 The placing of windows within the wall thickness has a considerable effect on the character of the building. Generally, in brickwork window and door frames should be set back within the wall thickness so as to show a minimum reveal depth of 100mm. In rendered buildings the reveal depth is less critical and where the building is weatherboarded a timber lining should be formed around the opening. In rendered and weatherboarded buildings traditional pentice boards over window and door openings should be incorporated.

Doors

- S6.51 Doors are important elements of the historic and architectural character of any building. Traditional panelled or boarded entrance doors should be used and any patterns incorporating pseudo fanlight glazing should be avoided. Many off-the-peg doors attempt to copy historic detailing but are architecturally inaccurate. It is better to keep the design as simple as possible, for example, ledged-and-braced doors and basic four or six-panelled Victorian style doors.

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S6.52 Doors should generally be constructed in softwood and painted. Hardwoods whether unpainted, stained or varnished is quite unsuitable (as well as being ecologically unsound).

S6.53 Attention to small details of design such as doorcases, door furniture including hinges, knockers and letterboxes adds depth to a scheme. Simple doorcases with hoods can provide interest of which there are many traditional examples in the District.

DESIGN GUIDANCE – EXTENSIONS

S6.54 Whenever extensions to existing buildings in conservation and other sensitive areas are proposed all the criteria set out above will apply, but in addition, attention must be paid to the manner in which the extension may directly affect the existing building.

S6.55 Modern extensions should not dominate the existing building in either scale, material or situation. Extensions should be designed to be in sympathy with the character of the original building so that it complements its appearance. They are often successful only where they are limited to a size that ensures that they are visually subordinate to the main dwelling

S6.56 The form should follow the existing and generally the main building should be used as a reference for materials and detailing. Pitched roofs should have a definite break in the ridge-line. The wall line should not be continued on the same plane as a “break” or a “set back” is visually far more satisfactory. Care should be taken to follow the fenestration and detailing of the original building.

S6.57 Whilst generally the character of the new should reflect that of the old there are circumstances where this may not apply. In areas where variety of materials and forms frequently provide most of the local character an extension may best be expressed by using contrasting but still vernacular materials. Where the existing building is itself of poor design an extension may provide an opportunity to enhance or screen its appearance.

DESIGN GUIDANCE – CONSERVATORIES

S6.58 This form of extension deserves separate consideration because of its widespread popularity and the poor quality of design and materials normally proposed. Designs often take the form of elaborate Victorian or Edwardian styles which rarely sit comfortably with 20th Century buildings or simpler earlier cottages or terraces. The other problem is the proliferation in the use of UPVC materials which do not exhibit the character of a well designed softwood conservatory and can create considerable incongruity with the existing building. The grand examples of conservatory design only fit happily with large detached period houses sitting in spacious grounds.

S6.59 The most acceptable form of conservatory for smaller houses should take a simple lean-to greenhouse form, be constructed of white painted softwood and with the minimum of fancy decoration. They should be modest in size in relation to the original building, carefully detailed with the minimum of architectural embellishment and sensitively sited away from the principle elevations.

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DESIGN GUIDANCE – GARAGES

S6.60 The siting and design of domestic garages and other out buildings is an issue that is often overlooked. Irrespective of size, the garage can often be designed to look like a sympathetic outbuilding.

S6.61 A double garage is more or less square in plan and lends itself to a pyramid roof in certain locations. Garages with a rectangular shape usually produce buildings of better proportions, for example. where a garage and storage facilities have been combined under one roof with open bays and side hung doors.

DESIGN GUIDANCE – BOUNDARY TREATMENT

S6.62 The design of boundary walls, fences and gates is critical to the finished appearance of most developments. Walls should be constructed with suitable bricks for the locality. They should be articulated with piers at suitable centres and capped with traditionally detailed copings. Major lengths of enclosing walls may require a plinth in order to give them visual substance.

S6.63 Frequently, walls are necessary to provide enclosure and in such cases they should be at least two metres high. Where gates are necessary in such enclosing walls, they should be close boarded in order to continue the containment.

S6.64 Where railings are required the purpose is generally to protect and give enclosure to a yard or garden which has a residential character. Such railings and the necessary gates should be traditionally detailed with spear tops, hoops or other historic forms. The railings may be raised on low brick plinth walls with stone copings