

6. Urban Design Guiding Principles

This Section sets out guidance on the design of the built form within the Town Centre and needs to be read alongside Section 5, which provides guidance on design within the Public Realm. The Masterplan aims to achieve new development of the highest quality in terms of architecture and the quality of the public realm. New development must be sympathetically designed to ensure that it builds on the distinctive character and sense of place within the Town Centre, and protects environmental assets wherever possible. Best practice in the implementation of energy efficiency and sustainability in built development is encouraged.

All applications for development within the Town Centre will be expected to follow this guidance. The Masterplan and Urban Design Action Plan adopts the methodology set out within the DETR / CABE report 'By Design (2000)' as the basis for providing key guiding principles for achieving high quality development, Developers must also refer to "Leading in Design – A Development Guide for the Borough of Charnwood", which has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document by the Council (2005). "Leading in Design" supports the key design policy of the Charnwood Local Plan (EV/1) and explains the importance that the Council places on good design.



Old Magistrates Court

Its aims are to encourage high quality, sustainable developments which:

- **Are appropriate to their context in respect of scale and compatibility with their surroundings;**
- **Secure positive improvements to the landscape, biodiversity, streetscape or place where they are located;**
- **Create safe environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime do not undermine quality of life;**
- **Encourage strong and positive relations between people from different backgrounds within neighbourhoods;**
- **Make efficient and prudent use of natural resources; and**
- **Address the needs of all in society.**



Reel Cinema



Former Towles Factory

A significant portion of the Town Centre and adjacent suburbs are covered by Conservation Area designations (see plan 18). All applications for development within the Conservation Areas will be expected to respond to the Council's adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisals.

Furthermore the Council will require all planning applications to be accompanied by Design and Access Statements. In the statements applicants should demonstrate a clear understanding and sensitive response to the characteristics of the site and the context. No two places are identical and there is no such thing as a blueprint for good design. Good design arises from a thorough and caring understanding of place and context. Applicants will also need to demonstrate to the Council that the guiding design principles in the Masterplan and 'Leading in Design' have been considered and fulfilled. If they do this, determination of the application should be speedier by avoiding the need for modifications. If they fail to do this, however, their designs are likely to be unacceptable and refused planning permission.

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The Character of Loughborough

Loughborough is an historic town, which has grown from an early settlement, first mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086, in the vicinity of the medieval Parish Church. Documentary evidence shows the steady growth, into the sixteenth century, of a merchant and trading town second only to Leicester in the County. Unfortunately apart from the Parish Church and the Old Rectory, which are both stone buildings, and a handful of nearby timber-framed buildings, all now encased in brick or render, little obvious evidence of the Town's built heritage prior to the early nineteenth century remains.

The opening of the Soar (1777) and Leicester (1794) Navigation Canals, linking the town to Leicester and Nottingham, encouraged further growth related to the mechanised hosiery and lace manufacturing industries. The period of growth that ensued, however, was short and is poorly reflected in the few examples of Georgian architecture that remain today. The town was then more or less static until 1870 when the first piped water supply was laid and encouraged the town's industries to flourish and expand and the population to expand significantly. As a consequence much of the townscape dates from the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Surrounding the Town Centre the majority of the residential streets were developed at this time in the form of terraces built in local red brick with roofs of Welsh slate.

A major programme of Town Centre street improvements undertaken by the Loughborough Corporation between 1928 and 1932 resulted in further significant new development. The buildings of this period are beginning to be recognised as a distinguished and valuable part of the town's character; particularly notable being the number that display a wealth of Art Deco decoration and style.

To the casual observer, however, Loughborough might appear to be a very ordinary town where the contribution of centuries of building is limited, and examples of outstanding buildings appear few and scattered. The natural landform provides no features of interest and the Charnwood Forest to the west is too remote

to add variety to the urban scene. The canal skirts the outer edge of the Town Centre and makes little obvious contribution to the townscape. The flatness of the Town Centre ensures that no single feature plays a dominant part in the townscape. The tower of All Saints Parish Church is modest in scale. Even the Carillon Tower, which is 150ft high, is not visible from the nearby Market Place.

Nonetheless Loughborough does have a sense of place, an individual character and a cultural diversity, that makes it an interesting, lively and distinctive town. Despite first impressions, the town's dynamic nature is reflected in a diverse heritage of quality buildings, the most obvious being the ancient stone and timber-framed buildings, with distinctive Swithland slate roofs, collected around the medieval Parish Church. More general but less obvious are the worthy facades of Victorian and Edwardian buildings, displaying fine craftsmanship and richness of detail and texture in local brick, terracotta, occasionally dressed stone and with Welsh slate roofs. The 1920s and 30s buildings add spice to the mix, most notably the Art Deco facades which display the use of faïence, exotic decoration, geometric style and refreshing colours.

A very significant characteristic is that this varied and lively collection of buildings defines a Town Centre that has changed very little in shape over the centuries. The "four fair streets with market" referred to by Leyland in 1539 probably represents High Gate (High Street), Baxter Gate, Wood Gate, Pinfold Gate and Church Gate linking the Market to the oldest core of the town around the Parish Church. The town is very fortunate that the historic sequence of public spaces from Bedford Square and Wards End through Devonshire Square, the Market Place and Church Gate to the churchyard, with secondary spaces such as Ashby Square, has been preserved almost in its entirety. These spaces have sufficient formal quality to be locally unique and memorable. Outside this key sequence of spaces, for reasons largely related to the needs of the car, the design of later twentieth century development has sometimes led to the loss of historic street patterns. As a result the intricate grain of some parts of the Town Centre has been lost and the locally distinctive character has been eroded.



Art Deco building, Market Street



Leicester Road



Limehurst House

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Distinctiveness – A Town Centre with its own identity

A key design objective of the Masterplan is the promotion of character in townscape and landscape by responding to, and reinforcing, the locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture. New development should enrich the qualities of the Town Centre.

In promoting and protecting local distinctiveness the Masterplan will apply the following principles:

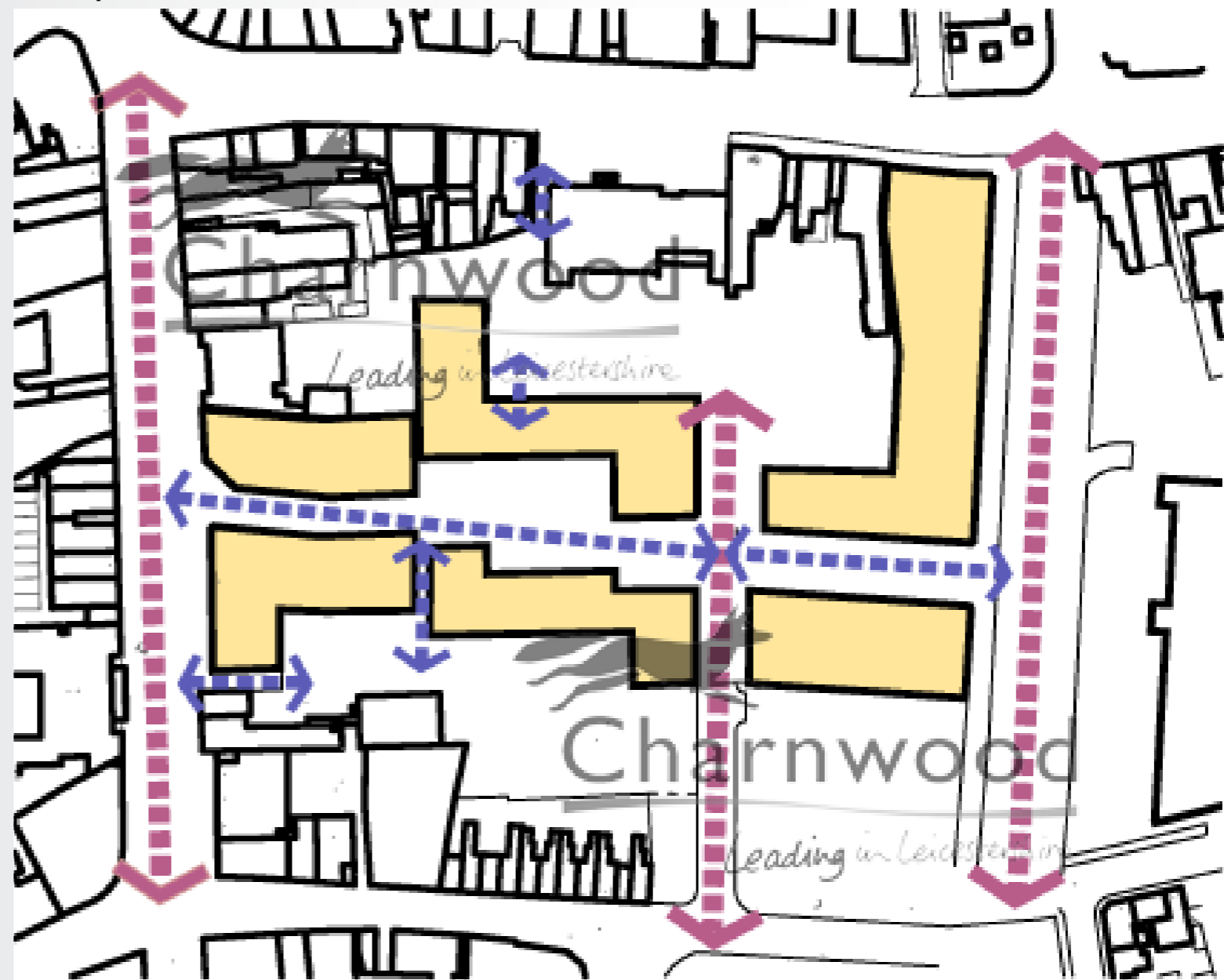
- To ensure high quality in urban design, architecture and landscape design, developers and property owners commissioning development proposals within the Town Centre should ensure that their schemes are prepared by appropriately skilled and experienced designers.
- A high quality design will be sought using layout, form, scale, massing, detailing and materials in the design of buildings and external spaces appropriate to the character of the street, place and Town Centre in general. Design inspiration should be sought from the particular local materials, building forms and features of character within the Town Centre.
- There will be a presumption in favour of retaining buildings and open spaces of quality and marrying them into new development.
- New development should respect the historic street patterns, intricate grain and vertical and horizontal rhythms (e.g. the building widths, the proportion and scale of windows and doors etc.) of the Town Centre. Opportunities to repair street pattern and grain where this has been lost should be exploited.

- **Adjacent building heights, roofs and cornice lines should be respected and development should generally respect the two to four storey scale of the traditional Town Centre, with buildings located at the back of pavement. Single storey street facades within the Town Centre will be unacceptable.**

Fig 2 Links through spaces

Key

- vehicular
- pedestrian
- development

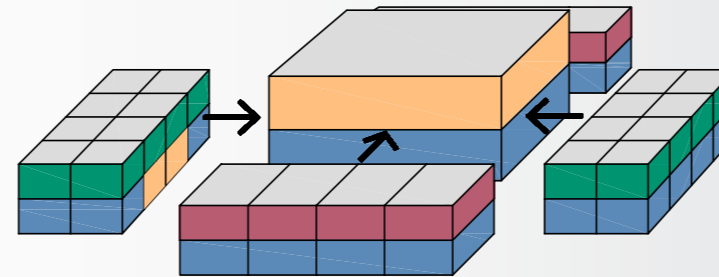


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- Outside the key facades onto the Bedford Square/Parish Church axis, including Granby Street, Market Street, High Street and Baxter Gate, restrictions on building height can be relaxed and areas adjoining the Inner Relief Road in particular are considered suitable for higher development.
- Any proposal for a high building within the Town Centre, however, will be subject to careful consideration of its effect on the key and local landmarks identified in the Masterplan, its impact on the skyline, the quality of its architecture and the particular relationship to adjacent buildings and spaces, existing and proposed.
- Relationships between developments of different scales may be resolved by ‘wrapping’ large spaces with smaller buildings; ‘stepping’ a large mass down to its neighbour; and ensuring that the ground level is as active and interesting as possible. Where ‘stepping down’ is adopted the change in height should arise out of the requirements of the designer’s brief and should avoid a lop-sided appearance in the new building which merely emphasises the difference in height between it and the neighbouring building.
- Developments should be designed to have ‘active’ frontages, which add interest, life and vitality to the public realm. This includes frequent doors and windows with few blank walls; narrow frontage buildings; well articulated facades (e.g. with bays and entrance porches/canopies); and easily visible internal uses, which may in some circumstances have scope to spill onto the street. Solid security shutters and blank boundary walls and fences, facing the public highway and ill-defined open spaces are not acceptable.

Fig 3 Wrapping the big box



Graphic by Bellinger Design

Key

	residential		retail
	commercial		leisure

- Utility elements in any development require careful siting and design attention. This includes bin storage, cycle storage, meter/inspection boxes, service entries, ventilation and cooling systems, and other service equipment. These elements should be designed to fit inconspicuously but accessibly within the building/site envelope and minimise visual and noise intrusion. Details should be submitted with applications.
- Development needs to reflect a high quality contemporary design but acknowledge that much of Loughborough Town Centre is covered by Conservation Area designations. Where historic precedents are adopted they must be followed closely and authentically. The embellishment of developments with randomly applied historic elements should be avoided.



The Orange Tree, Wards End

- Materials used for new buildings and spaces need to be selected for high standards of visual attractiveness, durability and environmental performance, not economy. Detailed design must pay attention to all elements of the building (e.g. elevations, corner treatments, roof lines, entrances and windows etc) and must maintain the interest, variety and liveliness of the Town Centre scene.
- High quality Public Art can make a major contribution to the quality of development and the creation of a successful, distinctive place, and should be incorporated into all major developments within the Town Centre. The Council’s adopted guidance on Per Cent for Art, ‘Public Art - Making Places Distinctive’, will be expected to be followed.
- Shopfront designs will be expected to follow the Council’s adopted guidance – Shopfront and Signs Supplementary Planning Document.



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Continuity & Enclosure – A Town Centre where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished

In pattern and urban form the core part of the Town Centre is relatively compact and fine-grained. In general, building lines are clearly defined and building frontages are contiguous. In particular Market Place, Market Street, Wards End, High Street, Church Gate and Baxter Gate have continuity of street frontages providing good enclosure. However, a number of areas to the rear of these principal streets (e.g. Wood Gate and the back of Devonshire Square) provide poor continuity of street frontage. The continuity and enclosure of street frontages is an important characteristic of the Town Centre which must be respected and reinforced in new development.

The Masterplan embraces the following principles of continuity and enclosure:

- Development should be in the form of secure perimeter blocks which clearly distinguish between public fronts and private backs, and follow a coherent building line.
- Projections and occasional set-backs from the building line can be used to add emphasis but the function of any space created must be clearly defined.
- The primary access to buildings should be directly from the street.
- Developments including large stores and other 'big box' units, such as multi-storey car parks, can create exposed 'dead' frontages (the Bridge Street frontage to the Rushes is a local example). Careful design will be required in any future developments of this nature to ensure the retention/creation of active and attractive street frontages which are compatible with the fine-grain of the Town Centre.

This may involve:

- wrapping the perimeter street faces with smaller/more active uses (as in the Biggin Street frontage to the Rushes);
 - building other uses above the box
 - incorporating a well designed upper façade for roof top parking.
- Where potential exists to create new pedestrian routes, the development should provide positive frontages (with entrances and windows to active rooms) which overlook these routes in order to maximise natural visual surveillance of the street.
 - Private yards or rear servicing areas should be enclosed as far as possible by the rear of other properties; otherwise the extent of private ownership should be clearly defined by the detailed design of walls, railing, gates, entrance arches, signage and paving.

- Development should seek to enhance safety, security and surveillance and minimise the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour. Security should be achieved through a coherent approach to the design of the development rather than by adopting add-on measures that overtly create an impression of fortification.
- An important influence on the character of a place is the arrangement of car parking. Vehicles should not dominate the space, or create inconvenience to pedestrians and cyclists. Off-street parking is best located in secure, well overlooked rear courtyards. Larger developments may provide the opportunity to provide parking under or above buildings.

Fig 4 Mixed building use and car parking



- Key
- residential
 - commercial
 - retail
 - leisure

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Legibility – A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand

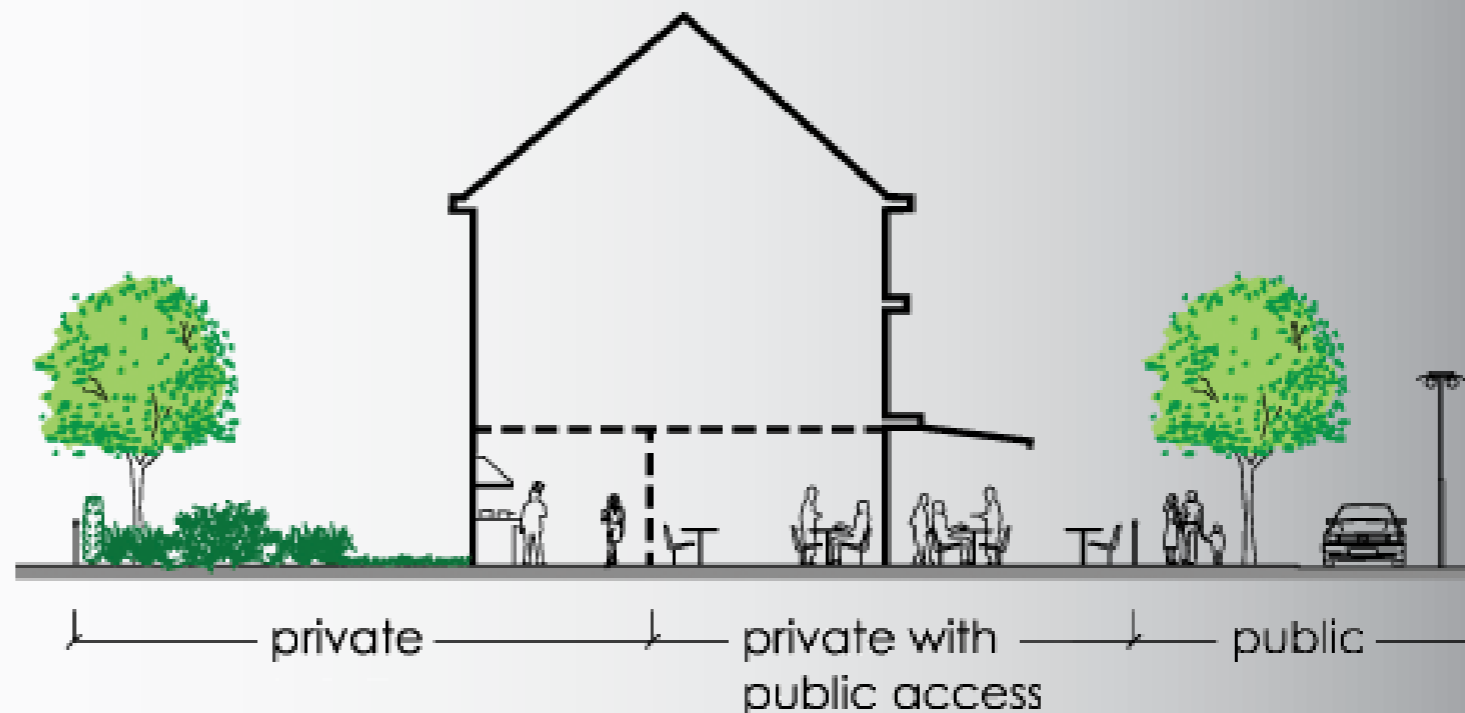
At present the legibility of the Town Centre is fragmented and for the first time visitor, particularly when arriving by car, it may not be obvious where the Town Centre is located. There is a need to have visual connections that knit together the Town Centre to the north and south of Swan Street/ A6.

The Masterplan will seek the following approach on legibility of design:

- **New development at key gateways to the Town Centre should be distinctive, welcoming and memorable emphasising a ‘sense of arrival’ and assisting people to orientate themselves.**
- **The need to respect or add new local landmarks. Consider how proposals may contribute to the linked series of markers that make it easier for people to find their way around the Town Centre. The form and architecture, and not just the height, of buildings will give them landmark status.**
- **Emphasise the hierarchy of the Town Centre by creating new landmarks at main centres of activity, where they are the focus of converging streets.**
- **Create a skyline which adds visual interest and conveys particular activities and concentration of uses.**
- **The main entrances to public and other major buildings should be emphasised through carefully designed streets, lighting, signage and paving.**

- **Existing important views and vistas should not be blocked or compromised by new development. In new development the opportunity to create new views and vistas that will contribute to the legibility of the Town Centre should be considered.**
- **Development at strategic corners should emphasise their importance through the use of building height, prominent entrances and other architectural features**
- **Close attention to the detailing and quality of materials should be provided especially at ground floor and building entrances that are very visible to pedestrians.**

Fig 5 Public and private space



Graphic by Bellinger Design

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Adaptability - A place that can change easily

Places and buildings should be robust, versatile and capable of being adapted to new uses and able to respond to future social and technological changes. This includes ensuring that buildings and spaces address the needs of everyone, and especially those with pushchairs, people with disabilities and the elderly. A linked principle is the encouragement of sustainable Town Centre development that is designed for energy and resource efficiency.

Adaptability will be achieved by applying the following principles:

- **New development should incorporate adaptable buildings with flexible layouts which can sustain a variety of uses and help buildings to change over time. Particularly care should be taken to ensure that ground floors are designed to be adaptable, with active frontages, including separate access ways to upper floors, and fire and sound proofing to good standards.**
- **Residential development should provide the opportunity for studio workspace to be provided on the ground floor.**
- **Residential development should provide lifetime homes that can adapt to people's changing circumstances. The opportunity to extend and create additional bedrooms should be considered as an integral part of the initial design.**
- **Private amenity space to the rear of properties should demonstrate that it is usable for a number of different activities, particularly for traditional family houses.**

Diversity of Uses – A Town Centre offering variety and choice

Loughborough Town Centre is fairly compact and offers relatively easy access to a wide range of facilities. These characteristics contribute to the success and attractiveness of the Town Centre as the variety of uses on offer and convenience of a place will determine how well it is used. If the Town Centre is to be successful in the future it is important that people should continue to have easy access to varied facilities, including shopping, leisure, and work opportunities. Higher densities focussed on the Town Centre will help ensure it remains lively, with local facilities at hand.

The Masterplan will promote diversity in the following ways:

- **All new development will be expected to consider the opportunity to encourage a mix of uses that contribute to the economic and social 'health' of the area. Complementary uses can be mixed horizontally (side by side) or vertically (on different floors of the same building).**
- **Large development proposals should provide a mix of housing type, form and tenure. A compatible mix of uses should include live/work units.**
- **Within the Town Centre higher densities will be sought with an average density of between 50 -100 dwellings to the hectare. In high density development particular care will be expected to:**
 - ensure buildings, streets and places are of human scale;
 - moderate the mass of the development so that it steps up or down to its neighbour harmoniously;

- use high quality landscaping to soften the appearance and add to the quality of the public realm.

A Sustainable Place

The principles of sustainable development are incorporated throughout the Masterplan, which seeks to ensure the economic, social and environmental regeneration of the Town Centre. Future development will be expected to comply with the aspirations of Charnwood Borough Council as a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. Furthermore, the Council has an adopted 'Climate Change Strategy' and has included Sustainable Places guidance in 'Leading in Design'. Developments should follow the principles of sustainable construction and design to reduce the demand for energy, use energy more efficiently and generate more energy from renewable sources.

Developments should not only avoid, mitigate or compensate for harm but also seek ways to enhance, restore and add to biodiversity. The incorporation of biodiversity features within urban design promotes healthy living, gives a strong sense of local identity and contributes to an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Sustainability will be encouraged in the following ways:

- **The opportunity to re-use good quality existing buildings should always be examined before demolition or replacement is considered.**
- **Developments must follow the energy hierarchy by:**
 - Reducing the demand for energy (e.g. avoid/reduce cooling requirements) by maximising solar gain.

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- Using energy efficiency measures to meet demand including the use of community combined heat and power (for the production of both electricity and heat), tri-generation (for the production of electricity, heat and cooling during summer months) or district heating.



Sustainable Development, Loughborough University

- Incorporating energy efficient and renewable energy equipment on site to reduce predicted carbon emissions of the development by at least 10%.
- Undertaking a BREEAM or EcoHomes assessment and achieving a VERY GOOD or higher rating.
- Incorporating measures to reduce water demand and recycle greywater and rainwater. Consideration should be given to the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) designed to limit the waste of water, and reduce water pollution and flood risk.
- Incorporating recycled materials into developments. Best practice indicates that at least 10% of the total value of materials used should derive from recycled and reused contents in the materials and products selected.
- Using wood from sustainable and managed forests, in accordance with RIBA environmental guidance, and avoiding the use of tropical hardwood.
- Using, where possible, locally sourced materials in constructing buildings and urban spaces.
- Adopting best practice in dealing with construction and demolition site waste including the source segregation of re-usable and recyclable materials.
- Adopting the maximum use of recycled or secondary aggregates feasible in construction projects.
- Reducing air pollution the ensuring acceptable air quality.
- Providing recycling capacity in developments including building in recycling facilities for organic and other wastes.
- Ensuring that the existing biodiversity resource within the Town Centre is protected and enhanced within development proposals. This should include the implementation of mitigation measures to retain sustainable wildlife populations. The detailed design of buildings and spaces should encourage wildlife and deliver biodiversity gain. There is a great deal which can be achieved for biodiversity through sympathetic design, such as the use of native tree and shrub species, the provision of bat and bird boxes within the fabric of buildings, the incorporation of green features such as green roofs, living walls and roof gardens, and the creation of wildlife corridors linking existing habitats and reaching into the heart of urban areas.

