CALDERDALE

URBAN DESIGN ACHIEVEMENTS - VALUE, IMPACT & FUTURE DIRECTION

2025-2026

Calderdale Council


THE

Information

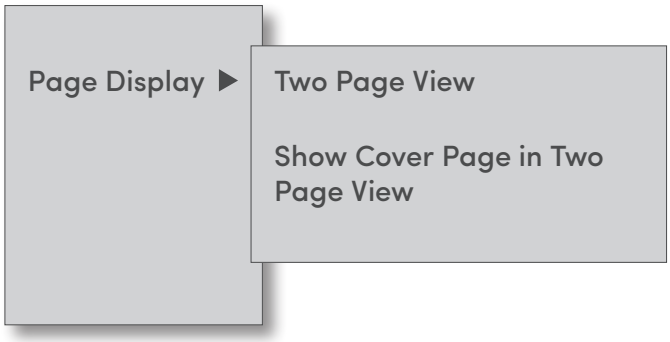
Calderdale Council
Town Hall
Crossley Street
Halifax, HX1 1UJ
T. 01422 288001

calderdale.gov.uk

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INNOVATION
INNOVATION
WE ARE
The Original
HEBDEN BRIDGE
MILL
Established
1314 A.D
THE
TONIC
CBD OIL
Antiques
Oriental
Lucy and the Caterpillar
Enjoy
Drinks
on our
RIVERSIDE
TERRACE

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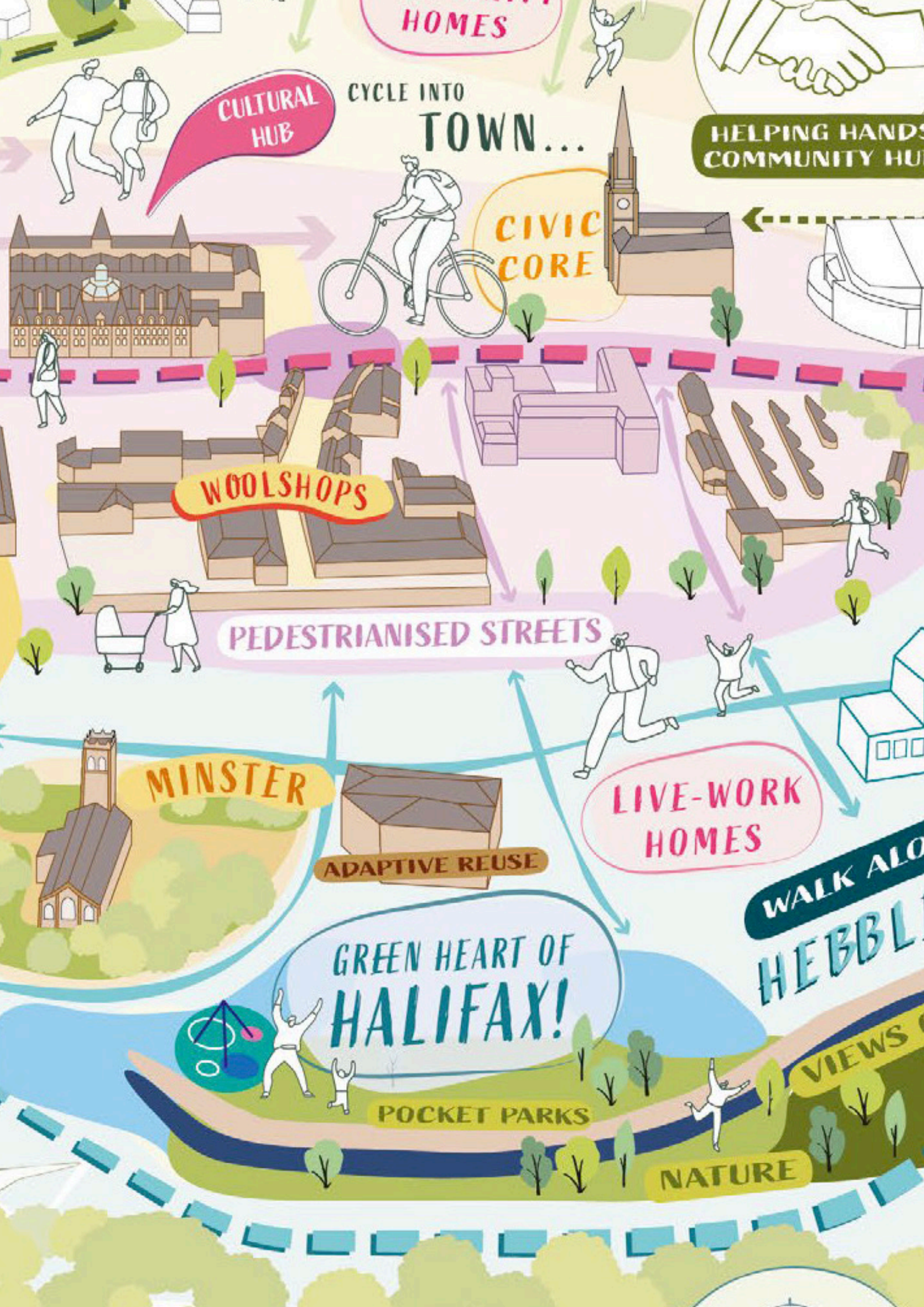
Introduction

Role Purpose & Context

This chapter provides an overview of the Urban Design role within Calderdale and summarises the key achievements from the first year in post. It sets out where the role has added value across development management, policy, strategic projects and capacity building, with a particular focus on health, wellbeing and design quality.

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HOMES
CULTURAL HUB
CYCLE INTO TOWN...
HELPING HANDS COMMUNITY HU
CIVIC CORE
WOOLSHOPS
PEDESTRIANISED STREETS
MINSTER
ADAPTIVE REUSE
LIVE-WORK HOMES
WALK ALO
HEBBL
GREEN HEART OF HALIFAX!
VIEWS
POCKET PARKS
NATURE

Foreword / Executive Summary

Urban design plays a critical role in shaping environments that enable everyday physical activity, support healthier lifestyles and reduce long-term health inequalities. The quality of streets, neighbourhood layouts and public spaces directly influences how people move, interact and access opportunities for sport, play and active travel as part of daily life.

This report sets out the impact of the Urban Design role over the past year, highlighting how design expertise has been applied across development management, strategic projects and corporate initiatives to raise the quality of development, reduce risk, and embed health and wellbeing considerations into the planning process.

Urban design plays a critical role in shaping environments that enable everyday physical activity, support healthier lifestyles and reduce long-term health inequalities. The quality of streets, neighbourhood layouts and public spaces directly influences how people move, interact and access opportunities for sport, play and active travel as part of daily life.

The year has been characterised by challenging development conditions, including viability pressures, constrained and complex sites, and increasing expectations from Members and the public around design quality. Within this context, the role has focused on providing clarity, structure and consistency in how design quality is assessed, defended and improved—ensuring that Calderdale continues to expect, and secure, better places rather than simply more development.

A significant proportion of the role has been dedicated to development management casework, particularly major residential schemes where layout, street structure, topography, movement and character have a direct influence on everyday activity levels, social interaction and long-term health outcomes. Through detailed, SPD-aligned design critique, early engagement with applicants, and close working with case officers and Planning Committee, the role has helped shape proposals, identify fundamental design flaws early, and provide robust, defensible advice to support decision-making.

Beyond individual applications, the role has added value by strengthening the planning system itself. This has included the development of consultation templates, guidance and protocols to support consistent application of the Placemaking and Design SPD; capacity-building activity for officers and Members; and contributions to strategic initiatives such as the Calderdale Place Review, the Developers Charter and early work on Streetscape+. Together, these actions have helped embed a stronger design culture within the service and improve confidence in addressing design-related issues.

Health and wellbeing have been a central thread throughout this work. By prioritising walkable layouts, connected street networks, accessible public spaces and inclusive design, the role has directly influenced schemes to deliver improved opportunities for physical activity and social interaction. The report also highlights the emerging strategic role urban design can play in shaping the next Local Plan, particularly in relation to location-based density, walkability and the testing of site capacity through design-led approaches rather than fixed assumptions.

This document therefore provides both a record of achievements and a forward-looking assessment of how the Urban Design role can continue to add value—supporting better decisions, reducing risk, and helping Calderdale deliver healthier, more distinctive and more resilient places.

Role Purpose & Strategic Context

The work aligns closely with Sport England's Active Environments ambition, which seeks to create places that make it easier for people to be active every day through well-designed streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces. By focusing on walkable layouts, connected movement networks, accessible public realm and inclusive design, the Urban Design role has helped ensure that development in Calderdale contributes to environments that support movement, social interaction and healthier choices as a natural part of everyday life.

The role sits at the intersection of planning, public health and placemaking, translating high-level ambitions around Active Calderdale and Sport England's Active Environments principles into practical, site-specific design decisions. This includes shaping how streets are designed, how neighbourhoods connect, how public spaces are located and overlooked, and how everyday movement is prioritised within new development.

Over the past year, the role has operated within a challenging context. Development proposals have increasingly been characterised by constrained sites, complex topography, viability pressures and variable design capability across the development industry. At the same time, there has been growing public and Member scrutiny of whether new development genuinely supports healthy lifestyles, accessibility and inclusive movement.

Within this environment, the focus of the role has been to provide clarity, structure and consistency in how design quality is assessed and secured – ensuring that the planning system actively supports environments where walking, cycling, play and informal activity are the easiest and most attractive choices.

Alignment with Job Specification and Corporate Objectives

My first year in post has closely aligned with the Council's Active Calderdale agenda and Sport England's Active Environments ambition, recognising that physical activity is shaped as much by the design of places as by individual behaviour.

A core element of the role has been embedding health-led and activity-supportive design principles across development management, pre-application advice and strategic projects. This has involved consistently promoting:

- Walkable and legible street networks
- Direct, overlooked and accessible walking and cycling routes
- Reduced car dominance and safer street environments
- Active frontages and well-used public spaces
- Inclusive design that supports movement for all ages and abilities

Rather than treating physical activity as a standalone policy objective, the role has focused on how everyday design decisions – such as block structure, street gradients, junction design, frontage treatment and the location of green space – directly influence levels of walking, social interaction, informal play and access to services.

Through this approach, urban design has acted as a delivery mechanism for active environments, ensuring that health outcomes are embedded into the physical fabric of new development rather than addressed retrospectively.

> "Urban design is one of the most effective tools available to shape active environments – influencing how people move, meet and live every day"

Influencing Design and Masterplanning Outcomes

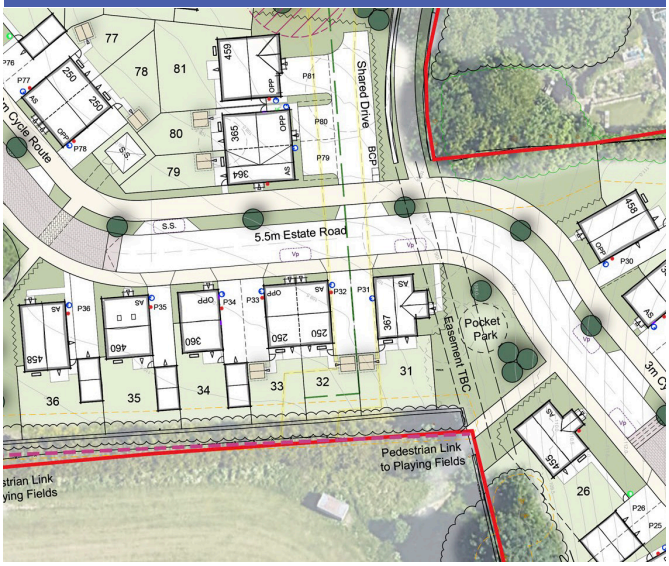
Through detailed design reviews of major applications including Exley Lane, Cock Hill Lane, Soaper Lane and Toothill Bank, I have influenced masterplanning decisions at a formative stage. In each case, particular emphasis has been placed on how layout logic, movement patterns and topography affect walkability, legibility and long-term health outcomes.

This approach has helped to:

- Identify fundamental layout and structural issues early
- Challenge car-led or cul-de-sac dominated designs
- Promote more coherent street hierarchies and connected neighbourhoods
- Improve relationships between buildings, streets and public spaces

By addressing these issues upfront, the role has reduced the risk of poor-quality development becoming embedded through incremental amendments later in the process.

Influencing Design & Masterplanning



Extract from a revised residential layout, demonstrating clearer street hierarchy, improved connectivity and stronger frontage definition following urban design input.

Policy, Guidance and System Improvement

Beyond individual planning applications, the role has added value by strengthening the wider planning system. This has included influencing policy, guidance and internal practice to ensure that healthy and inclusive design is given meaningful weight in decision-making.

Key contributions have included:

- Leading on the Calderdale Developers Charter
- Advancing the Calderdale Place Review, including the Design Skills Audit and Housing Design Audit
- Supporting early work on the Streetscape+ Design Code, including development of the brief
- Providing clear, practical interpretation of the Placemaking and Design SPD

Together, these initiatives help ensure that expectations around design quality are clear, consistent and defensible—both internally and to applicants.

Pre-Application Engagement and Early Design Influence

Attendance at pre-application meetings has been a critical aspect of the role. By engaging early with developers, architects and agents, I have been able to steer schemes before positions become entrenched and before poor design decisions are locked in.

This work has included advising on:

- Block structure and orientation
- Walking routes and desire lines
- Street gradients and accessibility
- Open space distribution
- Character and identity strategies

Early intervention has helped reduce downstream conflict, improve submission quality and support a more collaborative approach to design.

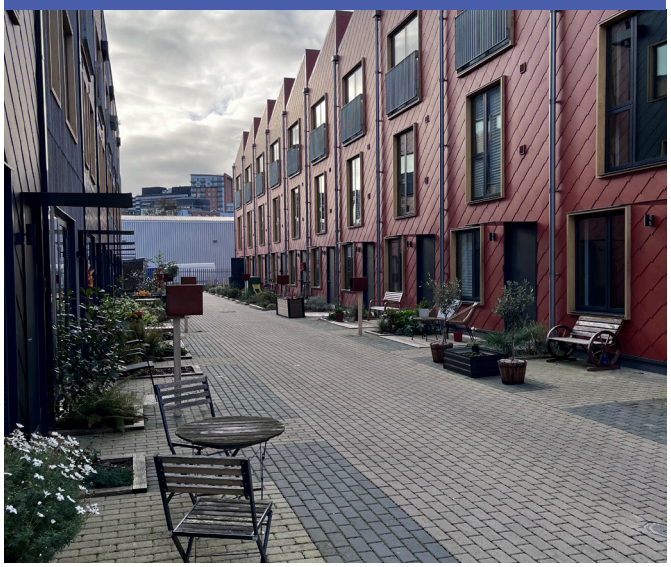
Role Purpose & Strategic Context

Design Critique, Capacity Building and Officer Support

A core element of the role has been providing structured, constructive urban design critique aligned with the Placemaking and Design SPD. This has supported Planning Officers and Planning Committee by translating design issues into clear, policy-backed reasoning that can be relied upon in reports and decisions.

Alongside casework, I have acted as a service-wide design resource, supporting colleagues across Development Management, Planning Policy, Strategic Housing and Major Projects. This has been complemented by capacity-building activity, including learning lunches, site visits to exemplar developments and the preparation of a structured Officer and Member training programme for 2026.

Embedding Design Quality



Clear streets, active frontages and high-quality public realm illustrate the outcomes that design critique, guidance and officer support are working to achieve across Calderdale.

Chapter Summary

The first year of the Urban Design role has demonstrated its value in improving individual schemes, strengthening decision-making and embedding health and wellbeing considerations into everyday planning activity. By providing clarity, consistency and early design influence, the role has helped Calderdale move towards more coherent, inclusive and resilient places.

The following chapter sets out this work in detail through development management casework and direct design outcomes.

> Good urban design is not an optional extra in the planning process – it is fundamental to creating healthier places, reducing long-term inequality and ensuring that growth de-

Delivering Active Environments Through Urban Design

The Urban Design role plays a critical role in translating Sport England's Active Environments ambition into practical outcomes through the planning system. By shaping how streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces are designed, the role helps ensure that new development in Calderdale actively supports everyday physical activity, social interaction and inclusive movement as part of daily life.

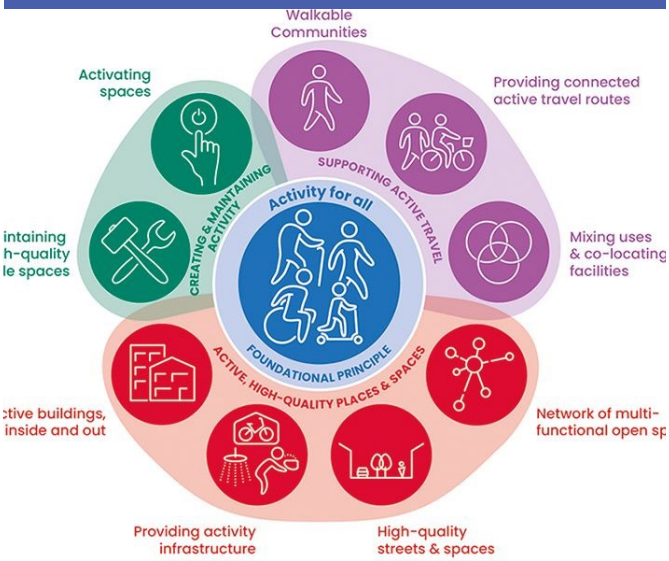
Sport England's Active Environments approach recognises that the design of places has a fundamental influence on how active people are, particularly through everyday activities such as walking, cycling, play and informal recreation. Well-connected streets, overlooked public spaces, accessible green infrastructure and inclusive movement networks all contribute to environments where being active is the easy, attractive and natural choice.

The Urban Design role provides a direct mechanism for embedding these principles within the planning process. Through development management casework, pre-application advice, strategic site briefs and policy guidance, the role consistently promotes walkable neighbourhoods, reduced car dominance, safe and legible street networks, and public spaces that encourage use throughout the day.

Rather than treating physical activity as an add-on or mitigation measure, the role focuses on upstream design decisions that shape long-term behaviour. This includes influencing block structure, street gradients, junction design, frontage treatment, and the relationship between homes, streets and open spaces. These elements directly affect whether people feel confident walking to local services, allowing children to play outside, or choosing active travel over short car journeys.

In practice, this approach has helped secure improvements such as more direct and continuous walking and cycling routes, safer street crossings, better overlooked green spaces and layouts that prioritise people over vehicles. Collectively, these changes contribute to healthier, more inclusive environments that align with both Active Calderdale and Sport England's national ambitions.

Sport England - Active Environments



Active Environments focus on shaping streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces to support everyday physical activity as part of daily life.



Section A

Casework & Outcomes

This chapter highlights how urban design input has influenced live planning applications, with a particular focus on major housing schemes and complex constrained sites. It demonstrates how structured design critique, early engagement and SPD-led assessment have secured measurable improvements to layout, movement, streetscape quality and relationships with surrounding areas.

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Role of Urban Design within Development Management

A core function of the Urban Design role has been the provision of detailed, structured design advice on planning applications and pre-application enquiries. Throughout the year, this has involved advising on a substantial volume of schemes across Calderdale, with particular focus on major residential developments where design decisions have the greatest long-term impact on place quality, health and wellbeing.

Urban Design in Development Management



Urban design advice provides a consistent framework for assessing layout, movement, streetscape quality and health outcomes across planning applications of all scales.

Throughout the year, I have advised on a substantial volume of applications ranging from minor domestic proposals to complex major residential schemes. While the scale and context of schemes vary, the consistent focus has been on the fundamentals of good place-making: how development is structured, how people move through it, how buildings relate to streets and spaces, and how the public realm supports everyday activity and social interaction.

Urban design input has been particularly valuable in clarifying where issues are capable of being resolved through detailed refinement, and where proposals suffer from more fundamental structural flaws. By distinguishing between these two scenarios, the role has helped officers and Members avoid protracted negotiations on schemes that require more substantive redesign, reducing risk and improving efficiency.

The role has also provided a clear and consistent design voice within the planning service. By grounding advice in the Placemaking and Design SPD and translating policy requirements into practical, site-specific guidance, urban design input has helped strengthen officer confidence and ensure that design-related concerns are articulated clearly and defensibly in reports and decision-making. Major Applications – Housing

Major Applications - Housing and Mixed Use

Major residential applications represent the point at which strategic policy objectives are translated into built form. My involvement in these schemes has focused on ensuring that fundamental design decisions—particularly those relating to layout, street structure, walkability and topography—are addressed early and robustly, rather than being diluted through incremental amendments.

Urban design input has been particularly valuable in clarifying where issues are capable of being resolved through detailed refinement, and where proposals suffer from more fundamental structural flaws. By distinguishing between these two scenarios, the role has helped officers and Members avoid protracted negotiations on schemes that require more substantive redesign, reducing risk and improving efficiency.

The following examples illustrate how urban design input has shaped negotiations, strengthened decision-making and highlighted where schemes required more fundamental reconsideration.

Major Applications

Cock Hill Lane, Shelf (25/00255/FUL) - Lovell Homes

Original Layout



Key Design Issues

The original proposal at Cock Hill Lane was heavily constrained by steep topography and sensitive settlement edge conditions. Urban design review focused on how the layout responded to landform and how design decisions would be experienced in key views.

Key design issues identified included:

- Extensive cut-and-fill operations resulting in stepped plots and visually intrusive retaining structures.
- Street alignments that failed to respond positively to slope, leading to weak enclosure and inconsistent building lines.
- A lack of spatial definition along key streets, undermining streetscape quality.
- Insufficient consideration of how the development would be perceived from approach routes and public viewpoints.
- Cycleway alignment was not consistent and did not meet with the adjacent site.
- Lack of coherence with the adjacent Barratt's development.
- Weak southern edge to the development.

Current Amended Layout (Version 3)



Key Improvements Secured

1. Cycleway realigned to run directly through the site, providing a continuous connection to the adjacent Barratt Homes cycle route.

2. Continuous footways introduced at cycleway crossings, reinforcing pedestrian and cyclist priority and reducing vehicle dominance.

3. Primary street re-aligned and tree-lined, with integrated SuDS within the verge to improve streetscape quality and surface water management.

4. Dwelling alignment improved on lower-order streets, with parking moved to the side so buildings frame the street more effectively.

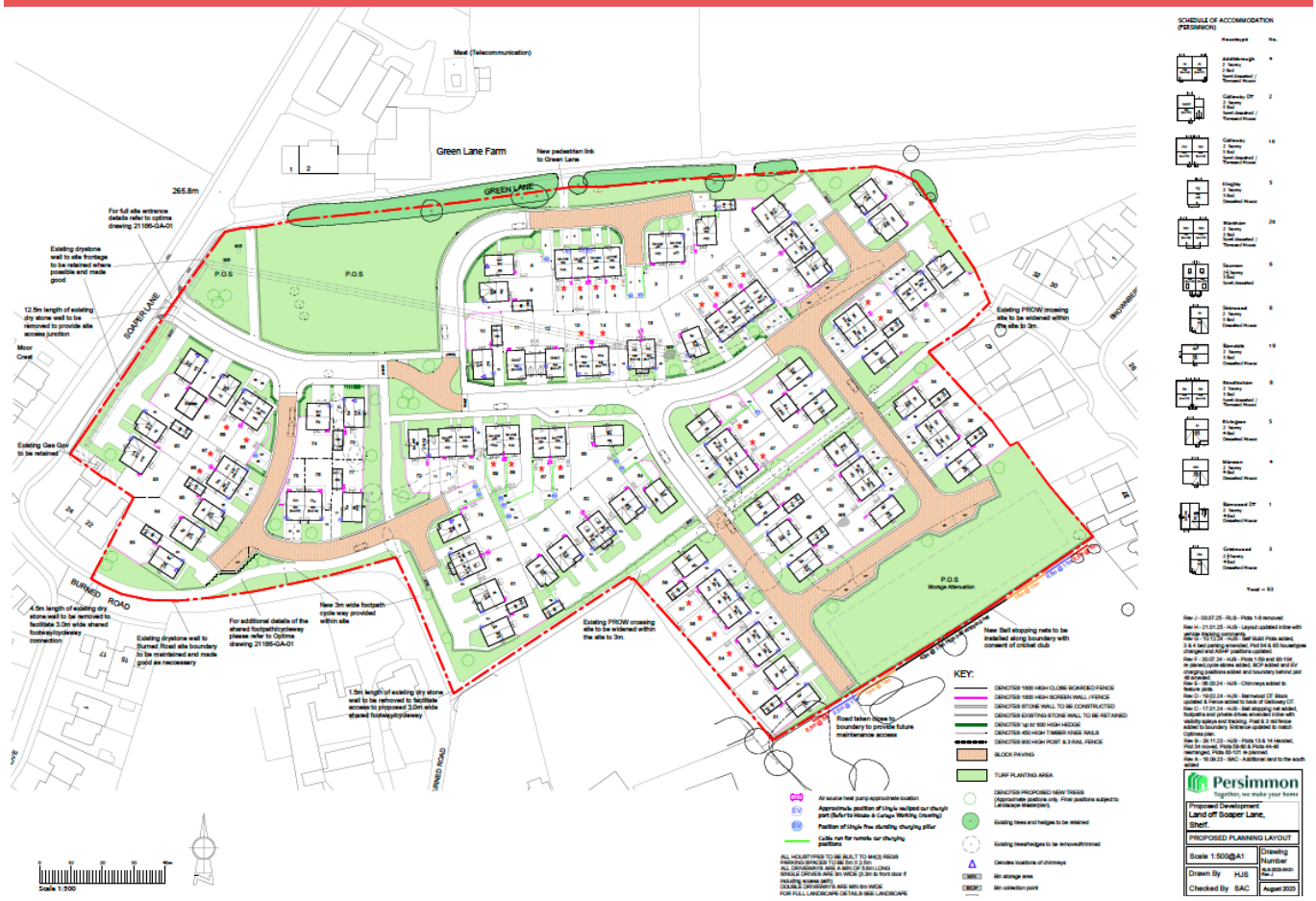
5. Building lines and street geometry adjusted to align more closely with the adjoining Barratt Homes development, improving continuity and legibility.

6. Southern site edge redesigned to introduce active frontages and improve natural surveillance of the existing footpath.

Major Applications

Soaper Lane, Shelf (24/00252/FUL) - Persimmon Homes

Original Layout



Key Design Issues

The original submission proposed a large residential development but lacked a coherent spatial structure capable of delivering a legible, walkable and characterful neighbourhood. Urban design review identified that the layout relied heavily on standardised house types and car-led streets, resulting in a generic and poorly defined place.

1. Absence of a clear street hierarchy, with movement dominated by car-led streets and loops.

2. Poor permeability and limited pedestrian connectivity, restricting opportunities for walking and everyday movement.

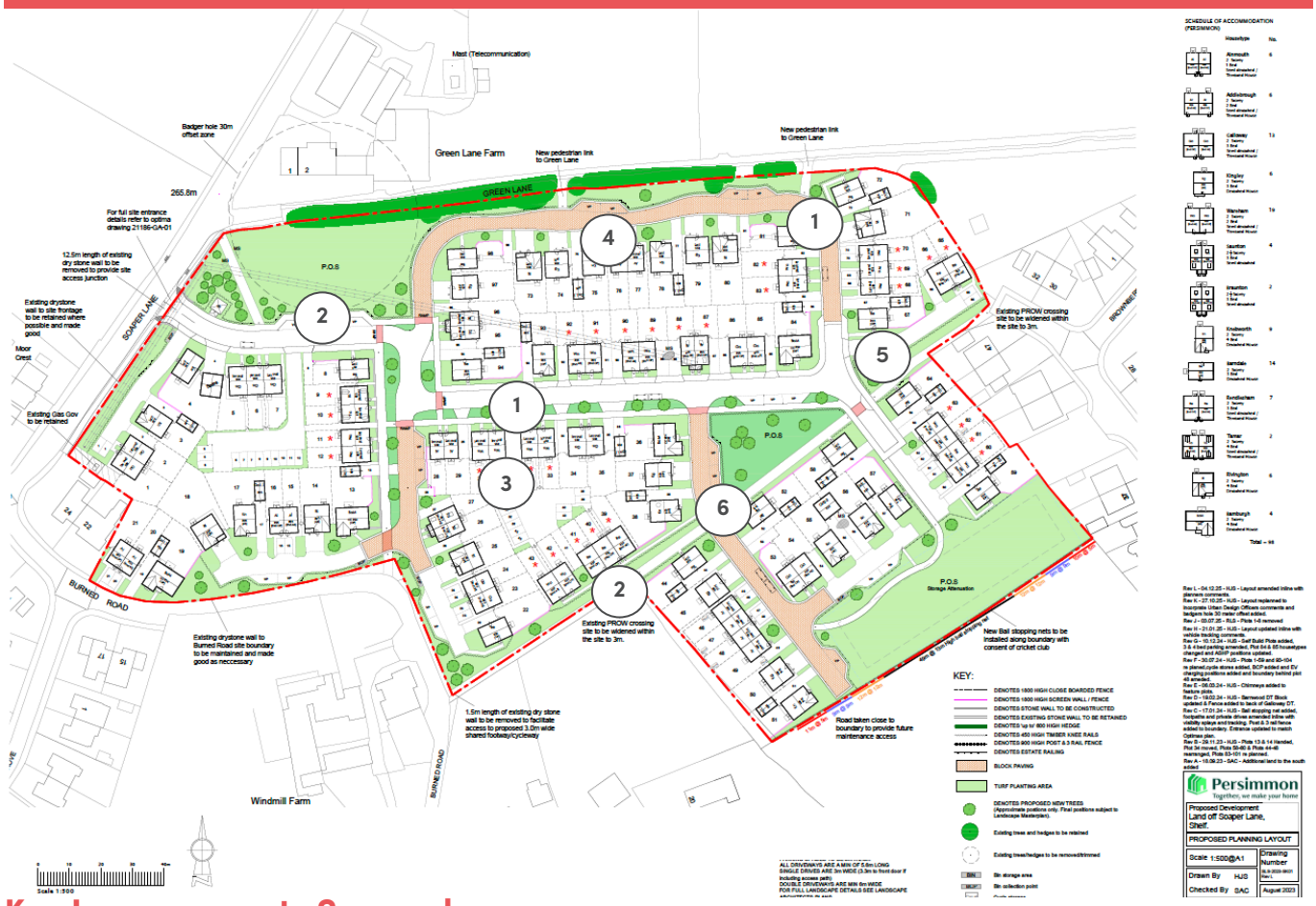
3. Weak definition of character areas, with excessive repetition of house types and elevations across the site.

4. Parking-dominated frontages creating inactive streets and undermining enclosure.

5. Poor corner-turning and unresolved building relationships at junctions.

6. Lack of a coherent public realm strategy, resulting in generic streetscape treatment throughout the scheme.

Current Amended Layout



Key Improvements Secured

1. Introduction of a clearer street hierarchy, improving legibility and defining primary and secondary movement routes.

2. Improved pedestrian connectivity through more direct routes and stronger links across the site.

3. Clearer definition of character areas to reduce monotony and improve local distinctiveness.

4. Improved frontage treatment, reducing the visual dominance of parking and strengthening street enclosure.

5. Enhanced corner treatments to improve townscape quality at junctions and key turning points.

6. More consistent public realm approach to reinforce a coherent streetscape across the development.

Major Applications

Toothill Bank, Rastrick (24/01004/FUL) - Gleeson Homes

Original Layout



Proposed Site Layout

Key Design Issues

The original submission proposed a large residential development but lacked a coherent spatial structure capable of delivering a legible, walkable and characterful neighbourhood. Urban design review identified that the layout relied heavily on standardised house types and car-led streets, resulting in a generic and poorly defined place.

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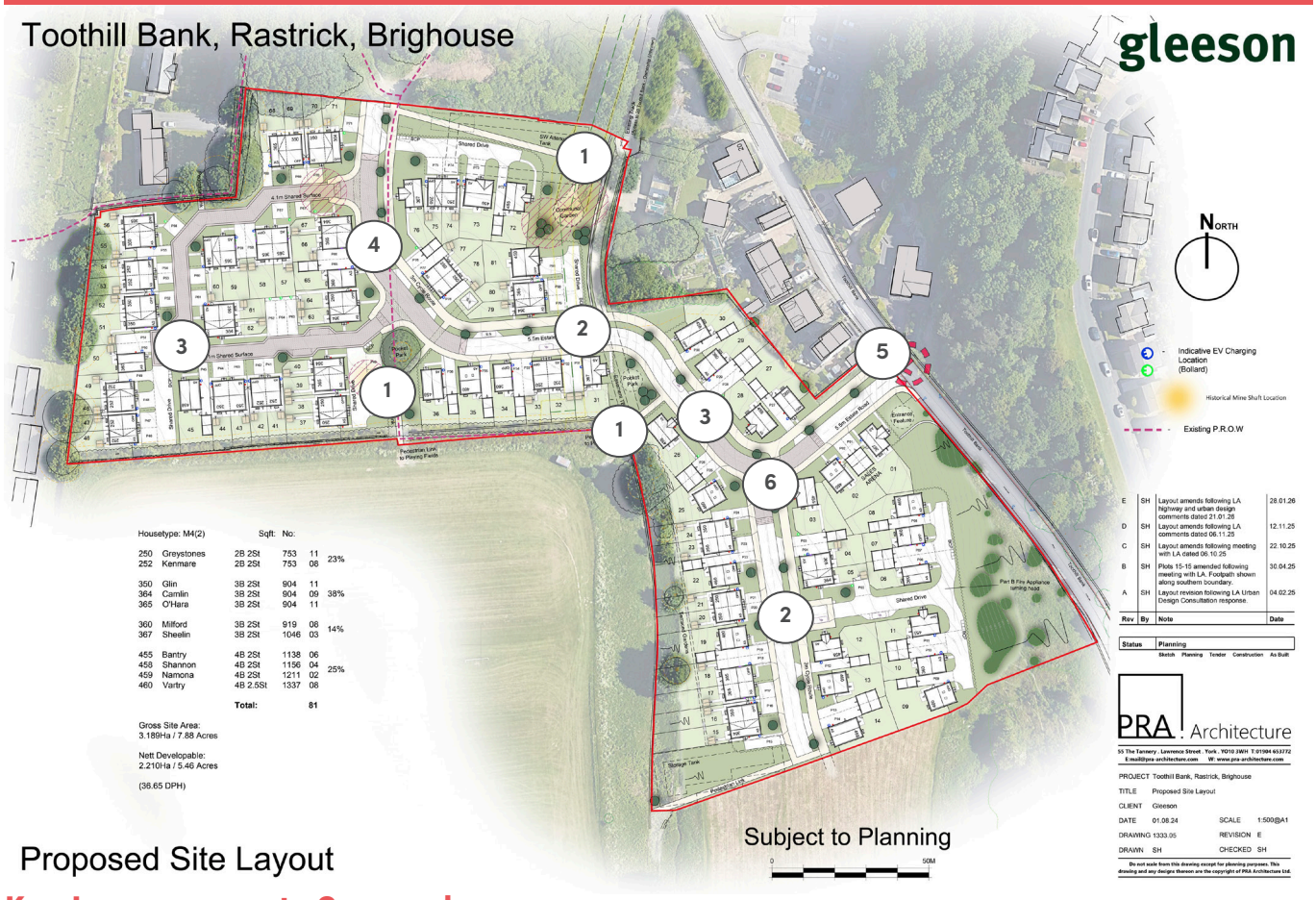
3. Weak definition of character areas, with excessive repetition of house types and elevations across the site.

4. Parking-dominated frontages creating inactive streets and undermining enclosure.

5. Poor corner-turning and unresolved building relationships at junctions.

6. Lack of a coherent public realm strategy, resulting in generic streetscape treatment throughout the scheme.

Current Amended Layout



Proposed Site Layout

Key Improvements Secured

1. Creation of pocket parks and communal garden at key locations on routes through the site towards nearby playing fields, introducing 'play on the way' features.

2. Improved street enclosure by re-balancing parking and frontage relationships along key streets.

3. Clearer street hierarchy to improve legibility and reduce the dominance of cul-de-sacs.

4. Improved distribution and orientation of house types to introduce greater visual variety.

5. Better alignment of buildings with level changes to improve thresholds and streetscape continuity.

6. Stronger gateway and edge treatments to reinforce a clearer sense of arrival and structure.

Schemes with Complex Site Constraints

A significant proportion of development proposals in Calderdale are located on steeply sloping land, settlement edges, or sites with complex physical and environmental constraints. These conditions present heightened risks in terms of townscape impact, visual intrusion, neighbour amenity, and long-term place quality if not handled with care.

Design Quality on Difficult Sites

Across the year, I have provided detailed urban design input on a wide range of constrained sites, ensuring that topography, landscape character, and settlement edge conditions are treated as fundamental design drivers rather than engineering problems to be solved late in the process.

My reviews have consistently focused on whether development proposals are working with the landform, rather than forcing standardised layouts onto unsuitable sites through excessive cut-and-fill operations.

Key areas of focus have included:

- The scale, extent and visual impact of land reprofiling and retaining structures
- The relationship between stepped plots and neighbouring properties
- Street alignments in relation to slope, legibility and safety
- Settlement edge transitions and views from public vantage points

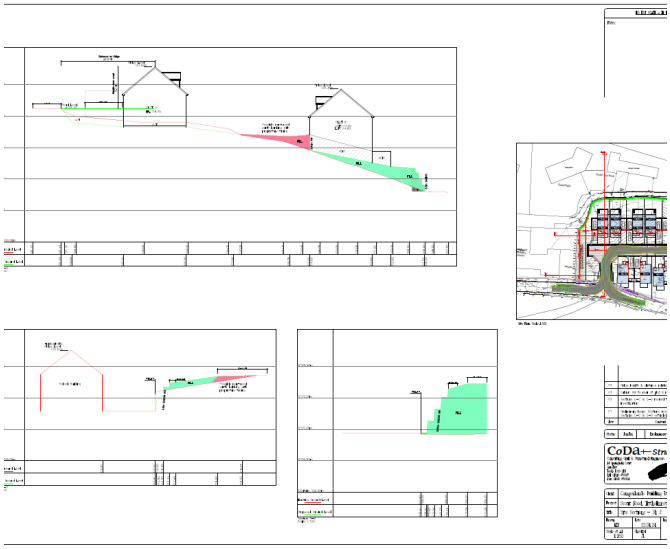
This approach has helped officers to articulate clear, defensible concerns where schemes rely on excessive engineering interventions that undermine local character and visual quality.

Appeal Case: 23/00579/RES – Retaining Walls and Excessive Fill

In this appeal case, I supported the Council by critically reviewing the appellant's justification for extensive retaining structures and land reprofiling. My assessment identified that the proposed layout relied on significant artificial manipulation of levels to force development capacity, resulting in dominant boundary treatments, visually intrusive gabions, and poor relationships with neighbouring properties.

The design critique directly informed the Council's appeal case by demonstrating that the scheme failed to respond positively to the site's constraints and did not meet the expectations of the Placemaking and Design SPD or the NPPF.

Designing with topography, not against it



Example of excessive cut-and-fill and retaining structures used to force development capacity, resulting in visually dominant features and poor integration with surrounding context.

Steeply Sloping and Settlement Edge Sites

Beyond individual appeal cases, I have provided consistent design input across multiple steeply sloping and edge-of-settlement schemes in locations including Walsden, Luddendenfoot,

Barkisland and Northowram.

These reviews have strengthened officer understanding of levels-based design, settlement edge sensitivity, and the cumulative impact of piecemeal development on Calderdale's landscape setting. In several cases, this has led to more robust advice being issued to applicants at an early stage, avoiding escalation later in the process.

Minor and Medium-Scale Applications

Raising design quality across everyday development

While major housing schemes attract the greatest scrutiny, a substantial proportion of development activity in Calderdale consists of minor and medium-scale applications. My role has ensured that design quality, character and placemaking principles are applied consistently across this wider portfolio of schemes.

Throughout the year, I have provided detailed advice on:

- Infill developments, ensuring appropriate grain, enclosure and building line discipline
- Extensions within sensitive townscape and heritage contexts
- Plot reconfigurations where vehicle dominance risks eroding street character
- Shopfront design and small-scale public realm improvements

This work supports Development Management colleagues by providing clear design rationale that underpins decision-making, negotiations and enforcement positions, ensuring that incremental change does not gradually undermine local character.

Pre-Application Discussions and Early Design Influence

Embedding quality at the earliest stage

A critical part of my role has been early engagement with applicants through pre-application discussions. This has allowed fundamental design issues to be identified and addressed before schemes become fixed through engineering, viability or land ownership constraints.

Everyday decisions, long-term character



Design input on smaller schemes helps protect local character and ensures that cumulative change contributes positively to Calderdale's streets and centres.

I have participated in a high volume of pre-application meetings, advising on:

- Street hierarchy and movement networks
- Walking and cycling routes and desire lines
- Block structure, orientation and enclosure
- Open space distribution and overlooked edges
- Initial character strategies and context response

By addressing these issues early, applicants are encouraged to adopt street-led, walkable layouts with reduced reliance on cul-de-sacs and car-dominated environments. This approach has helped to improve scheme quality at submission stage and reduce the need for extensive redesign later in the process.



Section B

Embedding Design Quality

This chapter focuses on the systems, guidance and processes developed to support higher quality, healthier and inclusive places. Covering the use of consultation templates, strategic site protocols, Streetscape+ and other tools designed to provide clarity, consistency and confidence for officers & Members.

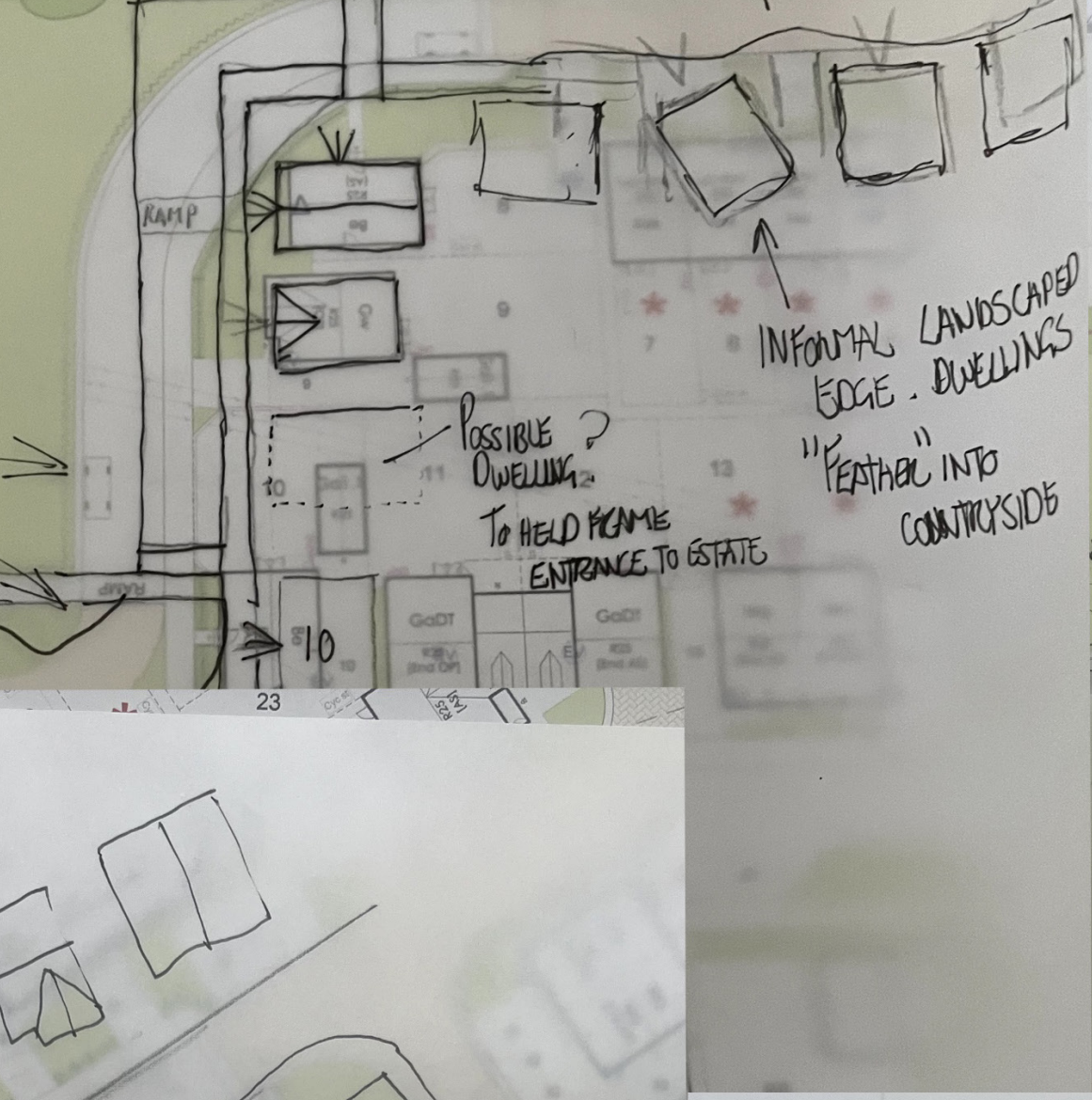
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RAMP
POSSIBLE DWELLING ?
TO HELD FRAME ENTRANCE TO ESTATE
INFORMAL LANDSCAPED EDGE . DWELLINGS "FEATHER" INTO COUNTRYSIDE
10
23


Green Lane Farm
GREEN LANE
RAMP
POSSIBLE DWELLING ?
TO HELD FRAME ENTRANCE TO ESTA
10


PEAK PARKING ?
10M
10M
45
46
48
40
49

CONTINUOUS FOOTWAY
14
PEAK PARKING COURT
15M


KEY VIEW
RAMP
POS
10

From individual schemes to consistent standards

While development management casework is essential in shaping individual outcomes, lasting improvements in design quality require clear frameworks, shared expectations and practical tools. Over the past year, a key focus of my role has been embedding design quality systematically across the planning service—ensuring that good design is not reliant on ad-hoc intervention, but is consistently understood, applied and defended.

This chapter sets out how I have supported this shift through the development of guidance, templates, protocols and policy interpretation that strengthen Calderdale's design culture and decision-making.

Implementing the Placemaking and Design SPD

Turning policy into practice

A core function of my role has been supporting the consistent and confident application of the Calderdale Placemaking and Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). While the SPD provides a strong policy foundation, its effectiveness depends on clear interpretation and practical use in day-to-day casework.

During the year, I have effectively acted as the service lead for SPD implementation, supporting officers by:

- Interpreting SPD principles in the context of complex and constrained sites
- Translating qualitative design guidance into clear, defensible consultation responses
- Helping officers and Members understand how SPD criteria relate to layout, streets, levels, massing and character

This has strengthened consistency across development management and reduced ambiguity in design negotiations.

Street-Led Layout and Connectivity



Applying the Placemaking and Design SPD to improve street hierarchy, permeability and active travel connections, supporting more walkable and legible neighbourhoods.

Active Frontages & Public Realm Quality



SPD principles around enclosure, active frontages and public realm quality applied consistently to reinforce character, safety and everyday social interaction.

Urban Design Consultation Template

To improve the clarity, consistency and defensibility of design advice, I developed a structured Urban Design Consultation Response Template aligned directly with the Placemaking and Design SPD.

Clear structure and transparency are essential to defensible design decisions.

Improving clarity, consistency and robustness

One of the most practical service improvements delivered this year has been the creation of a structured Urban Design Consultation Response Template aligned directly with the Placemaking and Design SPD.

The template was developed in response to recurring challenges around inconsistency, subjectivity and lack of clarity in design-related consultation responses. It provides a clear structure that separates:

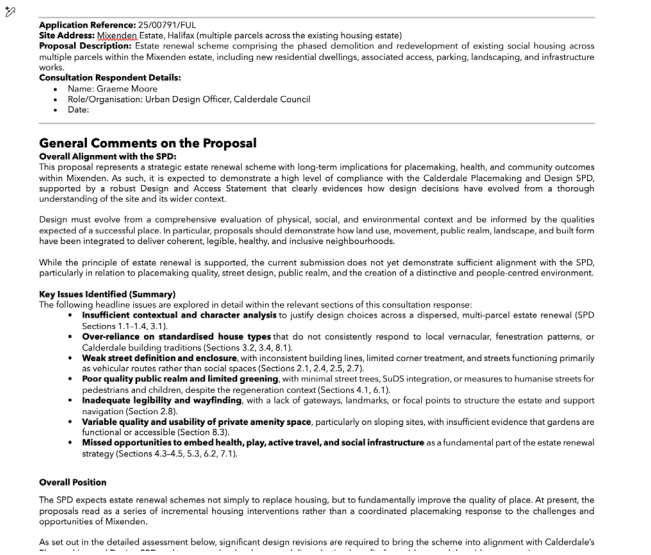
- Explanation of relevant SPD principles
- Assessment of the proposal against those principles
- Clear recommendations for improvement

By mirroring the SPD's paragraph structure, the template ensures comprehensive coverage and provides a transparent audit trail linking design critique to adopted guidance.

This has improved the quality and clarity of advice issued to applicants, strengthened the Council's position at appeal, and supported case officers by reducing uncertainty around how to frame and defend design concerns.

For smaller applicaations, email correspondence has been used, as with the major applications, this has been used with a structure that explains the relevant SPD principles, and assessment and clear recommendations for improvement.

Structured design advice



Application Reference: 25/00791/FUL
Site Address: Mixenden Estate, Halifax (multiple parcels across the existing housing estate)
Proposal Description: Estate renewal scheme comprising the phased demolition and redevelopment of existing social housing across multiple parcels within the Mixenden estate, including new residential dwellings, associated access, parking, landscaping, and infrastructure works.
Consultation Respondent Details:
- Name: Graeme Moore
- Role/Organisation: Urban Design Officer, Calderdale Council
- Date:

General Comments on the Proposal

Overall Alignment with the SPD:
This proposal represents a strategic estate renewal scheme with long-term implications for placemaking, health, and community outcomes within Mixenden. As such, it is expected to demonstrate a high level of compliance with the Calderdale Placemaking and Design SPD, supported by a robust Design and Access Statement that clearly evidences how design decisions have evolved from a thorough understanding of the site and its wider context.

Design must evolve from a comprehensive evaluation of physical, social, and environmental context and be informed by the qualities expected of a successful place. In particular, proposals should demonstrate how land use, movement, public realm, landscape, and built form have been integrated to deliver coherent, legible, healthy, and inclusive neighbourhoods.

While the principle of estate renewal is supported, the current submission does not yet demonstrate sufficient alignment with the SPD, particularly in relation to placemaking quality, street design, public realm, and the creation of a distinctive and people-centred environment.

Key Issues Identified (Summary)
The following headline issues are explored in detail within the relevant sections of this consultation response:
- **Insufficient contextual and character analysis** to justify design choices across a dispersed, multi-parcel estate renewal (SPD Sections 1.1–1.4, 3.1).
- **Over-reliance on standardised house types** that do not consistently respond to local vernacular, fenestration patterns, or Calderdale building traditions (Sections 3.2, 3.4, 8.1).
- **Weak street definition and enclosure**, with inconsistent building lines, limited corner treatment, and streets functioning primarily as vehicular routes rather than social spaces (Sections 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7).
- **Poor quality public realm and limited greening**, with minimal street trees, SuDS integration, or measures to humanise streets for pedestrians and children, despite the regeneration context (Sections 4.1, 6.1).
- **Inadequate legibility and wayfinding**, with a lack of gateways, landmarks, or focal points to structure the estate and support navigation (Section 2.8).
- **Variable quality and usability of private amenity space**, particularly on sloping sites, with insufficient evidence that gardens are functional or accessible (Section 8.3).
- **Missed opportunities to embed health, play, active travel, and social infrastructure** as a fundamental part of the estate renewal strategy (Sections 4.3–4.5, 5.3, 6.2, 7.1).

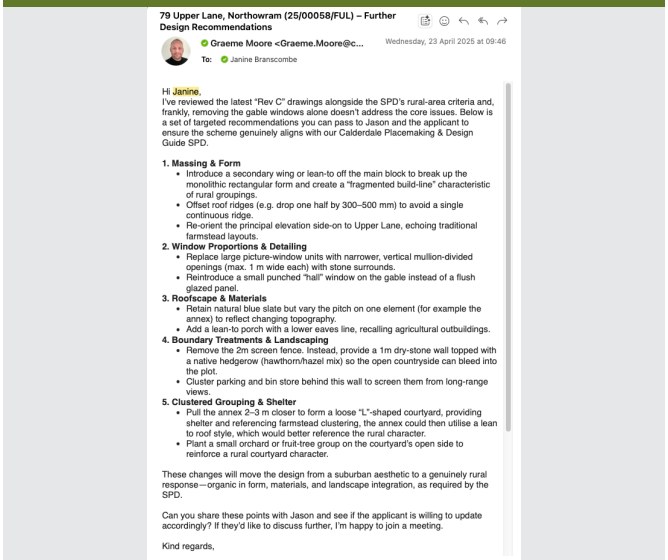
Overall Position

The SPD expects estate renewal schemes not simply to replace housing, but to fundamentally improve the quality of place. At present, the proposals read as a series of incremental housing interventions rather than a coordinated placemaking response to the challenges and opportunities of Mixenden.

As set out in the detailed assessment below, significant design revisions are required to bring the scheme into alignment with Calderdale's

The consultation response template improves clarity for applicants while strengthening defensibility for officers and decision-makers.

Small scale design advice



79 Upper Lane, Northowram (25/00058/FUL) – Further Design Recommendations

Graeme Moore <Graeme.Moore@c... Wednesday, 23 April 2025 at 09:46
To: Janine Branscombe

Hi Janine,
I've reviewed the latest "Rev C" drawings alongside the SPD's rural-area criteria and, frankly, removing the gable windows alone doesn't address the core issues. Below is a set of targeted recommendations you can pass to Jason and the applicant to ensure the scheme genuinely aligns with our Calderdale Placemaking & Design Guide SPD.

1. Massing & Form
- Introduce a secondary wing or lean-to off the main block to break up the monolithic rectangular form and create a "fragmented build-line" characteristic of rural groupings.
- Offset roof ridges (e.g. drop one half by 300–500 mm) to avoid a single continuous ridge.
- Re-orient the principal elevation side-on to Upper Lane, echoing traditional farmstead layouts.

2. Window Proportions & Detailing
- Replace large picture-window units with narrower, vertical mullion-divided openings (max. 1 m wide each) with stone surrounds.
- Reintroduce a small punched "hall" window on the gable instead of a flush glazed panel.

3. Roofscape & Materials
- Retain natural blue slate but vary the pitch on one element (for example the annex) to reflect changing topography.
- Add a lean-to porch with a lower eaves line, recalling agricultural outbuildings.

4. Boundary Treatments & Landscaping
- Remove the 2m screen fence. Instead, provide a 1m dry-stone wall topped with a native hedgerow (hawthorn/hazel mix) so the open countryside can bleed into the plot.
- Cluster parking and bin store behind this wall to screen them from long-range views.

5. Clustered Grouping & Shelter
- Pull the annex 2–3 m closer to form a loose "L"-shaped courtyard, providing shelter and referencing farmstead clustering, the annex could then utilise a lean to roof style, which would better reference the rural character.
- Plant a small orchard or fruit-tree group on the courtyard's open side to reinforce a rural courtyard character.

These changes will move the design from a suburban aesthetic to a genuinely rural response—organic in form, materials, and landscape integration, as required by the SPD.

Can you share these points with Jason and see if the applicant is willing to update accordingly? If they'd like to discuss further, I'm happy to join a meeting.

Kind regards,

Even smaller scale proposals benefit from design advice, such as this email to the case officer of an application for a new dwelling.

Creating People Friendly Places: A Strategic Sites Protocol

Large-scale residential developments shape long-term health outcomes, movement patterns and place identity, and this protocol sets clear expectations for how such sites should be designed and assessed.

Raising expectations for strategic development

The Creating People Friendly Places Strategic Sites Protocol was developed in response to recurring issues on major housing sites, including over-reliance on standard house types, poor movement networks, excessive use of cul-de-sacs, weak character definition, and late-stage disputes over layout, density and infrastructure.

The protocol sets out what is expected from applicants at each stage of the process and shifts the emphasis from reactive critique to early, collaborative design-led engagement.

What the Strategic Sites Protocol Includes

The protocol establishes clear and proportionate requirements for strategic residential-led schemes, including:

Early engagement through Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)

- Ensuring sufficient time and resource is allocated to design quality, masterplanning and multi-disciplinary collaboration at the outset.

Masterplanning and layout testing

- Requiring applicants to demonstrate how site constraints, topography, movement, density, and open space have informed the proposed layout, rather than being addressed retrospectively.

Design Review for complex or sensitive sites

- Embedding independent design scrutiny where schemes have borough-wide significance, landscape sensitivity, or complex delivery challenges.

A pro-active framework for strategic sites

	The purpose of the Urban Design Framework is clearly stated
	The UDF explains its role in guiding future masterplans, design codes and planning applications
	A clear, place-led vision for the site is articulated
	The vision responds to site context, constraints and opportunities
	Strategic objectives for the development are clearly defined
	B. Policy Context
	Relevant Calderdale Local Plan policies are identified (including IM7 and BT1)
	The relationship between the UDF and the Placemaking & Design SPD is clearly explained
	Relevant national policy and guidance is referenced proportionately
	The UDF demonstrates how policy requirements have informed the vision and principles
	C. Site Context, Constraints and Opportunities
	Physical constraints (topography, access, utilities, flood risk, ecology) are clearly mapped
	Heritage, landscape and townscape sensitivities are identified
	Surrounding land uses and character areas are described
	Key opportunities for placemaking, connections and enhancement are identified
	D. Movement, Access and Connectivity
	Access points into and through the site are identified
	The relationship to existing movement networks is explained
	Walking, cycling and public transport are prioritised in line with policy
	Permeability and legibility principles are clearly set out
	Movement proposals respond to topography and landscape character
	E. Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Open Space
	Strategic green infrastructure is identified and mapped
	Existing landscape features are retained and integrated where possible

The Strategic Sites Protocol embeds design quality early in the process for major residential developments, reducing risk and improving outcomes.

Clear expectations around movement and health

- Prioritising walkable street networks, active travel connections, permeability and overlooked routes to support physical activity and everyday movement.

Density, character and place identity

- Encouraging context-responsive densities and clear character structuring, rather than uniform or formulaic layouts.

Why the Protocol Matters

Without a clear framework, strategic sites are vulnerable to late-stage design compromise driven by viability, engineering or delivery pressures. The protocol helps address this by:

- Setting expectations early, reducing conflict at application stage
- Improving the quality of initial submissions
- Reducing the risk of refusal or appeal on design grounds
- Supporting better health, wellbeing and placemaking outcomes

It also provides transparency for applicants and Members, clarifying what "good design" looks like at scale in the Calderdale context.

Streetscape+: Calderdale's Street Design Code

Streetscape+ is being developed to provide a clear, consistent framework for street design that supports walking, cycling, social interaction and everyday activity, while responding to Calderdale's distinctive topography and settlement patterns.

Streets are Calderdale's most important public spaces and play a critical role in supporting active lifestyles, health, safety and social interaction.

Creating healthier, safer and more inclusive streets

Streets make up the majority of public space in Calderdale and strongly influence how people move, interact and experience their neighbourhoods. Poorly designed streets can discourage walking and cycling, prioritise vehicle movement over people, and undermine both health outcomes and place quality.

The need for Streetscape+ has emerged from repeated issues in planning casework, including inconsistent street widths, poor footway continuity, weak tree planting, vehicle-dominated layouts and a lack of clarity around the relationship between carriageways, footways, parking and frontages.

Why Streetscape+ Is Needed

Existing guidance is spread across multiple documents and often interpreted inconsistently. Streetscape+ responds to this by:

- Providing a single, accessible reference point for street design
- Embedding health, wellbeing and active travel objectives into street layouts
- Supporting officers and developers in making consistent design decisions
- Reflecting Calderdale's varied topography, character and settlement types

It will help shift street design away from minimum technical compliance and towards streets as places that support everyday activity and social life.

What the Streetscape+ Design Code Will Cover

Based on the draft brief, Streetscape+ will set out clear, illustrated guidance covering:

- **Street hierarchy and typologies**
  Defining the role and character of different streets, from primary routes to local streets and mews.
- **Movement and active travel**
  Supporting continuous, legible and safe walking and cycling routes, including crossings, junctions and desire lines.
- **Street dimensions and spatial relationships**
  Clarifying carriageway widths, footway widths, verge provision, tree planting and SUDS integration.
- **Frontage design and enclosure**
  Ensuring buildings positively define streets and provide natural surveillance.
- **Parking and servicing**
  Reducing visual dominance of vehicles while ensuring functionality.
- **Materials, landscape and detailing**
  Supporting local character, durability and ease of maintenance.

The Role of Streetscape+ in Year Two

During my first year, I have supported early preparation for Streetscape+, including developing the project brief and shaping its scope. In the year ahead, the focus will shift towards code preparation, testing and implementation, ensuring that Streetscape+ becomes a practical, widely used tool across planning and highways.

Embedding Design Quality: What Has Changed

Embedding design quality is about changing behaviours, expectations and decision-making, not simply producing new guidance.

From reactive critique to a consistent, service-wide approach

Over the past year, the focus has shifted from isolated design interventions to a more consistent, structured and proactive approach to securing quality across Calderdale's planning service.

Rather than design quality relying on individual judgement or late-stage negotiation, the work set out in this chapter has helped embed shared expectations, clearer processes and greater confidence across Development Management and related teams.

This shift has been achieved by strengthening the link between policy, tools and live casework, ensuring that design quality is addressed early, clearly and consistently.

What Has Changed

- Design expectations are now set earlier in the process, particularly on larger and more complex sites
- Applicants receive clearer, more structured design advice aligned to adopted guidance
- Officers have greater confidence in articulating and defending design-related concerns
- Design issues are addressed more strategically, rather than through piecemeal negotiation
- Health, walkability and place quality are more consistently considered alongside layout and capacity

Why This Matters

These changes have tangible benefits for the service and for outcomes on the ground:

- Improved quality of submitted schemes
- Reduced risk at committee and appeal
- More efficient use of officer time
- Clearer decision-making and audit trails
- Stronger alignment with health and wellbeing objectives

By embedding design quality into everyday processes, Calderdale is better positioned to secure healthier, more inclusive and more distinctive places over the long term.

Raising the Baseline for Design Quality



Clear streets, active frontages and strong public realm illustrate the standard of design quality now consistently promoted through development management, guidance and officer support.



Section C

Capacity Building & Culture Change

This chapter sets out the work undertaken to raise design literacy and confidence across the Council through officer training, Member engagement and site visits. It demonstrates how exposure to best practice and real-world examples has helped strengthen decision-making, expectations and understanding of what is achievable in challenging contexts.

Building Officer Confidence 37

Officer & Member Training 38

Learning from Best Practice 39

Site Visit Feedback 44

Strategic Housing Development Briefs 45


KELHAM ISLAND MUSEUM
Celebrating 300 years
of Sheffield making history
Car Park

Building Officer Confidence in Design

Embedding high-quality, healthy and inclusive design requires more than good policy and guidance. It depends on officer confidence, shared understanding and a culture that values design as a core part of decision-making.

Over the past year, a key focus of my role has been building capacity across the organisation—supporting officers and Members to engage confidently with design issues, strengthening cross-disciplinary collaboration, and helping to normalise design-led conversations across the planning service and beyond.

Building Officer Confidence in Design

Good design outcomes depend on officers having the confidence to challenge, explain and defend design decisions.

A central part of my role has been supporting planning officers to engage confidently with urban design issues and apply design guidance consistently across casework.

This has included providing informal advice on live applications, sense-checking draft reports, supporting committee preparation, and helping officers articulate design impacts clearly and defensibly.

By acting as a sounding board and technical resource, I have helped officers navigate complex design issues—particularly on constrained sites or major housing schemes—without design concerns being seen as subjective or secondary.

Over time, this has contributed to greater confidence across the service in addressing layout, movement, character, levels and placemaking considerations as core planning matters.

Supporting Officers Live Casework



Ongoing officer support helps embed design-led thinking across development management.

Officer & Member Training & Learning

Design quality improves most effectively when officers and Members share a common understanding of what good looks like and how to secure it.

Over the past year, I have helped deliver and prepare a structured programme of learning activities aimed at improving design literacy, confidence and consistency across the organisation.

Developing a shared design language

A key element of this work has been the coordination of a series of Learning Lunch sessions, delivered by external specialists and internal colleagues, focused on practical design challenges encountered in Calderdale. Topics covered during the year have included:

- Street design, walkability and active travel
- Housing density and character in different contexts
- Designing for health, wellbeing and inclusion
- The role of masterplanning and layout testing
- Understanding design review and its value
- Lessons from exemplar housing and regeneration schemes

These sessions have provided officers with accessible, case-led learning opportunities and helped build confidence in engaging with design issues as part of everyday decision-making.

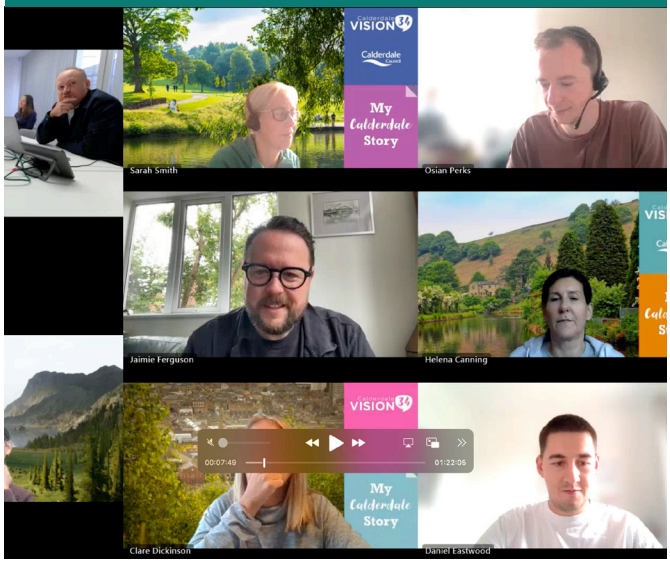
Officer and Member Training Programme (2026)

In parallel, I have been developing a more structured Officer and Member training programme, planned for delivery in 2026. This programme is intended to move beyond one-off sessions and provide a coherent framework covering:

- Understanding design quality and placemaking principles
- Interpreting the Placemaking and Design SPD in practice
- Assessing layout, density, movement and character
- The relationship between design, health and wellbeing
- Reading and interrogating plans, sections and streetscenes
- The role of Members in securing good design outcomes

This programme will support more confident, consistent and informed decision-making, particularly at Planning Committee, and strengthen the Council's ability to secure high-quality outcomes through the planning process.

Building a shared understanding



Learning sessions and structured training help embed a shared approach to design quality across officers and Members.

Learning from Best Practice

Seeing well-designed places first-hand builds confidence, ambition and a shared reference point for decision-making.

To complement policy and training, I coordinated a programme of site visits to exemplar developments, allowing officers and Members to experience how high-quality design principles are delivered in practice.

Rather than abstract discussions, these visits focused on real-world examples of how density, street design, parking, public realm and character can be handled positively, even in challenging contexts. Each visit was selected for its relevance to issues commonly encountered in Calderdale.

The following pages set out the focus and key learning outcomes from each visit.

Learning beyond the page



Site visits provide a shared reference point for future design discussions and decision-making.

Kelham Island & Sheffield City Centre

The visit to Citu's Kelham Island development provided a powerful demonstration of what is achievable on constrained brownfield sites when development is led by design quality, sustainability and long-term stewardship.

Learning from urban regeneration and mixed-use neighbourhood

The scheme illustrates how higher densities can be delivered without compromising liveability or character. Innovative housing typologies, including communal car ports at ground floor level, allow homes to benefit from small private courtyards opening directly onto shared gardens. Back-to-back one- and two-bedroom homes are arranged in an inventive 'over-and-under' configuration, with roof terraces providing valuable private outdoor space. These approaches challenged conventional assumptions about density, privacy and housing typologies, particularly in urban contexts.

The quality of the public realm and movement network was a key learning point for officers. Reduced privacy distances, supported by Sheffield City Council, enable more intimate routes and a strong sense of enclosure, with carefully revealed views into communal green spaces. Shared surface streets demonstrate how servicing and emergency access can be accommodated without defaulting to highway-led design, reinforcing the role of streets as social spaces rather than traffic corridors.

The integration of cafés, independent businesses and everyday services was also instructive, allowing the neighbourhood to function as a genuine community rather than a purely residential development. The wider visit through Sheffield city centre, including Grey to Green and Pounds Park, reinforced the value of confident public realm design and investment in detail, playfulness and inclusivity.

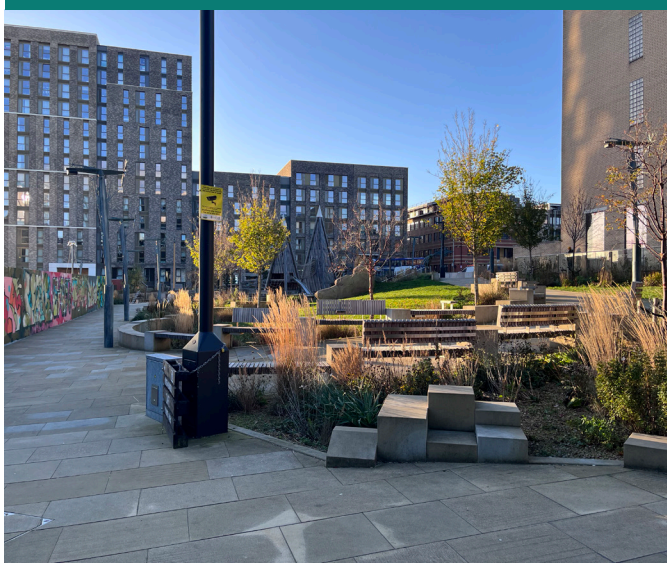
Overall, Kelham Island provided a clear and practical reference for Calderdale officers, demonstrating that design-led, low-carbon development can successfully deliver density, character and community on challenging urban sites when supported by a confident planning framework.

Housing Typologies and Shared Gardens



Innovative housing arrangements at Kelham Island show how density can be achieved without sacrificing liveability or access to outdoor space.

Inclusive Design in Sheffield City Centre



Pounds Park, Sheffield. A City Centre park that is inclusive and accessible by all the family.

Skyhouse – Contemporary Housing & Street-Led Design

The visit to Oughtibridge and Waverley provided officers with a practical understanding of how modern housing typologies, street hierarchy and landscape integration can deliver attractive, walkable neighbourhoods at a range of densities.

At Oughtibridge, the Sky-House development demonstrated how compact housing forms can successfully combine private outdoor space with strong street definition. Roof terraces, courtyards and carefully managed parking arrangements allow higher densities to be achieved while maintaining a clear relationship between homes and the public realm. The clarity of the street network and consistent building lines reinforced the importance of streets as the primary organising element of residential layouts.

Waverley offered a contrasting but complementary example at a larger scale. The development illustrates how a coherent masterplan, delivered over time by multiple housebuilders, can still achieve legible movement networks, identifiable character areas and a hierarchy of streets and spaces. Officers were able to observe how landscape, SuDS features and green corridors are integrated into the street structure rather than treated as residual spaces.

Perhaps the most enlightening element of Waverley was the human scale Local Centre that was being developed. Delivering a mix of uses and homes that provide a real heart to the development as it develops

Together, the two sites reinforced the value of street-led design, typological variety and early masterplanning in achieving walkable, legible neighbourhoods. The visit has directly informed officers' approach to assessing layout structure, parking strategies and character differentiation on major housing schemes in Calderdale.

SkyHouse typologies at Oughtibridge



Compact housing forms at Oughtibridge demonstrate how density, private outdoor space and strong street definition can be successfully combined.

Olive Lane - A New Heart for Waverley



Olive Lane is the Local Centre being developed for Waverley and is a real eye-opener as to how to develop a local centre in a new community.

Duncombe Barracks, York – Long-Term Place Stewardship

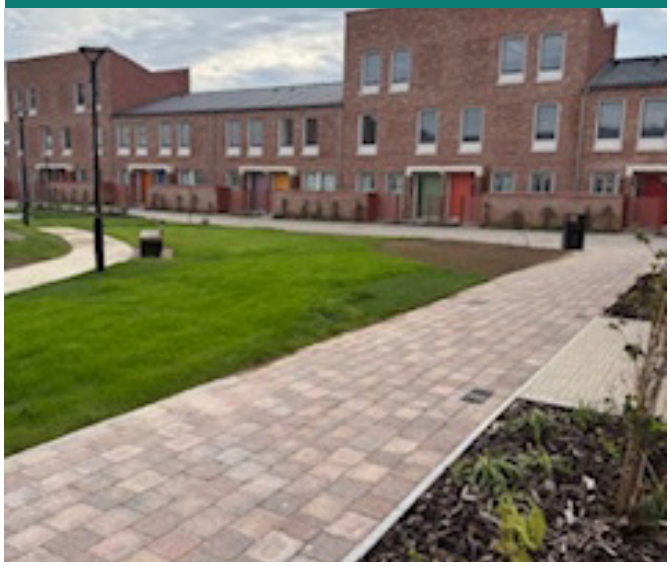
The visit to Dunholme Barracks provided a compelling example of how local authority leadership, long-term stewardship and high design ambition can deliver exemplary housing outcomes on publicly owned land.

The scheme is led by York City Council and designed in partnership with Mikhail Riches, forming part of a wider programme to deliver high-quality council housing across a number of council-owned sites. In addition to new council homes, the scheme includes a small number of plots for custom and self-build, introducing variety and long-term community investment while retaining public-sector control over the overall masterplan.

The housing typologies demonstrate a level of innovation rarely achieved through speculative development alone. Terraced forms play a strong role in shaping streets and public spaces, creating clear enclosure and legibility while supporting higher densities without reliance on dominant parking or detached layouts. The architecture and landscape work together to define character, with strong frontages, shared green spaces and carefully designed thresholds between public and private realms.

Landscape is integral to the scheme's success, structuring movement, reinforcing identity and delivering biodiversity and sustainable drainage benefits. Crucially, the project illustrates how long-term council stewardship — rather than disposal to the highest bidder — can prioritise design quality, resident wellbeing and place-making outcomes over short-term land value. For Calderdale, Dunholme Barracks offers a powerful reference point for how council-led development can unlock better housing, stronger communities and more enduring places.

Terraced Typologies



Innovative terraced forms demonstrate how council-led schemes can achieve density, character and strong street definition.

Integrated Landscape & Public Realm



Landscape plays a defining role in shaping movement, identity and long-term quality at Dunholme Barracks.

This page has been intentionally left blank to reflect a postponed visit to Citu's Climate Innovation District.
The scheme remains a key future reference for low-carbon, design-led regeneration.

Site Visit Feedback

Feedback from the site visits to Kelham Island and Sheffield City Centre, SkyHouse at Oughtibridge and Waverley, and the Council-led housing development at Dunholme Barracks in York demonstrated a consistently strong impact on officer confidence, design literacy and understanding of what is achievable through design-led approaches to housing delivery.

Across both visits, officers reported a clear increase in confidence in assessing design quality and applying placemaking principles in their day-to-day roles. Seeing completed schemes first-hand helped translate abstract policy and SPD principles into tangible outcomes, reinforcing how layout, street design, landscape and built form work together to create successful places. Many respondents noted that the visits would directly support more informed and confident discussions with applicants, agents and Members.

A recurring theme from the SkyHouse visit was the importance of strong street structure and public realm in shaping liveable neighbourhoods. Officers highlighted how well-defined streets, clear hierarchy, and consistent frontage treatment contributed to a coherent sense of place, particularly around schools and local centres. The integration of movement, landscape and built form was frequently cited as a transferable lesson for Calderdale, alongside the benefits of design coding when applied with clarity and intent rather than as a purely technical exercise.

At Dunholme Barracks, feedback strongly reflected the value of Council leadership and long-term stewardship in achieving high-quality outcomes. Officers were struck by the confidence with which York City Council had set expectations around layout, density, housing typologies and landscape quality, and by the resulting coherence of the scheme. The use of terraces, strong landscape structure and well-defined public spaces demonstrated how council-owned land can be developed in a way that prioritises long-term place quality and resident wellbeing, rather than short-term maximisation of land value. Respondents consistently identified this model as highly relevant to Calderdale's own strategic and council-led sites.

Across all of the visits, officers emphasised the value of seeing real, built examples rather than theoretical case studies. The ability to walk streets, experience enclosure, observe how people use spaces, and understand how design decisions perform in practice was seen as invaluable. Suggestions for future visits focused on maintaining this practical, discussion-led approach, with time built in to reflect on what lessons are genuinely transferable to Calderdale's context.

Overall, the site visits were overwhelmingly viewed as a valuable use of time and a powerful tool for embedding design-led thinking across the service. They reinforced shared expectations around quality, raised collective ambition, and provided a common reference point for future discussions about layout, density, street design and stewardship. As such, site visits will continue to play an important role in supporting officer development, improving design conversations with applicants, and strengthening the Council's ability to champion better placemaking outcomes.

Strategic Housing Briefs

The preparation and review of strategic housing briefs has been a key mechanism for embedding design quality and placemaking principles at the earliest possible stage of development, particularly on Council-owned land. By shifting emphasis away from purely technical or capacity-driven considerations and towards site structure, character, movement and long-term stewardship, these briefs have helped establish clearer expectations for developers and internal stakeholders alike, reducing risk and improving the quality of outcomes from the outset.

Minsterview, Halifax

At Minsterview, the existing development brief was comprehensively rewritten to place design quality and placemaking at its core. The revised brief moved beyond a narrow focus on housing numbers and constraints, instead setting out a clear spatial vision for the site, including structure, access, landscape integration and relationships with surrounding development. Greater emphasis was placed on street hierarchy, character areas and the role of public realm in shaping a coherent neighbourhood. This approach helped reframe the site as a place rather than a parcel of land, providing applicants with clearer direction while retaining flexibility for design-led solutions.

Cemetery Lane, Sowerby Bridge

A similar approach was taken at Cemetery Lane, Sowerby Bridge, where early work focused on understanding the site's sensitive context, including its relationship to the adjacent cemetery, listed chapel, allotments and surrounding residential areas. The emerging brief emphasised opportunities for higher density and more innovative housing typologies, supported by strong landscape structure and flexible separation distances where justified by design quality. Rather than relying on standard suburban assumptions, the brief encouraged a contextual, design-led response that balanced viability, character and long-term place performance, particularly important given the site's Council ownership and strategic importance.

Smaller Sites

Alongside these larger sites, advice has also been provided on a number of smaller Council-owned housing opportunities, helping ensure that design expectations are proportionate but consistent across the portfolio. In each case, the emphasis has been on establishing clear principles around layout, movement, landscape and character early, rather than leaving design quality to be negotiated through development management. Collectively, this work demonstrates how strategic housing briefs can act as a critical bridge between policy ambition and delivery, reducing risk, improving certainty and supporting the Council's role as a proactive, design-led landowner.



Section D

Risks, Challenges & Priorities

This chapter provides a reflective assessment of the risks, limitations and challenges associated with embedding urban design within the planning service, alongside a clear set of priorities for the year ahead.

Strategic Priorities & Value Added 49

Risks, Limits & Challenges

linked with the Urban Design Role 51



Strategic Priorities & Value Added

Beyond individual planning applications, the Urban Design role has established a set of strategic priorities that influence how Calderdale plans, designs and delivers development at a borough-wide scale.

These priorities reflect where the role adds the greatest long-term value—moving design input earlier in the process, embedding health and wellbeing into spatial decision-making, strengthening policy alignment, and improving delivery certainty.

Strategic Priority 1: Shifting Design Input Upstream

Principle: Early design influence delivers better health and place outcomes

The role has prioritised moving design input away from late-stage mitigation and towards early, concept-stage engagement. This includes strengthening pre-application advice, promoting Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs), and embedding clearer expectations through the Strategic Sites Protocol.

Value added:
Earlier clarity on site structure, movement and layout fundamentals, reducing abortive redesign, improving walkability, and supporting healthier, more coherent places.

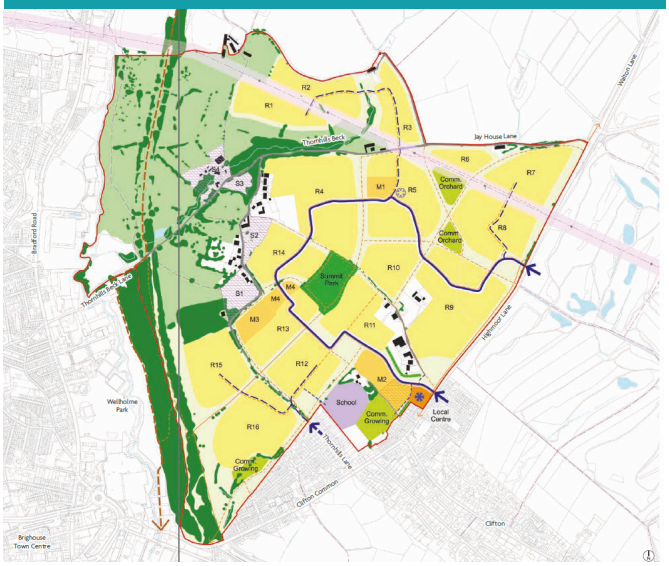
Strategic Priority 2: Design-Led Site Capacity and Density Testing

Principle: Density should be design-led, not theoretical

A recurring issue within the current Local Plan framework is the use of broad, untested density assumptions. The role has begun to challenge this by promoting design-led capacity testing that responds to topography, accessibility, character and infrastructure constraints.

Value added:
More realistic site capacities, reduced under-delivery of allocated sites, and layouts that better reconcile density with quality and health outcomes.

Shaping Development at the Right Stage



Strategic design frameworks provide clarity on movement, landscape and structure before detailed layouts are fixed, reducing risk and improving outcomes.

Strategic Priority 3: Embedding Health, Walkability and Inclusion

Principle: Everyday movement and inclusion are shaped by layout, not just policy

Across casework, guidance and strategic projects, the role has consistently embedded Active Calderdale principles—prioritising walkable layouts, connected street networks, active frontages, inclusive design standards and reduced car dominance.

Value added:
Development that supports everyday physical activity, social interaction and long-term reductions in health inequalities.

Strategic Priorities & Value Added

Strategic Priority 4: Strengthening Policy, Guidance and Certainty

Principle: Clear expectations support better outcomes

The role has focused on turning aspiration into delivery through clear guidance and tools, including the Placemaking and Design SPD, the Developers Charter, the Strategic Sites Protocol and early work on Streetscape+.

Value added:
Greater certainty for applicants and officers, more consistent decision-making, and improved defensibility at appeal.

Strategic Priority 5: Building Long-Term Design Capability and Resilience

Principle: Design quality should not rely on individual roles

Recognising the limits of single-post dependency, the role has emphasised officer upskilling, shared tools, templates, learning visits and structured training.

Value added:
A more confident, resilient planning service capable of maintaining design standards over time.

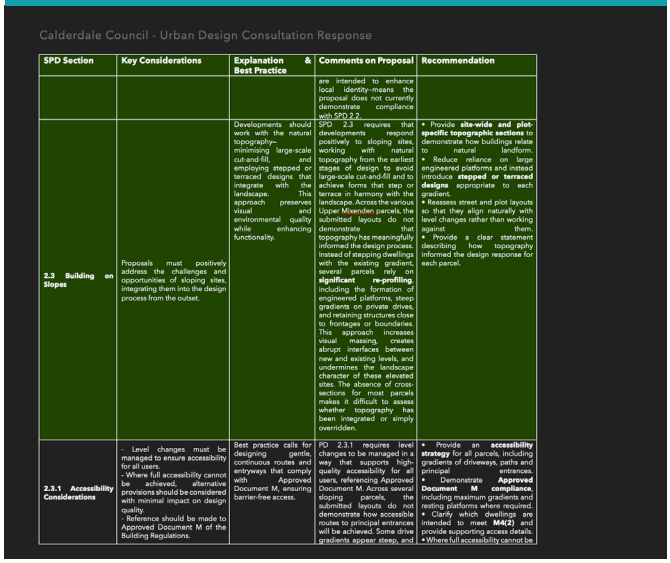
Strategic Priority 6: Informing the Next Local Plan

Principle: Spatial strategy must align with design reality

The Urban Design role provides a critical bridge between development management experience and future policy-making—particularly around site selection, density, walkability and health outcomes.

Value added:
A more deliverable Local Plan that better aligns location, density and accessibility with long-term wellbeing.

Embedding Design Knowledge Across the Service



Calderdale Council - Urban Design Consultation Response

SPD Section	Key Considerations	Explanation & Best Practice	Comments on Proposal	Recommendation
			are intended to enhance local identity-means the proposal does not currently demonstrate compliance with SPD 2.2.	
2.3 Building on Slopes	Proposals must positively address the challenges and opportunities of sloping sites, integrating them into the design process from the outset.	Developments should work with the natural topography—minimising large-scale cut-and-fill, and employing stepped or terraced designs that integrate with the landscape. This approach preserves visual and environmental quality while enhancing functionality.	SPD 2.3 requires that developments respond positively to sloping sites, working with natural topography from the earliest stages of design to avoid large-scale cut-and-fill and to achieve forms that step or terrace in harmony with the landscape. Across the various Upper Mixenden parcels, the submitted layouts do not demonstrate that topography has meaningfully informed the design process. Instead of stepping dwellings with the existing gradient, several parcels rely on **significant re-profiling**, including the formation of engineered platforms, steep gradients on private drives, and retaining structures close to frontages or boundaries. This approach increases visual massing, creates abrupt interfaces between new and existing levels, and undermines the landscape character of these elevated sites. The absence of cross-sections for most parcels makes it difficult to assess whether topography has been integrated or simply overridden.	• Provide **site-wide and plot-specific topographic sections** to demonstrate how buildings relate to natural landform. • Reduce reliance on large engineered platforms and instead introduce **stepped or terraced designs** appropriate to each gradient. • Reassess street and plot layouts so that they align naturally with level changes rather than working against them. • Provide a clear statement describing how topography informed the design response for each parcel.
2.3.1 Accessibility Considerations	- Level changes must be managed to ensure accessibility for all users. - Where full accessibility cannot be achieved, alternative provisions should be considered with minimal impact on design quality. - Reference should be made to Approved Document M of the Building Regulations.	Best practice calls for designing gentle, continuous routes and entryways that comply with Approved Document M, ensuring barrier-free access.	PD 2.3.1 requires level changes to be managed in a way that supports high-quality accessibility for all users, referencing Approved Document M. Across several sloping parcels, the submitted layouts do not demonstrate how accessible routes to principal entrances will be achieved. Some drive gradients appear steep, and	• Provide an **accessibility strategy** for all parcels, including gradients of driveways, paths and principal entrances. • Demonstrate **Approved Document M compliance**, including maximum gradients and resting platforms where required. • Clarify which dwellings are intended to meet **M4(2)** and provide supporting access details. • Where full accessibility cannot be

Shared templates, guidance and tools reduce reliance on individual input and help embed consistent, design-led decision-making across Development Management.

A Shared Understanding of What Good Looks Like



Training sessions, site visits and live casework support help raise design literacy across officers and Members, improving confidence, consistency and decision-making.

Risks, Limits & Challenges linked with the Urban Design Role

The risks and limitations outlined below relate directly to the ability to deliver the strategic priorities identified in Chapter 6. Addressing these risks is therefore essential to embedding design-led, health-focused planning as a core function of the service rather than a reactive input.

Reactive Nature of Development Management Input

A significant proportion of the role is necessarily reactive, responding to submitted schemes already constrained by land ownership, viability assumptions, standardised house types or pre-determined layouts. In these circumstances, urban design input can be limited to mitigation rather than fundamentally shaping outcomes.

Mitigation / Response

- Increase early-stage engagement through pre-application advice, PPAs and the Strategic Sites Protocol.
- Strengthen expectations around concept design, site structure and movement strategies prior to submission.
- Shift design input upstream through closer alignment with Strategic Housing, site briefs and Local Plan preparation.

Late Engagement on Site Capacity, Density and Layout Fundamentals

Untested density assumptions—such as a blanket 35 dwellings per hectare—mean many sites come forward without proper consideration of topography, access or character. This often leads to under-delivery, excessive engineering or compromised layouts.

Mitigation / Response

- Embed urban design input into Local Plan preparation and site allocation work.

Design Quality Within Real-World Constraints



Steep topography, infrastructure, viability pressures and legacy site constraints shape what can be achieved through development management, highlighting the need for earlier, plan-led and design-led intervention.

- Use design-led capacity testing to inform realistic, context-sensitive density ranges.
- Trial proptech tools (e.g. Blocktype) alongside bespoke SketchUp modelling.
- Develop clearer guidance linking density to location, accessibility and topography.

Viability Pressures Limiting Design Ambition

Viability pressures are frequently cited to resist improvements to street structure, accessibility, landscape and public realm quality. Without strong policy alignment, there is a risk that design quality is treated as discretionary.

Mitigation / Response

- Strengthen policy and guidance through the Developers Charter, Strategic Sites Protocol and future Local Plan policy.
- Improve pre-application clarity to reduce late-stage design changes.
- Articulate the long-term value of good design in terms of health, place quality and market resilience.

Risks, Limits & Challenges linked with the Urban Design Role

Single-Post Dependency and Capacity Constraints

As a single-post role, there is an inherent capacity and resilience risk. Balancing major applications, strategic projects, training and corporate work limits comprehensive coverage.

Mitigation / Response

- Continue officer upskilling and embed shared tools to reduce reliance on individual input.
- Explore future service resilience opportunities arising from the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, including fee-setting flexibility and reinvestment.
- Reference comparator authorities such as East Riding of Yorkshire Council, where an initial single urban design post has grown into a small multi-disciplinary team.
- Prioritise interventions delivering the greatest borough-wide benefit.

Variable Design Literacy Across Applicants and Agents

Wide variation in design capability leads to repeated fundamental issues requiring significant officer time and multiple redesign cycles.

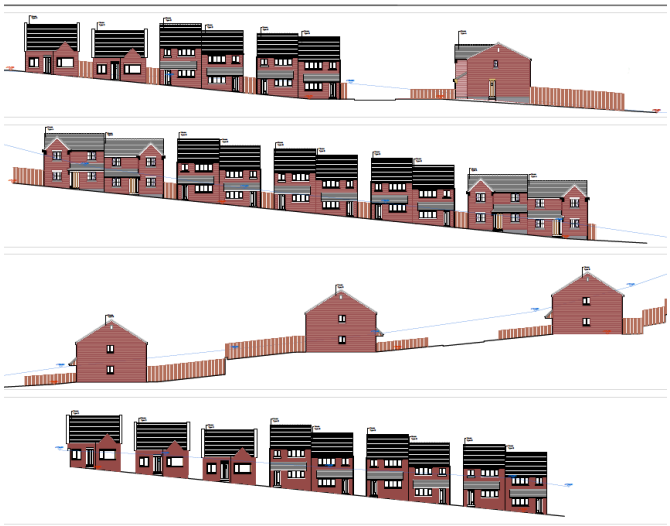
Mitigation / Response

- Set clearer upfront expectations through guidance and the Developers Charter.
- Promote earlier concept-level engagement.
- Apply SPD principles consistently with clear, structured feedback.

Policy and Guidance Gaps at Strategic Scale

While the Placemaking and Design SPD is strong at development management level, it cannot fully compensate for gaps in strategic policy around density, walkability and access to services.

Balancing Density, Viability and Place Quality



Urban design decisions often require balancing competing pressures around density, access, topography and viability, particularly when engagement occurs late in the process.

Mitigation / Response

- Integrate urban design and health expertise into the next Local Plan process.
- Use development management evidence to inform policy wording and site allocations.
- Explicitly link location, density and accessibility to health outcomes.

Rising Expectations from Members and the Public

Improved scrutiny of design quality is positive, but it increases expectations around what the planning system can realistically secure.

Mitigation / Response

- Support Members through training and clear, evidence-based advice.
- Provide transparent explanations of planning system limitations.
- Use consistent SPD-aligned design narratives to support defensible decisions.

Priorities for Year 2

The priorities for Year 2 are structured to respond directly to the risks identified, while delivering the strategic priorities set out at the beginning of this chapter. The focus is on moving design input earlier, strengthening policy alignment, improving service resilience and maximising health and wellbeing outcomes.

Shifting Design Input Upstream

- Increase early-stage engagement through pre-application advice, PPAs and the Strategic Sites Protocol.
- Strengthen expectations for concept design and movement frameworks.
- Reduce reliance on late-stage mitigation.

Embedding Urban Design in Local Plan Preparation

- Work closely with Planning Policy to embed health-led design principles.
- Support site allocation through design-led capacity testing.
- Move away from blanket density assumptions.

Design-Led Capacity Testing and Digital Tools

- Trial Blocktype and SketchUp modelling to test capacity and layout logic.
- Use outputs to inform Local Plan evidence, briefs and pre-application advice.

Strengthening Service Resilience

- Continue officer training and shared guidance.
- Explore reinvestment opportunities enabled by planning fee reforms.
- Use comparator authorities as evidence for scalable approaches.

Shaping Places Earlier in the Process



Year 2 priorities focus on moving design input upstream — testing site capacity, density and movement at concept stage to improve certainty, reduce risk and deliver healthier, more walkable places.

Improving Certainty and Design Literacy

- Roll out the Developers Charter.
- Strengthen pre-application advice.
- Reduce negotiation time through clearer expectations.

Delivering Training and Capacity Building

- Implement the Officer and Member Training Programme in 2026.
- Focus on design quality, health outcomes, density and walkability.
- Support Members in responding to increased public scrutiny.

Delivering the Calderdale Place Review

- Complete and publish the Place Review and associated audits.
- Use findings to inform policy, service priorities and future investment.
- Establish a clear evidence base linking design quality to health and wellbeing.

Calderdale Council