

Quality in Town and Country



A Discussion Document

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Preface



As we secure economic growth and development we expect to enjoy our greater wealth through an improved quality of life. That means improving our surroundings; conserving and enhancing the environment of town and country. So as we emerge from recession it is right for us to take a fresh look at our villages, towns and cities and consider how we can best safeguard their distinctive character and future viability.

The first thing to recognise is that towns and cities must accommodate modern needs if they are to survive and succeed. People's concerns are constantly changing, the economy is evolving, new technology sets new demands even as it relieves us of old burdens. We are evolving new ways of working, of communicating and of travelling. All this leaves its mark on the urban fabric.

English townscapes are a testament to the enduring craft of the builder and the vision of the architect and his patron. However, they also remind us of past mistakes. Each new building affects our familiar landscape so, while we need new development, we yearn for buildings which will raise our sights, not dash our hopes.

Buildings set the tone, but there are many other contributors to the urban scene, including air quality, noise, road design and traffic management, open spaces, street signs and lighting, trees and walls. In tackling each of these, quality and co-ordination must be our constant concern.

Quality affects us all Architecture is the only art form which is inescapable. Most of our days are spent in or around buildings which therefore have a great influence on our lives and require careful thought.

Good urban design can reinforce a sense of community, whereas anonymous grey and alienating surroundings isolate the individual. A depressing environment destroys local pride, attracts crime, deters investment and leaves people feeling powerless. Yet quality attracts quality, good design attracts life and investment and a strong community stands out against crime.

We need to pay more attention to urban detail; whether in street signs and furniture, in the standard of local services, or in the thoughtfulness of design of the public space between buildings. All these contribute to our experience of the whole built environment, so if we improve our buildings and the streets and spaces which they define, we surely improve the quality of all our lives.

Quality is sustainable Sustainable development is about how we develop in this generation without stealing from the next. It is about how we use the wealth which growth provides to build a better world - built to last.

Sustainable development means a war on waste - wasted land, wasted energy, wasted travel time. We must continue to target derelict and underused land in our urban areas, both to regenerate the economy locally and to relieve the pressure for green field development in the wider countryside. The conservation of energy in buildings, and of fuel in cars, saves money while benefiting the environment. By contrast, the disparate zoning of different everyday activities - working, living, shopping - increases demand for travel and reduces the speed of travel as roads become congested. Our urban areas cannot accommodate unlimited growth in road transport. Nor can our environment tolerate it. We need to find ways in the longer term of containing our dependence on the motor car and managing its impact on urban life.

Our towns and cities are in competition. They vie with each other for investment and trade; and all vie with the rural idyll to which so many aspire. More and more, people can really choose where they wish to live, and they increasingly seek a quality environment for themselves and their families. Such an environment must be provided in our urban areas if they are to continue to thrive.

Applying the principle of sustainable development means understanding the impact of our actions upon others. It also means facing up to the effect of all our individual actions taken together. It means placing civic responsibility - our duty to others, and to the future - at the centre of our lives. It will need considerable vision to meet rising expectations and the demands of the urban economy, yet still safeguard our architectural heritage.

Quality pays Good quality is good economics. The building which gleams in the sun of its first summer, but is decayed and stained before its fifth, is a challenge to the judgement of its owner and designer. The wise investor considers the costs of maintenance, the availability of replacement materials, adaptability and longevity.

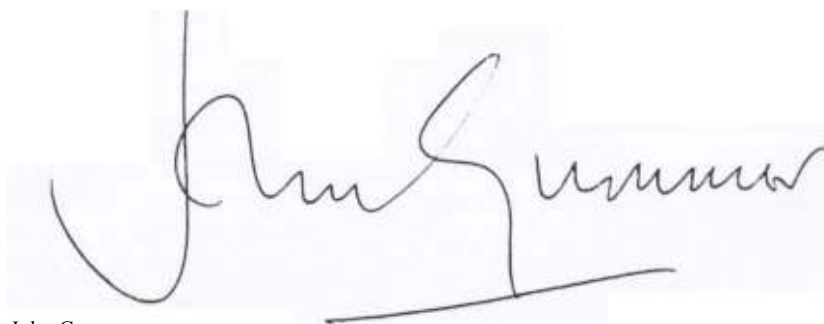
Responsibility The quality of our surroundings depends not only on government and developers, but upon companies as owners and tenants, the professions, local authorities, and individuals. The responsibility for what is built, and where, is shared, as are the rewards which good quality bestows.

This document challenges individuals in all these fields to consider what they can do to deliver quality. How can the wealth that economic growth generates be harnessed to deliver a better quality built environment for our children? How can we safeguard local identity without sentimentalising the past? How can we each help to keep our towns and cities places where people really want to be - places of vitality and culture, places for living as well as working.

In this paper we are concerned with the quality of England's entire built environment. Much of what we say applies to all buildings, including those in the wider countryside. Our main focus, however, centres on urban areas, as it is here where most people live and work, where most development takes place, and where the greatest opportunities for improvement lie.

Each chapter in this document looks at a different aspect of these issues - how we live, how we build, how we travel, how we make decisions. Each chapter outlines some of the action that Government, for its part, already has in hand. We show examples of good practice and, most important of all, we invite further discussion and debate.

We have a great task - creating the environment in which our children will grow. None of us can properly opt out of that endeavour.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Gummer', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

John Gummer
Secretary of State, Department of the Environment

Town and Country

The number of households is still growing and the way we live is changing. There is a much greater variety of lifestyles than have been accommodated in the past. Young people leave their families and set up home earlier, while the old have an independent life for longer than before. At the same time, employment patterns have changed. As primary industries decline and manual jobs are fewer; so service and new technology industries represent the ways many of us now make our living. Shopping and leisure activities too have fundamentally altered in recent years.



Far left: Petticoat Lane market, London. A thriving traditional market.

Centre: Cycleway, well integrated into the streetscape of Islington, London. Left: Skipton, North Yorkshire. An iron and glass vaulted roof creates an arcaded shopping street.

In such a changing world, the way we use buildings has naturally changed too. Dereliction and decay has followed the run down of heavy industries. New developments have spread out into the countryside to accommodate changing family patterns.

We cannot avoid constant evolution, but it is sustainable change which we seek. Sustainable developments make it possible for people to live close to their work and within communities that can provide for their needs locally. In built up areas it means making better use of the finite resource that our land represents. We should aim to give the same or better access to facilities, while using less fuel in motor vehicles. We need to encourage more viable economic centres and reduce the demand for public expenditure on regeneration. In this way we may reduce the pressure for suburban sprawl. Development in the countryside will still be needed, but this can be accommodated in ways which sustain distinct rural communities.

The Government is seeking to encourage **sustainable urban growth** both through its planning guidance to local authorities and through the spending programmes and advisory actions of its agencies and Departments of State.

Planning policy guidance - particularly that concerning housing, shopping and transport matters (PPGs 3, 6 & 13) - emphasises the value of mixed developments imaginatively integrated into the existing fabric. The desirability of providing choice in transport should inform strategic planning decisions from the outset and the vitality and viability of town centres should be safeguarded.

Ultimately, both **vitality and viability depend on custom**. Towns and cities must attract people in; that can only be done if they offer the quality of environment, and the cultural and commercial services, which people need and want. Where possible, communities need to be large enough to offer the services needed, and the **best principles of urban design** need to be explored and adopted by developers and planners alike.

Government agencies encourage the **development of derelict and contaminated land** with grant aid where there is a market barrier to the effective re-use of that land.

1

Discussion issues



1.1 What demands does the principle of sustainable development make upon the planning of our towns and cities, and how should it influence our understanding of sustainable rural communities?

The Government's new arrangements for direct grant aid in the regions through the **Single Regeneration Budget** build on the highly successful partnership approach which City Challenge fostered. As a result Government support will in future be able to respond much more directly to real local needs and priorities.

Central Government **support for local authorities' expenditure** is itself distributed according to their spending needs measured by the Standard Spending Assessment system, which has been revised this year to recognise a wider range of economic and social factors.

The Department of the Environment sponsors **research** into appropriate levels of urban density, strategic planning and sustainability and into the "ecological city", in which economic, social and environmental benefits may be integrated more effectively. Similarly, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) back research on "cities and sustainability" to look at how a city behaves as a whole and how demand for scarce resources can be reduced. The EPSRC also supports research to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and traffic flows on existing roads.

Above: View of Oxford from Boar's Hill. This city setting and its surrounding countryside shows the advantage of defining properly where the town ends and the countryside begins.

Towns as Villages

Some towns have a single centre with a compact surrounding area. Yet it is remarkable how in even the smallest towns there are areas which are clearly distinct, often with their own focal points or open spaces which help to create a village "feel". These villages may be the result of once discrete settlements which have been enveloped as a town has grown, or of houses and services provided by a single employer. The reality of these separate communities is often recognised by the distinct civic groups and amenity societies which grow up to safeguard and improve their distinctiveness and separate identity.

Sometimes these villages have been consciously promoted, and there are many who believe that this suggests a more general mechanism for improving the quality of urban life. There can be no universal blueprint, but certainly it is right to seek to build on these experiences of community to ensure that urban structures are sufficiently small and coherent to give residents pride and a sense of place.

The opportunities for mixed-use community developments will be varied. Large areas, such as disused industrial sites, may provide the chance for major integrated schemes, while a carefully orchestrated amalgamation of smaller sites may help revitalise an existing community. Just as existing villages and communities are unique in their growth and characteristics, so each development will need to be unique according to local circumstances. The Department of the Environment is contributing to the funding of the Urban Villages Forum which promotes this concept in new development. Local authorities which wish to accommodate such schemes



Above: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. A planned infill project conceived as a series of villages with distinct centres while forming a clear edge to Aylesbury.

2

Discussion issues

2.1 Are there ways of transferring the experience of those urban communities which have grown naturally into the development of new urban villages?

2.2 How widely applicable are such schemes, and in what circumstances do they provide a real alternative to the forms of urban and suburban development which have been more typical in recent years?



within the strategy for their area can already include proposals for individual sites within their Local Development Plan. These need to be considered on their merits, and although development briefs can predicate a mix of uses, in all such cases it will be essential for local authorities to consult with the private sector to ensure that any proposals drawn up are practicable.

Above: Covent Garden, London. A focal point for market and leisure activities since the 17th century. The square was designed by Inigo Jones.



Left: Shepherd Market, London. A thriving village in Mayfair within the heart of London.

Vital and Viable Town Centres

A city without a heart has no hope of life. It is the vibrant centre which attracts people to shop and to do business, to pursue leisure activities or just to meet and pass the time of day. From the small town to the great metropolis, urban quality relates to the state of the centre.

Of course, it would be possible to describe town centres in terms of function alone. Single journeys can serve several purposes: people meet and mix activities on a single visit thus reducing dependence on the motor car. The countryside is protected from urban sprawl if the city centre is full of life. Buildings can be used more



Far left: St. Helen's Square, York.
Centre: Accessibility to town centre shopping for all.
Left: Market Square, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

profitably: the historic can survive and the best of the new can be afforded. If people live near where they work in town, in flats or houses, or over shops, then crime and vandalism are easier to combat.

Yet to reduce the life of the city centre to mere component parts is to miss the real point. We instinctively recognise that it is in the whole that the city lives and it is in the reaction and interaction of these elements that we find the ever changing attraction and appeal of urban life.

Today there are real challenges to our urban centres. The decline of old industries and the housing which they supported, the need for urban renewal, the creation of other centres of attraction on the edge of towns and far beyond and the choking effect of ever growing congestion all challenge the vitality of our town centres. So we need to help them to recover, not just by halting the decline but by encouraging new life.

Successful town centres are those which meet the needs of people in the area. This will depend on the alertness of the businesses which operate there, on the quality of services which the local authority provides and on the responsibility of property owners and developers. All have a stake in achieving and maintaining success.

The Government's **planning guidance** explains the importance of nurturing the town centre economy and requires that the impact of out of town developments be carefully scrutinised. The aim is to retain vital and viable town centres. However vitality cannot be preserved: it must be constantly nurtured. A local authority will not safeguard viability merely by opposing the wrong sort of proposal in the wrong place: it must positively court the right sort of new development in the right place. **Town centre management** cannot be a passive operation if towns and cities are to retain their competitive edge.

A detailed survey and **guide to good practice** has recently been published by the Department of the Environment to help all those who shape the future of our urban centres. It puts forward key indicators for checking vitality and viability, and ways to assess a town centre in depth. The report also suggests how to develop a strategy appropriate to local circumstances.

3

Discussion issues

3.1 How far is it proper to use the planning system to promote urban renewal?

3.2 How can commerce and local authorities best contribute to town centre management and to the achievement and retention of vital and viable town centres?

3.3 Could local authorities be more responsive to ideas from business about how the revenues from the business rate should be spent?

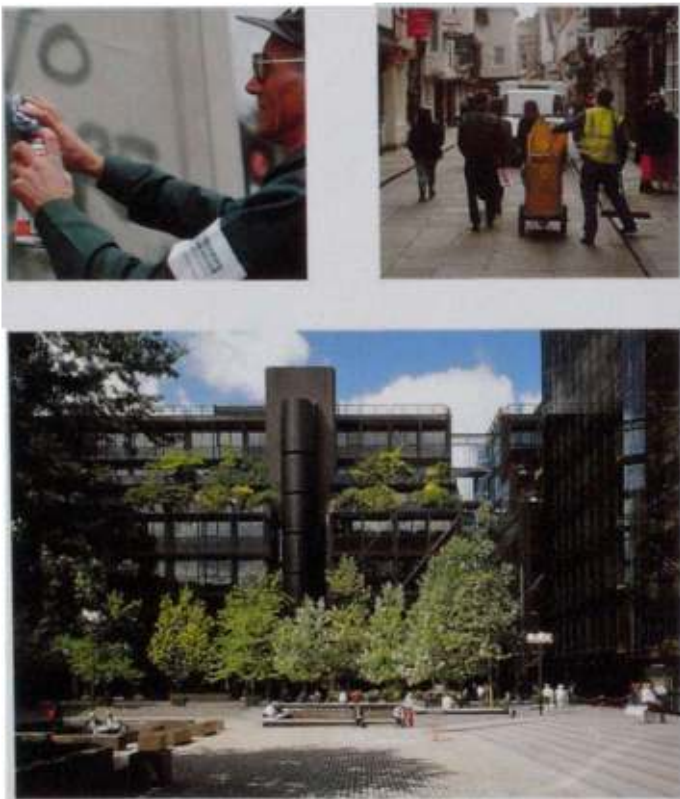
3.4 Could the concepts behind City Pride be adapted to inspire local initiatives in towns and cities throughout the country?



Above: Castle Mall Shopping Development, Norwich. Sensitively sited within a conservation area, the city centre development establishes pedestrian routes across the city.

Our Local Environment

Then you judge the quality of an area, you cannot isolate the architecture from the trees, parks and open spaces which give it scale and perspective. Grime and dirt, noise and air pollution, litter and graffiti will combine to detract from the area as a whole, however fine the buildings. Improvements in the quality of the built environment are therefore greatest where a whole approach is taken.



**Top left: Graffiti removal.
Top right: Town centre
street cleaning. Above: A
balanced environment of
office buildings, good tree
planting and a public
square.**

There is a wide range of action in hand to improve particular aspects of the local environment, but the most important action is that taken at the local level by the groups and individuals who live in and use our towns and cities. Much also depends on the responsiveness of the local council and the quality of its services.

The Department of the Environment is the largest hinder of the Tidy Britain Group which advises local authorities and others on how to control litter more effectively. The Government proposes to make local authority action against litter easier and performance monitoring clearer.

Encouragement is also given to tree planting in urban areas through urban regeneration grants and assistance to voluntary groups. The planting of trees and careful maintenance of other green spaces can make a tremendous difference to an area. Individual trees of particular importance may be the subject of local authority preservation orders.

In a number of places the quality of the urban fringe is targeted by Groundwork Trusts. Supported by the Government and the private sector. Groundwork enlists much local support for tackling unsightly dereliction and improving the local environment.

In March this year, the Government published a discussion paper on measures to improve air quality. Good progress is already being made in reducing emissions from homes, industry and vehicles. Proposals later this year will examine how this action can be reinforced. Individual measures such as tackling smoky vehicles are important, but it is also necessary to target local action on areas where there are particular problems. It is envisaged that various approaches will be tested out in different places.

The Community Forests Initiative is encouraging the planting of new wooded areas on the edges of a number of towns and cities throughout the country. This greening of the urban fringe will provide many environmental, educational and recreational opportunities, and some new employment for

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Discussion issues

4.1 What is the role of local government, of parish and neighbourhood councils and of civic societies, in maintaining and improving the local environment?

4.2 How do we encourage a sense of ownership of public spaces, particularly of the smallest sites, so that they can be properly kept up?

4.3 Are there specific areas where the law could help, for example, through powers to remove illegal fly posters on private land immediately, without advance notice?



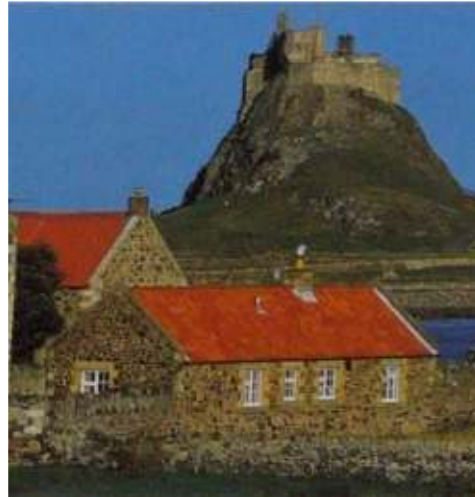
local people who are helping to transform these sometimes soulless areas. By bringing urban wasteland back to life, Community Forests will carry the countryside to many more people's doorsteps.

Public art can be important in improving people's perceptions of town centres. Interestingly, it can also often help to discourage vandalism, as does good maintenance of the area generally. This illustrates clearly the value of a quality environment in encouraging a wider sense of responsibility and ownership.

Above: Richmond, North Yorkshire. Community identity is given strength by the urban pattern, in which the road and building layout form a public space, creating a natural focal point for the town.

Heritage

Our heritage of buildings is a reflection of our great national history. From the remarkable wool churches to the proud civic buildings of the Victorian age, from the medieval castles to today's metropolitan railway stations, architecture records our history. Whether it is the simple cottage of the canal towpath, or the splendour of a royal palace or a stately home, our buildings are the most visible sign of man's effect on the environment.



Left The De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill. Designed in 1934 by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, it is now Grade I listed and under restoration.

Right: Lindisfarne Castle Northumbrian Built in the 1540s as a military defence and restored by Edwin Lutyens in 1902 as a summer retreat.

Sometimes we make our presence felt only by blighting the landscape, but there are many other occasions when it is human ingenuity, artistry or design which enlivens and enhances what nature has given us.

Our historical concern should not just be for individual buildings, nor for their setting in countryside or in town. It ought to include the pattern of roads and open spaces, the views and perspectives that are created, the designed landscapes of the great estates and the cared for patches of town gardens.

Statutory systems for *listing* historic buildings and designating conservation *areas* are administered by the Department of National Heritage and by *local* planning authorities respectively. English Heritage also compiles a register of parks and *gardens* of special historic interest. Local authorities have powers to ensure the preservation of historic buildings by carrying out urgent works and *recovering* costs from the owner or *by* taking compulsory purchase action where longer term repairs are necessary and are not *being earned* out by the owner. Taken together, these enable *local authorities* to provide effective protection for the historic environment. The procedures require open and accountable decision *taking* and *full* public debate. The Government also continues to *promote good* practice through new planning policy guidance *notes on planning* and archaeology and on historic buildings and conservation areas.

However, in maintaining our historic buildings and landscapes the main responsibility must rest *with their owners*. This is usually best encouraged by *allowing* a viable use which can support the cost of *upkeep*. *It is an illusion to think that ever tougher controls will somehow secure a lively historic district.* The Government's policy to improve the *vitality and*



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Discussion issues

5.1 Is the balance properly struck between conformity and freedom in our conservation areas?

5.2 Can local authorities take a more positive approach in suggesting new uses for old buildings when proposals made seem unacceptable to them?

5.3 What are the pressure points for the owners and occupiers of those buildings which form a significant part of our heritage?

Above: Liverpool Street Station, London. A spectacular restoration project with the sensitive introduction of new facilities in quality materials.

viability of town centres will contribute to the protection of historic buildings and conservation areas: for instance, finding alternative uses for historic warehouses and industrial buildings, when the original functions can no longer be sustained, will ensure their good repair in the long term. It is therefore right to expect local authorities to be positive toward planning applications for changes of use of historic buildings. This does not mean saying "yes" when it would be inappropriate, but it does mean giving a positive indication of what uses will be allowed if the owner's proposal is not acceptable.

In conservation areas we must be wary of being over prescriptive. However it is clear that the character of such areas can be greatly spoilt by insensitive changes to individual properties. There is a difficult balance to strike, but after careful consultation the Government has announced that it intends to give local planning authorities in England a new power to withdraw "permitted development" rights for certain types of work on houses in conservation areas (such as changes to doors, windows and roofs). Before exercising that power, authorities will be required to publicise their proposals and consider local people's views.

Better Quality

Building

*p*reservation is not enough. What we build today will have an important impact upon future generations, and every new building influences how we feel about a place or a street. That puts a high value on good design whether we are building in town or country.

Prima facie, to build ought to be to improve. Developers and their professional advisers are not merely expressing their wider responsibilities but also their financial advantage when they build to attract and



Left: Fountains Abbey Visitors Centre, North Yorkshire. The use of traditional and modern materials to create distinct building forms that blend

build to last: better tenants, better return, higher capital value and lower maintenance. Good architecture need not be more expensive, nor need it be more difficult to realise. Yet it contributes hugely to the regeneration of our towns and cities. With imagination, creativity, and sensitivity we can provide quality at reasonable cost.

Good design pre-supposes efficiency, and implies a building fit for its purpose: there should be no conflict between good design and the construction of buildings which are operationally functional and meet the needs of their occupants. Sensible maintenance costs, long lasting materials, affordable and environmentally-friendly heating and ventilation are all essential features. A novel concept or striking outline does not excuse excessive running costs.

We need commissioning processes which use modern techniques, good materials and design in a responsible way.

A new building is rarely viewed in isolation: people both see and use a building in context. It is important that new development recognises that context, which may mean the immediate neighbours, the street or square, or the building traditions of the wider area. Successful new buildings are often those that unselfconsciously integrate into their context, borrowing from local building techniques and using local materials. Yet there are always instances where something different is required. We should ensure that the planning system does not stifle responsible innovation and originality.

6

Discussion issues

6.1 What changes in design briefing, contractual arrangements and relationships between developers, architects and clients would be likely to improve the quality of building and urban design?

6.2 Are there special factors that need to be considered in promoting good design in the countryside?

6.3 What is the local authority's role in consulting with developers on major development opportunities?



People look to government - both central and local - to give a lead. The Government and its agencies commission substantial office schemes, major refurbishments and other developments. Guidelines for the design of government buildings and a separate guide on office buildings demonstrate that the Government takes its responsibilities for good design seriously. Architectural competitions are held when appropriate, and constant efforts are made to improve the commissioning process.

One key contribution will be the demolition of the Department of the Environment's existing building on Marsham Street. Outline proposals are being discussed with Westminster City Council for the future use and re-development of the Marsham Street site. The Government will also commission work from external consultants as part of its policy to improve co-ordination of urban design in the Whitehall area. The extensive programme of cleaning public buildings is having a dramatic effect. People can now be proud of the Palace of Westminster after its £20 million facelift.

Of course, relatively few buildings are built by the Government or local authorities. The majority are the responsibility of the private sector. Development control can prevent only the worst abuses of urban design. The promotion of what is good is substantially in the hands of architects, designers and property owners. It is largely for the professional bodies to inspire good practice and creative imagination among those responsible for the design of buildings.

The planning system should give confidence to building design professionals. Planning refusal should be seen as a costly and time consuming failure in the partnership between public and private sectors. The challenge of paying more

Above: New government offices in Whitehall, London, are given distinctive character by using the stock brick of the old Richmond Terrace and Portland stone typical of Whitehall.

Below: New cottages, Luccombe, Dorset. A variety of forms and materials fitting in well with the village in marked distinction from the standard patterns that so often occur.



attention to design is shared between developers, designers and planners and it need not, and should not, founder in delayed decisions or refusals. Indeed, there is scope for improved dialogue to increase the efficiency of the planning system.

Other public controls are relevant to building design. For example, the Building Regulations have basic health and safety objectives, although some parts are framed with energy efficiency and environmental considerations in mind. While in principle there is considerable flexibility in the way the Regulations are applied, there is some feeling that good design is needlessly at risk where they are administered uncritically.

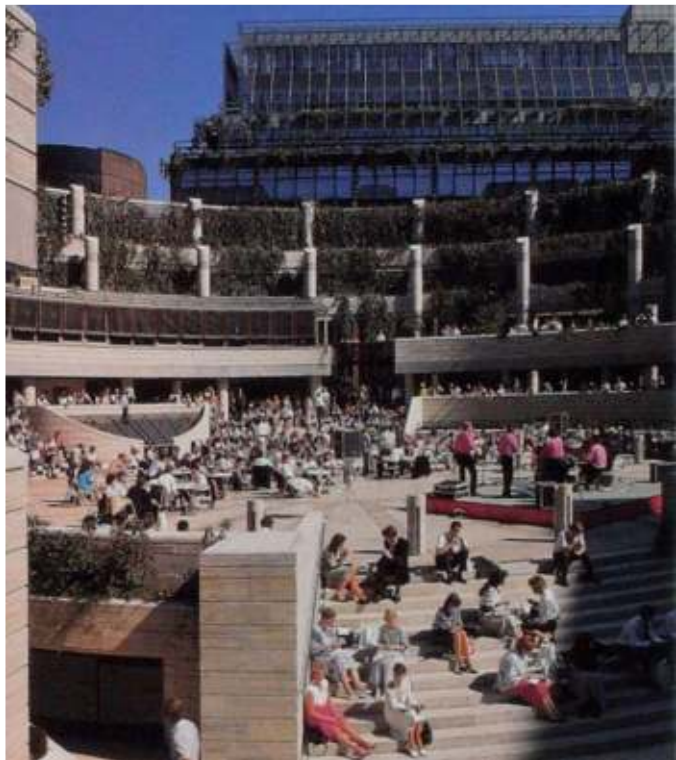
The Royal Fine Art Commission reviews designs for certain major or particularly sensitive developments, and makes suggestions on how they might be improved. The Commission also offers general guidance arising from its casework, as in publications on bridge design and lighting.

The Countryside Commission has recently published a guide "Design in the Countryside" for all those involved in designing and planning rural developments. It explores ways to prevent local character being lost through standardisation. Local people should feel able to participate in the planning process to make sure that new development enhances their surroundings.

Areas designated for their natural beauty will continue to be protected from inappropriate development. New building in these areas must respect the features which led to the designation. For example, in National Parks only exceptional circumstances would justify major development, while in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty policies should be designed to conserve the natural beauty of the landscape.

Many local authorities, both urban and rural, have published design guides to help people who are unlikely to commission an architect for minor works such as house extensions to build according to these principles.

Below: Broadgate Development, London.
This ambitious 1980s scheme created a high quality environment for the City with an important new public square as its focus.



Right: Mound Stand, Lord's Cricket Ground, London. An imaginative interpretation of high-tech building materials with traditional construction creates a festive atmosphere and uninterrupted views of the terraces.



Discussion issues

6.4 Should urban design statements accompany major planning applications?

6.5 Are there ways in which Building Regulations constrict good design?

6.6 Are there difficulties in incorporating energy efficiency into planning policy, and if so how can they be overcome?



Left: New Tate Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall. Built into the picturesque fabric of a sea-side village. Awareness of scale, the successful handling of colour, texture and materials have contributed largely to the building's success. Below: Richmond Riverside Development, Surrey, provides offices, flats, shops, restaurants, community facilities, two underground car parks and riverside gardens. It is finely built and exhibits some of the rich variations of English building traditions. The riverside gardens are an acknowledged success.



Traffic and Travel

We have all grown used to easy movement from place to place. Efficient transport - by road, rail or air - makes possible economic growth; opens up opportunities for work and recreation, for visiting family and friends; and has redefined our sense of what is local.

Whilst recognising these benefits, increasing demand for travel has given rise to concern over congestion, pollution and noise. We need to manage the road and rail networks with sensitivity to the setting and to those affected so these problems can be reduced wherever practicable.

We also need to encourage means of transport in towns and cities - walking, cycling and public transport - that will reduce reliance on the private car by giving people greater choice.

The design and use of roads, the impact of parking, signs and roadside 'furniture' all affect the quality of an area. Moves to improve local conditions by managing traffic include reducing or removing through traffic in areas where people live, work or shop; slowing it down where it creates a hazard; improving safety and amenity through traffic calming and giving priority to those who walk, cycle or use public transport.

The Government is supporting these initiatives through the 'package approach*' to funding local transport. This encourages authorities to develop coherent strategies and bid for funds on the basis of packages covering different aspects of the problem - roads, public transport, traffic control, parking and cycling. In this way transport can be managed as an integrated whole and the environmental impact reduced.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 13, published jointly by the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment in March 1994, is a landmark document setting out the need to manage demand and improve the attractiveness of local centres. Roads should be designed to suit their locality; Design Bulletin 32, published by the DOE and DOT in 1992, shows how residential road design can reduce speeds and minimise land 'take'.

Accommodating lorry traffic is essential for the supply of shops and businesses in the town centre, but it is important to find ways of doing this which minimise the nuisance



Left: Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset. The new quarter of the market town of Dorchester, currently under construction, seeks to integrate pedestrian and traffic needs by the use of good urban design principles.

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which can sometimes arise in residential areas or at certain times of the day. Guidance on achieving this has been set out in a manual and publication "Lorries in the Community" produced jointly by DOT, the Civic Trust and the County Surveyors Society. Improving public transport can, in association with other measures, help to encourage car drivers to switch mode of transport and relieve congestion. The Government provides grants for rail services and investment in new public transport facilities. Careful attention to detail in design, whether for a local rail system or a bus shelter, will make it more attractive for potential passengers.

The highway authority can have a major influence on the appearance of a street. Inappropriate or ill- thought out works can mar an area, while careful design and siting can raise its quality. The English Historic Towns Forum and the Civic Trust recently published a guide to good practice in reducing street clutter and blending road-related work with historic or sensitive areas. Local authorities are able to spend revenue from parking charges to improve the quality of the streetscape. The quality of lighting also offers great potential for improved design. Bad lighting creates glare and casts light upwards, which not only reduces security but is wasteful and reduces the view of the night sky. The Department of Transport has published a guide to sensitive street lighting.

Traffic calming schemes, where traffic is slowed along a road or throughout an area, can return a street to its residents, allowing the parts 'reclaimed' from the roadway to be used for seating, trees or landscaping. Design that is sensitive to the character of an area is important. The Department of Transport's Bypass Demonstration Project shows what can be achieved by capitalising on the opportunity created when a bypass takes traffic out of a town.

The Government wishes to encourage traffic management schemes which show greater sensitivity to the impact of the street on the local environment. Local policies for traffic management, including for cycle lanes, bus priority and better facilities for pedestrians, therefore need to be addressed in development plans. Guidance, through a Good Practice Guide to PPG 13 (currently being prepared) and Traffic Advisory Leaflets, will support the efforts of local councils.

Everyone has a part to play. Statutory works undertakers could consider how to improve the quality of their finish to streets after repairs and plan their work to avoid damaging street trees that take many years to replace; local traders, in partnership with local authorities, might determine better quality street furniture in shopping centres; and local people can help to identify surplus signs that can safely be removed.



Above: Metrolink, Manchester. A highly successful scheme funded largely by the local authority and Government. Opened in 1992, it combines a regional transport link into the city, running on old railway lines and operating as a tram in the city centre.



Above: Traffic congestion in London.



Above: The Carfax, Horsham, Sussex. A peaceful tree lined square, complete with bandstand, replaces a double roundabout.

7.1 Good design can help to reduce the impact of traffic on our cities and countryside. How can this best be achieved while still maintaining accessibility and economic viability?

7.2 What role can design play in reconciling the different interests of all road users, especially in encouraging people to walk, cycle or use public transport?

7.3 The design quality of street furniture makes a major contribution to perceptions of our urban fabric. What can be done to promote a new genre of design which is neither brutalist nor pastiche, but fitted to today's urban needs?

Housing

The creation of a home is one of the most central experiences in many people's lives. Good design in housing lies at the heart of urban renewal. Being at ease with life in town or city depends in particular upon the quality of housing; not just the building itself but its surroundings, its access to services, jobs and leisure facilities.

For too long those who have sought to improve their housing condition have had little option but to move to new suburban developments. This is a choice which people will continue to make, but it is a necessary part of bringing life back into our urban centres that we offer people the opportunity to live there in comparable comfort, with clean streets, good services, pleasant surroundings and open spaces all within easy reach.



Castle Court, Hyde Park, Sheffield.

Top Left: Block A after refurbishment

Top Right: Block A before refurbishment

Above: Block B during demolition.

After a mixture of demolition and refurbishment, the density of this 1960s housing scheme has been reduced significantly. It incorporates various types of tenure and housing, built on a traditional street pattern

The best guarantors of effective maintenance and management of houses are the people who live there. Owners and tenants are taking more responsibility in a variety of ways.

First, private ownership has increased steadily during the last decade, with 67% of houses now owner-occupied. Home owners are usually directly responsible for the quality and maintenance of their own property. For many years new houses for sale were largely restricted to edge of town estates but more recently developers have made more use of previously derelict urban sites. This has made a greater variety of housing available and many run-down districts have been regenerated.

Second, the reputation of the private rented sector has greatly improved, so that more people are willing to choose rented accommodation. There has been a welcome revival following deregulation in 1988, with new landlords investing in the sector and providing housing to a high standard. Private renting helps regenerate our urban areas, for example by bringing empty property back into use.

Third, there are the councils and housing associations which help to put decent housing within the reach of all families. Many council homes are well designed low-rise buildings which have stood the test of time, but some poorly designed estates from the 1960s and 1970s have severe structural and design problems, and a big effort is being made to deal with them. In all cases enthusiastic participation by tenants in the management of the houses or estates brings great benefits. Community involvement is vital to the success of schemes such as Estate Action. Housing Action Trusts, City Challenge and Safer Cities, which all help to refurbish run-down housing estates and regenerate neighbourhoods, turning unpopular estates into places where people once again want to live. Alongside general renovation work are measures to cut crime by giving people greater security and control: entry phones, concierge systems, gardens and restricted access to communal areas all contribute to this important task.

The Government want to raise all council housing management to the standard of the best, and has

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Discussion issues

8.1 What more can be done to enable home owners and tenants to work together to improve the quality of their local environment? What steps should local communities themselves be taking?

8.2 Can a greater attention to coherent urban design make new housing more acceptable to the existing local community?

8.3 How can developers ensure that their new developments on the edges of villages are properly integrated into the existing fabric?

8.4 How can the contribution of private landlords to regeneration of our cities be further enhanced?

8.5 What more could be done to encourage new housebuilding in urban rather than greenfield locations?



Left: Mothers Square, Hackney. Built on a former hospital site, the scheme combines a variety of health and housing uses focusing on attractively designed large internal gardens.

introduced legislation to give tenants important new rights: a right to get certain urgent repairs done quickly; a right to compensation when they move for certain improvements they have made to their homes; and a right to manage their estate themselves. Councils can transfer their housing to new owners through large scale voluntary transfer, bringing in fresh funds and improvements in management.

Below: Abbotsbury, Dorset. New housing, well placed and using local materials to enhance the village character.



Quality and Investment

The Government's policy is to encourage inward investment. As the White Paper "Competitiveness - Helping Business To Win " explains, the British economy benefits from this inflow of technical innovation and world class production and managerial techniques.

The UK is second only to the United States in attracting inward investment. This has helped revive the international competitiveness of key sectors of our industry in recent years. Yet every survey shows the importance to incomers of the physical environment in both town and country: the quality of buildings and the open spaces, the transport infrastructure, and the cultural, educational and leisure facilities which they find here.

A high quality environment attracts inward investment and this investment helps improve the environment further. The challenge is to find ways of drawing that investment into the areas where the benefits are greatest and the improvements most needed.



Above: The new Manchester Airport railway link.

English Partnerships, the newly integrated urban regeneration agency, will promote high standards both in its own developments and those it supports. It recognises the important link between improving an area's image and attracting the inward investment essential for successful regeneration. Guidance issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment makes clear that the Agency should take proper account of the need for good design, sensitive landscaping, tree planting and suitable aftercare. The Agency will ensure that all its projects support long term environmental enhancement. English Partnerships also has a special role in promoting the reuse of derelict land, and the reclamation of contaminated land.

Similarly, the Rural Development Commission (RDC), another Government agency, backs local efforts to promote the economic and social well-being of rural communities. A major part of the Commission's role is to encourage rural enterprise and regeneration and it has a range of programmes to stimulate enterprise and business in rural areas. All these are conducted with close attention to the quality of what is built and its appropriateness to the rural setting. In particular, the Commission's Redundant Building Grant will enable companies to refurbish old buildings on farms, estates or abandoned industrial sites to provide business premises.

The Rural Challenge programme, also run by the RDC, is a new initiative to stimulate innovative approaches to social and economic development in less prosperous areas. Where this involves development or redevelopment, then matters of quality, scale, location and appropriateness of design will be important criteria which the Commission will use in advising Ministers on the merits of bids.

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9.1 Which aspects of a town or city are most important in attracting people and new business and investment?

9.2 In what respects can we learn from other European cities as we constantly look to improve our own?

9.3 How important is cultural and artistic life to the attraction of people and new business to an area?



Above: Stansted Airport, Essex. The elegant terminal building looks back to the simplicity and convenience of the earliest flying era and is clearly integrated with other transport links.

Left: Concordia Wharf, Shad Thames, London. A refurbishment of the brewery site alongside Tower Bridge and the creation of a new square with an adjacent development of housing, offices and shops. It has brought significant new life to a run down part of the Thames.

Taking Decisions in the Round

The life of the city is much more than the sum of its parts. However convenient it may be to talk separately about transport, housing, employment or leisure, it is only when we come to view the whole, to think much more in the round, that we can begin to plan with any hope of success.

Nor can we see the life of our cities as if they were the responsibility only of government, of councils, or of planning committees. Instead, we have to see them as products of the whole community; affected by a mass of different influences, and supported by a host of different individuals and groups. By considering urban life as a whole and recognising that responsibility rests with us all, we can further improve the quality of our urban life.



Above: Salford Quays, Manchester. Development of the disused and derelict City docks has provided housing, employment and recreational facilities. The scheme was co-ordinated by Salford City Council and involved private sector companies.

For each region of the country, the work of four central government departments has been brought together into a single government office, under a single regional director. The Home Office and the Department for Education have made new arrangements to form close links with these offices, and a Single Regeneration Budget has been introduced to draw together 20 programmes from government departments. Funds can thus be focused according to local needs and priorities, without being earmarked from the centre and inflexibly administered.

There are more opportunities for local authorities and the private sector to put together the most effective packages through programmes such as City Challenge and Rural Challenge as well as the Single Regeneration Budget. Constraints and criteria for funding have been reduced to allow individual applicants to decide how the overall objectives can best be met flexibly.

The importance of developing a broad understanding locally of the strengths and weaknesses of an area led to the promotion of the City Pride Initiative by the Government. Although being piloted only in London, Birmingham and Manchester, interest is already more widespread. In each place, civic and business leaders have been challenged to work with their communities to define a vision for their cities: a strategy for building on their areas' strengths.

Major planning applications must include environmental statements, supported by an analysis of the

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Discussion issues

10.1 How do we involve more effectively the whole community in planning for their future?

10.2 In what ways can we further encourage individual and voluntary initiatives to improve the quality of life locally?

10.3 Are there changes in the mechanisms of local and national government which would facilitate an holistic approach to urban problems?



Above: A community consultation discussion of the scheme for Poundbury, Dorset.

possible impacts of a development on the environment, the means of mitigating them and a formulation of the best course of action.

Partnerships between government, nongovernment organisations, business and people will also be necessary. It is usually possible to ensure that modest day to day conflicts do not prevent progress on broader fronts. Early public consultation can smooth the path of substantial developments.

The Government has launched a new citizens' environment scheme - Going for Green - to increase people's awareness of how their choices affect their surroundings. A campaign committee, chaired by Professor Graham Ashworth, will enlist support and commitment in the coming year in the effort to deliver sustainable development, concentrating always on local and individual action.

What next?

This document is about increasing awareness that good design of buildings matters and encouraging debate about how, through better design, we can improve the quality of the built environment in our cities, towns and villages. John Gummer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, would welcome your views about how we can achieve this.

Whatever your involvement or interest in buildings and the built environment, this is your chance to say how you think our cities, towns and villages can be improved in future. If you wish to take part in this debate and have ideas or comments about any of the issues raised, please use the tear-off response sheet at the back of this document to make your views known to us. The deadline for responses is 30 September 1994.

The Department of the Environment will consider carefully all comments received. Where issues of shared interest with other government departments have been identified, these will be drawn to the attention of the relevant department(s). For example, the Department of National Heritage has a clear interest in the built heritage as has the Department of Transport in traffic and travel.

A conference is planned for later in the year to consider how better quality can be achieved.

Your chance to influence

quality in town and country

About you

To help consider responses it would be useful to have the following information. If you wish the information to be treated in confidence please indicate this at the top of the response form.

Name

Relevant qualifications

If you are responding on behalf of a company or organisation, please give the following details:

Name of company/organisation

Position held

Follow up to responses

We may wish to follow up some of the comments and ideas put forward in response to the discussion document. This may take the form of a postal questionnaire or interview involving a sample of the responses. If you would be willing to take part please indicate this by ticking the appropriate box:

I would be willing to answer a postal questionnaire

I would be willing to be interviewed

I would be interested in attending a conference about Quality in Town and Country.

If you have ticked any of the above boxes, please provide an address and daytime telephone number by which we may contact you, if necessary.

Address

Telephone number (daytime)

If you wish to comment on any of the discussion points highlighted, or have other comments about Quality in Town and Country, please use this form and return it by 30 September to the address given below. If you require more space please attach additional sheets of paper.

Where your comments relate to one of the numbered discussion issues, it would be helpful if your responses indicated the appropriate reference number.

Thank you for responding to the discussion document.
Please return your response by 30 September 1994 to:
Quality in Town and Country
Department of the Environment
Room CI3/IOa
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P3EB