

# Development Control Advice Note **8**



## Housing in Existing Urban Areas



# Development Control

## Advice Note 8

Development Control Advice Notes (DCANs) represent non-statutory planning guidance which is intended to supplement, elucidate and exemplify policy documents, including Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and development plans.

The purpose of this DCAN is to provide advice which will help to ensure that urban and environmental quality is maintained, amenity preserved, and privacy respected when proposals are being considered for new housing development within existing urban areas.

This Advice Note is not a statement of policy as to where housing development can or cannot take place. In making its decisions the Department will assess proposals against all planning policies and other material considerations that are relevant to it. The contents of this guidance will be material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals. However, any legal views expressed in this note have no statutory force and should not be relied upon as an authoritative interpretation of the law.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## A Sustainable Approach

1. Current policy at the strategic level advocates a more sustainable approach to development by promoting more housing in existing urban areas. The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) has set an ambitious target which aims to achieve 60% of housing in Northern Ireland on land within existing urban areas. The RDS states that

*“the objective ‘on the ground’ must be to achieve a significant increase in ‘brownfield’ housing in a manner which pays sensitive regard to the amenities enjoyed by those living beside proposed redevelopment and infill housing sites.”*

2. It is therefore recognised that the drive to encourage additional housing in existing urban areas must not result in town cramming and a situation where unsympathetic development is forced into established residential areas. The overriding concern in such areas needs to be the maintenance of environmental quality, local character and the privacy of existing residents.

## A Design-led Approach

3. A design-led approach to new housing in existing urban areas embraces the philosophy of working with context, and ‘fitting’ development in with the prevailing character and appearance of the neighbourhood.
4. The successful application of this approach is not dictated by standards, but involves a stronger appreciation of the surrounding context, and a better understanding of the



Enniskillen, County Fermanagh



*East Belfast*

urban design and architectural principles which underpin successful residential development. These strategic principles include location and urban structure, urban form, land use and community, and movement.

5. The following detailed design principles also need to be considered:
  - creating a safe environment;
  - clearly defining public and private space;
  - ensuring adequate privacy and daylight;
  - providing appropriate garden and amenity open space;
  - creating an attractive landscape setting;
  - responding to opportunities created by corner sites;
  - providing for enhanced public transport, walking and cycling facilities; and
  - accommodating car parking and determining the appropriate level.

### ***New Housing in Established Residential Areas***

6. Proposals for housing in established residential areas need to illustrate that they have taken the above design principles into account, clearly demonstrating an appreciation of the context, and reinforcing local character. This is particularly important in relation to:
  - building lines;
  - boundary treatments;
  - scale of built form; and
  - varied rooflines.

### ***Types of Proposals for New Residential Development in Existing Urban Areas***

7. New housing proposals in existing urban areas can take various forms including:
  - demolition and redevelopment;
  - backland development;
  - conversion/extension of houses; and
  - Living Over The Shop (LOTS).

### ***Conclusion***

8. A design-led approach to housing in existing urban areas will help to safeguard urban and environmental quality. However, it is essential that proposals for housing, particularly in established residential areas, demonstrate that they have fully appreciated the context, leading to a design which reinforces local characteristics, while preserving the residential amenity of the area and respecting the privacy of existing residents.



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# 1.0 Introduction

## *Purpose of the Advice Note*

- 1.1 The guidance given in this Advice Note is intended to assist prospective developers and their professional advisors when considering proposals for all types of housing in existing urban areas.
- 1.2 This DCAN must be read in conjunction with the relevant contents of the Department's policy publications, including Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), development plans, and the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (produced by the Department for Regional Development), as well as other published supplementary planning guidance documents.
- 1.3 This advice supersedes Development Control Advice Note 8 'Small Unit Housing - New Development in Existing Residential Areas' (1987).



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## *Structure of the Advice Note*

- 1.4 The Advice Note is divided into five parts:
  - Part 1 outlines the purpose of the guidance and sets the overall context in relation to national trends.
  - Part 2 deals with the policy context, focusing on the Regional Development Strategy and Planning Policy Statements, together with related supplementary planning guidance.



*South Belfast*

- Part 3 sets out a design-led approach to housing within existing urban areas and includes the strategic and detailed design principles which need to be taken into account.
- Part 4 focuses on new housing development in established residential areas, and highlights the importance of maintaining environmental quality, appreciating the context, and building on local character.
- Part 5 considers the different types of new residential development which can take place within existing urban areas.

## **Context**

- 1.5 Recent planning policy in Northern Ireland has reflected an international and national commitment to achieving more sustainable patterns of living. This has been reflected in the drive towards an urban renaissance, focusing on maintaining compact urban areas, maximising the use of neighbourhood resources, and creating high quality urban environments.
- 1.6 Higher density development and the re-use of derelict urban land can help to achieve a range of sustainability goals, with a more efficient use of land, the encouragement of more environmentally friendly forms of travel including walking, cycling and public transport, and a reduction in the dominance of the car. However, it is also important to recognise that sustainable development is not achieved solely by building new units, as the re-use of existing buildings is in effect the most sustainable form of development. This can include the conversion of existing buildings such as former factory premises in order to accommodate apartment development.
- 1.7 Care is therefore needed to ensure that proposals for new housing in urban areas are sustainable and result in attractive housing which is capable of meeting the needs of both current and future generations.



*Londonderry*



*Enniskillen, County Fermanagh*

## *The Need for a Balanced Approach*

- 1.8 Promoting more housing on land within existing urban areas is regarded as a sustainable way of accommodating additional urban growth. However, it is important that this takes place without town cramming, or adversely affecting residential amenity.
- 1.9 Development in existing urban areas usually involves residential intensification, and can take various forms, including:
- demolition and redevelopment;
  - backland development;
  - conversion/extension of houses; and
  - Living Over The Shop (LOTS).
- 1.10 The trend towards the provision of more housing within existing urban areas has been accompanied by increased development pressures in established residential areas. One of the main aims of this DCAN is to provide guidance which will ensure that urban and environmental quality is maintained, amenity preserved, and privacy respected when new proposals are considered for housing development in these areas.



*Lisburn, County Antrim*

## *A Design-led Approach*

- 1.11 It is important that additional housing should maintain or enhance the quality of the existing environment, and in accommodating higher densities, a design-led approach will be encouraged, rather than one that is dictated by standards. This approach requires:
- a stronger appreciation of the surrounding context;
  - a better understanding of the urban design and architectural principles which underpin successful residential environments; and
  - an integrated approach to the design of new housing which includes a planning, urban design, landscape, architecture and transport input.
- 1.12 This approach will aim to ensure that any new housing promotes urban quality, and as a result, development proposals will need to be considered in terms of their relationship to their setting, and by reference to the character of the local environment.

## 2.0 Policy Context

- 2.1 This DCAN is one of a series of publications concerned with improving the quality of new housing development as a key part of the Quality Initiative. This policy initiative was introduced in 1996 with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of good design and quality in the built environment. It requires that the Department should aim to secure a higher quality of layout and landscaping for new residential development.



*South Belfast*

### ***Regional Development Strategy***

- 2.2 The Regional Development Strategy provides a strategic planning context for planning policy and the preparation of development plans. It sets new directions to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development in the interests of future generations. The importance of development plans is recognised in terms of identifying suitable sites for housing taking into account land availability, access to public transport, and existing and proposed infrastructure both at regional and local level.
- 2.3 In order to encourage an urban renaissance and promote sustainable development, a larger share of residential development will need to be accommodated within existing urban areas. Within this context, the RDS recognises the benefits of building more housing in towns and cities, and sets a challenging regional target for the proportion of new housing to be accommodated in these locations. Over the past 25 years, the main trend in Northern Ireland has been the development of housing on greenfield sites, and during the 1990's it was estimated that the provision of housing within existing urban areas was at a level of around 25% to 30%. The Strategy seeks to double that level of



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achievement setting an ambitious regional target of 60% for the period up to 2010.

2.4 The RDS recognises that encouraging development within the existing urban area offers many advantages including:

- bringing life and vitality back to urban communities;
- stimulating the process of regeneration by renewing the urban fabric;
- encouraging the re-use of buildings as a means of reducing dereliction;
- extending the range of housing choice;
- reinforcing public transport services within towns;
- enabling residents to walk to local facilities;
- making the best use of existing infrastructure; and
- reducing the pressure for greenfield development.

2.5 Promoting imaginative and innovative forms of housing development within urban areas is also encouraged in the RDS in Strategic Planning Guideline HOU 5. This can involve promoting the densification of housing near to public transport nodes and corridors and urban centres. In established residential areas, harmonious housing is encouraged, together with an approach which is sensitive in design terms to the people in the existing neighbourhood, and to the local townscape character.

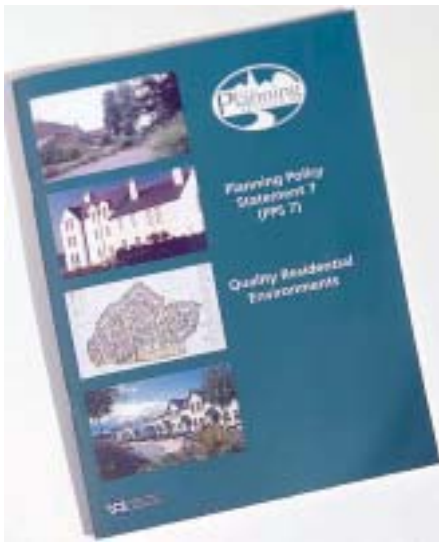
2.6 Therefore, while promoting a concerted housing drive within urban areas, the Strategy also recognises in HOU 4.2 that town cramming should be avoided. To this end, when assessing potential housing sites there is a need to:

- protect land for other purposes such as open space, employment and services;
- exercise particular sensitivity in areas of distinctive townscape character, in order to ensure that traditional character is not harmed; and
- consider public transport accessibility.

2.7 The RDS stresses that achieving an overall increase in town densities must not be interpreted as a mandate to force over-developed and unsympathetic housing schemes into established residential areas. Sensitivity is required when redeveloping existing houses and developing infill sites, and the Strategy concludes that the overriding objective has to be to avoid any significant erosion of the environmental quality, amenity and privacy enjoyed by existing residents.



*Londonderry*



PPS 7

## ***Planning Policy Statement 1 – General Principles***

- 2.8 The objectives of the Quality Initiative have been taken forward in the Department's Planning Policy Statements. PPS 1 emphasises the need for good design as a way of promoting sustainable development, and improving the quality of the existing environment, stressing that good design can secure continued acceptance of new development.
- 2.9 PPS 1 also recognises the importance of understanding the context when considering new proposals, and advocates an approach which makes positive use of the characteristics of the site's surroundings.

## ***Planning Policy Statement 7 – Quality Residential Environments***

- 2.10 PPS 7, published in 2001, seeks to achieve residential developments which promote quality and sustainability in their design and layout, and which are in harmony with their townscape setting. It applies to all developments regardless of size.
- 2.11 Within the context of the Regional Development Strategy, PPS 7 – 'Quality Residential Environments', seeks to achieve quality residential developments on both brownfield and greenfield sites.
- 2.12 This Planning Policy Statement complements the RDS, and the other PPSs mentioned in this section which are aimed at achieving attractive and sustainable places through better design. It recognises that the quality of development resides not only on the design of its parts, but also on the overall character of what is created.



South Belfast

- 2.13 PPS 7 highlights the need for residential development in urban areas to respect its immediate setting, in order to avoid a level of intensification which can adversely affect local townscape character and identity. The Department considers that analysis of context is particularly important, and emphasises that new development should seek to reinforce and evolve local characteristics that are considered to be positive and attractive.
- 2.14 In Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character, PPS 7 requires that housing proposals will maintain or enhance their distinctive character and appearance. Proposals involving intensification will only be permitted in these areas in exceptional circumstances.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 12 – Housing in Settlements***

- 2.15 PPS 12 is being prepared by the Department for Regional Development. It will provide planning policies for housing within the context of the Strategic Planning Guidelines contained in the RDS, and define the considerations to be taken into account when preparing local housing policies in development plans. This PPS will also focus on the issues associated with making better use of the existing land within settlements for housing.

### ***Supplementary Planning Guidance***

- 2.16 Supplementary guidance on how the principles of good design can be applied in practice is included in 'Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Developments' (2000).
- 2.17 The Department was also the co-sponsor of a document entitled 'Improving the Quality of Housing Layouts in Northern Ireland', which focuses on the need to adopt a more holistic design-led approach involving developers, urban designers, architects, landscape architects, planners and roads engineers.



*Carrickfergus, County Antrim*



*Well designed apartment development.  
Belfast City Centre*

## 3.0 A Design-led Approach to Housing in Existing Urban Areas

- 3.1 Making the most of opportunities for housing on sites within existing urban areas requires a more flexible approach to the application of conventional planning standards particularly in respect of density and car parking.
- 3.2 As stated in PPS 7 - 'Quality Residential Environments', the application alone of the good practice principles contained in supplementary planning guidance documents will not make fundamentally unacceptable proposals acceptable, particularly in established residential areas. Proposals should also seek to ensure that the form, density and character of any new development is in harmony with adjacent housing, and does not detract from the environmental quality, residential amenity and established character of the surrounding area.
- 3.3 A design-led approach based on strategic and detailed design principles is therefore encouraged with the emphasis on the creation of imaginative, safe and attractive housing.



*Housing which responds to the location and setting of the site.  
Enniskillen, County Fermanagh*

### *A Design-led Approach*

- 3.4 A design-led approach will help to ensure that any new development within urban areas contributes to maintaining, and where possible, enhancing urban quality. The successful application of such an approach requires:



*Mixed use development integrated with the surrounding community.  
Enniskillen, County Fermanagh*

- an appreciation of the surrounding context and setting of sites, illustrating how this informs scheme design at both the structural and detailed levels;
- an understanding of the urban design and architectural principles which underpin successful residential environments;
- an integrated approach to the design of new housing which brings together planning, urban design, landscape, architecture and transport expertise; and
- positive dialogue between developers, the Planning Service, the local community and other stakeholders, including District Councils.

3.5 The design principles for successful development in existing urban areas operate at different spatial scales, ranging from the strategic, to the neighbourhood, and then to the site and its immediate surroundings. The aim is to create housing which responds to the location and setting of the site and which is fully integrated with the surrounding community.

3.6 The rest of this section sets out advice on some of the key planning and design principles which form the basis of a design-led approach, looking first at strategic principles followed by detailed principles. It is important to recognise that these are applicable to all housing proposals in existing urban areas, and will therefore also apply to established residential areas.

## **Strategic Design Principles**

### **Location and urban structure**

- 3.7 An analysis of a site's location within the existing urban structure is the starting point in developing proposals for a site. This will involve considering the site's relationship to landscape and open space networks, to surrounding built form, movement patterns and other land uses.
- 3.8 Accessibility on foot to local shopping, leisure, education, and employment opportunities as well as to the public transport network will be important in considering the appropriate form of development, particularly in relation to development density and car parking provision.

### **Urban form**

- 3.9 A strong block structure is necessary in order to clearly define spaces, streets and routes and to provide connections with surrounding neighbourhoods, centres and established movement corridors.
- 3.10 Detailed consideration needs to be given to the appropriate

density of development and the configuration of built form in terms of the shape, height and grain of the building patterns, the use of materials, street and building lines, set backs and the space between buildings.



*Infill housing which incorporates services and facilities.  
Londonderry*

### **Land use and community**

- 3.11 Where practicable, opportunities should be taken to introduce a range of services and facilities into a development and to provide different types of housing to meet varying needs, including families, single people, the elderly and people of differing economic status.
- 3.12 This requires an assessment of the opportunities to include a mix of uses taking account of a site's location, surrounding uses and activities, market demands and the demographic characteristics of the population.

### **Movement**

- 3.13 Proposals should consider a much wider area than the site itself, and should have regard for sustainable movement patterns. Roads should be planned and designed to contribute to the overall quality of the development.
- 3.14 An analysis is needed of the opportunities for access and circulation to and through the site and for establishing direct and safe pedestrian connections to surrounding facilities and the public transport network. This should involve a consideration of the ways to improve pedestrian and cycling movement within the site, as both are important in contributing to reduced car dependency, and in achieving a more sustainable form of development.
- 3.15 Accessibility and a choice of routes are vital characteristics in promoting walking and cycling on larger sites.

### **Detailed Design Principles**

- 3.16 The strategic urban design principles provide the framework for a series of more detailed design principles. The main considerations relating to each of these principles are as follows:

#### **Creating a safe environment**

- 3.17 Residents feel safer when they are able to see the street and the activities in it. Passive or natural surveillance can strengthen the residents' governance of the street and enable a quick response to incidents. The 'see and be seen' concept can also affect the conduct of non-residents using the street. Easy access improves the residents' relationship to the street and the feeling of social connection. Through movement can provide vitality, interest, passive surveillance and opportunities for social interaction.



*Pedestrian accessibility.  
Londonderry*



*Achieving a secure environment.  
Londonderry*

- 3.18 'Secured by Design' is a UK project for promoting the principles of designing out crime from the built environment, and developers should take these principles into account when preparing development schemes.
- 3.19 The safety of residents as they move about the development is important and has been recognised by the 'Home Zones' concept. This is an idea promoted by the Children's Play Council (1999), and aims to restore streets to pedestrians and make them more sociable places to live, by removing vehicle priority, and parking, and replacing them with enhanced landscaping, street furniture and public spaces. The principles embodied in 'Home Zones' are common place in Europe and have been piloted in Belfast.

### Clearly defining public and private space

- 3.20 Housing layouts should seek to maintain a clear definition between the public or civic realm of the street and private space associated with the dwelling. Front gardens, or other forms of defensible space, of even a modest size, can provide an effective buffer to the street, particularly if car parking can be accommodated on-street, thus enabling boundaries to be articulated with walls and hedges.
- 3.21 Housing layouts should seek to achieve continuity of fronts and backs. At the neighbourhood level this arrangement provides a coherent, permeable block structure, and provides for direct pedestrian movement through a site while securing rear garden space.

### Ensuring adequate privacy and daylight

- 3.22 Distance separation, screening, window size and style, orientation and location of rooms and circulation space are some of the factors to consider in relation to ensuring adequate privacy and daylight.
- 3.23 The protection of neighbouring properties from unreasonable loss of light is a well established planning consideration, and it is also important that layouts and dwellings are planned to provide acceptable levels of daylight into interiors.



*Good provision of amenity space.  
East Belfast*

### Providing appropriate garden and amenity open space

- 3.24 Garden sizes should be appropriate to context, and the amount and nature of space provided will vary widely from generous private gardens where family houses are being developed, to balconies and communal open spaces which are associated with apartment development. While greater provision may be expected for individual houses, in the case of apartment or flat developments, and 1 and 2 bedroom houses on small urban infill sites, communal gardens will be acceptable, where appropriate management arrangements are agreed.



*Quality landscape setting.  
East Belfast*

- 3.25 The amount, location, type and design of open space provision for amenity purposes will normally be discussed with developers according to the specific characteristics of the development, the site and its context, also having regard to the Department's policy contained in PPS 8 - 'Open Space, Sport and Recreation'.
- 3.26 Therefore, whilst the Department will take a flexible approach in considering the form and amount of open space, the fundamental concerns will be to ensure that its provision is appropriate to residents needs, and is robust in its design, layout and use of materials and also that it provides for a safe and secure environment.

### **Creating an attractive landscape setting**

- 3.27 Quality landscaping both hard and soft is always important. However, the more urban a scheme, the less space that will be available for landscaping, and the greater the attention which must be paid to the landscape strategy, the choice of materials, planting and lighting.
- 3.28 In considering planning applications the Department will look to developers and their professional advisors to present imaginative and well considered landscaping proposals which contribute to the creation of a quality urban environment, a sense of distinctiveness, and which help to integrate new development into its surrounding context. However, landscaping should not conflict with the benefits of appropriate natural surveillance, create a fear of crime or lead to road safety problems.



*Well developed corner site.  
Londonderry*



*Linkage with public transport network.*

- 3.29 Developers are encouraged to work more closely with landscape architects, and conservation bodies which have an expertise in these areas. 'Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Developments', provides further supplementary planning guidance in relation to landscape design (pages 42-43) and planting (pages 106 -111).

### **Responding to opportunities created by corner sites**

- 3.30 Many potential sites will require special attention to be paid to corners, and standard off-the-shelf layouts should be avoided. Corner sites are visually prominent, have two frontages, and have potentially more entrances to different parts of the building and often therefore provide a special opportunity for mixed uses. Their landmark status should be recognised and prominent entrances incorporated.

### **Providing for enhanced public transport, walking and cycling facilities**

- 3.31 The design of the development should consider providing direct routes and access points to shorten trips by pedestrians to local facilities, such as shops, schools and public transport links. Any pedestrian routes need to be designed with safety in mind.
- 3.32 Minor adjustments to the design of a development can make a significant contribution to encouraging people to cycle, and this can include the provision of linkages to local cycle route networks.
- 3.33 Consideration of how the development would relate to public transport services, such as bus stops or train stations is also important. The development can be orientated to make access to such facilities more convenient.

### **Accommodating car parking and determining the appropriate level**

- 3.34 The amount and arrangement of car parking has an important influence on the environmental quality of new housing development. It can also have a bearing on the number and type of dwellings which can be accommodated on a site.
- 3.35 'Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Developments', sets out the Department's normal requirements for the total number of parking spaces to be provided within a development scheme (see pages 144 -151). It is important to recognise that these are Northern Ireland-wide requirements and that lower levels of provision may be appropriate in urban contexts where there is good pedestrian access to local facilities and public transport. 'Creating Places' also indicates that in special circumstances 'car-free' housing development may be possible.



*Car free housing. Londonderry*

- 3.36 Levels of parking provision below the normal requirements should be discussed with the Planning Service and Roads Service (Department for Regional Development) early in the process of scheme design. Where this option is being considered, it will be important to recognise that developments with reduced parking may have an unacceptable impact on existing on-street parking, and also on the amenity enjoyed by existing residents.
- 3.37 A reduced level of car parking provision may be appropriate where:
- a site enjoys a high level of pedestrian accessibility to local facilities and the public transport network. This is likely to include sites within 10 minutes walking distance (c. 800 metres) of a town centre or significant district centre which is well served by buses or local rail stations;
  - the townscape character of the area surrounding the site would be undermined by in-curtilage parking; or
  - car ownership among future residents is likely to be below average. This could be the case in respect of social housing or housing for elderly people.
- 3.38 It is important that discussions about reduced levels of parking provision are based on an analysis of the relevant factors, and evidence that a lower level of provision is desirable and/or necessary.



*Reduced car parking provision.  
Belfast City Centre*



*Apartments with basement car parking.  
Lisburn, County Antrim*

It may be necessary to extend this analysis to include:

- The range and quality of local facilities and public transport facilities with convenient access for pedestrians and cyclists. This should take account of access to local convenience shopping (newsagents, small food stores, cafés/take-aways, banks etc.), community services and facilities (schools, doctors, dentists, churches, playgrounds and parks etc.), as well to bus stops and train halts/stations;
- The likely level of car ownership among residents, which could include analysis of comparable schemes (including evening and day time surveys) or a survey of future residents where they can be identified in advance (for example, by a Housing Association); and
- Sketch layouts showing the options for accommodating parking. These allow the merits of different amounts and arrangements of parking to be evaluated.

3.39 Such analyses will help to determine if the Department's normal standards can be reduced. In some areas with very good accessibility, for example, a main arterial route, the reduction could be substantial, while in other cases the reduction could be more marginal.

3.40 The Department's approach will be to ensure that the level of parking provided is realistic, adequate for resident's needs without compromising those of existing residents in the vicinity and that its arrangement on site is convenient and safe for users. Car parking also needs to be environmentally friendly without adversely affecting amenity.

### ***Different options for accommodating car parking***

#### **Communal and grouped surface parking**

3.41 Surface level parking courts are a common approach to parking for higher density apartment-development. They provide greater flexibility in accommodating variations in car ownership across households, including the changing pattern of car ownership as residents move through different stages of the family and car ownership cycle.

3.42 Provision for car parking should be broken up into a number of smaller areas, instead of one large car park, and it should be well integrated into the landscape strategy for the development.

3.43 Communal parking can also enable traditional boundary treatments such as walls, hedges and fences to be incorporated so providing a clear definition between the civic space of the street and the private realm of the dwelling. It is preferable for car parking to be located in an area within view of residents and which will benefit from appropriate natural surveillance.



*Rear courtyard car parking.  
South Belfast*

- 3.44 Rear parking courts can provide for a strong street frontage with unobtrusive parking behind. However, rear parking courts have often become a source of nuisance and danger and the Department would need to be convinced about the robustness of this approach in the context of the particular site and the proposed housing development.

### On-street parking

- 3.45 On-street parking can be associated with inconvenience and nuisance. However, if properly designed into the road layout, it can be a good way of accommodating parking for terraced, semi-detached houses and town houses, as it is convenient, efficient, benefits from surveillance of people using the street and allows for traditional boundary treatments.
- 3.46 In new developments, on-street parking bays can be incorporated into the overall width of the street, and can be demarcated with paving, trees and planting.



*Semi-basement car parking.  
Belfast City Centre*

### Basement parking

- 3.47 Basement parking may be an appropriate parking strategy for higher density apartment development in areas of high land values. This can create space for landscaping and enable a higher density of development to be achieved.
- 3.48 The design of basement car parks requires careful attention to ensure that they are safe to use and that they do not have a negative impact on the street scene at ground level. A common problem is the creation of dead or even hostile frontages at street level where parking is accommodated in a 'semi basement'.
- 3.49 Surface parking underneath a raised ground floor can create the same effect to an even greater extent and effectively removes life from the street. Where the parking areas are open and unsupervised, a threatening and unpleasant environment can be created. Such an approach will not be acceptable.

### Dedicated parking

- 3.50 Dedicated parking requires a higher absolute level of parking provision than communal parking, because it does not provide the same flexibility towards variations in car ownership. However, it can be an appropriate approach particularly for detached and semi-detached houses in generous plots where parking takes place on driveways screened from the road by walls and hedges.
- 3.51 In more urban contexts such as with semi-detached, terraced and town houses, dedicated in-curtilage parking can reduce the parking capacity of the street, breakdown the distinction between civic and private space and reduce

the opportunities for landscape and greenery. In particular, the tendency for some standard town house types to incorporate an integral garage at ground floor level can create a dead frontage effect and remove life from street level. Such space could be better used to provide additional living accommodation.

- 3.52 It is important to ensure that the design of screen walls and hedges to frontages do not limit appropriate natural surveillance.
- 3.53 As stated earlier, the design principles outlined in this section apply to all proposals for housing in existing urban areas, including established residential areas which provide the focus for the following section.



*Town houses with integral garages.  
East Belfast*

## 4.0 New Housing in Established Residential Areas

### *Maintaining Environmental Quality*



*New housing integrated into the established urban environment.  
South Belfast*

- 4.1 Adaptation to changing circumstances and demands is a recurrent theme in established residential areas, and these processes of change are important in ensuring that contemporary demands are met, enabling continued investment in and maintenance of the built stock. However, change needs to be managed carefully in these areas, to ensure that the quality of the residential environment is at least maintained, if not enhanced.
- 4.2 The balance between recognising the need for change, and the need to protect established quality is particularly important in suburban areas dating from the Victorian and Edwardian periods. In these instances, not only is the quality of the urban environment typically high, but the demands for development are also often very strong, encouraging developers to seek to maximise the amount of floor space which can be accommodated on any given plot.



*Quality established residential area.  
East Belfast*

- 4.3 Increased pressure for development has threatened the established character and quality of many mature residential neighbourhoods, and in these areas the acceptability of intensive development will depend on more than just good design. Policy QD 1 in PPS 7 - 'Quality Residential Environments', states that

*'in established residential areas proposals for housing development will not be permitted where they would result in unacceptable damage to the local character, environmental quality or residential amenity of these areas.'*



*High density development resulting in a loss of garden space.  
South Belfast*

4.4 The successful integration of new housing in established residential areas requires very sensitive urban design, landscape and architectural approaches. This is necessary in order to avoid the prospect of eroding, or even destroying, the character and qualities which make an area an attractive place to live and visit. The approach taken should:

- maintain and where possible enhance environmental quality;
- respect the privacy and preserve the amenity of existing residents;
- reinforce the character and qualities which make an area an attractive place to live and visit;
- ensure good practice principles in the design of buildings and landscaping of surroundings; and
- aim to provide a safe and secure environment.

4.5 A failure to take the above factors into account can often result in new housing in established residential areas adversely affecting environmental quality in various ways.

4.6 For example, intensifying the scale and massing of buildings can lead to a loss of valued open garden spaces along with mature trees and shrubs. When combined with the impact of ancillary facilities including car parking and refuse storage, such intensification of development, if unchecked, may undermine the qualities that attract people, and important parts of the built heritage could be damaged beyond repair.

4.7 It is also important that full account is taken of the potentially damaging effect of cumulative changes in a neighbourhood, by which individual proposals, although not detrimental in isolation, could be judged to be detrimental when considered alongside other recently approved development.

4.8 In established residential areas, development proposals will therefore need to be considered in terms of their relationship to their setting, and should respect the physical, social and environmental context.

### ***Appreciating the Context***

4.9 While good design is important, it is only one of several factors which needs to be addressed when considering new development proposals in established residential areas. In line with PPS 7

*‘the Department considers that an analysis of context is particularly important for infill housing, backland development or redevelopment schemes in established residential areas.’*



*Making a positive contribution to the surrounding streetscape.  
Londonderry*



*Development tailored to the local context.  
South Belfast*

4.10 The Planning Service will want to see that the character and surroundings of the site have informed the development proposals. Any proposals for housing development within established residential areas must therefore be based on a sound understanding of the characteristics of the existing residential environment. Planning Service will expect applicants and designers to carry out an appraisal of the local context, which takes into account the character of the surrounding area.

4.11 New development should respect the architectural, streetscape and landscape character of the area, and follow the established character in terms of:

- the set backs of properties from the street;
- the treatment of boundaries, both hard and soft;
- the landscape structure and the presence of trees;
- the scale of buildings, particularly in terms of height and massing when viewed from the street;
- the articulation of the roof and building lines; and
- the architectural detailing and use of materials.



*Appreciating the local residential environment.  
East Belfast*

4.12 As referred to in Section 3, these requirements demand a design-led approach tailored to the local context, and the particular circumstances of the individual site and its surroundings. The use of standard house or apartment types will rarely provide an acceptable design solution. A key consideration is the need to respect the privacy of the occupants of residential properties, which are adjacent to the proposed development. A sensitive approach is also required in terms of highway design and the siting of car parking areas.



*Sensitive development  
in a Conservation Area.  
Londonderry*

## Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character

4.13 Development plans may include specific policies for the control of housing particularly in areas which display a distinctive townscape character. In some established residential areas, additional protection is afforded through designations such as Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character. As stated in Policy QD 1, PPS 7-‘Quality Residential Environments’, in the primarily residential parts of these designated areas, proposals involving intensification of site usage or site coverage will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Listed buildings and their settings also enjoy specific protection in the policies which are contained in PPS 6, ‘Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage’.

## Building on Local Character

- 4.14 In addition to the strategic and detailed design principles considered in the previous section, additional advice needs to be followed to ensure that any development and change builds on, and respects the character of established residential areas. PPS 7, states that the Department will need to be satisfied that unacceptable harm will not be caused to local character, environmental quality or residential amenity when new housing proposals are being considered in established residential areas.
- 4.15 The pattern of streets and spaces, the building materials used, and the landscaping all help to determine the character and identity of an area. Developers can help to build on this character, by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development and culture.
- 4.16 New development in established residential areas should maintain and where possible enhance the features which together provide these areas with their own local character. Some of the key characteristics which contribute to the distinctive identity and townscape of established residential areas are set out below.



*New housing which retains the  
building line and contributes to  
local character.  
North Belfast*

## Building lines

- Set backs from the building line of the street help to contribute to the urban character of an area. In some instances there is no definitive building line with housing on the edge of the footpath. While in other cases a distinctive building line exists, for example, in areas of late Victorian and Edwardian housing where set backs tend to be more generous and are associated with significant soft landscaping.

## Boundary treatments

- Boundary treatments are important in articulating the distinction between the civic space of the street and the private realm of the dwelling. They often consist of existing trees and hedgerow planting which contribute to amenity value and are essential to the character of the area.

## Scale of built form

- The local pattern of streets and open spaces helps to determine the character and identity of the area. In addition, the footprints of existing buildings, and the relationship of the scale of buildings to gardens and open space exert an important influence on the character of an area.

## Varied rooflines

- Historically rooflines have contributed to the character of townscape, and a diverse roofline with a variety of pitches can be considered to improve the richness of the townscape.



*Building on local character and identity.  
Caledon, County Tyrone*

## ***Protecting the characteristics which contribute to local character***

- 4.17 The local character of an area evolves from a combination of the above characteristics, and it is important that where possible, when new development occurs, care is taken to ensure that these characteristics are protected.



*Fitting in with the local context.  
Holywood, County Down*

### Retaining building lines

- Retaining the building line is an important way of maintaining the character of the area. Sometimes new housing schemes are designed around considerations of vehicular access and circulation and this can leave a 'gaping' hole in the established street scene, impacting on the character of the area. A different approach to road layout can maintain the existing building line and landscape structure of the street.
- Most urban housing benefits from a set back which provides an adequate buffer zone to the street and is capable of accommodating suitable frontage planting, or providing defensible space. It will not, however, normally be sufficient to accommodate in-curtilage parking.

### Protecting boundary treatments

- Boundary treatments can have an important influence on local character, and should be retained where possible, in order to protect the surrounding street character.
- Well-designed walls or railings, and planting, can be used to mitigate the detrimental visual impact of cars and dustbins.

### Respecting the scale of built form

- Care should be taken to respect the 'footprints' of existing development. As stated in PPS 7, paragraph 4.9, intensifying the scale and massing of buildings in established residential areas can adversely affect local character.
- A plan and section of the scale of proposed buildings can demonstrate a sympathetic fit to the surrounding neighbourhood.
- New proposals usually show building heights sympathetic to neighbouring properties, but this does not preclude the identification of places for taller buildings to provide landmark legibility or for lower buildings to respect existing important structures or land forms.
- Large single span buildings tend to be out of scale with existing housing forms, and can produce roofs with a high visual impact.

4.18 It is essential that proposals demonstrate that they have considered the local context, in relation to both positive and negative characteristics, the aim being to build on local character. Any proposal, which departs significantly from the local context, must demonstrate that it does so for good design reasons.

## 5.0 Types of Proposals for New Residential Development in Existing Urban Areas

- 5.1 New housing proposals in existing urban areas can take various forms including the demolition and redevelopment of existing houses; development on backland plots; the conversion and extension of existing houses; and utilising opportunities for Living Over The Shop (LOTS).
- 5.2 In general, the Department will look more favourably at proposals for the sympathetic re-use of existing buildings as compared to proposals involving demolition and re-development. Proposals for redevelopment will need to be carefully justified in terms of their relationship to surrounding buildings, landscape and streetscape. All new housing proposals will require careful appraisal in terms of their effect on the character of the area and on the privacy and amenity of residents.
- 5.3 There are different design issues which need to be addressed when considering the various types of new housing proposals which can be made in existing urban areas.



*Redevelopment incorporating existing factory premises.  
Londonderry*



*Demolition and redevelopment of a corner site. East Belfast*

## **Demolition and Redevelopment**

- 5.4 Demolition and redevelopment of existing houses presents the greatest challenge in terms of retaining the character and integrity of the established street scene. Without great care and attention to detail in terms of the siting of buildings, their massing and architectural treatment, the use of materials and the maintenance of the existing landscape, there is a danger that redevelopment schemes will detrimentally affect the quality and character of the residential environment.
- 5.5 Particular attention needs to be taken over the design of the new road access and its relationship to the street. An imaginative approach is needed which considers the whole character of place including enclosure, landscape treatment and the sequence of spaces within the development.
- 5.6 Redevelopment is generally the least attractive option for residential intensification. The Department will need to be convinced that redevelopment is preferable to conversion (and extension); that the quality of the proposal is sufficiently high to maintain or enhance the established environmental quality of an area; and that there is no undue impact on the privacy and amenity of adjacent residents.



*Backland development which respects local context. Ballymena, County Antrim*

## **Backland Development**

- 5.7 There is the potential in appropriate circumstances to integrate new residential development into backland areas to produce a high quality residential environment. However, to be successful, there are a number of important design principles that should be followed. The study of 'Sustainable Residential Quality' (London Planning Advisory Committee, 1998) identified a number of key principles which are reproduced here. The proposals should:

### **i) relate to a site which has appropriate plot depth and configuration**

A fundamental requirement for successful backland development is for the backland plot to be of sufficient depth to accommodate new housing in a way which provides a quality residential environment for new and existing residents.

Backland development on plot depths of less than 80m is unlikely to be acceptable, except where the existing urban grain is very urban in character, and where careful design can overcome concerns of overlooking and day lighting.

### **ii) be of a form and scale which respects the local context**

It is important to ensure that new development respects the scale and density of existing development. In general the



*Access to backland development impacting on streetscape. East Belfast*

scale and massing of new housing in backland areas should not exceed that of the existing dwellings fronting the surrounding streets.

### **iii) achieve a coherent and legible form**

A coherent form is important for all new development, however, it will be different for backland schemes with through access and those without. A through access will effectively sub-divide a large perimeter block into two smaller blocks thus maintaining legibility. Where the development is effectively a cul-de-sac, buildings will be most legible when they are organised into crescents, clusters and squares.

### **iv) integrate existing landscape features**

Where trees or landscape features form part of a backland plot, the design should seek to retain these and integrate them into the new development.

### **v) provide a residential aspect onto the new road**

New residential development should seek to reinforce the existing organisation of the fronts and backs of the dwellings. It should also seek to organise aspects to increase street overlooking where this is deficient.

### **vi) take care over the integration of the existing and new landscapes and streets**

The threshold between the new development and surrounding streets requires very careful attention. The aim must be to achieve continuity in design and character in terms of both the streetscape and landscape. It should not simply be seen as an add-on or solely a road engineering issue.



*Backland development achieving continuity in design and character. Ballymena, County Antrim*

## **Conversion/extension of Houses**

5.8 In considering proposals for the conversion of houses into apartments the Department will need to be satisfied both that the individual dwellings are appropriate for conversion; and that the conversion provides good quality accommodation, respecting the character of the area and the amenity of the residents. While offering a sustainable option, the conversion of large houses can have a negative impact on the local character, the amount of amenity space, and on the privacy of adjoining residents, as a result of increased density, overlooking, and the need for additional car parking.

5.9 In terms of the design, all main living rooms and bedrooms should enjoy natural light and a pleasant outlook, although internal 'core' kitchens and bathrooms can be acceptable



*Successful conversion of large house into apartments.  
South Belfast*

subject to suitable mechanical ventilation. Proposals must also demonstrate satisfactory arrangements for access.

5.10 The conversion of houses into apartments can result in an increased demand for car parking, especially where apartments are occupied by households with a high level of car ownership. The arrangement of this parking provision is a crucial factor in securing the success of any conversion scheme. A number of objectives need to be reconciled. These include the need:

- to provide sufficient parking to meet the needs of residents and visitors;
- to ensure that parking spaces are safe and conveniently located for users, and if possible within view of residents in order to benefit from natural surveillance. It is also important that landscaping should not limit natural surveillance;
- to ensure that the impact of car parking provision on the street scene is kept to a minimum and that parking areas are well landscaped and screened;
- to ensure where car parking is located to the rear of a proposed development, it does not result in an unacceptable reduction in residential amenity as a result of noise and increased activity; and
- to acknowledge that a situation could be eventually reached where there is no remaining on-street parking.



*Conversion with car parking provision.  
Lisburn, County Antrim*

- 5.11 These objectives need to be considered together in relation to each conversion project.
- 5.12 The options for accommodating parking will include on plot (either to the front or rear of the property) on-street, or



*Conversion with in-curtilage car parking reducing the need to park on-street.  
South Belfast*

some combination of these options. The optimum solution will depend on the dimensions of the plot (particularly in relation to front of plot provision), the presence of mature trees, which should be retained, and the capacity of the street to accommodate on-street car parking.

- 5.13 Where parking is to be provided off-street within the front garden of a dwelling, careful consideration must be given to the retention of mature and semi-mature trees (these will need space to gain maturity), and the use of planting and walls or fences to screen the parking areas. Care should also be taken to ensure that screen landscaping does not limit natural surveillance.
- 5.14 The loss of significant vegetation to accommodate car parking will make a proposal unacceptable, as it can significantly diminish environmental quality.



*Conversion which harmonises with adjacent properties.  
South Belfast*

- 5.15 Dwellings with smaller frontage areas provide the greatest challenge. In such cases, there is a real danger of replacing the front garden with a harsh car parking area, which is highly damaging to the integrity of the street. Proposals, which would result in the loss of established boundary treatments and the creation of extended areas of hardstanding will not be acceptable.
- 5.16 In appropriate circumstances, on-street parking provision can provide a solution in maintaining the integrity of the street and in providing parking which is flexible in terms of meeting changing resident and visitor demands.

However, the potential for on-street parking will depend on the dimensions of the street, the availability of surplus street capacity and road safety considerations.

5.17 In considering applications for conversion and extension of large houses the Department will need to be satisfied that any extension will:

- harmonise with the existing dwelling in scale, style and the use of materials;
- not be detrimental to the amenities of adjoining properties, particularly in terms of privacy and their right to light;
- not overdevelop the site in terms of mass or density, as this can contribute to the loss of character of existing residences;
- retain an acceptable proportion of amenity space to the built form.

5.18 Where proposals include the conversion of the loft space, careful design is needed to ensure that the introduction of dormer windows or mansards does not introduce a discordant and intrusive element into the street scene and roofscape. In general neither dormers nor mansards should be introduced to the front of properties, unless there is an established tradition of such features in the street.

### *Living Over The Shop (LOTS)*

5.19 Living Over The Shop can make a small but valuable contribution to the promotion of high-density development. However, such forms of mixed use do not suit all tenants (e.g. families and special needs groups).



*Successful provision of residential accommodation over shops.  
Londonderry*

# APPENDIX 1

## *Need for Equality Impact Assessment*

### *Development Control Advice Note 8 (DCAN 8)*

#### *Housing in Existing Urban Areas*

1. DCAN 8 was initially included by the Department in the Equality Scheme which was approved by the Equality Commission on 8 February 2001. At that stage, the DCAN was entitled 'Small Unit Housing', and it was judged that the contents could possibly have a differential impact on the following Section 75 groups:
  - persons with dependants and persons without;
  - men and women generally;
  - persons of different ages; and
  - persons of different marital status.
  
2. When preparing the draft for public consultation, the Department rescreened the document, and concluded that there would be no significant implications for equality of opportunity or community relations arising from the contents of the DCAN. Therefore, it was considered that an Equality Impact Assessment was not required.
  
3. The Public Consultation Draft was widely circulated, and was sent to representatives of the nine Section 75 groups. However, only one respondent raised the subject of the Equality Impact Assessment. Transport 2000, the National Environmental Transport body, felt that with the exception of provisions for the private car, accessibility and transport issues had been under represented in the draft document, and that this could have an adverse impact on some of the Section 75 groups. However, issues relating to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport have been more fully addressed in the final version of the document. It is considered that the points raised by Transport 2000 are of a general nature, and do not alter the decision not to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment.

## APPENDIX 2

### *New TSN Implications*

#### *Development Control Advice Note 8 (DCAN 8)*

##### *Housing in Existing Urban Areas*

1. New TSN is a Government initiative aimed at identifying people and areas in greatest need and seeking to ensure that programmes and policies are more effectively targeted to address this disadvantage.
2. The planning guidance contained in Development Control Advice Note entitled 'Housing in Existing Urban Areas' (DCAN 8) is intended to supplement the Department's existing published planning policies for housing development in Northern Ireland.
3. The DCAN is not in itself a policy document, and as such it will not directly influence the zoning of land. It seeks to inform consideration of matters of detail in relation to planning applications for new housing in existing urban areas. These applications can relate to any urban location in Northern Ireland.
4. When publishing the consultation draft of the DCAN, the Department did not consider that the Advice Note would have any implications for targetting any financial or other Government resources to specific people or areas. It has also been concluded that there are no New TSN implications associated with the publication of the final version of the DCAN.

## APPENDIX 3

### *List of Development Control Advice Notes*

- No. 1 Amusement Centres (1983)
- No. 2 Multiple Occupancy (1983)
- No. 3 Bookmaking Offices (1983)
- No. 4 Restaurants, Cafés and Fast Food Outlets (2002)
- No. 5 Taxi Offices (1983)
- No. 7 Public Houses (1983)
- No. 8 Housing in Existing Urban Areas (2002)
- No. 9 Residential and Nursing Homes (1987)
- No. 10 Environmental Impact Assessment - Revised (1999)
- No. 11 Access for People with Disabilities (1991)
- No. 12 Planning Controls for Hazardous Substances 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (2000)
- No. 13 Crèches, Day Nurseries and Pre-School Playgroups (1995)
- No. 14 Telecommunications Prior Approval Procedures - 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (2000)
- No. 15 Vehicular Access Standards - 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (1999)

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