

## 4 The Design Process

4.1 This section outlines the process by which design proposals should evolve, through the incorporation and integration of:

1. The understanding of the character of Elmbridge and its sub-areas (summarised in section 3 and detailed in the companion guides).
2. The appraisal of the development site and its setting.
3. The generation of a design concept.

4.2 Points 2 and 3 above are introduced and illustrated through the six case studies, in section 7.

4.3 The elements of the process described in this section should prove useful for applicants and the local community, in explaining, discussing and assessing the rationale for a particular design, thus making the evolution of the design more transparent. Moreover, the process should provide a valuable basis in the compilation of a Design and Access Statement.

4.4 All the following sections give a fuller explanation of the objectives of design, which are illustrated in the case studies.

4.5 The application of this process may result in a range of possible design solutions, some innovative, others more conventional, but none of which are standardised and lacking in local distinctiveness. If closely followed, each design solution will be grounded in a demonstrably sensitive response to its site and context.

4.6 Many new developments can result in poor replicas of the past, and modern schemes can often jar with their immediate surroundings. If it is your intention to reproduce a recognised style from the past, consider the design in its entirety. Contemporary buildings can add interest to an area provided that they respect key design principles, and can deliver fine examples of 21<sup>st</sup> Century architecture. Whatever style you choose, make sure it is high quality, true to its style, and respectful of its neighbours.

## Appraising the Development Site and its Setting

Before appraising the development site and its setting, it is crucial that you understand the wider context of the settlement and sub-area. Please refer to the relevant companion guide for this part of the design process. It is important that the Design and Access Statement refers to this analysis of character.

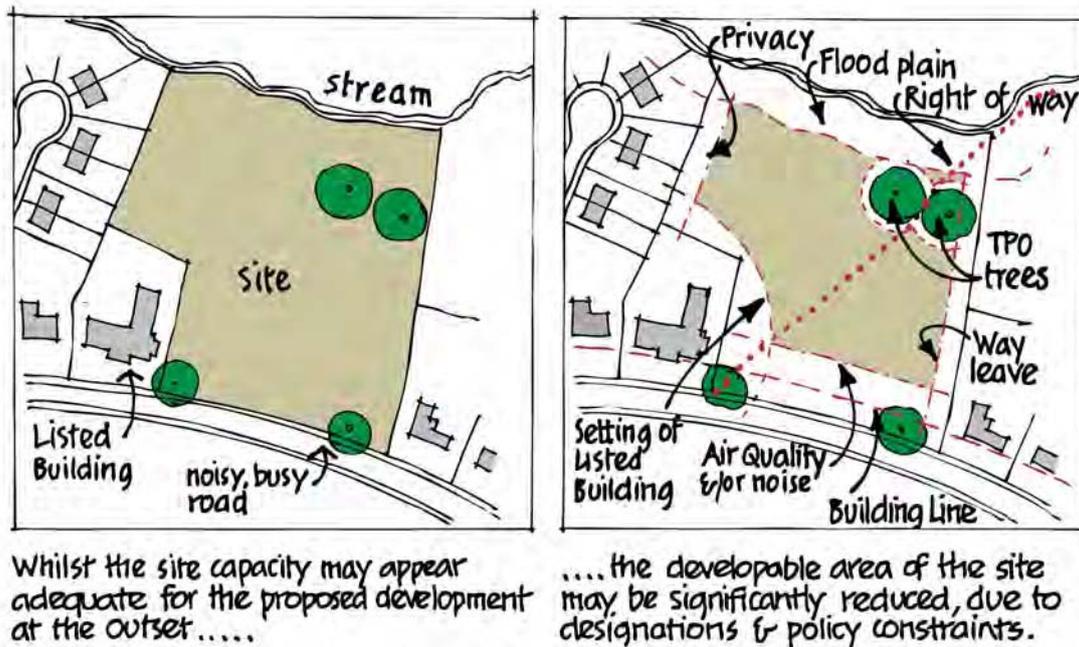
## Getting Started

4.7 Once you have understood the character of the settlement area and sub-area, it is important to evaluate the nature of the site and its setting, in order to ensure that:

1. The proposals relate sensitively to the built and landscape character and are locally distinctive
2. The land is used efficiently
3. The opportunities for renewable energy and carbon dioxide reductions are utilised
4. Biodiversity is enhanced
5. The layout of the proposal enables easy access by its users to existing facilities, services and linkage in the neighbourhood
6. Through the use of appropriate place making principles, an attractive, coherent, safe, convenient and healthy development is created

## Conducting the Appraisal

4.8 **Appraisal** means the evaluation of relevant factors on site and within the setting of the site. The use of a **SWOT** analysis (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) may help the process. Sometimes it may be helpful to add the heading 'constraint' to this list.



**Figure 4.1 Conducting the site appraisal**

**4.9** Appraisals consist of both 'desk study' research and on-location surveys.

Desk studies can include:

- the planning history of the site (to ascertain reasons for previous refusals etc)
- analysis of historic maps. This will indicate previous building uses (including potential hazards), footprints, key boundaries, lost street alignments, place names etc.
- designations covering the site or setting, e.g. Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, flood risk, nature or landscape designations, wayleaves etc).
- contour maps covering the local context
- the use of satellite imaging is also helpful in identifying tree cover (canopy spread) and nearby local facilities.

**4.10** There is no substitute for an appropriate amount of time being spent on the site and its vicinity, however much effort is expended on desk study. The notes in the following sub sections on site and setting surveys will identify typical factors for consideration. In general, these surveys should concentrate on those aspects which

cannot be ascertained fully through desk study (even by online search, e.g. 'street view' or similar).

**4.11** Factors may include; critical building and tree heights, boundary materials, condition, key views, ridges or skylines, sounds, levels of activity and change, the effect of different seasons, perceptions of safety etc.

### Local Consultation

**4.12** The Council will expect you to consult neighbours or the wider community at various points in the appraisal, explaining the background to a scheme and the development of a design. Workshops or forums could help to identify local issues and aspirations.

**4.13** It is strongly recommended that you consult with the Council at a pre-application stage in order that the aspirations of the Council in regard to the site and the proposed amount of development can be discussed. This is also a good opportunity for you to understand the validation requirements for the application as well.

### How is the setting defined?

Every setting and context is different. However, as a general guide, the setting could be defined as the area from which the site can be seen and the points from which the height of any proposed buildings could be seen, especially in relation to critical skylines or landmarks.

### Typical factors to note when appraising the setting of a site (Context Appraisal)

- **The 'grain' or structure of the surrounding streetscape:** The general size and shape of plots; the typical distance between the building frontages and the front boundary of plots (building line); the spacing (if any) between the buildings and the sides of plots; general density of development; and the typical percentage of building footprint to site area.
- **The appearance of the surrounding streetscape:** The character of the typical front boundaries e.g. 'open plan', brick walls, hedges, fences, railings. The degree of enclosure and dominance of mature trees. The sense of enclosure of the streetscape, e.g. 'open' such as greens, suburban-buildings close to or on the back edge of the pavement. Are the streets winding or geometric in layout?
- **Typical built form in the surrounding streetscape:** Range of building styles and materials, noting the predominant styles. The range of building uses and the predominant use. Note whether the context is changing in terms of building form and uses or whether this pattern is static.
- **Key views within the setting of the site:** Are there any view corridors to critical skylines, roof lines and landmarks which you should identify? Are there any

important panoramas or vistas which might be affected by proposed development and frontages of the site?

- **Linkages:** Identify the routes and distances to the nearest bus stop, railway station, shops, local facilities, primary school etc. Note where potential improvements to walking routes might be improved.
- **Roles within the street scene:** What role does the site (and existing building if applicable) play within the local street scene? (e.g. pivotal corner, terminating view, key group etc, see paragraph 5.64 onwards). To what degree should the new development reinforce this role?

### Typical factors to note when appraising the development site (Site Appraisal)

- **Site topography:** Note changes in level as these may have an influence on the layout of any built form or structures, or orientation for solar gain (it is assumed that bearing capacity, stability, risk of contamination, flood risk, underground services, wayleaves and levels, will be established through surveys).
- **Site features:** Plot accurately existing buildings, structures, walls, trees, hedges or bushes, access ways, (driveways, yards, roadways etc.). Evaluate each to assess their condition and their potential for rehabilitation and re-use. This will be essential if they are considered a heritage asset, or if they are considered as important components contributing to the positive character of the area. Even if these features are of little value in this category, it is good sustainable practice to re-use as much as is feasible.
- **Site boundaries and their sensitivity:** Plot all site boundaries, describing materials, condition and height. Additionally, note their sensitivity to overlooking and overshadowing. The heights of buildings adjacent to the site and the position of windows to habitable

rooms should be noted. Locate the existing access point(s) to the site and evaluate future levels of vehicular access. Existing gate piers or other entrance features should generally be retained where appropriate.

## Generating a Design Concept

4.14 An overall design concept should be generated prior to embarking on a detailed design scheme. This will emerge through dialogue with the community and the Council and by applying the conclusions of the site and context appraisals. The Design and Access Statement will then demonstrate how you have adopted the principles of good placemaking and sustainable development in generating a design concept and a rationale for the layout and form of development.

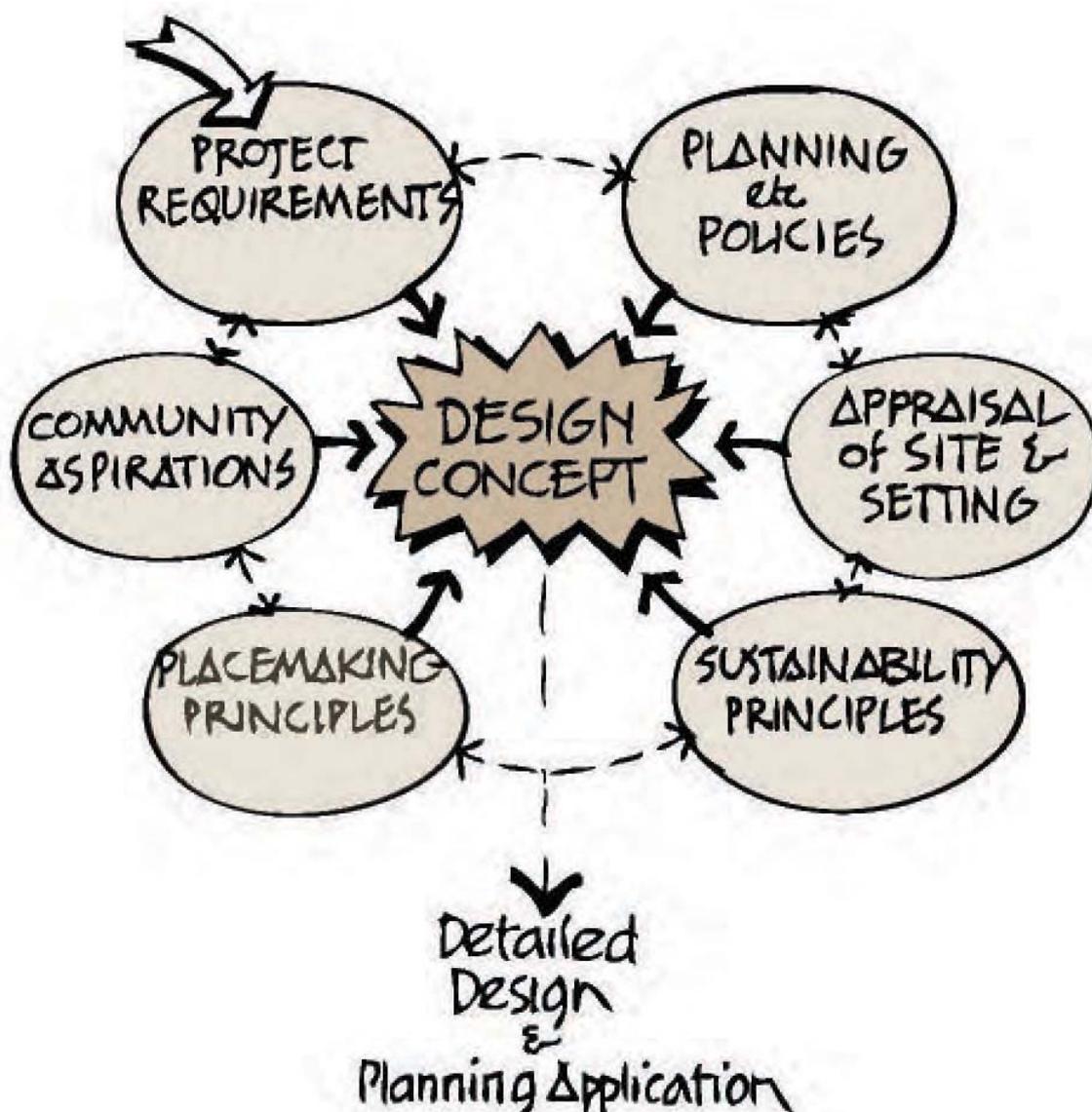


Figure 4.2 Generating a design concept