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Dear *[CEO/ Chief Planner]*

The Planning Bill: delivering well designed homes and high quality places

Local authorities must be committed to taking the lead in their area's improvement - saying "yes" to high quality developments and "no" to poor quality developments. Negotiating from a position of strength with developers to achieve high quality requires having the skills and knowledge in place, and I am writing to remind you of the sources of support available.

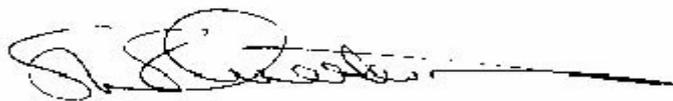
With the passing of the Planning Act 2008, local authorities are now required in primary legislation, to have regard to the desirability of achieving good design. High quality design has a crucial role to play in delivering prosperity and inward-investment, as well as ensuring that your area is an attractive and functional place for people to live. This is not an additional burden from central government but a re-statement of the importance of design quality in your local area, building upon existing national planning policy statements.

We are continuing to take a lead in encouraging high quality design by further strengthening the national framework. As well as introducing the design objective into the new Planning Act, the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 also included a clear objective that the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Government's housing and regeneration body, should aim to achieve high quality design. Bodies such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), also have clear objectives to help achieve high quality design, working closely with local authorities and others.

The quality of development which takes place in your area is indivisible from its success as a place; setting out a clear strategy and objectives on how this will be done, and backing them up with the skills and capacity needed to implement them represents a big opportunity for innovation and empowerment of local authorities and I hope you will see fit to take the lead on this in your area, even in the light of the current challenging

economic conditions. Further information on the services available to you is attached, and I encourage you to make use of them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Quartermain", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steve Quartermain

BACKGROUND

A strengthened legislative framework

You will be aware that the Government's Planning Bill received Royal Assent on 27 November 2008. This has introduced a new system for nationally significant infrastructure planning, the ability for local authorities to raise Community Infrastructure Levies to pay for new infrastructure demands arising from housing growth, and reforms to streamline the town and country planning system. An important aspect of this legislation was also to strengthen the role of design in creating high quality places, through the planning system.

These legislative changes add further emphasis to the need for all local policy and decision making, including local development frameworks and development control, to have regard to the importance of high quality design in delivering sustainable development, adding weight to the existing planning policy framework.

Implementing and delivering design objectives

As you will know, there are a number of tools and support structures available to ensure that you, as the local planning authority, can achieve our shared objectives of planning and delivering high quality homes and places.

Robust decision making must be made against the backdrop of clear strategies and consistent policies. This applies both at regional level, through a robust and ambitious Regional Spatial Strategy, and at the local level, through the Local Development Framework (LDF). Through understanding the place, a clear and locally specific vision can be established that gives confidence and clarity to the community, investors and developers. A clear and up-front commitment to design quality is essential, and reference should be made to objective measures such as the 20 Building for Life criteria developed by CABI and the Home Builders Federation. Ultimately, to strengthen the LDF and realise the opportunities of spatial planning, a corporate commitment to the LDF and its vision is needed. CABI is publishing a briefing paper in the new year to support local authorities in developing a spatial and place-led core strategy, and examples of good-practice are also available in their Plan Making Manual. Examples of where this has been achieved include Plymouth City Council and North West Leicestershire District Council.

The Government's design advisor, CABI, is leading on a number of programmes to help improve design awareness and skills at the regional and local level. This includes their *Design Review* service and their *Enabling* service, which provide free advice to local authorities and wider public sector clients on a range of growth, regeneration and public realm projects, as well as wider training for officers and council members - such as the Urban Design Summer School.

I would encourage you to look at using Building for Life, an assessment and negotiating tool, to help set out and evidence expectations of quality for residential or mixed-use developments. CABI is inviting Local Authorities to nominate and empower one of their staff for training to gain accreditation as a Building for Life assessor, in order to support their use of Building for Life as a quality check in pre-application discussions. Starting this year, and to be delivered over the next three years, this programme will create a group of at least 500 professionals who are trained and supported to use the Building for Life standard. You can register your

authority's interest for this programme via the Building for Life website www.buildingforlife.org.

Local authorities are encouraged to consult CABI about significant schemes using the Design Review service, both at the masterplanning and application stages. Guidance can be obtained from the CABI website. The 2006 Chief Planner's letter is still current and we encourage local authorities to consult CABI and the regional design review panels at both the pre-application and application stages.

There is further support from the independent Advisory Team for Large Planning Applications (ATLAS), available to advise local authorities on a range of specialisms, including urban design, masterplanning, design coding, transport and engineering, social infrastructure planning and delivery, Environmental Impact Assessment and S106 negotiations. The ATLAS team can also advise on Planning Performance Agreements, a project management tool that can enable better collaboration and smarter working, achieving higher quality design outcomes that benefit all stakeholders.

Providing clear leadership on design matters is crucial to improving the quality of what is built in your area. Financial support is available to kick-start this commitment through the use of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant which can be used flexibly towards the cost of employing an urban designer or establishing a design initiative. Guidance and programmes such as the HCA Academy (formerly ASC) leadership programmes, CABI Space Leaders Programme, Manual for Streets and CABI guidance for Councillors are all available to support you in this.

Monitoring the design quality of built-out residential developments in your area will be a requirement of next year's Annual Monitoring Returns core indicator (known as H6), and there are also opportunities to celebrate success locally through nominating schemes to the Building for Life and the Housing Design Awards. The next opportunity for nominations opens in the new year, and if you have a scheme you feel is of sufficient quality to merit an award, please go to the following site for details on how to enter <http://www.designforhomes.org/hda/howtoenter.html>

Examples of High Quality Design

With the right leadership locally, high-quality design can be achieved irrespective of size, location or style.

The design quality of buildings, streets, parks and squares can make a significant contribution towards improving the quality of life in local areas by helping to:

- Attract economic investment - ensuring that our towns and cities are economically competitive and socially inclusive
- Improve health and well-being through better healthcare, housing, educational and recreational facilities
- Improve community safety and cohesion – create usable places that accommodate diverse needs and reinforce local community identity through respect for historic context and heritage
- Improve liveability, management and maintenance of the built environment, including creating clean, safe and green public places and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, through the efficient use of resources and adaptability to respond to future change
- Encourage more sustainable approaches to transport, energy, water and waste management in response to climate change concerns

Good design can have a positive impact on the whole of the built environment. CABE's website - <http://www.cabe.org.uk/casestudies.aspx> is a good source of examples, with details on all the following types of development;

- Civic buildings
- Commercial - industrial | offices | retail
- Culture and leisure - arts | bars and restaurants | libraries | museums and galleries | sports
- Education - early years | primary | secondary | special educational needs | universities and colleges
- Health - health centres | hospitals
- Housing
- Transport
- Neighbourhoods and regeneration
- Public space - parks and gardens | squares | streets

The examples below illustrate the range of schemes that have contributed positively to the success of their local area as a place where people want to live and work. Full case studies at www.buildingforlife.org and <http://www.designforhomes.org/hda/>

Royal Arsenal, Woolwich

This massive mixed-use regeneration project on former MoD land has quality at its core, with well-overlooked and pedestrian-friendly public spaces.

Good example of: Developer-led regeneration project

Lacuna, West-Malling

This high quality project combines the need to meet economic objectives with that of sustainability.

Good example of: High standards set on local authority land

Great Bow Yard, Somerset

An impressive mix of uses for such a small site: eight houses and four flats are set around a communal garden.

Good example of: Small scale rural scheme with exemplary environmental credentials

Rostron Brow, Stockport

This small residential scheme regenerating 18th century warehouses is to be found nestled amongst Stockport's historic core.

Good example of: Small scale development sensitive to historical context

Accordia, Cambridge

High architectural quality offers an exciting range of well designed family houses and flats. The homes benefit from proximity to open spaces, have slow speed streets, and communal play areas.

Good example of: The first residential winner of the RIBA Sterling Prize, offering a private sector led mix of family home types and tenures

Gorton Monastery, Manchester

After being placed on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk register, this church was rescued and brought back into use for the local community, as a venue for weddings and conferences.

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.19791>

Good example of: Locally led regeneration effort to restore a historic building

Old Market Square, Nottingham

Old Market Square has been transformed from an unloved, traditional city square into an inviting public space. The elegant design includes bands of terracing and ramps leading to and from water features, and a new city wall marker. Winner of RIBA/CABE Public Space Award

http://www.e-architect.co.uk/england/old_market_square_nottingham.htm

Good example of: Sensitive regeneration and reinvigoration of an important public space, improving accessibility for all

Westminster Academy

Located in a gritty urban context, dominated by the Westway road, the aspiration was to create a new civic landmark in which the pupils, staff and wider community felt a sense of pride.

www.e-architect.co.uk/london/westminster_academy.htm

Good example of: High quality architecture creating a positive presence and identity in a challenging urban setting