

# SECTION 1

## BACKGROUND



## 1.1 OVERALL URBAN DESIGN GOALS

### 1.1.1 Introduction

The Islington Urban Design Guide (IUDG) is a supplementary planning document that provides design principles and standards for the whole of the borough that expand and provide further detail to the core policies in the council's emerging Islington Local Development Framework (LDF), the Islington Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2002, and the London Plan 2004. The IUDG responds to the ODPM Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1), which states that planning authorities should prepare robust policies on design. The IUDG also builds upon Government advice contained in PPS1 and other guidance including Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions - 'By Design' (Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice), (refer to list of guidance in 1.4.4) and applies them to the London Borough of Islington (LBI).

### 1.1.2 Overall Objectives and the Organisation of the Guide

Urban design is about making better places. There are two underlying elements: places should be pleasing in appearance, and should function properly.

These two elements are addressed in the advice contained within PPS1:

"Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted". (Planning Policy Statement 1, para 34)

This guide has been organised in three sections. This section sets out the background to the IUDG. The other sections reflect the two aforementioned elements of urban design. Section 2 deals largely with aesthetic considerations; the need for new buildings to fit into their setting and reinforce local distinctiveness, while section 3 deals more with how the layout and organisation of places, spaces and buildings, affect the way they are used.

This guide is organised in this way for the sake of clarity; the aesthetic and functional issues nevertheless need to always be considered together. Urban design involves an integrated approach. An essential role of urban design is to make the connections and identify shared solutions that resolve various different, and sometimes competing, demands. To achieve this, it needs to be collaborative and interdisciplinary, bringing together the skills and expertise of a wide range of professionals and others. Francis Tibbalds argued the need to stand back and look at what we are producing as a whole:

"We need to stop worrying quite so much about buildings as single artefacts and think instead of places in their entirety". (Francis Tibbalds, Making People Friendly Towns: Improving the Public Environment in Towns and Cities (Longman 1992), p9)

As stated in 'By Design': (Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice) there are a number of key areas that urban design can and should address:

"It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the process for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities". (DETR - 'By Design', p8)

### Connections between People and Places

Urban design can improve human communication and activity within the public realm while respecting the need for privacy and security within the private realm. It can also make places more usable by improving the links between places and accommodating the access requirements of everyone, particularly the more vulnerable and “hard-to-reach” people.

### Community Safety

Urban design can provide many of the elements that make places feel safe. The relationship between buildings and their surrounding spaces strongly influence people’s sense of personal safety.

### Sustainability

Providing a safe, accessible and attractive environment can also contribute to a more sustainable environment.

PPS1 quotes the definition of sustainability drawn up by the World Commission on Environment and Development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. PPS1 also states that:

“Planning should facilitate and promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development by:

- protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, ..., and existing communities:
- ensuring high quality development through good and inclusive design, and the efficient use of resources.”

The mistakes of post-war redevelopment demonstrate the importance of getting the design right to help safeguard against constant renewal. Urban design analysis should also identify the potential opportunities and benefits of re-using and adapting existing buildings to meet modern needs.

### Regeneration

The economic success of an urban area is increasingly dependent on how it is perceived and remembered. Urban design has an important role in helping to deliver regeneration by creating a high quality environment and a level of activity that make people want to live, work and visit. To achieve this, all designs should be fully inclusive in their approach with the aim of addressing everyone’s accessibility requirements.

### Summary

The IUDG draws these threads together by putting forward principles and standards for new development that together aim to create safe and attractive places that are sensitive to Islington’s special character while also enabling the regeneration of the borough and allowing creative, contemporary design solutions.

It is the role of architects and designers to produce high quality designs that meet these criteria. Because of the generic nature of the guide there may occasionally be circumstances where the principles and standards do not apply. There may be a scheme, which can be considered as an exception because of its outstanding quality; particularly if it is linked to special circumstances (refer to examples on page 10). For instance, it may be justifiable because it adds to local distinctiveness in an unpredictable way by providing an element of surprise as well as delight. This also applies to public art.



The Venus House projects beyond the established building line of the terrace and has a blank frontage at ground floor level. It was accepted because it replaced an existing structure that occupied the same footprint and because of the exceptional quality of the scheme. Its idiosyncratic character helps give the street local distinctiveness.



While the horizontal proportions of the Camden Road frontage of the City and Islington School exaggerate its scale, it covers over an uninteresting 1960's facade and was accepted because of the exceptional quality of the architecture and because it works in terms of its context.



The east elevation of the same City and Islington College faces onto a triangular space close to the junction of Caledonian Road and Holloway Road. The dramatic design of the building is appropriate to its prominent location, while its fully glazed lower floors connect and provide a sense of activity to the surrounds.

## 1.2 ISLINGTON AND THE APPLICATION OF THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDE

### 1.2.1 Islington's Advantages

Islington is constantly changing. Its attractive environment and proximity to central London contribute to bring in visitors and inward investment. This translates to constant development pressures that continue to regenerate the borough.

The challenge in urban design terms is to enable regeneration by maximising development opportunities, channelling development where it is appropriate, and shaping it so that it is sensitive to the character of Islington's street environment while also being people-friendly. Getting this balance right is essential to ensure that Islington maintains itself as an attractive place to invest as well as live, work and visit. While Islington experienced a huge decline in population during the twentieth century, this decline has recently been reversed and Islington is now attracting back people and businesses.

Islington has a wealth of great architecture and the good fortune to have retained much of its original street pattern. It benefits from an historic environment with a unique townscape, individual buildings with famous past residents, cultural features such as its pub theatres and clubs, street markets and traditional craft quarters. These factors have provided the borough with an attractive street-based environment and dynamic mix of uses.

### 1.2.2 Main Commercial Centres

Like other inner London boroughs', Islington radiates out from the central area into the outlying inner suburbs approximately following the pattern of its growth along its corridors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Superimposed upon this



Islington benefits from a large number of buildings of historic and architectural merit.



Many street frontages along Islington's commercial streets are in need of attention.



Market Estate is a typical rundown post-war estate now subject to a comprehensive redevelopment that aims to address its many problems through a street-based / perimeter block scheme.



Highbury Quadrant estate is the antithesis of Islington's typical urban grain within Islington where buildings define the streets and spaces. Instead it is composed of a series of identical medium rise point blocks set in a parkland setting.



Despite not conforming to the surrounding street environment, the high quality of the Spa Field's Estates architecture is reflected in its grade 2\* listing.

are a series of historic settlements, many of which have developed in to polycentric sub-centres including important commercial nodes such as the Angel, Nags Head / Holloway Road, Archway, Kings Cross and Finsbury Park. In the south of the borough the financial centre has also been extending its boundaries. As well as being the areas of greatest activity, these areas have tended to suffer most from degradation in the quality of their physical environment during the post-war years. As these are areas that are most used by everyone, they need the greatest attention. Islington's A1 Borough project reflects the Council's commitment to this.

As long as development is sensitive to the historical fabric, most of these areas provide significant potential redevelopment opportunities to maximise their advantages (including their proximity to public transport, shops, facilities as well as jobs) and bring about regeneration in line with the objectives of the Urban White Paper. Significant redevelopment opportunities have already been taken - most notably associated with Arsenal Football Club around both sides of Holloway Road. To make lasting improvements, it is essential that quality is not sacrificed for quantity, and that future regeneration follows the principles and standards laid down in this guide as well as the Government's urban design guidance.

### 1.2.3 Post-War Residential Estates

Islington also has a number of post-war estates that suffer from high levels of deprivation. These are spread across the borough. There are nevertheless concentrated pockets, which are often close to many of the commercial centres. These include the City Fringe area (Finsbury) / Tollington (Finsbury Park) / Elthorne (near Archway) / the "Ten estates" (near Kings Cross). While there are a few estates / blocks such as Spa Fields, Bevin Court and Highbury Quadrant, which are well designed (despite not always fitting neatly into their street-based

surrounds), post-war estates are mostly characterised by their failure in design and social terms. This is often reflected in poor systems built construction; as well as their poor layout and lack of harmony with their surrounds, which have contributed to some of their social problems. Some of these estates are now the subject of urban renewal programmes that provide the opportunity to correct many of their problems and integrate these areas back into their surrounds. With reference to relevant existing policies and guidance (refer to 1.4), this guide sets out the key issues and solutions.

### 1.2.4 Pre-1939 Residential Streets

Outside the commercial centres and post war estates, most of Islington's built form is characterised by largely Victorian (as well as Georgian, Edwardian and inter-war) residential streets. These buildings are usually organised as continuous terraces of typically two, three and four storeys within a perimeter block layout. With the boom in house prices there is considerable pressure to extend and alter these residential buildings. This guide therefore sets out the standards and limits to change.

## 1.3 THE SCOPE OF THE GUIDE

The IUDG deals with design elements that fall within the scope of planning control. This includes the shape of urban spaces as they are defined by the buildings around them, as well as the use of the spaces and the relationship between pedestrian and vehicle access. This is particularly relevant for large developments which involve the creation of a new street pattern where the new roads need to be designed with consideration of both the proposed development and the surrounding urban fabric / street pattern.

The IUDG will not override listed building considerations. It does not cover detailed treatment of the spaces and streets on public

highway or open spaces, including street furniture, footway / carriageway materials and layout. This type of guidance on highway land is provided by Islington's streetscape manual, the Islington Streetbook. The treatment of private thresholds along street frontages is nevertheless dealt with in this guidance.

The IUDG complements the areas covered by the design guidelines contained in the following existing LBI planning documents: -

- Conservation Area Design Guidelines provides detailed design advice for every conservation area within Islington in addition to the principles and standards within the IUDG. These need to be considered alongside the detailed policies under section 12.3 of the UDP.
- Building Heights Planning Advice Note identifies appropriate locations for buildings that exceed the 30m UDP policy limit. It also supports a grander scale of building frontage along sections of some main streets. This responds to the London Plan's policies (4B.8 and 4B.9) on tall and large scale buildings.
- The Shopfront Guide provides advice on shopfront design.

Other key planning documents include:

- Green Construction Supplementary Planning Guidance provides advice on how to ensure greater environmental sustainability in new developments, and refurbishments / alterations to existing buildings.
- Lifetime Homes and Wheelchair Accessible Housing Supplementary Planning Guidelines.

In addition to the above there are also detailed planning briefs which the IUDG will also complement.

## 1.4 POLICY CONTEXT

### 1.4.1 The Draft Local Development Framework Core Planning Strategy

(LBI, October 2006)

Urban design is addressed mainly under the 'Quality of Life' core strategies. Building heights is dealt with under the 'Managing Growth' core strategies. Appendix 1 of the IUDG lists the most relevant policies.

### 1.4.2 The Unitary Development Plan

(LBI, June 2002)

Urban design is addressed throughout the UDP. Appendix 2 of IUDG lists the most relevant policies. As well as the policies set out in the 'Design and Conservation' chapter there are other key policies within the 'Environment', 'Housing', 'Sustainable Transport', 'Recreation and Leisure', and 'Implementation' chapters of the UDP.

There are specific UDP policies that address conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites set out in policies D19 to D47.

### 1.4.3 The London Plan

(GLA, February 2004)

#### and Supplementary Planning Guidance

The London Plan states that good design is central to all objectives of this plan. The key design policies are set out in chapter 4B – Designs on London. It focuses on the principles and the specifics of design for a compact city. The relevant supplementary planning guidance includes:

- Sustainable Design and Construction
- Housing
- Accessible London Borough of Islington
- Benchmark Standards for Play and Informal Recreation

### 1.4.4 National and Regional Guidance

Recent national and regional guidance have been taken into account when preparing this supplementary planning document. This includes the following:

#### Government Guidance

- Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) – 'By Design' (Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice).
- Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) – 'By Design' (Better Places to Live).
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) – Planning Policy Statement 1.
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) / Home Office – Safer Places (The Planning System and Crime Prevention).
- DETR – Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance. (The Urban White Paper).

#### Other Guidance

- English Partnerships / The Housing Corporation – Urban Design Compendium.
- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage – Moving towards Excellence in Urban Design and Conservation.

## 1.5 PREPARING DESIGN STATEMENTS

In line with policy D2 of the UDP, all planning applications for new development will require an urban design and access statement with photographs that explain how the proposal relates and responds to its context. The following guidelines should also be followed:

- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Planning and Access for Disabled People – A Good Practice Guide
- CABE – Design and Access Statements.
- DCLG – Design and Access Statements.
- DCLG Circular 01 / 2006.
- CABE – Inclusive Design.

The statement / drawings should normally consider: -

- The relationship of the building with the existing street frontage in terms of the massing and the articulation.
- Community safety considerations.
- The use of the building and it's internal / external layout and circulation in relation to it's surroundings.
- Private amenity considerations including daylight / sunlight / privacy.

Major planning applications for new development, which may take up to thirteen weeks to be determined, will also require a detailed urban design analysis. This should include a site analysis using scale drawings, as well as a written explanation and photographs to explain the site, the surrounding locality and how it informs the design. Its scope should be tailored to the location of the site, scale of the development and requirements of the planning controls. It should address all the relevant considerations set out in this guidance. Major applications should also show

evidence of consultation with local people and an access statement demonstrating the approach to inclusive design.

In addition to a full set of scale drawings, the following will normally be required: drawings and / or a model that convey the three dimensional form, and a bound A3 booklet with a full set of reduced scale drawings (for ease on site visits and consultations).

An access statement is a record of the process of inclusive design. Applicants are required to refer to the template in the Council's Planning website and follow Council guidance.

## 1.6 MAXIMISING AND CO-ORDINATING PROPOSALS

In line with policy Imp 6 of the UDP and policy CS1 of the LDF, the Council will, on receipt of any application for development, have regard to whether it involves an efficient use of the site or building. This should not apply only to the application site, but also its relationship with surrounding sites, and in terms of the overall opportunities to achieve an appropriate design solution.

Where there are two or more separate adjacent potential development sites, a planning / design brief will often be required. Consideration should always be given to ensuring that development is designed so that it anticipates the configuration of a future neighbouring development in terms of the standards and principles within this guidance. When the Council is aware of separate proposals on adjacent sites, it will normally require both prospective applicants to co-ordinate their design proposals.

## 1.7 SECURING DESIGN QUALITY THROUGH PLANNING CONDITIONS AND S.106

Care must be taken to ensure that the quality of a consented scheme is not compromised post planning permission. To safeguard against this, it is often important to ensure:

- All the key issues are agreed as part of the planning application, and not just deferred to condition. For instance, the success of a minimalist design may depend upon the quality and relationship of the facing materials; it will therefore be necessary to agree these details prior to the recommendation of the scheme. Alternatively, the design of a building threshold may be important in terms of community safety – if so, this should be negotiated as part of the planning application. To secure the agreed design, it will nevertheless normally also be necessary to include an appropriate condition.
- The architects responsible for the planning proposal are retained to develop the detailed design and oversee the implementation of the scheme. The quality of schemes that are progressed by another architect or, are subject to a “design and build” contract, often suffer, as the original author’s intentions can be misunderstood or, misapplied. This is even more of a problem when the client chooses not to retain any architectural expertise. Particularly on major or, idiosyncratic schemes, consideration should be given to including a section 106 agreement that secures the continuation of the original architect in the post application development of the scheme.