



SHAPING NEIGHBOURHOODS: CHARACTER AND CONTEXT DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

FEBRUARY 2013
PUBLISHED FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

**LONDON PLAN 2011
IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

MAYOR OF LONDON

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How to give your views

The draft SPG Shaping Neighbourhoods: Character and Context is published for consultation and your comments are invited. Responses must be received by 12th May 2013. They should be sent to:

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
(draft SPG Character and Context)
Planning Department
Greater London Authority
Freepost LON15799
London SE1 2BR

Or email to CCSPG@london.gov.uk

If you send a response by email it is not necessary to also send a hard copy

SHAPING NEIGHBOURHOODS: CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

FEBRUARY 2013

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This guidance will form part of the over-arching Shaping Neighbourhoods Portfolio. It is currently envisaged that it will have 4 parts:

- A. Character and Context
 - B. Lifetime Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning
 - C. Play and Informal Recreation
 - D. Accessible London
-

FOREWORD



Planning for neighbourhoods in a city as dynamic and diverse as London is a tricky business. The planner must steer a careful course between the whirlpool of total change and the shoals of complete preservation: on the one hand, the hazard of so changing the character of an area that it loses its much loved distinctiveness; and on the other, the risk of being so constrained by what is there at the moment that innovation is stifled. We have much worthy of being preserved, but equally have places where the existing character badly needs overhauling.

I am bringing out this guidance to try to help those facing these challenges, and to provide advice on how to navigate them. It explains the fundamental importance of getting an understanding of a place before taking decisions on its development – how it has come to be the way it is; the things about it that people who live, work, visit or just travel through value or want to see changed; the economic, social and other forces driving change. This understanding can then provide a springboard for development that makes a real contribution to a place and its people. A development that shows a clear understanding of, and relationship with, the

context of an area is one that is more likely to be successful economically as well as aesthetically. As the guidance points out, this is not about preserving neighbourhoods in aspic, rather it's about an approach to encouraging development that changes what needs changing and makes a contribution to London's overall success – but which also protects the things that are essential to an area's individual character and perhaps makes the best of previously hidden strengths.

This document seeks to help those concerned with development capture these issues, setting out approaches and processes that can be used to build the necessary understanding of place and draw on that to inform the design of development and planning decision-making. It emphasises the importance of engaging with communities and others with an interest or something to contribute from the earliest stages. Following this structure approach should help ensure quicker and better-informed planning decisions and the kind of high quality buildings and urban realm that will be valued by local residents and users alike. We have been helped in putting this document together by a steering group with representatives from boroughs, civic and amenity groups and developers. Their knowledge and insights have been essential to its preparation, and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for their contribution.

These are important issues which go to the heart of why and how we develop our city, and what we can do to make sure that the generations that follow us do not look at our legacy, scratch their heads and ask just why did they let this happen? We need to make sure we get it right, and I hope we will receive a range of views to help us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Boris Johnson'.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London



CLAREDALE STREET (TOWER HAMLETS)
KARAKUSEVIC CARSON ARCHITECTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

- 1.1 *“If you wish to have a just notion of the magnitude of this city, you must not be satisfied with seeing its great streets and squares, but must survey the innumerable little lanes and courts. It is not in the showy evolutions of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists.” Samuel Johnson*
- 1.2 London is a dynamic place and has many functions and values. It is a neighbourhood and home for residents, a national capital, an international centre for finance, a tourist destination and a seat of culture to name just a few. It is this diversity and multiplicity of roles that defines London. Understanding how the existing character and context of individual places in London contributes to this diversity is essential to an appreciation of how these different places may develop in the future. The process and use of the tools outlined in this SPG should bring time benefits to the planning process, improve the quality of decision making and bring about better quality developments.
- 1.3 The London Plan 2011 includes a number of policies for facilitating high quality design, building on the positive elements of places to help inform the future enhancement and development of an area, whether through protecting important elements crucial to an area’s distinctive sense of place or identifying those elements that could be enhanced through managed change. In particular Policy 7.4 Local Character states that new development should help people understand where a place has come from,

where it is now and where it is going; and that it should reflect the function of the place both locally and as part of a complex urban city region, understanding the physical, economic, environmental and social factors that have shaped it over time and are likely to in the future.

- 1.4 This document contains guidance supplementary to London Plan policies. Adoption will follow a period of public consultation and it will then have the same formal development plan status as these policies. It will be formally adopted by the Mayor as supplementary guidance under his powers under the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (as amended) and a summary of the comments received and the responses of the Mayor to those comments will be made available on the Greater London Authority website. The adopted SPG will therefore be a material consideration in drawing up development plan documents and in taking planning decisions.
- 1.5 Places are always in a process of ‘becoming’ and it is always important to understand both the present as well as the forces that are driving change, such as climate change. This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) sets out an approach to **understanding character and context so that it can be considered in the planning and design process to guide change in a way which is responsive to individual places and locations**. It is key to the implementation of many of the policies in Chapter 7 of the London Plan, particularly Policies 7.4 and 7.1.

1.6 The objectives of this SPG are to provide:

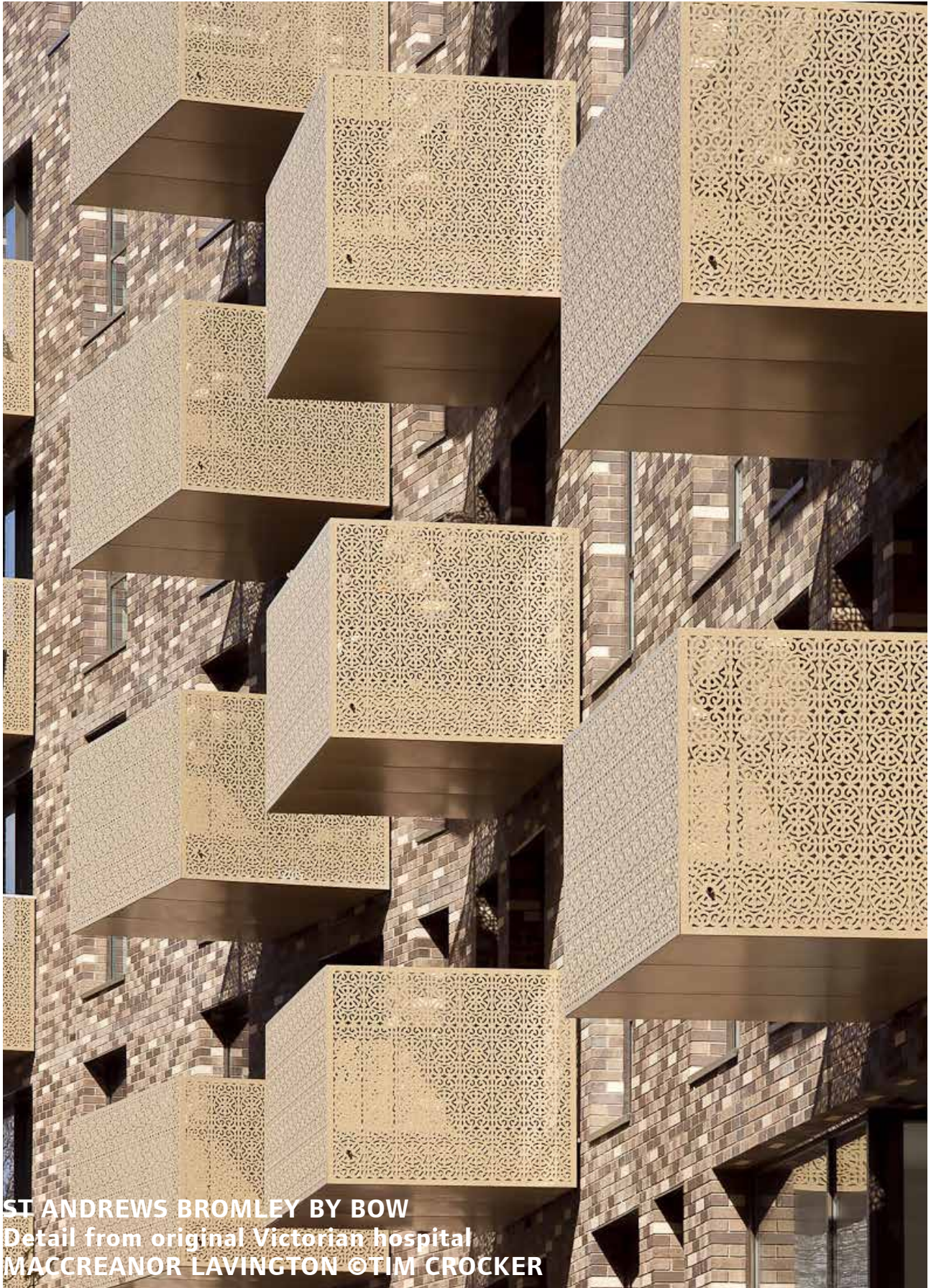
- specific guidance on the attributes of character and context in London (physical, cultural, social, economic, perceptions and experience);
- information on data sources and resources available to inform an understanding of character and context in London;
- an analysis and appreciation of the correlation and interrelationships between these different aspects of character, including examples of how this analysis can be articulated and presented to others;
- examples of good practice in how an understanding of character and context can be used to help manage change in a way that sustains and enhances the positive attributes of a place.

in understanding and preparing Neighbourhood Plans for their areas.

The audience for this guidance

1.7 The SPG has been prepared with the help of a steering group that included borough, developer and voluntary sector representatives. It is aimed at providing guidance for:

- Boroughs in preparing information about places as evidence base for their policies in their Local Plans and in assessing planning applications;
 - Developers and their consultants in preparing planning applications, so that an understanding of character and context can help achieve the right development in the right place;
 - Neighbourhood Forums / Communities
-



ST ANDREWS BROMLEY BY BOW
Detail from original Victorian hospital
MACCREANOR LAVINGTON ©TIM CROCKER

SOME DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

Character is created by the interplay of different elements, including the physical or built elements that make up the place, the cultural, social and economic factors which have combined to create identity, and the people associated with it through memories, association and activity.

Context can be defined as the way in which places, sites and spaces inter relate with one another whether physically, functionally or visually, or the way in which they are experienced sequentially and understood.

POLICY 7.4: LOCAL CHARACTER

Strategic

- A Development should have regard to the form, function, and structure of an area, place or street and the scale, mass and orientation of surrounding buildings. It should improve an area's visual or physical connection with natural features. In areas of poor or ill-defined character, development should build on the positive elements that can contribute to establishing an enhanced character for the future function of the area.

Planning decisions

- B Buildings, streets and open spaces should provide a high quality design response that:
- a has regard to the pattern and grain of the existing spaces and streets in orientation, scale, proportion and mass
 - b contributes to a positive relationship between the urban structure and natural landscape features, including the underlying landform and topography of an area
 - c is human in scale, ensuring buildings create a positive relationship with street level activity and people feel comfortable with their surroundings
 - d allows existing buildings and structures that make a positive contribution to the character of a place to influence the future character of the area
 - e is informed by the surrounding historic environment.

LDF preparation

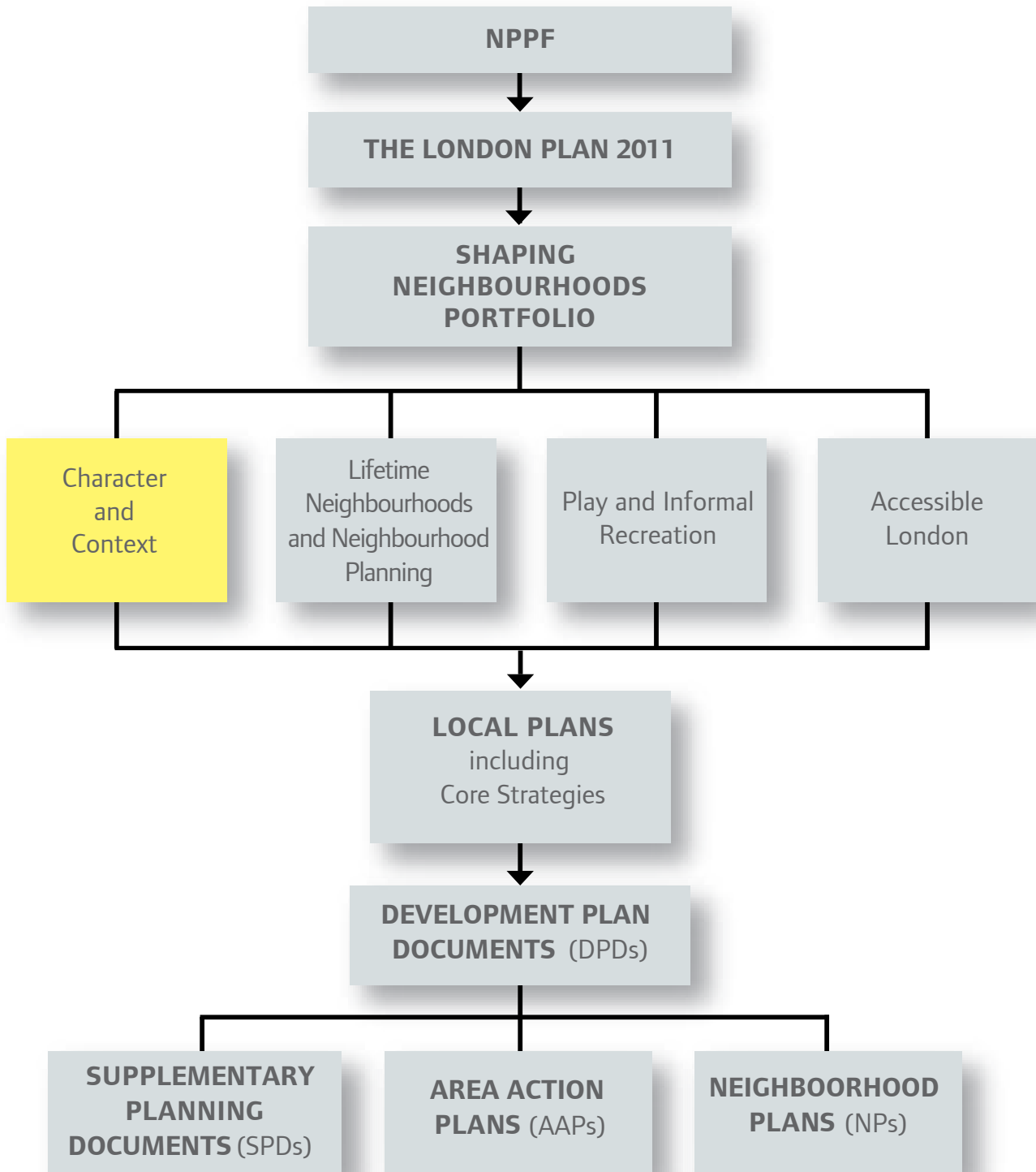
- C Boroughs should consider the different characters of their areas to identify landscapes, buildings and places, including on the Blue Ribbon Network, where that character should be sustained, protected and enhanced through managed change. Characterisation studies can help in this process.



LEYTON TOWN CENTRE PROJECT
JAN KATTEIN ARCHITECTS
©MORLEY VON STERNBERG

CHAPTER TWO

POLICY CONTEXT



Planning Policy Framework for Character and Context SPG

POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The policy context for this SPG is set out in Figure 2.1 below. The policy context reinforces the importance of understanding character, context and place from the national to local level. In terms of the London Plan element, only the Shaping Neighbourhoods portfolio of SPGs is shown on the diagram below, however details of other London Plan SPGs are set out in the supporting text.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. An understanding of local character and context is an important component of all three dimensions of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF (para. 7):

- Economic – achieving the right type of development in the right places to support growth and innovation;
- Social – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities - creating a high quality built environment;
- Environmental – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

2.3 The NPPF contains 12 core planning principles (para. 17). These emphasise the importance of good design and recognising

intrinsic character. Key aspects of this are to:

- always seek high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;
- take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

2.4 The NPPF expands on these core principles at section 7 – Requiring Good Design. It states that Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of an area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Requirements for planning policies in relation to development (para.58) seek to ensure that development:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- establishes a strong sense of place, using buildings and streetscape to create attractive and comfortable places in which to live and work, and to visit;
- optimises the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain a mix of uses including green and other public space as part of developments;
- responds to local character and history, reflecting local identity in terms of

materials, whilst incorporating innovative design where appropriate;

- creates safe and accessible environments;
- is visually attractive by virtue of good architecture and landscape design.

2.5 The NPPF also makes reference to the social aspects of a place and to the connections between people and places. It seeks to ensure that development is properly integrated with its environment and context, whether built, historic or natural (para. 61).

2.6 Aspects of the historic environment as they relate to places are also referenced in section 12 of the NPPF, in particular the concept of development drawing upon opportunities presented by the contribution of the historic environment to a sense of place. Understanding the significance of heritage assets as well as other features is a key part of understanding how places developed over time and their resultant character.

2.7 Under plan-making, the NPPF also requires the use of a proportionate evidence base (para. 158) to underpin a Local Plan with relevant up-to-date evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics of an area. In particular, it references the value and role of assessments in understanding the sensitivity of places and their capacity for change.

London Plan Policies

2.8 The London Plan includes a number of policies for facilitating high quality design, drawing from the positive elements

of places to help inform the future enhancement and development of an area.

2.9 The overarching policy for this SPG is Policy 7.4 Local Character. It states that:

Development should have regard to the form, function, and structure of an area, place or street and the scale, mass and orientation of surrounding buildings. It should improve an area's visual or physical connection with natural features. In areas of poor or ill-defined character, development should build on the positive elements that can contribute to establishing an enhanced character for the future function of the area.

2.10 There are a number of other policies that contribute to creating well-designed places which particularly relate to local character and context:

- Policy 7.1 Building London's Neighbourhoods and Communities
 - Policy 7.2 An Inclusive Environment
 - Policy 7.3 Designing out Crime
 - Policy 7.5 Public Realm
 - Policy 7.6 Architecture
 - Policy 7.7 Location and design of Tall and Large Buildings
 - Policy 7.8 Heritage Assets and Archaeology
 - Policy 7.9 Heritage-led Regeneration
 - Policy 7.21 Trees and Woodlands
-

- Policy 7.28 Restoration of the Blue Ribbon Network
 - Policy 7.29 The River Thames
 - Policy 7.30 London's Canals, and Other Rivers and Waterspaces
 - Policy 2.10 Central Activities Zone – Strategic priorities
 - Policy 2.13 Opportunity Areas and Areas for Intensification
 - Policy 2.15 Town Centres
 - Policy 2.18 Green Infrastructure
 - Policy 3.5 Quality and Design of Housing Developments
 - Policy 3.7 Large Residential Developments
 - Policy 6.1 Strategic Approach (Integrating Transport and Development)
 - Policy 6.10 Walking
- A Character and Context SPG – The subject of this SPG
- B Lifetime Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning SPG - This forthcoming SPG will provide guidance on the implementation of Lifetime Neighbourhood principles (London Plan Policy 7.1) through both the planning system and a range of other implementation tools. It will also provide guidance around some aspects of neighbourhood planning.
- C Play and Informal Recreation SPG 2012 - This SPG provides guidance on the appropriate level of provision for play and informal recreational space in developments based on updated child yields calculations. It also provides innovative approaches to play provision in terms of facilities, locations, design and management based on the Lifetime Neighbourhoods principles.
- D Accessible London SPG – This forthcoming SPG will update guidance and advice from the 2004 Accessible London SPG, providing clear guidance on meeting the principles of inclusive design, promoting and achieving the highest standards of accessible and inclusive design, and addressing the access needs of London's diverse population.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Shaping Neighbourhoods Portfolio of SPGs

2.11 This Character and Context SPG is part of a series of SPGs which sit within the Shaping Neighbourhoods portfolio. The portfolio also includes the Lifetime Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning SPG, Play and Informal Recreation SPG and the Accessible London SPG. Together this set of SPGs provide guidance and advice on planning issues that influence and have an impact on the planning and shaping of neighbourhoods:

Green Infrastructure and Open Environments SPG

2.12 The guidance forming part of the Green Infrastructure and Open Environments portfolio is also relevant to understanding character and context. In particular the All London Green Grid SPG states that green infrastructure should be designed and

managed as an integral network. One of the inherent functions identified for green infrastructure is creating a sense of place and opportunities for greater appreciation of the landscape, cultural heritage and geodiversity. Landscapes and heritage assets are identified as playing a key role in creating the basis for individual and collective cultural identity. The SPG on Preparing Tree and Woodland Strategies also contains useful advice, particularly in relation to the application of the valuation of tree assets.

Housing SPG

- 2.13 The Housing SPG provides guidance on the quality and design of homes. In particular it embeds the housing standards set out in the London Plan with other design features to ensure the provision of good quality flexible lifetime homes. The SPG also identifies the different sources of housing capacity that have to be explored if the London Plan's targets are to be achieved, explaining the balance which has to be struck between numbers, creating attractive places to live and respecting the character of surrounding areas.

Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks

- 2.14 Through the London Plan, the Mayor designates a number of Opportunity Areas. These are areas with significant capacity to accommodate new housing, commercial and other development. Much of the development in the Opportunity Areas has the potential to affect existing places and neighbourhoods. The Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks (OAPFs) provide a policy context against which planning applications can be assessed. In reviewing,

preparing or implementing OAPFs, account should be taken of the character and context provided by existing places and neighbourhoods and their contribution to the sense of place in relation to future visions for a locality.

Local Plans

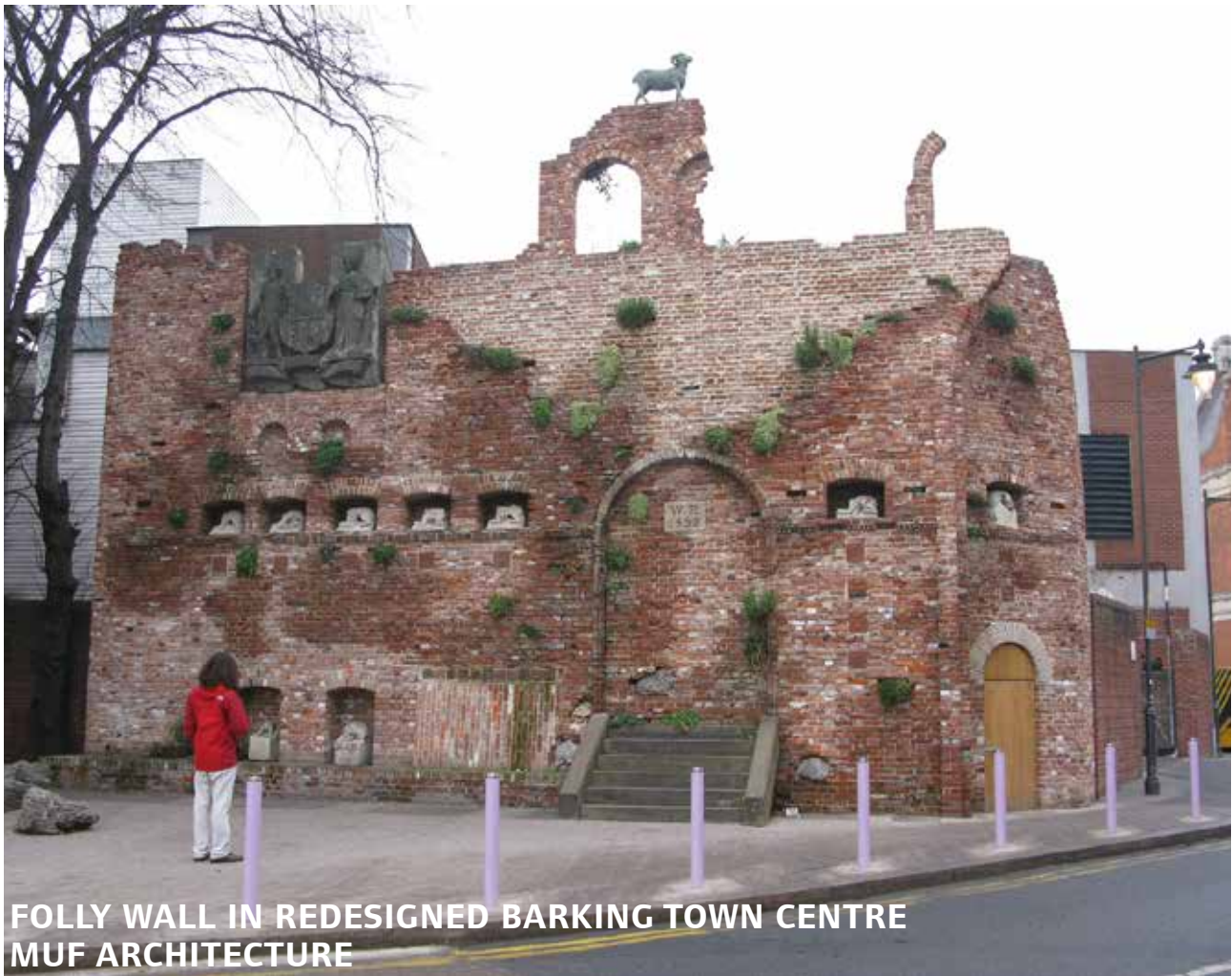
- 2.15 Ensuring there are robust local planning policy frameworks in place with policies which have regard to the character and context of existing neighbourhoods as well as the development of new neighbourhoods, and the sense of place that they provide for a community will be key to creating places which people are proud to identify with. This is particularly important where places cross borough boundaries. Any area has to be seen in its wider context, whether Londonwide or within a local travel to work area. Many localities are influenced by things outside their boundary, for example where designated views pass over or through an area.

Neighbourhood planning

- 2.16 Under the Localism Act 2011, neighbourhood planning can have a significant impact on the future of a local area and a community's sense of place. Ensuring there is a shared understanding of local character and context by all the players involved in shaping places in London is therefore essential.
- 2.17 Where neighbourhood plans come forward, they will need to be in general conformity with strategic planning policies in the development plan for the local area, this will include the London Plan, as well as national guidance and legislation.
-

Proportionality

2.18 The guidance set out in this SPG aims to provide a framework that can be used both in plan making and in the assessment of proposals for development to facilitate this. Where developers and applicants are being asked to undertake this work, local authorities will need to be clear about the appropriate level of detailed information that is being asked for. The detail will vary according to the scale of development.



**FOLLY WALL IN REDESIGNED BARKING TOWN CENTRE
MUF ARCHITECTURE**



THE BEST MANNY EVER
FROM IRIS FLORA BEATRICE
SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE DOG POUND
HUMAN CENTIPEDE PART 3: INCEPTION
TOY STORY 3D / AVATAR 3D / ILLUSIONIST

BAR

REDESIGNED WINDRUSH SQUARE (BRIXTON)
GLA REGENERATION CAMPAIGN ©WAYNE PARKER

CHAPTER THREE

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER AND CONTEXT AND KEY PRINCIPLES

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER AND CONTEXT AND KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 This chapter sets out the **benefits** of understanding the character and context of a place and the guiding **principles** to follow in establishing that understanding
- 3.2 A sense of place and identity form the setting to the lives of people and communities, through experience, association, and use or activity. Places which develop in a manner that responds to the local character and context of that place are likely to be more sustainable, contribute to a good quality of life and attract investment – economically, culturally and/or intellectually.
- 3.3 In order to facilitate appropriate levels of growth and change that respect a community's sense of identity and distinctiveness, it is necessary to consider and understand how places have developed. London is defined by constant change and evolution from a port and imperial capital, the seat of government, a centre of international trade and commerce to 'a world city', it has grown to incorporate numerous towns and villages within its boundaries and has extended far beyond the 'square mile' of the original Roman and Medieval City. Juxtaposition of different settlements and communities is one of the strands that contribute to the richness of sense of place and identity in London, as does the imprint left by various cultural, political, economic, social and ethnic influences. It is a multi-layered city of organic evolution, with numerous fragments from its different periods of development, none completely erased, some still very redolent of the era in which

they were developed and others often not fully cohesive or uniform. Change and the intensive distribution of different, often competing uses are a characteristic of the capital. Having a good understanding of different places can be used to guide and manage change in a way which responds positively to London's particular character, history and evolution.

- 3.4 In many cases, given the diversity of London's people and places there may not be a single 'community' entity that will have a single view about the character of an area. In practice there may need to be a process of understanding between a range of viewpoints and a need for the decision makers to strike a balance between them.

How can an understanding of the character and context of a place help?

- 3.5 Having a better understanding of the character and context of a place can help many people in their work, whether through policy development, decision making or site design. The table opposite shows the various audiences that may benefit from having a good understanding of the character and context of their areas and how this understanding might be applied. The case studies overleaf demonstrate some of these benefits.

AUDIENCE	HOW CHARACTER AND CONTEXT INFORMATION CAN BE USED
Local community and neighbourhood groups	Defining and shaping neighbourhoods; central strand in planning for and delivering responsive environments
Spatial planners	Developing sound and complete evidence bases and informing plan development, policies and proposals. Helping to ensure visions, plans and policies are relevant and respect localities
Development managers, urban designers and heritage advisors	<p>Ensuring schemes respond to policy objectives</p> <p>Enabling approval of higher quality and more place responsive design</p> <p>Relating individual sites and proposals to the wider context (place, green infrastructure networks, etc.)</p>
Developers and their consultants	<p>Informing and improving scheme design and development to respond to context/to be 'right for its place'</p> <p>Contributing to place specific design and access statements</p> <p>Speeding the planning process and achieving planning permissions</p>

3.6 An understanding of the character and context of a place can help to:

- Ensure high quality responsive design and a good fit between place and site design, and help develop local design frameworks;
- Contribute to the development of policies and objectives for an area based on its intrinsic character;
- Inform change by providing evidence for capacity studies, sensitivity assessments, regeneration strategies, etc. to help determine the right development in the right place;
- Improve visual and physical connections with natural features or elements such as green infrastructure – the All London Green Grid and Blue Ribbon Network;
- Integrate sustainable design with its context, including urban greening/green infrastructure, climate change adaptation;
- Recognise local historic character and contribute to conservation management – understanding sites and assets in context, including identification, conservation and management of heritage assets, significance and setting;
- Achieve or maintain suitable densities, and intensification where appropriate, in a way that responds to, creates or reinforces the local character of a place;
- Identify, conserve and manage key views, including the consideration of the siting of tall buildings;
- Contribute to a sense of safety and

security by creating well-designed legible places with opportunities for casual/natural surveillance and activity;

- Reinforce a sense of meaning, civility, belonging and distinctiveness.

3.7 The case studies overleaf demonstrate some of these benefits.

Ensuring good fit between place and site design, and developing local design frameworks

CLERKENWELL VILLAGE RENAISSANCE: PROPOSALS FOR FARRINGDON STATION FORECOURT

Shows existing built fabric and context complementing new development and public realm. The proposal reclaims the street, creating a new area of public realm linking the original and new station buildings. Retention and refurbishment of the historic listed station building and addition of a new station building with new active frontages has defined the space, keeping the old building as a focus and conserving the visual relationships to the fine Victorian buildings of Cowcross Street behind. The colour and texture of these buildings provides the cue for a new streetscape material palette. The scheme forms part of a wider public realm reclamation in Clerkenwell.

Scheme and image credit: Atkins/London Borough of Islington.



Integrating sustainable design with local context, urban greening, and climate change proofing, as well as a setting for activities/community focus

DALSTON COMMUNITY EASTERN CURVE GARDENS

Transformation of a derelict post-industrial site into a new community space, which facilitates opportunities for more sustainable, 'futureproofed' modes of living, for example through local food production as an integral part of the site design. The proposals also include creation of new areas of habitat and microclimate within this inner London site. The scheme reclaims a disused railway line, creating a new garden developed as part of the 'Making Space in Dalston' project. The project 'began with the identification and celebration of existing assets, social, cultural and physical'. This formed the baseline for strategies, design proposals and a programme of cultural activity to inform and enhance the public realm. The project aimed to value what was there and define what was missing. The site is run by a steering group of local community organisations who also help facilitate opportunities for local food production and work with local voluntary groups.

Scheme and image credit: muf architecture/Design for London



Conservation management and managing character; understanding sites and assets in context

BEDFORD SQUARE, FITZROVIA

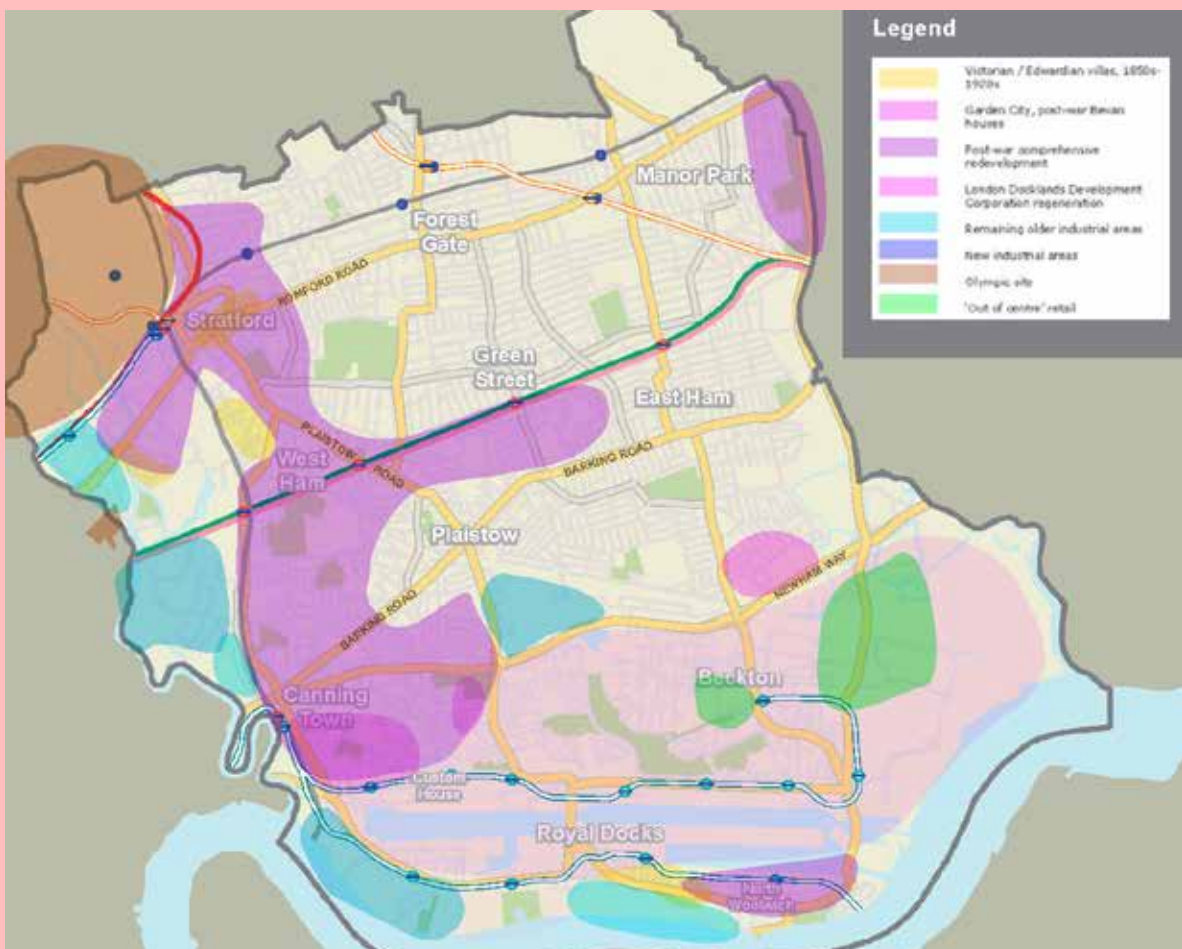
Restoration design implemented 2006. An exemplar project achieved by the London Borough of Camden, English Heritage, the Bedford Estate and Crown Commissioners jointly funding and working in partnership. This example shows how heritage assets can be successfully adapted for modern uses and changing demographics requirements, whilst retaining a strong character framework. In this case a set of 18th century terraces have been adapted as office and institutional accommodation. Whilst the gardens have been retained as a largely private amenity in the manner of the historic residential use, the formal bound gravel and flag paved spaces of former carriage drives create an appropriate context for the monumental Georgian facades. It also provides incidental and informal public realm – a permeable, safe and relatively ‘tranquil’ environment in close proximity to the busy streets of the West End at Tottenham Court Road. It is a local focus with a distinct identity and something more than a place to move through.



Using an understanding of the character and context of a place to guide design in a Borough wide character study

NEWHAM CHARACTER STUDY, LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM, 2011

This study developed a borough wide character typology, noting locally specific variations and aspects important to local sense of place. These were used to create a framework for a series of urban design cues and principles/priorities for different places within the borough. These principles included sensitivity and integration of the historic environment, visual unity and composition, permeability and legibility, character and local distinctiveness, diversity, adaptability and physical and visual integration with adjacent areas. The typologies were evaluated for their performance against these principles, forming the basis for a set of design cues and priorities for places in the borough.



Key Principles for Understanding Character and Place

3.8 This section sets out some guiding principles to consider in understanding the character and context of places. The four overarching principles aim to define a consistent approach whatever the scale or type of place and are relevant to all people who might be embarking on this work

BOX 3.1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN CONSIDERING LOCAL CHARACTER AND PLACE

FOUR PRINCIPLES

1. Place is all around us and everywhere has a distinctive character
2. Character is about people and communities as well as the physical components
3. Places are connected and overlap – boundaries, edges and transitions are important
4. Character is a dynamic concept – evolution and change are a fundamental characteristic of London

3.9 The four key principles are detailed below:

1 Place is all around us and everywhere has a distinctive character

3.10 Character exists at all scales from the site and neighbourhood level to city-wide. Character forms the setting of all processes and activities for people and communities and can contribute immensely to the

quality of life of those communities. It is relevant as much to a small patch of wasteland, a Victorian terrace, a conservation area or a regeneration area – all have their own character and sense of place and have value to different people or communities.

3.11 This SPG recommends a **consistent approach** to understanding the character and context of a place across the whole of Greater London that can be applied at any scale and in any location. The elements of character will be broadly common. What will differ is the **combination and juxtaposition of elements which make up a place and the respective importance or sensitivities these have to a given type of change**. This SPG contains further information on defining the extent of a place and dealing with boundaries and edges in chapters 5 and 6.

2 Character is about people and communities

3.12 People create places. How places have evolved, their function and the activities they support (both past and present) are pivotal to any understanding of the character of a place. This involves having an **understanding of the activity, use and movement within and through a place and its connections and linkages to its surroundings**. The experience of any place changes over time and may be very different between night and day – vibrant, lively, quiet, empty. How it is used and experienced by all sections of the community including residents, visitors, businesses, young, old, different ethnic groups, etc may also vary significantly.

3.13 It is important to understand **how places**

are perceived, experienced and valued.

Places are not just experienced visually but also through memory and association as well as through all the senses. People may value places for different reasons, often reflecting the services or benefits they provide for them. An awareness and appreciation of places in art, literature and music may also be valuable. All these values and experiences are essential to an understanding the character of a place.

- 3.14 Those involved in commissioning or undertaking studies should consider how they can involve the widest range of people appropriate depending on the scope and purpose of the work. True stakeholder engagement means participation, not just consultation. Stakeholder engagement should be seen as an investment, resulting in more informed outputs and greater ownership of the results and its applications. An assessment of place can help empower people to make decisions about how their local places are managed and changed. Assessments will also be more robust and carry greater weight in the decision-making process.

3 Places are connected and overlap – boundaries and transitions are important

- 3.15 Places does not exist in isolation but are connected to their wider environment. For any place, it is important to **understand the wider contextual elements that may influence** it – i.e., looking ‘outside – in’ and ‘inside – out’, considering proximity and what is on or beyond the boundary, etc. This may include:

- the functional and visual relationships between different elements;

- how places and spaces interrelate;
- how places are experienced sequentially or by different users;
- the connections and movement through and between places.

- 3.16 The boundaries and transitions between different places are often important and need to be considered in their own right and not just as edges of a place. Boundaries between areas of different character are rarely clear on the ground and do not necessarily stop at administrative boundaries. Any assessment of understanding the character and context of a place should therefore be aware and relate to studies on either side of such boundaries, where appropriate.

- 3.17 This SPG contains further information on defining the extent of a place and dealing with boundaries and edges in chapters 5 and 6.

4 The character of a place is a dynamic concept

- 3.18 London is the product of a complex set of inter-related processes and layering of different phases of cultural, social and economic evolution. As change is a fundamental characteristic of London, **respecting character and accommodating change should therefore not be seen as mutually exclusive**. Understanding of the character of a place should not seek to preserve things in a static way but should ensure an appropriate balance is struck between conservation management and guiding change is struck, although this will vary depending on the environment and what

is proposed. It is therefore essential to gain an appreciation of what defines the identity of a location, understand what is special or valued, and how different components may be sensitive or vulnerable, and using this information positively to guide and inform change. In some cases, this may include the creation of a new character.

3.19 This SPG shows how an understanding of the character of a place can be used to positively inform change in the case studies in chapter 6.



**FLAT IRON SQUARE (SOUTHWARK)
GLA REGENERATION CAMPAIGN - 100 PUBLIC SPACES**



LIVERPOOL ONE SITE 3
HAWORTH TOMPKINS ©PAUL RAFTERY

CHAPTER FOUR

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER AND CONTEXT OF A PLACE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER AND CONTEXT OF A PLACE

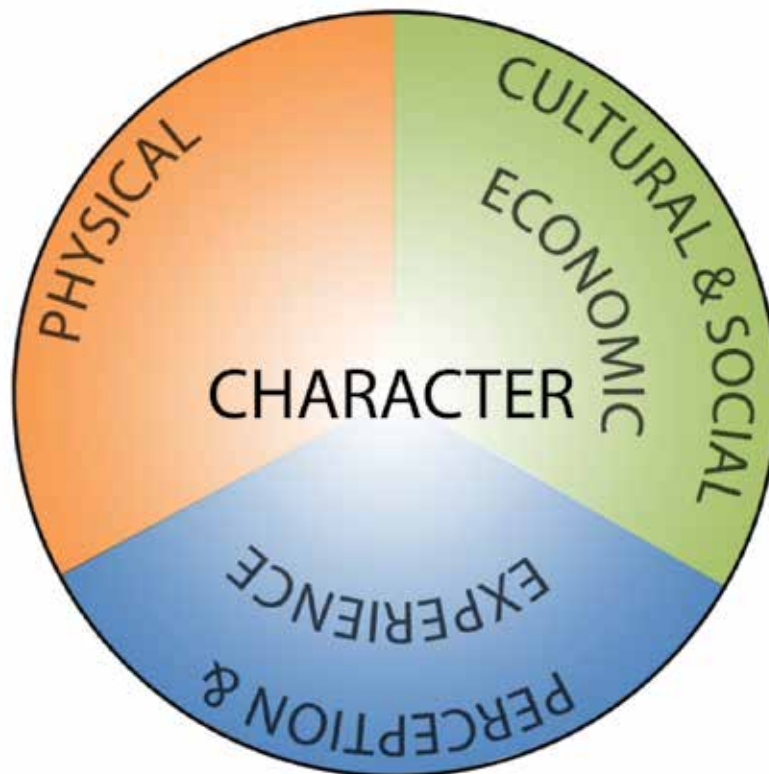
4.1 In order to fully appreciate the character and context of a place, a much more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the elements that make up character is needed than may have traditionally been considered before. This section provides an overview of the **main elements of character** to consider and **a process to follow** in gaining an understanding of the place as well as its requirements. A detailed account of these steps and the elements of character is set out in chapters 5 and 6.

The elements of character

4.2 All places are made up of combinations of the following elements, as summarised on Figure 4.1:

- **Physical:** including underlying structure such as geology and landform, landscape, architecture, urban and built form and settlement.
- **Cultural:** the evolution of places over time, often also linked to social, environmental and economic factors and the ways in which places function and the activities which define them.
- **Perceptual and experiential:** the sensory aspects of a place – how places

Figure 4.1: The elements of character



are used and experienced. Also covering memories and associations which people or communities have with their place.

- 4.3 The diagram overleaf shows the relationship between the various elements of character that make up a place. More detail of these elements of character with possible data sources and a discussion of issues to consider under each theme is developed in chapter 5. Different themes will have different importance depending on location, whether in the Central Activity Zone, inner London or outer London, and it may be that more or fewer elements relate to the study location. The spatial scale at which information needs to be understood, whether it is for a borough, a neighbourhood or is site specific, will also have an effect in terms of level of detail and type of information used.

Overview of the process for understanding the character and context of a place

- 4.4 The **main steps** in understanding the character of a place are essentially similar to many evidence gathering tasks in spatial planning, design and policy formulation. This SPG addresses the **scoping, survey and analysis stages of the process**. It provides guidance on the development of a **baseline study** to assist in understanding the character and context of a place. This baseline understanding can then be used in a wide variety of applications, whether in developing spatial planning evidence bases, interpreting policy or informing design and development management decisions.
- 4.5 Figure 4.2 outlines the principal steps in the process with more detail set out in

chapters 5 and 6.

- 4.6 Any study to understand the character and context:

- should be a transparent, open and collaborative process

All stages of the process should be clearly transparent, with decisions linked back to underlying evidence. There should be transparency with regard to communicating the purposes for any study or assessment to local community and user groups, and in the process of engagement. The aim should be to generate an 'audit trail' of information so that any study or assessment, and any related outputs such as a design framework or strategy, withstand public scrutiny through the plan making and decision-making process. The process of engagement should also be as collaborative as possible in order to help with the validation of any outcomes.

- can be undertaken at different scales and should form part of a hierarchy of information

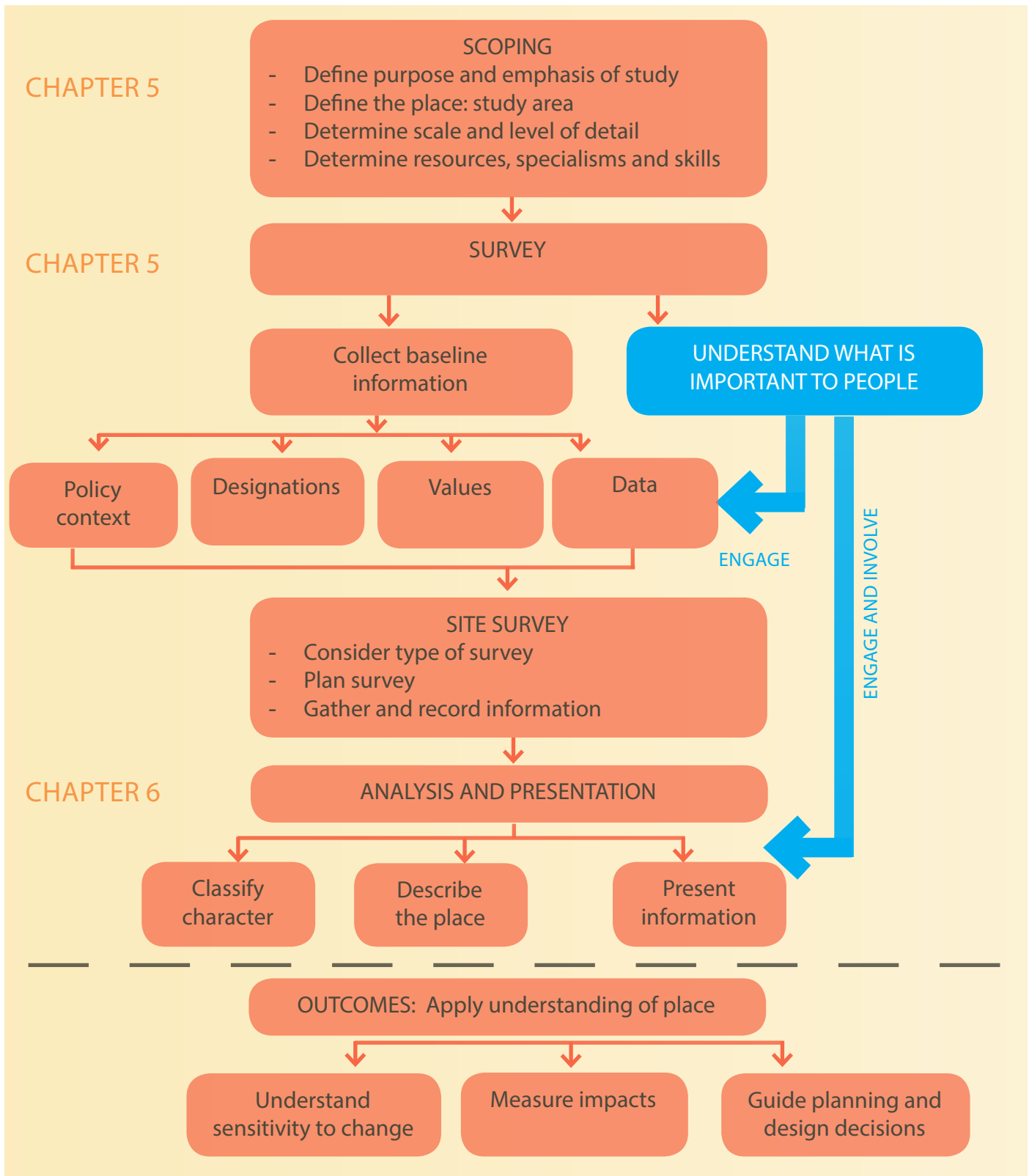
The process can be undertaken at all scales from London-wide, borough level down to the neighbourhood, streets, site level and individual building groups. The scale of any work should be tailored to its particular scope and purpose. The work should fit within a hierarchy of information so that work undertaken at each level adds more detail to the one above. For example a neighbourhood study should be aware of, and work within the context of any relevant borough-wide study. Similarly, a design and access statement for a planning application for a site should take account of any neighbourhood or

borough wide studies of the character and context of a place.

- requires a proportionate approach to be taken to evidence gathering and analysis

The scope of work needed to undertake a study/assessment to understand the character of a place will depend on the purpose of the work. This will include the following factors: geographic extent, scale, extent of data collected, amount of site survey needed, levels of engagement, skills required, level of detail needed and format of outputs. The proportionate approach should be determined at the initial scoping stage prior to embarking on the work. This will ensure data is not collected for the sake of it and that resources and time is not wasted unnecessarily.

Figure 4.2: The process of understanding the character of a place





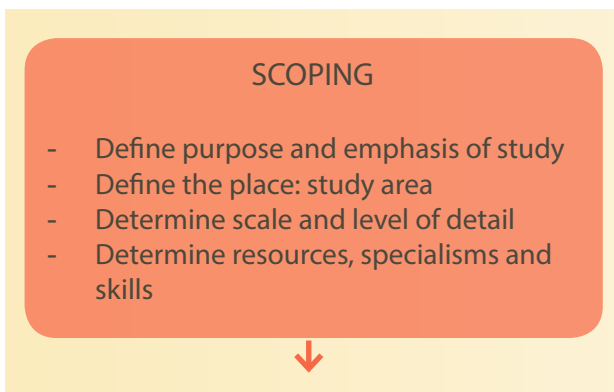
CHAPTER FIVE

SCOPING AND SURVEY

SCOPING AND SURVEY

- 5.1 This chapter sets out the key points to consider:
- in **defining the scope of a study** to understand the character of a place; and
 - in **undertaking a survey**, including the information to capture from desktop study and on site.

SCOPING



- 5.2 Figure 4.2 outlines the principal steps in the process.
- 5.3 Any study or assessment of the character of a place needs to be tailored to its purpose. This will need to take account of what is the appropriate level of information needed to achieve the desired purpose. The Growth & Infrastructure Bill includes provision for local authorities to only request information from developers that is reasonable and proportionate having regard to the development concerned. Scoping will need to consider some key questions. Working through the method presented in this chapter should help clarify answers to the above issues and ensure that the study is proportionate and appropriately focussed.

Defining the purpose and emphasis of the study

- 5.4 It is important to define the purpose and scope of the work from the outset and how it will be used, as well as the extent of the place or location of the study. This will dictate:
- The scale and detail at which the study is carried out
 - The extent to which it integrates other subject areas
 - Whether use can be made of existing relevant studies, and, if so, the extent to which this can be done – an audit of existing work to identify potential ‘knowledge gaps’ or particular issues for this study to address
 - Who to involve and ways to involve stakeholders and the community, or if being led by a community group such as a neighbourhood forum or Business Improvement District, ways in which to involve a wider audience.
 - The nature of outputs – how they are presented, their scope and format.
 - Resources and timescales
 - Project plan and brief development, whether additional expertise is required
- 5.5 The emphasis given to different elements of character will vary depending on the purpose of the study or assessment. All of the elements of character – physical, cultural, socio-economic and perceptual/experiential are important to understand to some degree, although there will be

variations according to emphasis of the study or assessment. For example:

- A study which helps inform a density strategy at borough level or provides the evidence for intensification may look more at scale, massing, building heights and urban grain.
- Work which informs conservation management is likely to emphasise historic layers, evolution and cultural pattern.
- A character baseline for a design guide, design codes or a design and access statement may cover all themes, and may make particular reference to those which may be of use for considering sustainable design, for example urban biodiversity, landscape, microclimate.
- A study which informs capacity to guide growth and regeneration is likely to focus on issues such as condition, quality or sensitivity of the environment/place, or issues such as scale and density.

5.6 Identification of whether a specific emphasis is required on certain elements of character at the outset will help guide the study or assessment in terms of skills required and whether any additional specialist input is needed. It will also guide the survey process in terms of information to collect, desk study and site survey.

Defining the study area

5.7 At the outset, it is necessary to define the extent of the area to be considered. In some cases this might be readily dictated for example by administrative boundaries of a borough or agreed neighbourhood. For example London Boroughs producing

a borough wide study such as a characterisation study will work up to their boundaries, taking account of any relevant studies which adjoin their boundaries as appropriate. In other cases, the area might be defined by architecture and built form, such as a square or street, or by its activity and patterns of movement such as a market. The area could also be defined by a different geographical approach or by the extent/nature of change proposed – proposals of significant scale which could result in a step change in character may create wide ranging impacts upon their context. An understanding of historic evolution e.g. noting of patterns through map regression analysis can also be used to help define the study area.

5.8 Boundaries of places are not fixed and definite on the ground; the edges of places are often zones of transition and change. It is important not to be too inward looking in tightly defining a place but to look out and understand the wider context and setting, and how places relate. The character of a place will usually continue across administrative boundaries. The extent of area will depend on the purposes of the study, and this will be an important part of the initial scoping. Site survey will also clearly be an invaluable part of defining and testing the study area.

5.9 Baseline mapping or survey information, such as Ordnance Survey mapping, is a helpful starting point, as this can often indicate topographical, hydrological or settlement patterns or historic features associated with a place, to provide an idea of subject areas to explore and where to gather more information. Such mapping can also begin to indicate areas of similar character to help define study parameters.

5.10 For larger, more complex studies, a decision will need to be made whether to divide the area into a series of zones (e.g. character types or areas, described at chapter 6) based on distinctions such as density, building form/blocks, land use and activity, or views and visual relationships.

Setting study parameters – geographic extent and scale

5.11 Examples of factors to consider for different types of studies are set out in table 5.1. This is not an exhaustive list, rather an initial exploration to give guidance on the type of points which may need to be considered.

Table 5.1: Setting parameters for different types of studies

TYPE OF STUDY	PARAMETERS	GUIDANCE ON EXTENT
Neighbourhood plans	Urban neighbourhoods within London are difficult to define. Definition will depend on how they are perceived and used.	Involve wider community and businesses early in defining appropriate boundaries for a neighbourhood. Depending on location and type of change, greater consideration of factors providing strategic context or visual character may be needed. This could include taking account of settings or visual envelopes of designated assets and strategically or locally significant views, requiring parts of the study area to be drawn well beyond the neighbourhood. It is most likely that boundary changes in a neighbourhood plan would be influenced by local planning issues or functional relationships. The concept of what is a neighbourhood can vary between individuals depending on their relationship to a physical area. Other factors that could have an influence include physical boundaries, both man-made and natural, health or educational catchment areas, places of work.

TYPE OF STUDY	PARAMETERS	GUIDANCE ON EXTENT
Tall buildings strategies	Generally defined by consideration of zones of theoretical visibility, massing, contextual grain, density and proximity to heritage assets, etc. This will involve the building up of layers of information to identify opportunities and constraints and to 'sieve' potential locations.	Extent will be defined by analysis of themes described under 'Parameters' column, and through consultation with the borough and relevant statutory consultees.
Evidence bases for density strategies	Defined by reference to areas of common scale, mass, bulk, height and permeability with public realm, community/ social/green infrastructure This will involve building up layers of information to identify opportunities and constraints for changes to existing densities to meet the identified drivers for change eg housing need.	Likely to be determined through a combination of digital modelling and site survey.
Inputs to Landscape/ Townscape and Visual Impact Assessments as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	Development which requires Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) usually requires detailed consideration of baseline townscape, visual and environment impacts, within an agreed study area and from a range of public viewpoints around a site.	Published sources such as the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ¹ , digital terrain modelling allied to modelling of building heights to create Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) models, or relevant officers in the borough (e.g. Conservation/Landscape officers may provide guidance or advise on the extent of study area.
Site level studies (including for Design and Access Statements)	An understanding of the wider context is critical. Parameters will relate to the type and scale of the change proposed in relation to its context, and the sensitivity and value of the baseline environment.	Study boundaries should be wider than the site boundary and may be defined by a break in a building typology or density, or by visual barriers.

Determining scale and level of detail

- 5.12 The purpose of the study will help to determine the amount of information needed. Some more strategic studies only require a general description of the character of the place, allowing generic strategies or guidelines to be developed in response to that place, e.g. broad based guidance for development management. This proportionate principle is a particularly important issue for local authorities to address in terms of giving early clear advice to developers and applicants.
- 5.13 Other uses of character information may require more specific detail. This could include, for example, work in central or inner London boroughs which may be defined by an intricate and varied streetscape network, proposals for the siting of clusters of tall buildings or for a comprehensive redevelopment of a neighbourhood or site. Conservation Area Appraisals, neighbourhood plans, development briefs or Design and Access Statements may all require this finer grain information. An even more detailed approach may be required where a study is to be used as a baseline for monitoring change, or is part of analysing development options through the extent, nature and distribution of individual elements. However it needs to be borne in mind that it may not be feasible in all cases to achieve very detailed information on a particular issue. In such cases the best available information should be included and this issue identified in the assessment.
- 5.14 A broad 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale study may be appropriate for a borough-wide study, a neighbourhood level study may be appropriate at 1:10,000, while a site level study will require a much finer grain.
- 5.15 The scale at which the work will be used will also have implications for the data that is used. Some examples of mapping of the character of place at different scales are shown in Figures 5.1 to 5.4. These show a strategic 'landscape scale' approach to defining area boundaries based on physical factors such as topography, geology and floodplains (London's Natural Signatures, a London-wide landscape character framework developed for Natural Englandⁱⁱ). The borough wide extract from the Croydon study shows a conceptual approach to defining boundaries based on broad zones of character, whilst the neighbourhood example for Croydon Opportunity Area shows an approach to defining boundaries based on the characteristics of the built form, predominant land uses and legible boundaries.
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Figure 5.1: London wide mapping (London's Natural Signatures – source: Natural England)

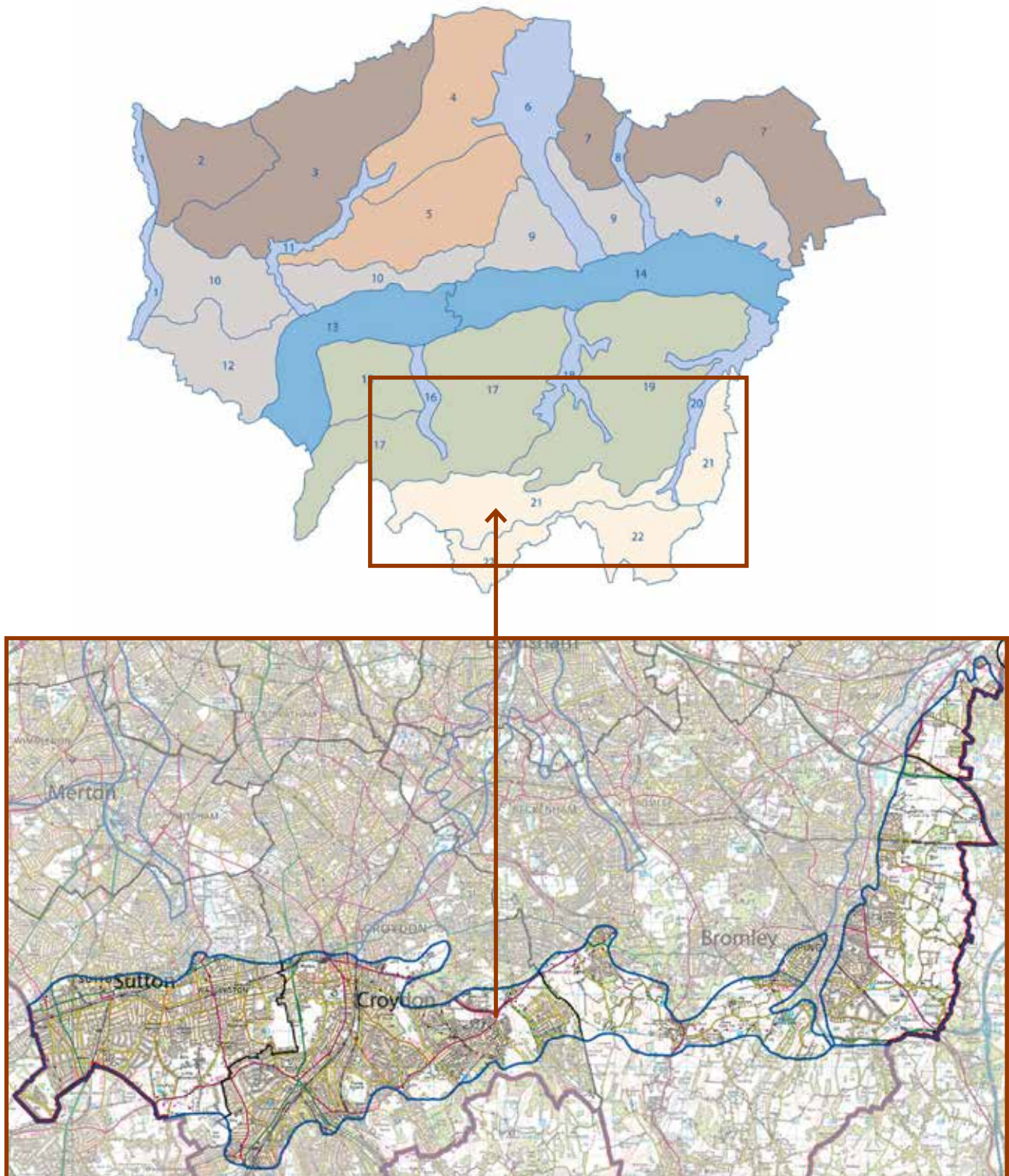


Figure 5.2: Borough wide mapping (Source: London Borough of Croydon)



Figure 5.3: Neighbourhood scale (Croydon OAPF – source: Greater London Authority)



CHARACTER AREAS

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1 North End (retail core) | 4 Civic and Cultural (mid Croydon and Fairfield) |
| 2 New Town & East Croydon | 5 Northern Fringe |
| 3 West Croydon | 6 Southern Fringe and Old Town |

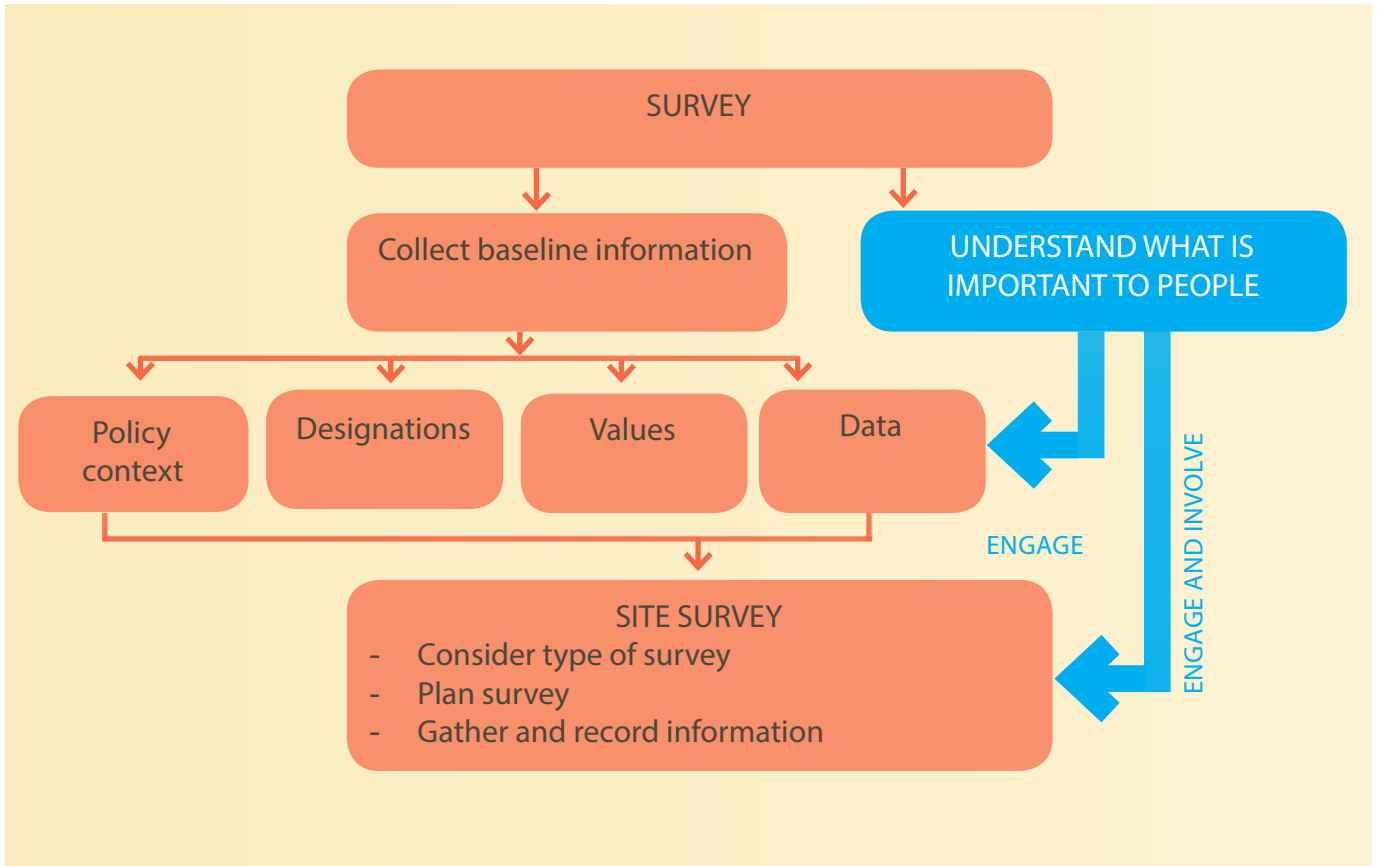
Figure 5.4 site specific character (Source: London Borough of Croydon)



Determining resources, specialisms and skills

- 5.16 It is important to determine the people, skills and time required to complete a study. Skills and resources such as time together with the scale and level of detail of the work will determine the ultimate cost. It is useful to remember that even a relatively modest study or assessment involving input from a limited range of professionals and stakeholders can help inform policy-making and interpretation in many situations. Community led studies can also provide a valuable input to decision-making at relatively low financial cost, although they require a commitment of time and enthusiasm. Here, the process and sharing of knowledge maybe a useful exercise in its own right although a final product in the form of written or graphical outputs is usually required for future reference.
- 5.17 Much of the work in understanding the character and context of a place can be undertaken by anyone with good local knowledge. Conversely undertaking a study may also call on a number of specialisms which may also be needed. For example, landscape architect, urban designers, architects/conservation architects, archaeologists and planners can add value if resources are available. At the outset a decision should be made about any specialist skills and expert knowledge required.
- 5.18 Particularly where resources are limited, it may be that use can be made of existing relevant studies as this can help avoid duplication of work. Relevant studies and appraisals may be available from the local borough (e.g. evidence base studies for Local Plans, area action plans, site planning briefs and master plans), local libraries or local history centres (e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals), or through community groups.
- 5.19 Consultation undertaken as part of such studies can help draw out recurring themes as well as enabling the opinions and views of local residents to be measured. It is important to consider the date that existing studies were produced as the baseline may have changed significantly. Other important considerations are the scale and level of detail to which they were developed and the purpose for which they were commissioned.
-

SURVEY



5.20 The survey stage involves the consideration of the physical, cultural and social/ economic characteristics which come together in a place and the way people experience and interact with that place. This understanding can be drawn from a combination of desk top studies (documents or mapped information) and on site surveys. Engagement with local communities is essential to this understanding, this will include residents, workers as well as visitors, particularly if places are used differently in the day and night as well as throughout the week or seasons.

Collect baseline information

5.21 For some studies, use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) can provide a powerful means of combining and analysing spatially referenced map data. However, it is important to be aware of its limitations. For other work manual collation and interpretation of information will be equally relevant. For any study, it is necessary to consider the source, date and the scale at which the information was originally collected and analysed. This is particularly important for more detailed and site specific work.

Understanding policy context

- 5.22 It is useful to understand the relevant policy context for any study of place, and the forces for change such as growth pressures or issues such as climate change which may affect the location. It is also important that the areas surrounding a place can have an influence on the values and identity of any locality. For example the experience of gateways into a place or strategic views passing over a place need to be considered. The policy context set out in the London Plan provides a starting point for understanding of the dynamic nature of the capital, change scenarios and forces acting on sense of place. Understanding the local policy context is also essential, particularly for smaller scale assessment such as for neighbourhood plans.

Understanding existing designations

- 5.23 A review of whether existing designations cover or adjoin the study area is essential. Whilst designations or their absence may not always be relevant to sense of place, they do provide an understanding of why a place or elements of a place may be valued for particular reasons. It is therefore important to be aware of the reasons for designation and any special qualities which are reflected in the location and which may be sensitive to change. Important qualitative information will be available, often online, in relevant citations, management plans and designation information.
- 5.24 Designations may include those relating to the townscape, landscape, historic environment, estuarine environment, biodiversity and/or geology. A decision

will need to be made on the appropriate level of information to source depending on the scope and scale of the study. Clearly for local scale studies a more detailed grain of information will be required, for example, on individual listed or locally listed buildings or particular distinctive habitats or species, while at a borough scale information on broadly characteristic patterns or themes may be more appropriate.

- 5.25 Information on designations may be collated digitally from sources such as the English Heritage National Heritage List for England or MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information Service for the Countryside) which also addresses urban and peri-urban areas, including designations relevant to central, inner and outer London such as nature conservation designations and information on registered parks and gardens. GIS data is available from www.magic.defra.gov.uk or www.gis.naturalengland.org.uk/pubs/gis/GIS_register.asp.
- 5.26 It is important also to understand values associated with non-designated features such as non-designated heritage assets and their significance as a basis for managing change. As described in English Heritage's Conservation Principlesⁱⁱⁱ, assessing significance involves gaining an understanding of a place's fabric and evolution, identification of who values the place and why, and relating these identified heritage values to the place's fabric. This can be equally applicable to gaining a wider understanding of the character of a place as to heritage assets specifically.

Understanding values: what is important to people

- 5.27 In addition to gaining an understanding of designated values, an appreciation of what local people value in a place and why can be invaluable in properly understanding and reflecting sense of place and its character. Engagement with relevant people, organisations and groups should ideally occur as early as possible and at as many stages of the process as is practical to feed this information in, although constraints imposed by resources and project timescales should be recognised.
- 5.28 Some effective techniques, mechanisms and references for involving local people in studies of place are presented at Appendix 2.

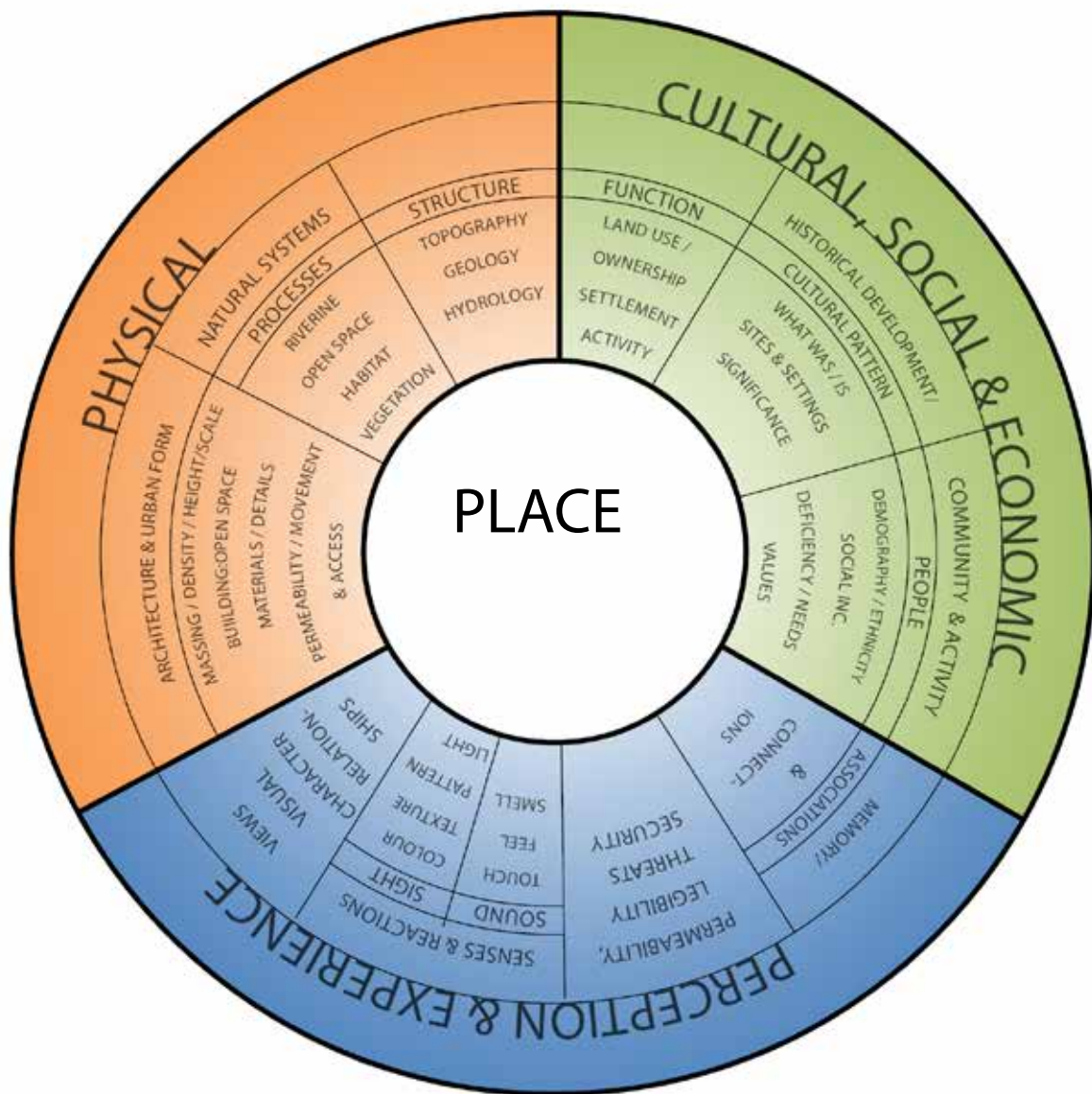
Collating and using baseline data

- 5.29 Figure 5.4 shows the main elements of character and supporting sub elements which can be explored in developing an understanding of the character of a place. This diagram is linked to the baseline data sources in Appendix 3. Baseline data listed in the table in Appendix 3 includes that from documentary and mapped sources. This table shows a range of data and identifies which of the broad character themes they relate to.
- 5.30 Information on relevant data sources and their use is set out in the tables according to the main headings on Figure 5.4. Not all of the sources of information will necessarily be available or relevant to every type of study. Data will depend on study scale and purpose and what data is most useful for intended applications rather than 'using data for its own sake'.

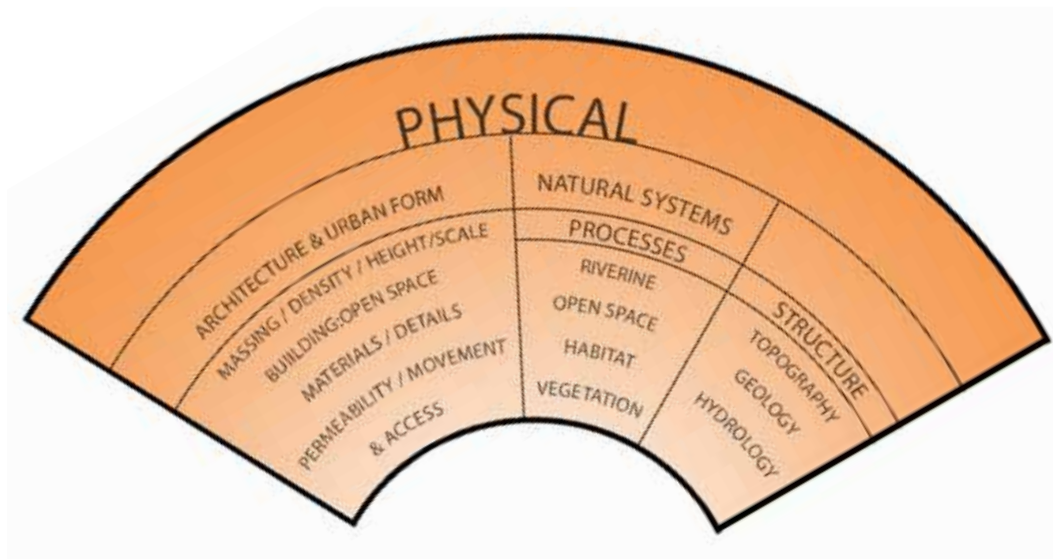
Available budget may also influence the level and type of data used in studies. As such, the information set out in Appendix 3 is a starting point for those undertaking a study to choose from, identifying sources appropriate for their purposes.

- 5.31 There are often lead-in times and resource implications with obtaining large amounts of data, particularly for more complex studies. Publication of any mapped data derived from Ordnance Survey (OS) material requires a data licence from Ordnance Survey, which governs how data is used, displayed and reproduced. More information on this is available from www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk.

Figure 5.4: Elements of the character of place and sub themes



Physical elements of character



5.32 Understanding the physical elements and the way these are combined and juxtaposed is fundamental to the understanding of a place, since these are often a starting point for the way in which places are used and exploited as well as how they have evolved over time. The principal physical elements of character are identified in the diagram above with the potential data sources referred to in Appendix 3.

5.33 Physical elements include the ‘natural’ environment, such as geology, topography, vegetation, water and floodplains, as well as the built environment. The built environment includes architecture and urban form, public realm and streetscapes and associated factors such as building heights, massing, density, relationship of buildings to spaces, movement, accessibility and permeability.

5.34 Examples of factors to consider at the survey stage in relation to physical character are set out below. Information

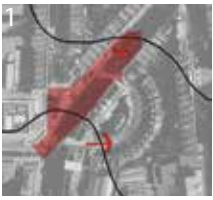
may be drawn from desktop studies using data identified in Appendix 3 and be informed by site survey.

- Topography and its role in creating visual links and connections, sense of scale, containment and context, backdrops and skyline character.
- Grain of underlying landscape – geology, soils, topographic and hydrological features.
- Distribution, age and condition of structural vegetation, such as key elements of green infrastructure - its function and value, and ‘connectedness’.
- Areas of natural green space or green infrastructure deficiency.
- How natural infrastructure elements link and inter connect, both within and outside a locality.
- Hydrological elements and systems,

whether buried or exposed, and associated needs to control or manage.

- Arrival and approaches - functional, physical, visual.
- Views and visual relationships.
- Level and perception of permeability, public/private amenity, natural surveillance, movement and footfall.
- Access and circulation patterns for both pedestrians and vehicles.
- Aspect, shadowing and microclimate.
- Existing massing, density, proportion, building heights/storey height/slabs and roofscape (pitch/design/steepness/covering/chimneys/flues), materials.
- Façade character – style/idiom, materials, fenestration and doorways.
- Condition and potential of existing buildings/infrastructure.

5.35 The diagrams overleaf give an idea of the type of information that could be collected in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented, and the interrelationship between these elements.



1. Topography and views: Use of contour mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Building heights/massing, landmarks, permeability

Visual permeability: Plotting of simple 'Isovist' maps from identified points on site. Related subjects: Legibility, perception of safety



2. Adjoining land uses/activity: Use of National Land Use (NLUD) data and site survey. Related subjects: Vitality/vibrancy, perception.

Access and circulation: Use of Green Grid, PROW/Sustrans Route data/ Transport Plans and studies, site survey. Related subjects: Permeability



3. 4 and 5. Aspects, shading and microclimate: Use of site survey. Related subjects: Building height/massing, perception, sensory aspects



Approaches and landmarks: Use of heritage /local heritage studies, appraisals and management plans, site survey. Related subjects: Legibility

Figure ground mapping: OS Mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Permeability and legibility



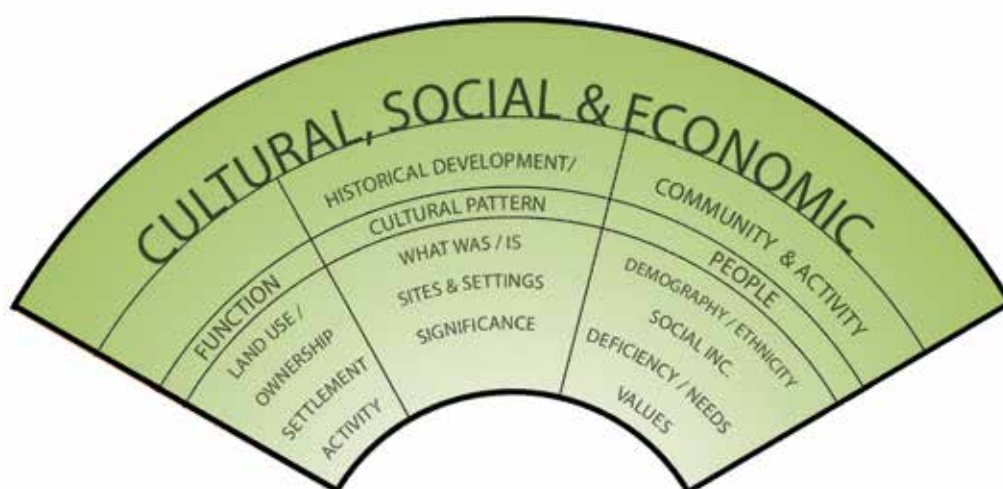
Building heights and massing/density: Site survey. Related subjects: Aspects, shading and microclimate, perception, land use/activity



6. Soft landscape/greenspace: Open space studies, site survey, Conservation Area Appraisals. Related subjects: Biodiversity, green and social infrastructure, perception, activity

Public and private realm: Land use data, open space studies, site survey. Related subjects: Activity, perception

Cultural, social and economic elements of character



5.36 Appreciation of a place's cultural evolution and the way in which past and present communities, uses and activities have shaped it is a vital part of the process of understanding the character of a place and helps to frame proposed change so that it is responsive and appropriate to the context. The cultural aspect considers not just designated assets and resources, but also non designated assets values and associations. The principal cultural, social and economic elements of character are identified in the diagram above and potential data sources explored in Appendix 3.

5.37 An understanding of relevant aspects of social and economic character can be gained from datasets such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and component datasets such as health deprivation, unemployment and crime. Other mapped data such as accessible natural greenspace deficiency assessment (ANG) data, open space deficiency mapping produced for borough open space audits/studies and Londonwide resource held by GiGL), public transport accessibility levels (PTAL) and

travel to work data may help build a picture of social character of an area when allied to other datasets such as land use data such as the National Land Use dataset (NLUD). Other documentary sources may also help to build a picture such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Reports/Strategies, retail needs assessments, etc.

5.38 These sources only tell part of the story. Much will also be revealed through appropriate community engagement. There is also no substitute for site survey as a means of gathering information on cultural, social and economic aspects of the place, which will be particularly important at the neighbourhood and site level. Site surveys will provide a more detailed picture of elements of character such as access, circulation, use and misuse, and the way people and communities behave and interact with their places and spaces. Management issues, barriers and areas of opportunity or need also influence the character of a place.

5.39 Examples of factors to consider at the survey stage in relation to cultural, social

and economic character are set out below.

- An understanding of the historic factors, functions, communities and land uses which have influenced site selection and their interrelationship.
- The place or site in context in terms of any intentional design associated with specific sites, including visual experiences or unintentional design which has evolved organically over time/as a consequence of other development.
- Consideration of settings beyond purely visual aspects - whether the place/site forms part of an area of complementary character, including functional and working relationships with other areas.

- Layers associated with a place's evolution, tangible and intangible, including archaeology and records local associations and values.
- How the place or site has changed / adapted over time including uses, ownership, activities and communities.
- Designed spaces and settings

5.40 The diagrams below give an idea of the type of information that could be collected in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented and of the interrelationship between these elements.



1. Interplay of hard and soft landscape elements, and microclimate: Site survey. Related subjects: Aspect, seasonality, urban heat islands

Also: Vitality and vibrancy; active frontages: Land use data, site survey (considering different times of day, night and year), community engagement. Related subjects: Land uses, visual permeability and perceived permeability/safety



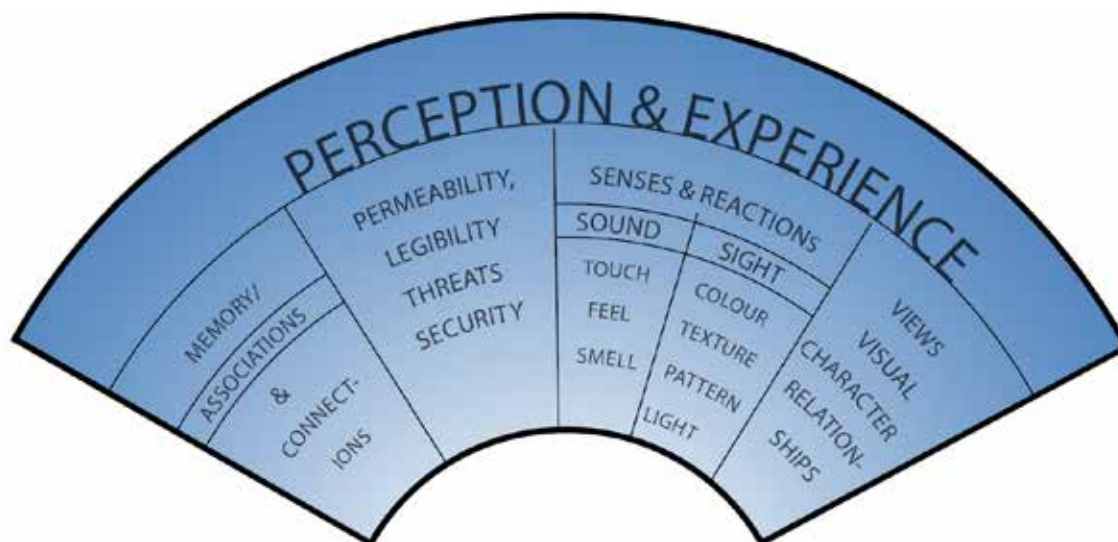
Perception of permeability and safety: Community engagement/community site survey/place check. Related subjects: Views, legibility, building heights, aspect and microclimate (light and shade), use and misuse issues.



2. Perception of scale and enclosure: Site survey (mapping of heights, massing and building treatments). Related subjects: Building heights, massing

3. Perception of intimacy: Site survey. Related subjects: Figure ground mapping, permeability and perception of safety, activity and vitality

Perceptual elements of character



5.41 Whilst the physical, cultural, social and economic elements are important building blocks in the make-up and understanding of the character of a place, the way in which these elements and their interaction is perceived and experienced by their community is equally significant. The perceptual elements of character may also link with many of the cultural elements of character, for example ways in which the place may have been recorded in art, music or literature. This maybe particularly important at the neighbourhood or local level and will help inform an understanding of significance and associations, or issues of local resonance to help guide any future change. The principal perceptual elements of character are identified in the diagram above and potential data sources explored in Appendix 3.

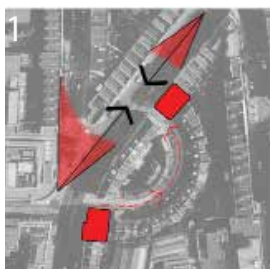
5.42 Some suggested points to consider and look for in site surveys in relation to perceptual and experiential character are set out below. Many of these elements will need to be understood through site survey as it is essential that such information

comes from being in and experiencing the place rather than only from desktop studies. The points set out are a starting point rather than an exhaustive list, since aspects will vary with each individual place.

- Interplay, distribution and connection of structural, hard and soft landscape elements, relationship to orientation/aspect, light, shade and microclimate.
- Any values or significance assigned to the place e.g. through designation or local values as evidenced by the way people use and interact with the place. Types of users, types of communities; sense of belonging and how the community relates to/interacts with physical and cultural form of the place.
- Sensitivity to change and condition of the place/space.
- Experiential aspects of need and deficiency e.g. microclimate distribution in public realm such as urban heat islands

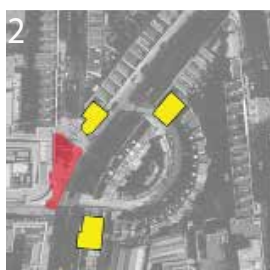
- Effect of light, shadow, time of day and weather on spatial perception and the way people behave in/use spaces.
- Vitality, vibrancy and activity. How the quality of the place varies according to different times of the day/night/week/year, as appropriate.
- Use and misuse issues associated with the place/space.
- Perceptions associated with accessibility, permeability, safety and security.
- Perception of scale and enclosure, intimacy and containment

5.43 The diagrams below give an idea of the type of information that could be collected on site in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented and of the interrelationship between these elements.



1. Strategic/locally important views: LVMF, local studies e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals, site survey. Related subjects: Landmarks, permeability

Visual experience of historic built fabric: LVMF, heritage management plans, local studies, site survey. Related subjects: Important views, figure ground, legibility/permeability



2. Locally valued elements: Local studies and community engagement/ community site survey/place check. Related subjects: Landmarks

Civic spaces and foci: Local studies and community engagement, site survey/ Place check. Related subjects: Public and private realm, land use

3 and 1



Approaches and landmarks: Use of heritage /local heritage studies, appraisals and management plans, site survey. Related subject areas: Legibility, locally valued elements

Figure ground/urban grain (understanding how the fabric of a place has evolved). OS mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Permeability and legibility, visual experience of the historic fabric

Also: Designed spaces and settings: Heritage studies and designations, local studies and community engagement. Related subjects: Open space, microclimate

SITE SURVEY

5.44 Being 'on site' is an essential step in understanding a place. It provides an opportunity to record and analyse the place and to confirm the elements that define the character 'on the ground'. It is therefore essential that the site survey aims at meeting the objectives of the project. A site visit can provide all sorts of information about people, use, activities and perceptions that is rarely available from mapped data.

Considering the type of survey needed

5.45 At a neighbourhood or site level, site survey may be a question of confirming the 'feel' of the place on the ground and using this to 'add value' to physical and cultural character. Noting perceptual qualities and experience or patterns of activity and use could be appropriate here. At this scale, it can be very useful to involve local residents as well as those who may have an interest in the area or the change being proposed. For example a streetwalking or 'Place Check' exercise as described in Appendix 2 may be helpful in gaining an appreciation of a wide range of experiences of a place which influences its character.

5.46 For large studies encompassing a wide range of different types of character, survey needs are likely to be more labour intensive or complex.

Planning a site survey

5.47 Key factors to consider include:

- Scale of working - local/neighbourhood and site level studies may require more detailed survey work than strategic level

studies.

- The focus of the assessment which may require the site survey to analyse some aspects of the place in greater detail than others.
- Baseline for recording information such as OS bases or air photos and survey sheets.
- The required outputs from the assessment, such as descriptions, sketches and photographs.
- The collation of survey records and their inclusion within the project outputs.
- The specialist skills which may be needed.
- Particularly for larger or more 'strategic' studies, an outline survey route, potential survey points, accessibility from public transport, any requirement for access on foot, cycle or onto private land, and the implications for time inputs.

5.48 Planning a site survey will help ensure all participants follow a consistent approach, albeit they may record different aspects, perceptions and values about a place. It is also useful to consider the need to cover ground efficiently, timings to capture the place at different times of day and night, or different times of year and the availability of existing evidence.

5.49 Consideration of these factors will help tailor the survey according to the focus of the work. The time allowed for site surveys will depend on the scope/purpose of the assessment, complexity of the place, number of locations to be visited, scale and geographic extent of the survey and level of information to be collected. Many

of these factors relate to the way that the work will be used and the decisions it is intended to inform, for example, to support policy context such as density studies or capacity studies for opportunity areas will require the survey of particular aspects of the place in a systematic way.

- 5.50 The resources and time allowed for work 'on site' should be considered and realistic since this is one of the most important steps in the process.

Gathering and recording information

- 5.51 Information that might be gathered on a site survey includes site notes recorded on a survey form, annotated sketches and maps. Examples of the type of information which could be captured for a local level study of character and context are provided in the box overleaf. Transparency, robustness and good information capture are vital. Therefore it is good to record and document as much on site information as possible, which will enable cross referencing to the description of the place at a later date.

Incorporating an understanding of experience and perception in surveys

- 5.52 For many studies of place, the involvement of the people who know the place best, the communities that live and work in and use the area will be essential. Examples of ways to incorporate local views and values are provided in Appendix 2.
- 5.53 Surveys can deal relatively easily with recording the hard data of the different elements and characteristics that make up sense of place, identifying their relative significance. They can be incorporated into

checklists or woven into factual, objective, written descriptions. However, it is also important to give equal attention to the perceptual and experiential dimensions of places in undertaking site survey.

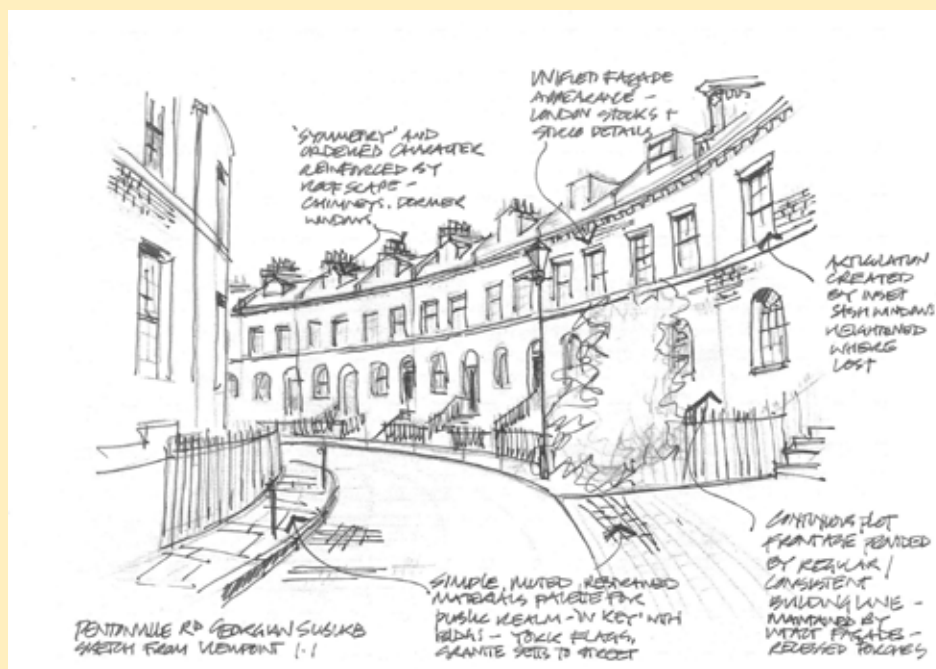
- 5.54 Some aesthetic aspects of place can still be recorded in a rigorous and systematic way on site. Such information can be recorded, using a checklist, by incorporating suitable adjectives into written descriptions and by ensuring that appropriate annotations are added to sketches or photographs.
- 5.55 Aesthetic factors will be particularly important if the work is to be used to influence design decisions, such as the siting and design of tall buildings, proposals affecting the historic environment, or higher density or contemporary residential development.
- 5.56 If more detail is required about aesthetic factors, perhaps to help inform detailed design, then notes can be made on site about matters such as balance, scale, colour, diversity and so on. It is essential to indicate how specific elements of character contribute to these aesthetic characteristics. For example, containment may result from localised topographic variation, street trees and tree canopy or the relationship of buildings to the street and the proportion of built elements to open space/public realm. While unity may come from the consistent use of a material, detailing or articulation created by reveals for doors and windows.
- 5.57 Other aspects of spatial perception may be more subjective and responses to them might be more personal and coloured by the experience of the individual and how they relate to a particular area such

BOX 5.1 EXAMPLE RECORDING OF INFORMATION ON SITE SURVEY

Example site survey map showing analysis area boundaries and photo location points and directions:



Example survey sketch, showing capture of information relating to physical characteristics of place:



as a resident, a visitor or worker. This is where it is important to get a balanced, measured view, informed by the capture of information on local values.

- 5.58 Such factors may include a sense of safety and security, the quality of light, vibrancy, microclimate and perceptions of quality or architectural merit. Perceptual and experiential aspects can be perceived by all senses, not just visually. Spending some time on site is essential for understanding and recording such perceptual information and it should be incorporated in a transparent way, acknowledging that this may be subjective and should be attributed accordingly as a place may hold different values for different people.
- 5.59 Mood mapping can be an effective way of translating the essence of a place, as an output of site survey. Examples of hand drawn mapping showing peoples' perceptions and experiences of London were exhibited at the Museum of London and the Building Centre in London in 2011.
- 5.60 A balance will need to be struck between the objective data and more subjective information gathered. In order to serve a useful purpose, the end result will need to be defensible in formal decision making and justifiable in formal proceedings such as a committee meeting or appeal hearing. Therefore judgements will need to be made on the subjective elements using objective evidence as a basis for the judgements taken.
-

Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area Planning Framework (VNEB OAPF): Digital testing of proposed built form



Exploring the effect of the built form of the proposed masterplan on surrounding context in terms of townscape, heritage and views. Source GLA.



Testing the effect of the proposed cluster at Vauxhall on the LVMF views and local views. Source GLA.



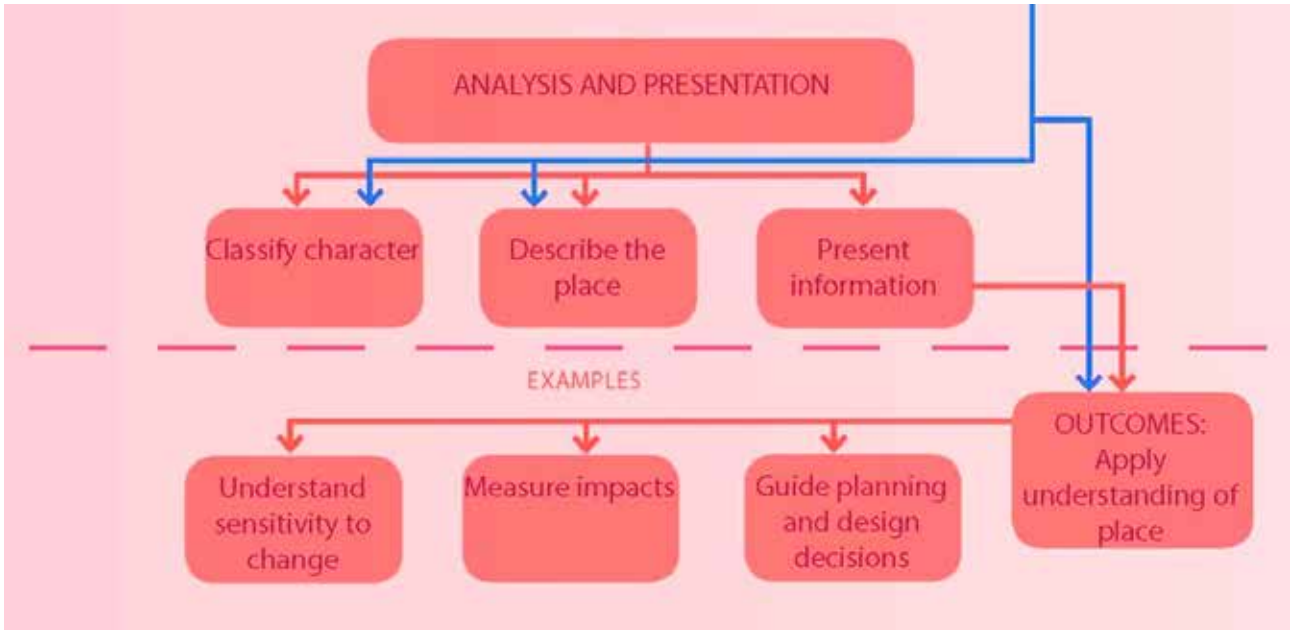
THREE MILLS PLAYSPACE
LLDC - WE MADE THAT

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

6.1 This chapter describes how to use, apply and present the elements of character that inform the understanding of a place by following the survey process outlined in **chapter 5**.(see also figure 4.2)



Classifying character

- 6.2 The survey of desktop based information and on site study may result in the collection of many layers of information and data. This will require interpretation to make it meaningful to understand what really influences the character of the place, as well as to understand how layers of information interrelate. Care needs to be taken to concentrate on the elements of character that inform or create a sense of place rather than simply describing all the data for its own sake.
- 6.3 When the information on physical, cultural, social and perceptual aspects of character have been identified and analysed, common themes and patterns will usually

emerge. In undertaking such analysis it is often useful to first understand the physical building blocks relating to geology, landform and physical features and river and drainage systems, then to understand the overlying patterns of land use, buildings and development. In London, it may appear that the underlying physical patterns are less evident or relevant with buildings and streetscape being dominant determinants of the character of a place. However, it is useful to understand the whole picture, such as geology and soils influencing vegetation, and landform/hydrology dictating patterns of drainage and flooding – all of which influence character of the townscape as well as future management decisions. Cultural, social and economic data can then be layered on top to add further detail to

the emerging picture. Any perception and experiential data / survey work collected can also be added if suitable for translation into maps or graphics.

- 6.4 Figure 6.1 provides an example of layers of baseline map data and the patterns emerging. This has been undertaken for a Borough level study, although the approach is similar irrespective of scale. This diagram provides an indication of the type of data sources that might be used and the layers that could be built up for analysis. It is not exhaustive or definitive, and specific requirements will vary with individual studies. The detail of information required does need to be proportionate to the task being undertaken. For example if it is in relation to the development of local plan policies it will need to be more detailed than if it is to underpin a small scale development proposal. Local authorities will need to give guidance on this specific to their local area.

Defining areas of distinct character – terminology

- 6.5 Many studies use the terminology **character types** or **character areas** in the process for classifying areas of distinct or similar character – terminology that is widely used in landscape character assessment. Regardless of what variation is used, it is important to recognise that character crosses site and administrative boundaries, and that there is a need to take account of and reflect the context of adjoining areas of character.

Character types

- 6.6 Sometimes known as ‘typologies’, these are distinct types of relatively homogenous

character. Generic in nature, in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of a borough, they share broadly similar combinations of factors such as topography, land use and development, building types, densities, etc. Not every area within a particular type will be identical. Rather, there is a common pattern which can be discerned both in maps and in site survey. Types may either occur repeatedly in a study area or in just one place. A character type or typology in London, for example, might be Victorian terraces or 1930’s suburbs. An example of the typology developed for the characterisation study for the London Borough of Barnet is shown in Figure 6.2.

Character areas

- 6.7 Are unique individual geographical areas which occur within a type. They share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own identity. They are the locally specific occurrences of a character type, bespoke to a given locality, neighbourhood or geographic entity. Often, there will be more character areas than character types, as types may occur in more than one area. If studies dealt only with character areas, they would clearly convey a real sense of identity. However, descriptions could potentially become repetitive, as characteristics shared by each similar area would be repeated every time. The advantage of identifying both types and areas is that shared generic characteristics can be described for types, leaving the areas to draw out the description of individual characteristics features, therefore avoiding repetition.

Figure 6.1: Layering of information (derived from mapping in the London Borough of Barnet Characterisation Study)

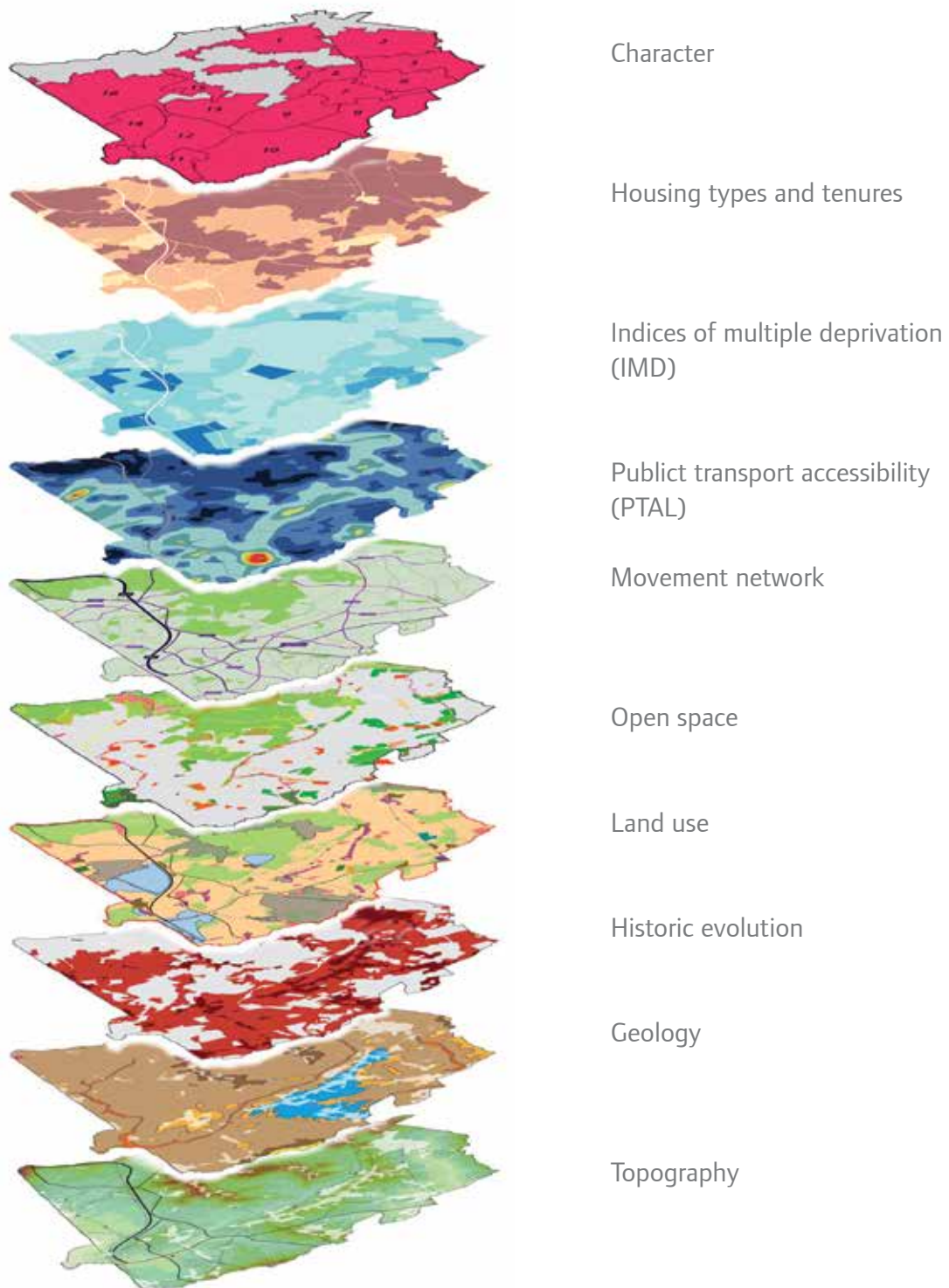














Figure 6.2: Extracts from the typology developed for the Barnet Characterisation Study (source: London Borough of Barnet)

	Photograph	Aerial	Scale and Grain	Land Use	Network Characteristics
Big Box			Large single building units (sheds) typically coarse grained and without an over-arching urban structure. Often surrounded in parking.	Industrial, retail, and leisure	Non permeable, typically insulated for pedestrian movement.
Campus			Large building units set in landscaped open space	Education (universities and secondary schools), civic, business, office, hospitals and leisure.	Non permeable with limited pedestrian connectivity.
Cores and Town Centres			Median-to-large building units arranged along streets forming strong terraces and coherent forms.	Mixed land use including retail, civic, residential, and office.	Permeable grid, based around strong street frontages and high levels of activity. Very well suited to pedestrian movement.
Residential Estates			Variable building scales, set in landscape and/or parking	Residential	Fine grain network of pedestrian routes, with a distinct lack of clear structure, hierarchy and legibility.
Residential Streets			Small-to-medium building units arranged along streets. Urban blocks tend to be large.	Residential	Permeable grid, although the scale of urban blocks limits the pedestrian connectivity.

	Density (Dwellings per hectare)	Density (Dwellings per hectare)	Density (Dwellings per hectare)	Building Types	Heights (Storeys)
Linear Rural			2 - 10	Detached houses	1 - 3
Suburban Periphery			10 - 15	Detached houses	2 - 3
Suburban			20 - 30	Semi-detached houses	2 - 3
Suburban Terrace			20 - 30	Terraced houses	2 - 3
Urban Terrace			37 - 50	Terraced houses	2 - 3
Flats			80 - 150	Street facing flats	3 - 6

Using character types and areas – factors that may influence choice

- Character types provide a good framework for analysing change since many influences and pressures affect areas with similar character in similar ways. Analysis of character types can provide a foundation to develop planning or management strategies.
- Character areas provide a good framework to draw out local patterns and factors influencing sense of place.
- Character areas can be used to develop more tailored policies or strategies, or to guide design reflecting elements which make a particular place different or special.
- Character areas may also be more recognisable and identifiable for community groups or others.
- Whilst studies may identify both character types and character areas, in some cases it may be decided that the distinctiveness of individual areas is such that the use of types is not helpful, using character areas instead as the basis for assessment.
- If resources are limited, an assessment may deal only with character types and not continue as far as dealing with individual character areas, though this will limit subsequent use of the work.

6.8 The approach may also be simplified according to the purpose of the study, or by noting variations in character in a less formal way for smaller scale, site specific work.

6.9 Information from the desktop research

and site survey can be used to identify common patterns. This can be undertaken using GIS for more complex studies or more intuitively for smaller areas and local/site studies. The process should be transparent and auditable so that any subsequent decisions made in relation to area boundaries or application in planning and design can be understood and justified. The level of detail achieved at this stage will depend on the purpose and scale of the study as well as the nature of baseline information and the character of the place itself. It may be a detailed classification of character types or areas or a simple representation of areas with a distinct sense of place.

6.10 A classification of the character of a place can also be obtained directly using people's perception of character, use and activity; however it is useful to back this up with other data and evidence.

Defining boundaries

6.11 Whatever the scale of working, it can be useful to identify variations in character. When working at a neighbourhood or borough level, it is useful to define boundaries for areas of distinct character, whether character areas or types, since an appropriate strategy or course of action will differ in response to variations in character and context. The precision of these boundaries will vary with the scale and level of detail of working. Broader scale (borough) assessments may define more conceptual, less precise boundaries, whilst detailed assessments (site level) may link boundaries to specific features in the townscape e.g. specific street blocks or building groups or clusters.

- 6.12 **Figure 6.3** shows an example of boundaries at broad and finer grain scales through sub division of units or types into smaller areas of local character fitting within a 'strategic' typology. However, even at the finer grain scale, the boundaries are rarely precise (unless in a site specific situation) and still represent zones of transition.
- 6.13 Definition of boundaries can suggest that there is a sharp change from one area of townscape or landscape to another. In reality, townscapes and landscapes are often a continuum or transition, and of mixed character, which does not always change abruptly.
- 6.14 More commonly, places will change gradually rather than suddenly. While the character of a place may be clearly defined, distinctive and cohesive in the centre of a site, type, settlement, typology or area, there may be transitions at the edges, due perhaps to backland or infill development and redevelopment, where the character of sense of place may be less consistent. The character of a place in these transition areas is no less important but may be more difficult to tie down precisely, and in these cases drawing a firm line as a boundary on a map may suggest a much more obvious change than is really apparent on the ground.
- 6.15 This can create problems, for example, in relation to development management decisions and intervisibility of schemes between core and peripheral areas. It may be appropriate to draw more blurred lines in relation to character zones, as shown in Figure 6.4. This looser, more amorphous means of representing areas can also be used to show transition between areas with different sense of place, or as a more open ended, flexible way of showing areas of different character.
- 6.16 If drawing boundaries, it is important to incorporate a statement about the status and meaning of boundary lines and their limitations. An alternative may be to define character areas which overlap around their edges or by the use of broader 'character zones' on maps to indicate areas of transition. Whatever solution is adopted, it is important that any judgements based on the work recognise the nature of such transitions.
- 6.17 It is important to keep a record, justifying where boundaries have been defined and including this as part of the outputs of the work. This record can be updated as boundaries are refined. Such records can also be helpful in justifying decisions to a wider audience, for example at Inquiry or Examination in Public, or if the work needs updating in future.

Describing the place

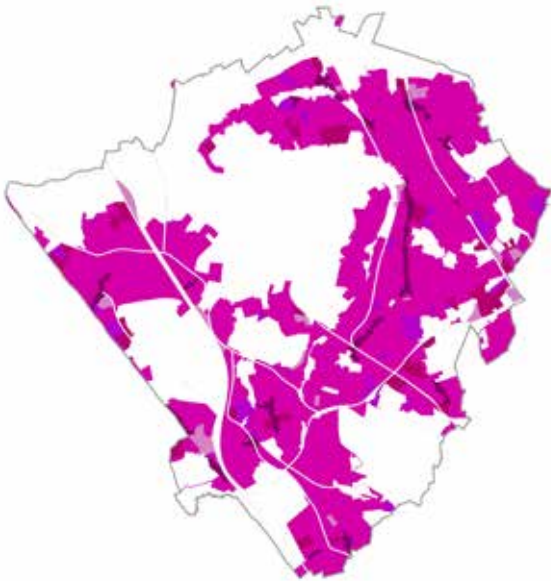
6.18 When the character of a place is properly understood and mapped, it needs to be described in a concise, effective way, capturing the essence of that place, whether in terms of a character type or area, or a specific site.

6.19 The balance of descriptive text and summary information should reflect the purpose of the study. For example:

- Where the assessment has a practical application, such as considering the opportunities within an area for the intensification of development in a way which respects the character of

Figure 6.3: Extracts from the Barnet Characterisation Study, showing broad brush character typology (townscape types) broken down into finer grain character areas by residential street pattern.

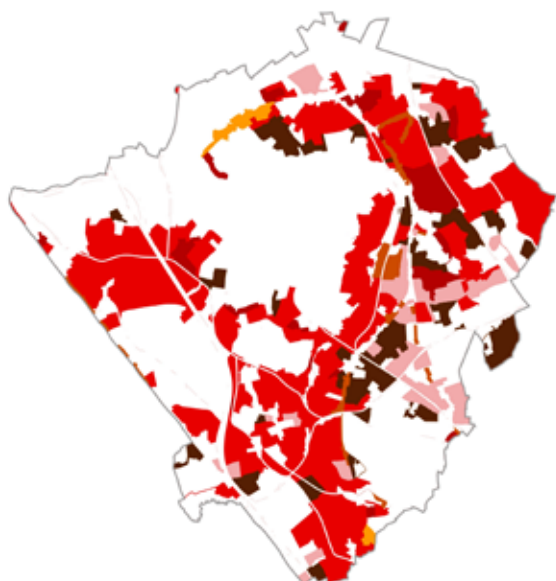
Identification of primary typologies



Further breakdown of residential streets



Identification of secondary typologies



Secondary typologies combined with primary typologies

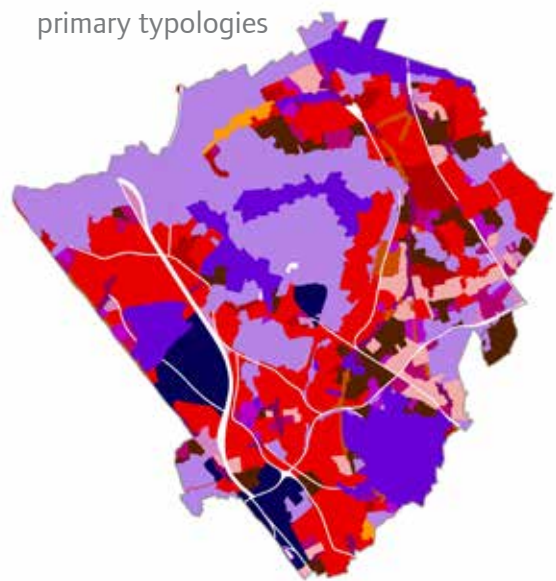
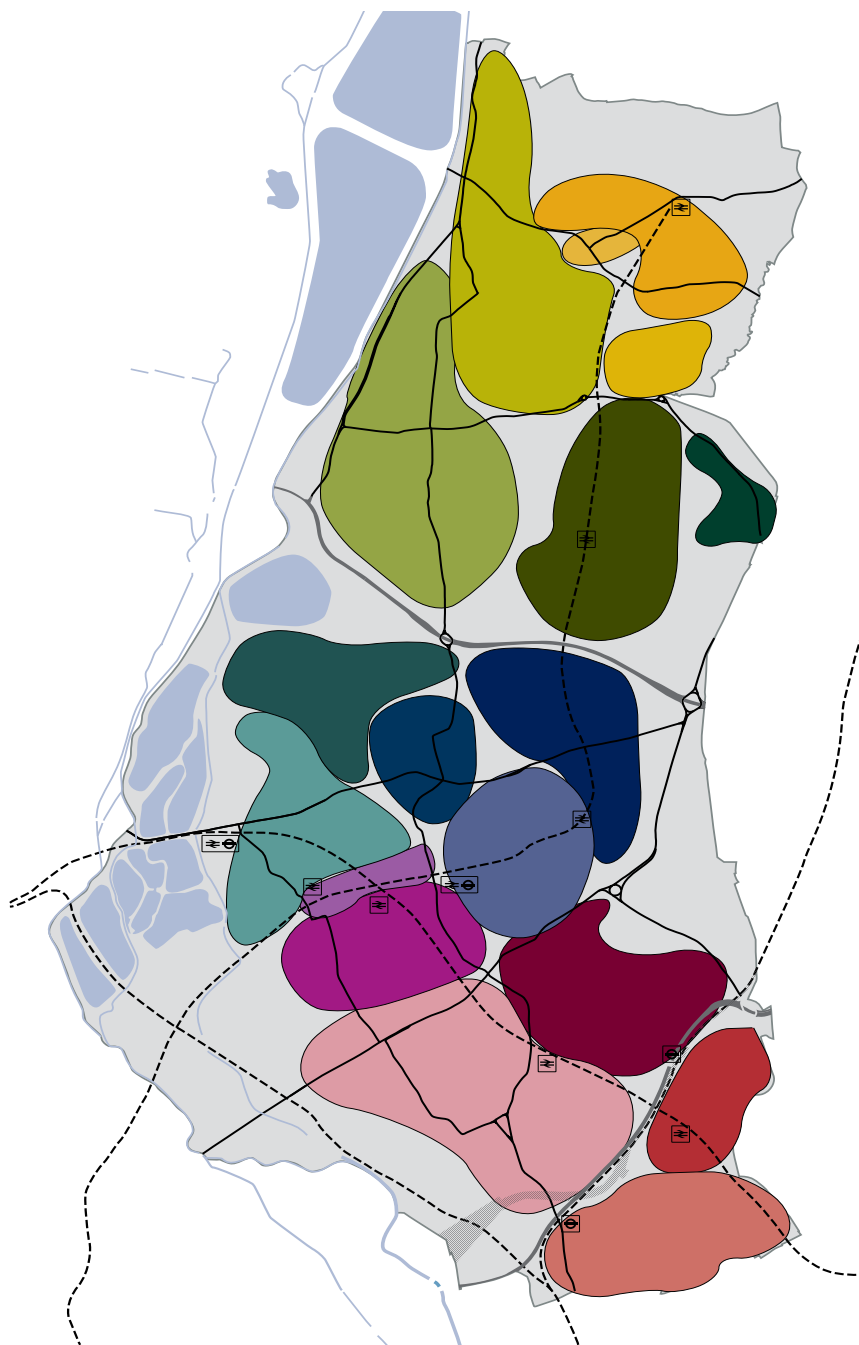


Figure 6.4: Representation of areas in the Waltham Forest Characterisation Study.



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey digital maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office (C) Crown Copyright. Licence No. London Borough of Waltham Forest LA 096376. Published 2008.

the area, the description will be shorter and focused around an analysis of the key characteristics of the townscape, particularly those relating to its ability to absorb or guide the type and design of development proposed.

- Where the assessment is intended to provide a robust evidence base on which a range of future policy or design initiatives will be based, there is likely to be a need for a more rounded description of the place and a comprehensive analysis of its key characteristics.

6.20 It is also often appropriate to use other media such as photography and illustration and to combine these with text. Approaches to graphic presentation are identified later in this chapter.

6.21 London is a dynamic, ever changing environment and the way that the layers of history are manifested physically as well as through memory and association is important in understanding the character of the place. It is helpful for descriptions to include an historical perspective on the way in which the sense of place apparent today has evolved and the human and social influences which shape it over time. Where there has been an Intensive Urban Survey or recording of oral histories, these findings can help to provide a 'time-depth' dimension to a description and greatly enrich it. A study will also have added local resonance if descriptions incorporate the views and opinions of local stakeholders. These should be clearly identified and attributed within the text.

6.22 A good description of the character of a place should draw on the information gained in the survey and highlight valued

elements irrespective of designation. The aim should be to describe the overall character of the place, with reference to factors such as:

- Landform
- Land use
- Demographics
- Activity and image
- Architectural style and vernacular
- Scale, mass and density
- Public realm
- Access and permeability
- Connections and circulation
- Views and visual interest

6.23 Descriptions should draw out the way these factors interact and are perceived. The level and type of description should be proportional to the scope and purpose of the study. It often needs to strike a balance between factual statements about the components of the place, and more evocative statements about its character. This balance may vary according to the purpose of the work. For example, an appreciation of a place or site which sets out to demonstrate what is special about it should be more evocative, seeking to capture qualities, making more reference to aesthetic qualities, views and perception. In contrast, if an assessment is to inform planning policy or development management decisions, a more factual description may be required.

6.24 Care should be taken in preparing descriptions of places. Subjective value judgements should be avoided and a distinction drawn between adjectives which convey the aesthetic qualities of a place and those which deal with personal perceptions or values. Local engagement will corroborate and clarify perception and values. Any place may hold multiple values for the people who experience the place; these are not necessary contradictory as all have value and should be recorded and attributed accordingly.

Defining key characteristics

6.25 Key characteristics are short statements encapsulating main aspects of the place or area (see example in box 6.1). Sometimes a simple summary description of the essential or key characteristics of a place will be enough on its own, or a list of essential characteristics can be generated in addition to a fuller description. The key or essential characteristics of a place provide an important reference point against which change can be assessed or as a 'hook' for site planning and design. They can also be used as indicators to judge whether the place is changing and whether particular policies are sympathetic to or are having the desired effect on sense of place and can be used to monitor change or guide future planning or design.

6.26 Key characteristics are those combinations of elements which create a sense of place and makes an area distinctive. If they change or are lost, there would be significant consequences for the current character of the place. Elements of character may be both positive or negative, and changes which affect these characteristics need not always be seen

in a negative light as the change could ultimately be beneficial for the character of the place, either through improving existing negative elements or through the creation of a completely new character.

6.27 Key characteristics should therefore be identified and described carefully as they may become a major reference point in making decisions about the future of a place and assessing design proposals and development management decisions. It is important that they are appropriate to the scale and nature of the work. In a borough scale study, they should be genuinely characteristic of a whole character type or area rather than being strictly local in occurrence. The smaller the scale and the greater the level of detail in the study, the more detailed and specific the key characteristics are likely to be.

6.28 An example of how physical, cultural and social factors derived from desk study and site survey, may be brought together to describe the key characteristics of a place or location is shown in box 6.1.

BOX 6.1: GEORGIAN TOWNHOUSE SUBURBS, KINGS CROSS

The information below has been generated for a sample townscape type, although it could apply at any scale down to neighbourhood and site specific.



- Intact residential streets built in the Georgian style, typically between c.1720 and c.1820/30
- Typically two and three storey terraced town houses arranged along narrow streets or in crescent formation, usually with narrow, deep building plots. Some remain as houses, others have been sub divided as flats in the 20th century.
- Close street frontages create an intimate and small scale character.
- Boundaries are defined by wrought iron railings, behind which lie short front gardens or the lower/basement storey, partially sunken below street level.
- Buildings are built of London stock, with slate roof tiles, and characterised by their symmetry and regularity of detail in a plain, understated style.
- Sash windows with glazing bars create rhythm and articulation along the street, as do panelled front doors with fanlights above.
- Buildings present elegant frontages to the street contributing positively to the public realm. Chimneys and dormer windows contribute to a visually interesting roofscape.
- Occasional glimpses of tall high rise modern buildings, which rise above the rooftops.

BOX 6.1 CONTINUED

- Pavements include riven York stone with granite kerbs, and granite setts form the road surface. Black heritage lamps and bollards contribute to the sense of historic character.
- Views are focussed and contained along streets, framed by elegant facades. Slightly taller buildings mark the end of the street, forming a visual focal point or local landmark.
- A quiet, private residential suburb, in marked contrast to the adjacent vibrant and busy commercial streets of Caledonian Road and Pentonville Road. The greatly mixed character of such areas contrasts with the unified quality of this area.

Understanding what is important and valued

6.29 Key characteristics can be used to draw out key positive features or attributes as well as negative features to articulate what is important and why. This can help inform a strategy for a place/area, and draw from appropriate local stakeholder or community input and judgements. This understanding of what is valued and the reasons why can be used to help guide future change in an area. It can also be used to help articulate and evaluate the area's sensitivity and capacity for change which can then be used to inform mitigation and design outcomes.

6.30 An understanding of what is important and valued can also be used as part of a 'sieving approach' to analyse the elements which contribute to a place's character, such as the approach used to identify opportunities and constraints in tall building studies. Use of values and value judgements which are corroborated professionally and by the community helps avoid any undue subjectivity or perception of this.

6.31 Any place will have multiple inherent values; different people or groups will

value different places and their individual elements for different reasons. Such values or reasons may not always be obvious and may hinge on local associations which have not otherwise been formally documented. In some cases a place may be valued in spite of rather than because of its character, perhaps because of its associations with a particular culture, activity or what it represents or means to a local community. Such distinctions are particularly important to draw out in neighbourhood and local level studies, and can be identified through a range of consultative processes (Appendix 2).

6.32 It can be helpful to distinguish different types of values inherent in any place, for example:

- Those values that might be widely recognised within the professional community such as through protection by designation or policy protection of buildings or spaces, or through cultural references (commemoration) or traditions.
- Those values that may appeal to people on a more 'fundamental' level and linked to sense and perceptions (such as comfort, security, safety, beauty, inspiration).

6.33 For any study of the character of places it is important to record and communicate all values, not just the values applied by professionals. In making decisions about future management and change for an area, these multiple values will need to be balanced together, relative to each other and spatially.

6.34 English Heritage guidance provides additional information on identifying and understanding values.^v

Presenting information

6.35 There are many ways of translating messages effectively and visually to a wide range of audiences. Some, such as artists' impressions, accurate visual representations or computer generated imagery are specialised and relatively resource intensive^{vi}, whilst others are comparatively simple to generate.

6.36 Effective visual means of communication can include at the simplest level, diagrams or flow charts to synthesise large amounts of information. Annotated photography or sketches, or a combination of photography with mapping to give some form of spatial and visual representation can also be very effective and relatively straightforward to produce, as shown in the some of the examples overleaf. The examples are presented under the following headings:

- Mapping and describing typologies.
- Graphic descriptions - using words and images effectively.
- Using drawings and sketch information to describe a place.

Mapping and describing typologies

Mapping and describing typologies

Figure 6.5 shows a simple, effective way of colour coding typologies to photographic and visual representation, providing a clear snapshot of their character.

6.37 Sketches, as in Figure 6.8, can be a quick and useful way of translating information on key characteristics or, as in the example below, to identify points for a strategy to manage and guide change in an area. They can either be done freehand or by tracing over photographs as a base.

Figure 6.5: Typology and illustrations developed for London Borough of Waltham Forest's Characterisation Study (Source: Urban Practitioners/London Borough of Waltham Forest).



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey digital maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office (C) Crown Copyright. Licence No. London Borough of Waltham Forest LA 096376. Published 2008.

Using words and images effectively

Figure 6.6 shows good use of thumbnail site elevations and annotated panoramic photographs to convey key characteristics. This is an efficient way of conveying large amounts of information concisely and in an accessible manner. Such a technique enables the reader

Figure 6.6: Example streetscape elevations (Source: Urban Practitioners/London Borough of Waltham Forest)



The street elevation above illustrates a typical Victorian terraced street.

This terrace, taken from the Bushwood area, illustrates the consistent rhythm of the Victorian form.

The street is comprised of a series of twin porches with a double height bay either side which are repeated through the length of the street. Chimney positions support this rhythm throughout.

Using drawings and sketch information

Figure 6.7 shows an alternative means of representing information for a block/part of a neighbourhood, using simple site plans and cross sections. Again, this is an accessible, low cost approach, which

can be developed by someone with access to and an understanding of maps, plans, scale and cross sections and sketching skills^{vi}, whether by hand and/or by use of proprietary image editing and illustration software^{vii}.

Figure 6.7: Example plans and sections from the London Borough of Barnet Characterisation Study (Source: Urban Practitioners/London Borough of Barnet)



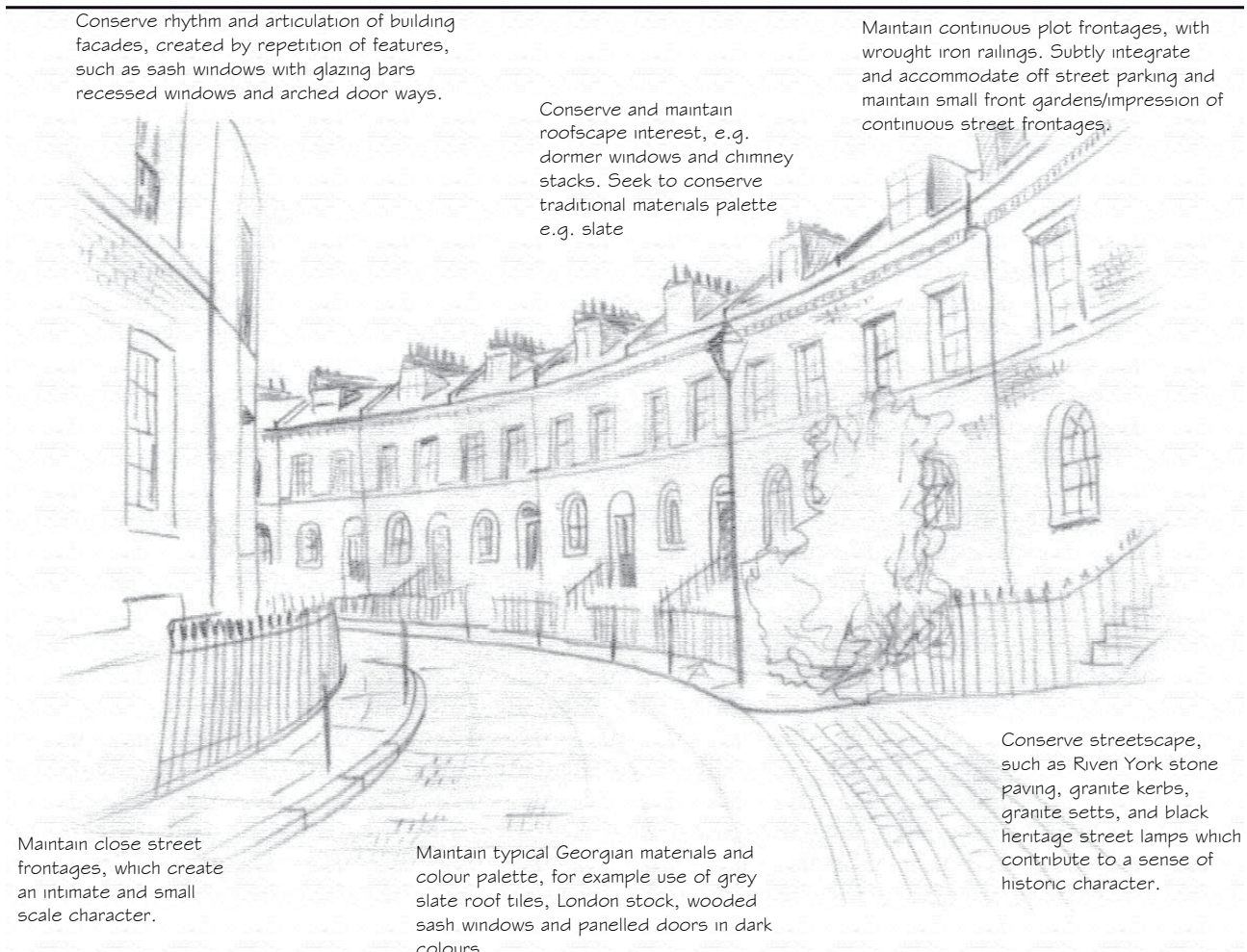
OUTCOMES: Applying an understanding of place

6.38 A key outcome of understanding the character of a place is its use to inform the making of judgements and planning decisions to guide change. As set out above, understanding of values and important aspects of character can be used as part of a ‘sieving’ approach to guide change so that it takes appropriate account of its context. It is however recognised that on occasion aspects of

character can potentially contradict with other elements, for example urban design versus conservation principles. In such cases, it will be important to weigh up the respective importance and sensitivities of the place and uses in making planning decisions.

6.39 Some examples of how an understanding of the character of a place can positively influence planning, design and change outcomes are set out in the case studies in the rest of this chapter. The case studies

Figure 6.8: Example sketch information to illustrate principles of a strategy for an area



include strategic, local and site specific examples. The examples are:

- Using an understanding of character to guide regeneration in an inner London Borough;
- Using an understanding of character to guide change in an Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF);
- Using an understanding of character effectively in a Design and Access Statement;
- Using an understanding of character to help apply and interpret the London Density Matrix in the London Plan;
- Using an understanding of character to guide institutional and commercial development in a Central London location.

CASE STUDY 1: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE REGENERATION IN AN INNER LONDON BOROUGH



Site as existing (Image: Jerry Tate Architects)

The place

- A large housing estate in an inner London Borough, situated in a disadvantaged economic area.
- Existing buildings were completed in the 1930s and are handsome examples of brick construction providing strong building lines and a rich materials palette.
- Accommodation is generally five storeys high, brick-built residential apartments with deck access to individual units.

- Estate is in a reasonably good state of repair, building fabric is well-built and there is gated access to housing blocks, although public space between buildings is sparse.
- The area surrounding the estate varies from private residential accommodation in mainly Victorian houses to a major retail high street. There is also a local park adjacent.
- The estate has a mixed social history, with excellent results from the local secondary school, but recent civil disturbances and vandalism.

The proposal

- Improvement of public realm on the site to provide additional green space and play areas.
- The construction of new estate facilities for community, youth and education uses.
- A general improvement of the sustainability and energy strategy for the estate, including renewable microgeneration, new heating systems for residential units and improvement of the existing building fabric.

How an understanding of the character of the place helped guide the change

- A context appraisal was developed for the site, mapping key features/assets and opportunities and constraints. As part of this, working with the community to discuss and understand their needs and aspirations assisted with developing a brief for the site, which aligned with local needs. For example, many residents were proud of the distinctive architecture of the estate and consultation with the community ensured that the upgrading of the building fabric respected and emphasized this strong character and materials palette.
 - Community consultation also enabled improvements to the public space which were complementary to the nearby park and helped address deficiencies in the area. Discussing the proposals with local community groups and assessing their needs enabled the new community space to be tailored to fit the most useful range of functions and ensured that it was embraced by the local area.
-

CASE STUDY 2: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE CHANGE IN AN OPPORTUNITY AREA PLANNING FRAMEWORK (OAPF)



The place

- A brownfield former industrial and commercial location adjacent to the canal basin at Little Venice, in inner West London.
- The site comprised a number of vacant and derelict plots with prime waterside frontage. In close proximity to a major rail transport terminus and tube interchange (Paddington) of which the principal buildings are Grade 1 listed.
- Surrounded predominantly by office/commercial and retail development and the existing residential quarter around Little Venice and a network of residential streets and squares south and west of Paddington Station with access links to nearby Royal Parks.
- Existing development is of mixed age and character with early and mid-Victorian houses associated with the construction of Paddington Station and with later and modern infill. Residential development predominantly comprises 4-5 storey townhouses, although there are many significantly taller buildings in the vicinity e.g. Paddington Station and hotel and many later and modern office buildings.
- The area immediately around the basin had a deficiency in terms of useable public realm due to its past industrial use.

The proposal

- A comprehensive redevelopment of the canal basin site for mixed use including offices, residential apartments, cafes/bars/restaurants and retail outlets, including some 8-10 storey focal/gateway buildings.
- Creation of new waterfront public realm between the new buildings and the canal basin as well as active and useable waterside frontages and new bridges to provide an effective circulation system.
- Provision of an integrated green infrastructure network to address deficiencies including a new urban woodland, SUDS water features and green roofs to a number of principal buildings.

How an understanding of the character of the place helped guide the change

- The relationship to the water and associated canal side heritage has formed a key part of the masterplan, as focus for public realm and access and circulation. Many of the new buildings have been designed in response to this in terms of form and materials (use of curved glass walls and panels) to maximise visual relationships with these features.
- New views and physical access have been opened up to the water, enhancing the legibility of the townscape.
- The importance of the Grade 1 listed Paddington Station has been recognised, with the stated aim being to make the Basin the 'front door' to the Station. This is being reflected in the creation of new views to this Victorian landmark and in a parallel, separate scheme by Network Rail to restore the derelict eastern train shed of the station which forms a component of these views.

CASE STUDY 3: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER EFFECTIVELY IN A DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT



Site proposal (Image: Jerry Tate Architects)

The place

- Owned by a London Borough Private Sector Housing Group, the site is an empty prominent corner plot which accommodated a three storey Public House before it was demolished.
- The site is located adjacent to a London Regeneration area. This significant regeneration initiative aims to transform the local area physically, socially, environmentally and economically.
- The area has excellent transport links into Central London and is close to the proposed Crossrail development. London City Airport provides direct connections to most European business destinations.

The proposal

- Four new-build 3 bed houses and three 2 bed apartments, one of which was fully accessible.
- The proposal will be an exemplar project to provide affordable housing options for rent and ownership, which will achieve level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and Lifetime Home Standard.

How an understanding of the character of the place helped guide the change

- Local characteristics of the site were specifically recorded and illustrated within the baseline part of the Design and Access Statement for the scheme in order to demonstrate the influence of the surrounding context and provide design cues for the scheme.
- Historic evolution of the site and its surrounding characteristics were established to understand how the site evolved.
- Extensive analysis of the site was undertaken to recognise the immediate environmental context. Shadow studies, massing models, environmental conditions, site aspect, site access, and pedestrian/vehicle rights of way, were investigated to gain an understanding of the site characteristics.
- A photographic survey of local building vernacular formed a strong visual aid for the proposed building form, height and materials.

CASE STUDY 4: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO HELP APPLY AND INTERPRET THE LONDON DENSITY MATRIX

The place

- A 1950s local authority housing estate within an outer London residential suburb.
- Low density residential layout defined by large leafy gardens with dwellings set well back from the street and gaps between them enabling views to the wooded backdrop of relatively large rear gardens.
- Development is defined by a mix of two storey semi-detached dwellings and short blocks of two storey terraced houses and a three storey blocks of flats.
- A quiet, private residential suburb approximately 1km from the nearest local centre with block orientation arranged to maximise and respect amenity of residents.

The proposal

- Demolition and replacement of the dilapidated flatted development within the housing estate (removal of the single central block of flats) to optimise site capacity for new local authority housing provision and increase habitable rooms per hectare within the site.
- Existing block to be replaced by a mix of eighteen 2 and 3 bedroom two storey houses plus gardens, private parking and community greenspace.
- Development proposed seeks at least 25% increase in density/utilisation of the plot.
- Two options were developed, as shown in the plans below.



(Images: Macreanor Lavington Architects)

How an understanding of the character of the place helped guide the change

- Both layouts have made reference to the existing building plot line and therefore maintain the appearance of a low density, green and leafy idiom to plot frontages. They also maintain gaps between dwellings as per the existing layout, enabling intervisibility with the vegetation

to rear gardens.

- The layouts both concentrate taller buildings (3/4 storey flats) to the central part of the site, enabling development to 'step down' to 2 storeys to the edge to mirror existing surrounding development.
- Option 1, whilst having a slightly lower increase in net density, better reflects existing building orientation, privacy and amenity of surrounding residents. It also enables slightly larger rear gardens which fit with the existing structure, allowing for incorporation of more vegetation to reinforce the leafy character of the housing estate.

CASE STUDY 5: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN A CENTRAL LONDON LOCATION



The place

- The existing building was constructed in the 1970's, set back from the street by a lightwell with composite cladding and metal framed single glazing.
- Located on a central London street covered by a 'shared surface' with mixed pedestrians and vehicular use in the middle of a very public and busy tourist area.
- The site is in a Conservation Area with a number of significant Listed Buildings, some of which are of national importance. Surrounding buildings range in size from six to eleven storeys and are in a variety of styles depending on the era in which they were built from 1860 to 2002.
- The site is in a prominent corner position. It is owned by a respected higher education establishment and denotes the outer extent of their west London campus.
- Surrounding uses vary from museums / tourist attractions, research establishments, performance venues and private residential accommodation.

The proposal

- Demolition of existing three storey building on site frontage.
- Replacement with a new building to provide space for teaching and research of between seven to ten storeys high increasing the development density on the site.
- As well as the new-build element, a major refurbishment and re-cladding of the existing rear eight storey building was proposed to improve building facilities and the elevation aesthetic.
- There was also a proposed new gated frontage to the college campus as part of the development to improve security on the site.

How an understanding of the character of the place helped guide the change

- An assessment of the surrounding building's massing and relationship to the street (context appraisal) guided the form of development to provide an improved urban environment. For example the existing building has a basement lightwell on the front façade, the proposal removed this element to give the building a public 'shopfront'/active frontage reflecting many of the more public buildings on the street.
 - An understanding of the materials and architectural style of the area aided appropriate expression of the new building. Many buildings on the street are exemplars of their particular architectural era and understanding this historical context helped develop an appropriate proposal that avoided pastiche.
 - An understanding of the social context, particularly the mix of tourist and education uses, assisted development of the public space strategy for the proposal, especially in suggesting ways to improve the public/private relationship within the proposal to promote public interaction without compromising security.
-

Endnotes

ⁱ Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2002, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition)

ⁱⁱ Alan Baxter/Sheils Flynn, London's Natural Signatures: The London Landscape Framework. Prepared for Natural England, January 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ English Heritage, 2008, Conservation Principles –Policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment

^{iv} Ibid

^v Guidance on preparing technically accurate and robust visualisations, such as for Public Inquiry, is provided in Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2002, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition). Also Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11: Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, available on line at <http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/publications/downloads.php>

^{vi} Publications which advise on graphic techniques include Reid, G, Landscape Graphics and Wang, T.C, Plan and Section Drawing


^{vii} Examples include the package of graphics programmes developed by Adobe, such as Photoshop or Illustrator. Cheaper alternatives include Paintshop Pro or CorelDraw. Google Sketch Up is an effective digital means of generating rapid three dimensional illustration.

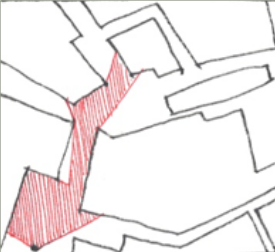


APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Community	For the purposes of this guidance and studies of character, the definition of community covers not just residents but also workers, the business community, tourists and transient users as appropriate.
Context	The way in which places, sites and spaces inter relate with one another whether physically, functionally or visually, or the way in which they are experienced sequentially and understood.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	A recognised process for understanding the environmental implications of certain proposals (above set thresholds) upon the environment. It is guided by the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (1999) as amended.
Figure: Ground mapping	<p>A device by which the relationship of the built form to open space and hence urban grain and permeability can be clearly shown by reversed out/silhouette mapping. Also known as Nolli Mapping after Giambattista Nolli who devised the technique.</p>  <p>Above: example of Figure : Ground mapping.</p>
Geodiversity	A term incorporating all rocks, minerals, landforms and the processes which have shaped them over geological time.
Geographic Information Systems or GIS	Spatial database software based on geo referenced map and map based data, for presentation and analysis of information.
Green Grid	A strategic green infrastructure network
Green infrastructure (GI)	A network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing as well as both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities
Hydrology	The study of movement, distribution and quality of water and water resources.

TERM	DEFINITION
Isovist mapping	<p>A mapping technique devised by Hillier et al as part of the Space Syntax methodology (see Space Syntax entry below) to demonstrate permeability and legibility. Isovists are generated by plotting the maximum extent of a space and its context visible from a specific point.</p>  <p>ovist otted from within urban open space</p>
Intervisibility	The property of visibility between one site or feature and another.
Map regression analysis	Using historic map sequences to map historic eras or epochs of growth and evolution to understand the evolution of a place.
Node	A junction or intersection e.g. by a market cross or milestone or a place where people congregate such as a market or square.
Nolli Mapping	See Figure : Ground Mapping entry above.
Peri urban	Urban edge or settlement fringe.
Place	The result of a complex interplay of different elements, e.g. the cultural and social factors which have combined to create identity, the physical or built elements that make up the place and the people associated with it through memories, association and activity.
Place-making	Recognising the distinctiveness of individual locations in plans, policies and proposals, and responding accordingly.
Settlement morphology	The form of a settlement, its process of formation and evolution.
SUDS	Sustainable Drainage Systems e.g. swales, planted filter strips, permeable paving.
Skyspace modelling	A form of digital modelling used to understand impact of tall buildings on sites and their settings.

TERM	DEFINITION
Space Syntax	A methodology encompassing a series of theories and techniques for understanding urban spatial configurations. It was developed by Bill Hillier, Julienne Hanson and other colleagues at the Bartlett in the 1970s as a tool for architects to understand social implications of their schemes.
Time-depth	The imprint of the past on the contemporary place.

Community Planning (<http://www.communityplanning.net/>) is perhaps the best starting point for those concerned in getting involved with shaping their local environment. This online resource provides a good overview of community engagement techniques and best practice information.

Each engagement method identified on this site is supported by additional details on tips, costs and best practice case studies. Some of the methods most relevant to understanding the character of a place in the context of this SPG are briefly described below:

Design Charette/ Design Workshop

APPENDIX 2: LOCAL ENGAGEMENTS MECHANISMS

Hands-on sessions allowing small groups of professionals and non-professionals to work creatively together developing planning and design ideas. They will normally be held as part of a planning day or other community planning event.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/design_workshop.php

Informal Walk/ Reconnaissance Trip

A mixed team of local people and technical experts walking around the area of interest to familiarise everyone with the physical environment and key issues. It is a useful start to any community planning process.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/reconnaissance_trip.php

Elevation Montages

Elevation montages show the façade of a street by assembling photos of individual buildings.. Comments on post-it notes or cards can be made by participants and placed underneath the relevant section (what they like/don't like/would like to see etc.). This generates a dialogue amongst participants for discussion and analysis.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/elevation_montage.php

Local Design Statements

Local Design Statements are a way for local people to provide guidelines for new development in their area, which can be incorporated into local planning policy. They are particularly useful in areas where local character is threatened by insensitive development. Such a statement will include guidance for future developers based on the character of the landscape setting, settlement patterns, building forms and transport networks.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/local_design_statement.php

Mood Mapping/ Mind Mapping

An effective way of translating the essence of place using hand drawn mapping of perceptions of a place. Refer to para 5.54.

Museum of London and the Building Centre in London in 2011

Participatory Appraisal/ Participatory Strategic Planning

This method can be applied to groups or whole communities to create a cycle of data gathering, reflection and learning. Ideally, participants first look at their perceptions of the current situation, identify barriers or gaps, and based on these, propose solutions or areas for change. This method allows for a range of creative and visual tools to work with individuals or groups in any given setting.

The residents and communities of Ponders Green used such a participatory approach to identify local economic, social and environmental concerns, a vision for the future and suggestions for overcoming obstacles to achieving the vision.

<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Participatory+Appraisal>

<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Participatory+Strategic+Planning>

<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/CaseStudies/Participatory+Strategic+Planning+in+Ponders+End%2C+North+London>

Photo Surveys

Photo surveys help stakeholders develop ideas by taking and discussing photos of their existing environment. This involves participants taking photos of places and images according to a general or specific theme. Photos can then be sorted, selected and placed on maps or large sheets of paper to be used as a basis for discussion, analysis and design.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/photo_survey.php

Placecheck

Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed and focussing people on working together to achieve them. Placecheck asks questions about the processes of change and the potential for improving the area physically. This involves a series of questions, starting from the basics of what people like or dislike about the place and what needs to be improved, to over a hundred more specific questions. Not all of these questions need to be asked, rather a series of questions and prompts can be pulled out that are more specific to the place.

The Placecheck initiative is supported by a wide range of organisations that include the Urban Design Alliance, Landscape Institute and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

The Placecheck initiative is supported by a wide range of organisations that include the Urban Design Alliance, Landscape Institute and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

<http://www.placecheck.info/>

Planning for Real

A method for community involvement in planning and development which uses simple models as a focus for people to put forward and prioritise ideas on how their area can be improved. A highly visible, hands-on tool, which people of all abilities and backgrounds find easy and enjoyable to engage in.

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/planning_for_real.php

The Planning/Design Game

This method of engagement provides a highly visual way of allowing people to explore physical design options of an area within the context of identified land-use constraints. This involves preparing a base map of an area or site and cut-out pieces representing items that could be incorporated. Individuals or groups move pieces around until they are happy with the design, which is then photographed. Layouts produced by different individuals or groups are discussed and analysed as a basis for drawing up sketch designs and costings.

Such an interactive game was designed by Urban Initiatives as part of a public engagement process for the regeneration of South West Canvey Island. The game won the 'Innovation of the Year' Award at the 2006 Regeneration Awards and is now promoted as a best practice engagement method by Urban Design London.

<http://www.urbaninitiatives.co.uk/index.php?id=118>

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/design_game.php

Public Participation through Geographical Information Systems

The main aim of the research is to develop and test web-based Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to enhance public involvement and participation in environmental planning and decision making. The main objective is based on the belief that by providing citizens with access to information and data in the form of maps and visualisations they can make better informed decisions about the natural and built environment around them.

<http://www.ppgis.manchester.ac.uk/>

Other sources of information for effective community engagement:

The 'community involvement' site is designed as a resource for people who want to know more about how to engage communities, why it needs to be done and if you need it. Some of the approaches explained are a means for enabling citizens to directly influence policy making, while others are designed primarily to allow citizens to share their experiences with each other:

<http://www.communityinvolvement.org.uk/Index.html>

The 'people and participation' site is a UK-based and oriented website that provides practical information for those working to involve communities. The site includes methods, case studies, news, library, events listing, advice service and a process planner. The site is run by Involve and funded by Communities and Local Government:

<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home>

<http://www.planningforreal.org.uk/default.html>

Planning Aid specialise in finding methods for consultation that suit the communities that are being involved, focusing in particular on 'hard to reach' groups. Their qualified Planning Advisors will provide anyone with up to 15 minutes of free and independent advice. Individuals who cannot afford professional planning advice and who do not stand to gain financially from their advice may qualify for further assistance. In association with RTPI and DCLG, Planning Aid have also published a short and easy to follow guide to public engagement in development schemes. It is illustrated by real examples of good practice and provides information and assistance to those planning, engaging in, or assessing community consultation. In London, Planning Aid for London provides this service.

<http://www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk/?idno=1>

www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/12967/Good-Practice-Guide-Spreads.pdf>

Community Participation in Planning – References

R. Chambers, (2002) Participatory Workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities, Earthscan, 2002

C.Church & C.Garratt, Changing where we live: A guide to working with communities to create green and sustainable communities, 2004. Available from Community Development Foundation <http://www.cdf.org.uk>

C. Flecknoe & N.McLlelan, The What, Why and How of Neighbourhood Community Development, 2004. Available from Community Matters <http://www.communitymatters.org.uk>

A. Gilchrist, The Well-Connected Community, 2004, Bristol Policy Press

C.L. Larsen, Facilitating Community Involvement: Practical Guidance for Practitioners and Policy Makers, 2004 (commissioned by the Home Office to evaluate community involvement in area based initiatives).

All of the following are published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:-

Danny Burns et al, Making Community Participation Meaningful: A

Handbook for Development and Assessment, 2004

Alan Caldwell, Re: sourcebook – Planning for Your Community, 2004

David Wilcox Community Participation and empowerment: putting theory into practice, 1994

Community Participation in Planning – Resources

APaNGO project

www.apango.eu

The APaNGO project (Advocacy, Participation and Non Governmental Organisations in Planning) aims to increase community involvement in regional planning across north west Europe by jointly planning, designing and implementing a network of resources and skills.

New Economics Foundation (NEF)

www.neweconomics.org

Toolkits and research reports on participation. For example,

Participation Works

Techniques for participation in the twenty first century

Locality

A national movement of development trusts and social enterprises with a specific expertise in community asset ownership. Runs a support hub on the 4 Community Rights in the Localism Act.

<http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk>

Capacity Global

Supports diverse community and neighbourhood activity on environmental issues. Outreach projects include Diversity Environment Engagement Project and Just Cities, a toolkit designed to help young people (10-17 years) influence decision making

<http://www.capacity.org.uk>

Friends of the Earth

Provides research and education support for community groups on environmental and planning issues. Produces Community Rights Resource Pack – The English Planning System.

<http://www.foe.co.uk>

The Prince's Foundation

Provides support to neighbourhoods through collaborative planning events, particularly Enquiry by Design and Planning Reset.

<http://www.princes-foundation.org>

Glass-House Community Led Design

A national charity working to help people make better buildings, spaces, homes and neighbourhoods. Provides training and hands-on support to communities and regeneration professionals.

<http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk>

APPENDIX 3: DATA SOURCES

The information in the table below relates to the main headings in Figure 5.5 within the main body of the SPG. Not all of the sources of information presented in the table will necessarily be available or relevant to every type of study. Data will depend on the scale of the study and its purpose, rather than ‘using data for its own sake’. Available budget may also influence the level and type of data used in studies. As such, the information set out in the table is a starting point for those undertaking a study to choose from, identifying sources appropriate for their purposes.

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Landform and topography	Review of landscape character assessment (LCA) information as appropriate for outer London boroughs – source: Borough Landform panorama contour mapping – source from Ordnance Survey Topographic surveys - Produce in study team, or commission from surveyor, subject to resources	•		•
Geology and soils	British Geological Society (BGS) Geological Memoirs (Regional Geology Guides) describing geological evolution of an area, and supporting BGS Mapping – source from BGS/Borough Soil Association Soils Mapping – source from Borough, if relevant and available Regionally Important or Local Geological Sites location data, plus descriptions/citations – source from Borough, if available – such geology sites are usually identified by local geology groups and it therefore very much depends on how active the local group is within a borough	•		•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Hydrology and riverine environments	Catchment Management Plan and Strategic and Local Flood Risk Assessments, as appropriate, including relevant mapped layers and information on geology/aquifers and main rivers – source from Environment Agency/Borough Relevant All London Green Grid Area Frameworks and supporting mapping – source from GLA/Design for London	•	•	•
Open spaces	Greenspace strategies/Open Space Audits (formerly known as PPG17 Assessments/Audits) – source from Borough All London Green Grid Area Frameworks and relevant map data – GLA/Design for London Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) data – source from GLA/Borough London Parks and Gardens Inventory of Historic Green Spaces (particularly for landscape heritage aspects of London’s open spaces, such as Registered Parks and Gardens, and London squares protected under the 1931 London Squares Act). The inventory is available from http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/	•	•	•
Atmosphere and microclimate	Information will be largely collected through site survey and by appropriate local/stakeholder engagement			•
Habitats	London Wildlife Trust Living Landscape Areas and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and BAP Priority Habitats/targets, plus supporting mapped data – source from London Wildlife Trust and/or MAGIC, plus relevant maps from All London Green Grid area frameworks, as appropriate. Site survey can be used to confirm information ‘on the ground’ Also Phase 1 habitat surveys developed by ecologists, where available	•		•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Trees	Tree Strategies and/or site specific management plans (whether landscape/conservation/ecological focus) – produce in study team, if required Woodland Trust Accessible Woodland data/National Woodland Inventory data; Ancient Woodland Inventory data – source from Woodland Trust/MAGIC (www.magic.gov.uk)	•		•
Nature conservation designations: National/international	RAMSAR Sites Natura 2000 Sites (Special Areas of Conservation or SAC; Special Protection Areas or SPA) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Sources: All of the above can be sourced from the relevant Borough, or from MAGIC Ancient woodlands – source: Woodland Trust Ancient Woodland Inventory	•	•	•
Nature reserves	National/Local Nature Reserves – source: MAGIC/Borough Roadside Nature Reserves – source: Borough	•		•
Designated geology/geodiversity	Local Geological Sites – source: Borough	•		•
Locally designated nature conservation interest	Local Wildlife Sites/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation – source: Borough	•		•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Urban grain and relationship of buildings to spaces	<p>Conservation Area Appraisals. Source: Borough Extensive/Intensive Urban Surveys. Source: English Heritage - (http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/townscape-character/)</p> <p>Pevsner's Buildings of England series – London volumes. Source: Local History Library or Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Library</p> <p>Historic Ordnance Survey map sequences (Map regression). Source: Landmark Information Group (www.landmark.co.uk) or Old Maps (www.old-maps.co.uk)</p> <p>Aerial photography. Source: On line resources/Google Earth</p> <p>Figure : Ground Mapping (also known as Nolli Mapping after Giambattista Nolli – a graphical technique for mapping relationship of built form to open space). Source: Produce within study team</p> <p>Elements of space syntax mapping e.g. isovists/permeability, movement corridors (Space Syntax mapping is a form of architectural theory based on understanding of movement patterns, developed by Hillier et al at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (Hillier B, 1996,, Space is the Machine; A configurational theory of architecture (Cambridge University Press)¹) Source: Produce within study team, using elements defined by Hillier (subject to need and resources)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Materials, detailing and building styles	Conservation Area Appraisals Extensive/Intensive Urban Surveys Listing descriptions/local listings – source: Borough	•	•	•
Building massing, density, height and scale	Conservation Area Appraisals Extensive/Intensive Urban Surveys Listing descriptions/local listings or descriptions for locally identified buildings of Townscape Merit, (where Boroughs use these terms) – source: English Heritage for national listings, Boroughs for local listings Building heights modelling (digital model, where available and subject to resources). Topographic surveys (produce in study team/commission from surveyor, subject to resources) – source: Likely to be produced by developer team as they bring schemes forward	•	•	•
Historic evolution of a place	Conservation Area Appraisals Extensive/Intensive Urban Surveys Local history studies, available from local history libraries	•	•	•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Significance and values, including community values and perceptions and understanding of setting	Where applicable, World Heritage Site Management Plans for sites designated as World Heritage Sites, including associated statements of 'Outstanding Universal Value' – source: on line Information on significance and settings of both designated and non- designated heritage assets may also be gained through site survey to confirm e.g. views/visual analysis, understanding aspects such as function, land use, context and inter relationships or historic and aesthetic connections. Also through gaining an understanding of values via local engagement. Information on the setting of heritage assets can be found in English Heritage Guidance available on-line: English Heritage Guidance: The Setting of Heritage Assets – see http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/setting-heritage-assets/ .	•	•	•
Built Heritage	Listing descriptions Conservation Area Appraisals Local history library/local archive or studies centre	•	•	•
Settlement pattern, hierarchy and morphology	Victoria County History (This was first published in 1899 and is an encyclopaedia of local history by county, recording England's places and people from the earliest period to the present day. Entries are available for London and Middlesex. It is available on line at http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk Pevsner Conservation Area Appraisals Historic map sequences using historic editions of Ordnance Survey map data (available from on line sources such as www.old-maps.co.uk)	•	•	•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Cultural pattern and layers	Extensive/intensive urban surveys, plus relevant GIS layers and mapping produce for these studies Conservation Area Appraisals Listed building descriptions/local listing descriptions/ listed parks and gardens descriptions Historic landscape characterisation (for outer London boroughs – consideration of ‘fringe’ land in adjacent counties) – source: adjacent county council archaeology departments	•	•	•
Heritage Designations	This is mostly dealt with in the themes above, however sources for key designations are also identified below: World Heritage Sites – source: on line Conservation Areas – source: Borough Listed Buildings – source: English Heritage on line resources Locally listed buildings/buildings of townscape merit – source: Borough Registered parks and gardens – source: English Heritage/MAGIC; also consider parks, gardens and squares identified by the London Parks and Gardens Trust - London Parks and Gardens Inventory of Historic Green Spaces, available from http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/ Battlefield sites – source: MAGIC/Historic Environment Records Scheduled Monuments or Sites on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR – formerly Scheduled Ancient Monuments or SAMs) – source: English Heritage National Monuments Record	•	•	•
Maritime heritage	Wreck sites – information available on line at http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/our-planning-role/consent/protected-wreck-sites/	•	•	
Battlefields	MAGIC website for information on battlefield sites and related designations	•	•	
Scheduled (Ancient) Monuments	Historic Environment Record or National Monuments Record – source: English Heritage	•	•	•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Designated views (LVMF)	London View Management Framework (LVMF SPG) – source : GLA (online) Aerial photography – source: on line resources Terrain and buildings modelling such as ZTV modelling overlaid on LVMF corridors) – source: Produce in study team, subject to resources	•	•	•
Locally important views	Local Views identified in Local Plan – source: Borough	•	•	•
Movement corridors, permeability and access/ circulation	All London Green Grid (ALGG), including paths and rights of way, promoted routes/Green Chain and cycle route mapping – source: GLA/Design for London Relevant Open Space Studies/Strategies – source: Borough Local Transport Plan/Rights of Way Improvement Plans – source: Borough	•		•
Transport infrastructure/ corridors	London Plan – source: GLA Local Plan evidence bases including transport studies/ transport assessments – source: Borough Mapping of main rivers, canals, railways and M and A roads, Sustrans routes, promoted routes such as Capital Ring/Green Chains/London Loop/paths and paths and rights of way (PROWs), plus any relevant to access in All London Green Grid – source GLA/Design for London/ Borough- Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTAL) –source: GLA/TfL	•	•	

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Public realm and street scene	Conservation Area Appraisals All London Green Grid (ALGG); relevant Open Space Studies/Strategies, plus supporting mapped data/consultation findings Figure : Ground/Nolli mapping	•	•	•
Demography/ ethnicity/ socio economic profiles	CACI socio economic location profiles – source; online Socio economic/community profiling work undertaken for Local Plan evidence base, or Neighbourhood Plan – source: Borough, neighbourhood forums/groups		•	•
Need and deficiency, areas of opportunity	Open space assessments All London Green Grid Socio economic/community profiling work undertaken for Local Plan/Neighbourhood Plan	•	•	•
Crime and perception of crime	Crime and Disorder Reduction Reports/Strategies at Borough level, where available – source: Borough	•	•	•
Barriers, real and perceived	Crime and Disorder Reduction Report/Strategy, where available – source; Borough Mapping of river, canal and road/rail corridors – source: British Waterways/Environment Agency/Network Rail/GLA/Borough Indices of Multiple Deprivation Mapping (IMD) - source: Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI)	•	•	•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Permeability, safety and security	Local engagement Crime and Disorder Reduction (CDR) Report/Strategy, where available – source: Borough Movement studies where available – source: Borough Mapping of promoted/strategic/local access and circulation routes and green travel routes, barriers to access (e.g. main roads, railways).	•		•
Land use and activity; use and misuse of spaces and places	National Land Use dataset (NLUD) and any more local Borough level information, where available – source: NLUD/Borough. More detailed information is likely to be revealed through local engagement and site survey.	•	•	•
Land ownership and land management	Many boroughs hold land ownership data, although this is often sensitive/confidential, and of often limited availability for this reason. Site specific management plans, where available.	•	•	
Literary and artistic associations with the place	Conservation Area Appraisals Pevsner Local museum or Local History Library/Local Studies Centre		•	•
Sensory aspects	Information captured through site survey	•	•	•
Colour and texture, light, shade and pattern	Information captured through site survey	•	•	•
Reactions – personal/emotional	Information captured through site survey	•	•	•

SUBJECT/ TOPIC	POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES AND WHERE TO FIND	CHARACTER THEMES TO WHICH THE TOPIC RELATES		
		Physical	Cultural, social and economic	Perceptual and experiential
Seasonal and temporal qualities of place	Information captured through site survey	•	•	•

Other formats and languages

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Public Liaison Unit
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

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Chinese

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Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn có văn bản tài liệu này bằng ngôn ngữ của mình, hãy liên hệ theo số điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ dưới đây.

Greek

Αν θέλετε να αποκτήσετε αντίγραφο του παρόντος εγγράφου στη δική σας γλώσσα, παρακαλείστε να επικοινωνήσετε τηλεφωνικά στον αριθμό αυτό ή ταχυδρομικά στην παρακάτω διεύθυνση.

Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinizde hazırlanmış bir nüshasını edinmek için, lütfen aşağıdaki telefon numarasını arayınız veya adrese başvurunuz.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਬਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये पते पर संपर्क करें

Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি (কপি) চান, তা হলে নীচের ফোন নম্বরে বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

Arabic

إذا أردت نسخة من هذه الوثيقة بلغتك، يرجى الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو مراسلة العنوان أدناه

Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજની નકલ તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી આપેલ નંબર ઉપર ફોન કરો અથવા નીચેના સરનામે સંપર્ક સાદો.