

Datchet Neighbourhood Plan

Copy for The Link, summer 2019

Why we should all care about good design

Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan team is working with urban, landscape and heritage planners to create a set of design principles for Datchet which will sit alongside the Royal Borough's new Design Guide. Alison Crampin explains

The design of buildings and spaces affects not only how a place looks, it also has an impact on our well-being. Poor-quality development and badly-designed places can contribute to poor physical and mental health and increased crime levels, while good quality design can create a distinctive, sustainable and attractive environment, and a better place in which to live and work.

Government policy now states that planning permission should be refused for poorly-designed development which doesn't take advantage of opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. Local authorities are also expected to work with local communities to develop design policies. To this end, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) has recently published a draft Borough Design Guide for consultation, the purpose of which is to improve the design quality of all new developments that need planning permission.

What is good design?

Design policies should reflect local aspirations, ensuring that any new development functions well and adds to the overall quality of an area. Well-designed developments should meet at least three basic requirements: they should be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and history; maintain a strong sense of place; and create a safe, accessible, pleasant and inclusive environment which promotes health and well-being and can be used by as many people as possible, regardless of age, gender or disability.

The Borough Design Guide seeks to prevent developments being similar and bland, lacking in local character, which undermines, rather than reinforces, a sense of local identity. It will apply to the majority of land uses and include all types of residential development, such as conversions, extensions and changes to frontages, as well as employment and retail development, and other forms of development such as recreational and infrastructure. Anyone planning any form of new development in the Borough will be expected to comply with the Guide and demonstrate how their design has addressed RBWM's four strategic themes of putting people first, creating a sense of place, delivering sustainable places, and improving quality.

Design in Datchet

The key principles laid out in the Borough Design Guide will apply throughout the Borough, to historic towns and villages as well as modern suburbs and new estates. Funding has also been secured for a Datchet Design Guide to be delivered in conjunction with Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan (DNP). This will add Datchet-specific detail to the principles set out in the Borough Design Guide and will sit alongside the DNP, the Conservation Area appraisal, and other supplementary planning documents. The intention is that any new development, big or small, extension or loft conversion, should reinforce the existing character of our village; or use cues from the local area to create a design which is sympathetic to the character of Datchet while providing a contemporary interpretation.

Local character and identity

In the DNP village-wide survey, the majority of respondents thought it was important to keep Datchet's unique character. That character comes from different elements, large and small, that collectively result in a distinct identity. These elements are principally the landscape, such as the greens, highway verges and trees, the river, open spaces and other natural elements; and the townscape which includes the connections and networks of streets and spaces; the layout, arrangement and forms of buildings and their distinctive architectural details; and the style of boundary development such as walls and railings.

The DNP team is currently working with specialist urban, landscape and heritage planners to establish good design criteria for Datchet which take account of the village's unique character. The Datchet Design Guide will add a layer of specific local detail to the Borough Design Guide, promoting high-quality design in any development throughout the village, helping to resolve some of the issues highlighted by residents on the recent DNP character assessment walks, at the drop-in day in January, and in the village-wide survey. Details of our progress will be published as they become available on the DNP website:

www.datchetneighbourhoodplan.org

((Possible illustration))



((Caption)) Datchet's Design Guide will help to ensure that new development is in keeping with local character

