

- DESIGN GUIDANCE: APPEARANCE -

Chapter 7 looks at the appearance of individual buildings: what they are made of, what shape they are, the types of colours and textures used, the detail and craftsmanship...

These are perhaps the things that people tend to notice most about new buildings, whether they seem 'right' or 'wrong'. These are very human-scaled aspects of a building, and easy for us all to relate to. It is important that the right choices are made so that a building fits with the character and appearance of the conservation area.

DESIGN GUIDANCE: APPEARANCE

Principles of good practice

1. Most buildings have a rationale to their fenestration (the arrangement, proportion and distribution of windows and doors across an elevation). Observing and understanding the common ‘rules’ of various building types and styles will help you get the fenestration right on a new building, even if the style and detail is not slavishly traditional.
2. Often, if the shape and proportion of a building (and its relationship to neighbouring buildings, or the grouping and massing of a collection of buildings) is ‘right’, there is a greater opportunity to be a little freer, less traditional and more inventive, with the finer detailing and even the use of materials.
3. Pay attention to the back and sides, as well as the front. Facing a building in a quality material will still look cheap and ‘stuck-on’ if the sides are highly visible, and particularly if the junction between the two materials is not crafted in a traditional way. Consider the fenestration on the back of a building as thoroughly as the front, particularly at upper storey levels – backs are often surprisingly visible from public vantage points.
4. Avoid using “matching” materials, which don’t actually match. The conservation area is rich in high quality traditional building materials and craftsmanship, but often it is impossible to source a good match. Seen side-by-side with the historic fabric, this can show up new work in a bad light, as well as devaluing the original. Sometimes it is better to go for a positive contrast of materials, rather than a poor match.

APPEARANCE

- 7.1 Appearance is probably the thing that most of us respond to most intuitively when considering whether a building seems ‘right’. But what are the components that come together to create that look?

Building form, façade and interface

The type of building, how it functions and what it houses. The relationship of the building to the street:

- The size of the building floorplate or ‘footprint’, its storey heights and the means and location of access to the interior
- The relationship of the building to adjacent buildings and how it relates to external space at ground floor level
- The nature and extent of the building’s setback at upper floors and its roof treatment
- The rhythm, pattern and harmony of its openings relative to its enclosure
- The nature of the setback, boundary treatment and its frontage condition at street level
- The architectural expression of its entrances, corners, roofscape and projections

Details and materials

The appearance of the building in relation to:

- The art, craftsmanship, building techniques and detail of the various building components true to local context
- The texture, colour, pattern, durability and treatment of its materials
- Materials sourced from local and/or sustainable sources, including recycled materials where possible
- The lighting, signage and treatment of shopfronts, entrances and building security

BUILDING FORM: SHAPES AND PROPORTIONS

- 7.2 Shapes are a refinement of height and massing. Choose an appropriate overall building shape or ‘form’ for the context: long, narrow, low; tall, skinny; pointy; blocky; fragmented...
- 7.3 Often, if the shape and proportion of a building (and its relationship to neighbouring buildings, or the grouping and massing of a collection of buildings) is ‘right’, there is a greater opportunity to be a little freer, less traditional and more inventive, with the finer detailing and even the use of materials.

Small buildings and domestic extensions: scale, shapes, proportion and detailing

- 7.4 Advice on the specifics of locally distinctive detailing of new buildings and extensions, and finer matters of appearance, is covered later in this Chapter. But on a small building, consideration of scale and proportion is intimately linked to consideration of detailing, the arrangement of openings on an elevation, the pitch of the roof and the relationship of all the various parts – perhaps more so than on a large building, where so much of its initial impact is down to its scale.
- 7.5 On small buildings, proportion and detailing becomes even more crucial. Attention to things like storey heights, window head heights, the pitch of the roof and the proportional relationship of the roof to the body of the building can turn an ordinary little box into something locally distinctive, with enormous character.

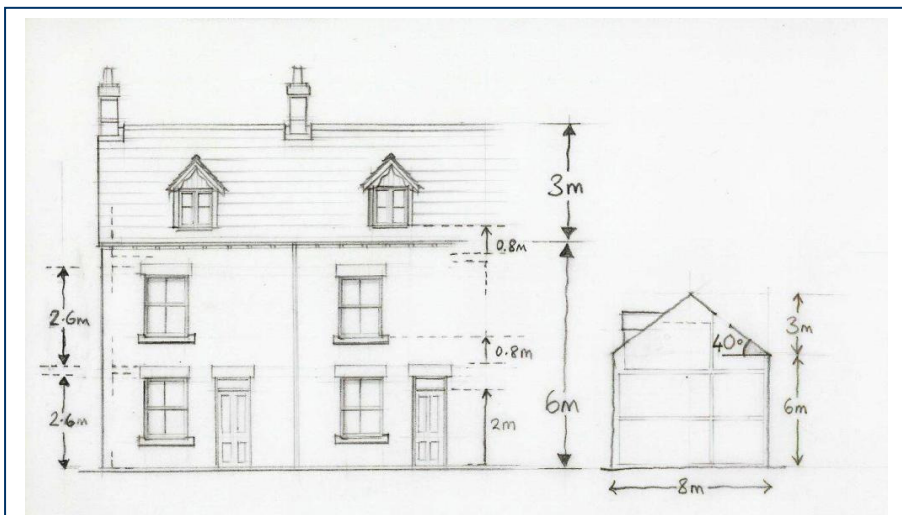
[Right] Design guidance about shapes and proportions from the IHCA Management Proposals SPD. Other policy and design guidelines (PDGs) may also be relevant. Refer to Chapter 3 of the SPD.

IHCA PDG24 **General: scale, proportions and detailing**
 New build, whether in the form of large new developments or small private extensions, will be expected to observe locally distinctive proportions and scale and (where the design is ‘traditional’) very close attention to locally distinctive details and craftsmanship. The scale, proportions and detailing must be appropriate to the particular context (the site or the host building) within the conservation area, and should seek to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the IHCA ‘Character Part’ in which the site lies.

IHCA PDG26 **Standard housetypes; locally distinctive design**
 Where new development is proposed, the use of standard house types and ‘anywhere’ architectural designs will not be acceptable. Arbitrary detailing and cosmetic alterations to standard designs in an attempt to make them superficially ‘fit in’ will also usually be inappropriate. New housing will be expected to pay close attention to locally distinctive building traditions. However, where no clear precedent/model of traditional built form is found to be appropriate, imaginative, innovative design, which is appropriate to the site and context, will be encouraged.

IHCA PDG27 **Roofscape and alterations to roofs**
 The roof is nearly always a dominant feature of a building and the alteration of its original structure, shape, pitch, cladding and ornament will be considered inappropriate in most circumstances. Alterations to roofs which have been previously compromised or altered will be expected to enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area.

IHCA PDG30 **Roofscape: new-build proportions, scale, pitch and cladding**
 The impact of new development on the roofscape of the IHCA will be carefully considered. New development will be expected to reflect the proportion, pitch, cladding and variety of its context and to create a roofscape which is characteristic of groups of traditional buildings in the conservation area. Deep plan forms, which necessitate wide roof spans (resulting either in uncharacteristically tall ridge heights or slack roof pitches) should be avoided, unless they can be accommodated in a locally distinctive way, appropriate to the style of the building and the character and appearance of the surrounding area.



Often, if the shape and proportion of a building is ‘right’, there is a greater opportunity to be a bit freer with fine detailing and materials.

The proportions and massing of traditional terraced housing in the conservation area provides a strong template [above], as does the traditional decorative combination of red, black and buff bricks. But rather than slavishly replicating the detailing, the essential ‘flavour’ of the materials and colour palette (as well as the vertical emphasis of the fenestration) could be reinterpreted...[below]



- 7.6 If the scale and proportions of a new building or an extension are absolutely spot-on, there can sometimes be an opportunity to be a bit more unconventional in terms of the use of materials and detailing.
- 7.7 Most developments will benefit from the inclusion of some small buildings, to provide a variety of scales and heights and a lively mixed environment. Buildings that have a ‘human scale’ can be psychologically comforting and welcoming.
- 7.8 Design Priority 5, in Chapter 4, took a look at how important it is to get scale and proportion right, when designing a house that looks convincingly locally distinctive and sits happily alongside other buildings in a traditional setting.
- 7.9 The Council’s Supplementary Planning Advice (SPA) booklet, the *Householder Design Guide*, provides some useful general advice about siting and scaling of extensions, to ensure that the amenity of neighbours is not harmed, and the development is broadly in keeping with the street scene and the scale and character of the host building.
- 7.10 In addition to these general considerations, new development in a conservation area is expected to have special regard to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of what is a historically and architecturally special area. This means extra care and attention to the design is needed, and a high standard is expected.
- 7.11 The IHCA **character appraisal** (VOLUME 1, ‘Summary and Character Overview’, particularly the Built Environment chapters) sets out some of the key characteristics of the traditional building vernacular in respect of houses and cottages in particular parts of the conservation area. This should be referred to when designing new small buildings in the conservation area, particularly houses and extensions.



If the scale and proportions of an extension are spot-on, there can sometimes be an opportunity to be a bit more unconventional in terms of the use of materials and detailing. But in most domestic situations in the conservation area, it will always be advisable to include at least some element of locally distinctive traditional material – particularly where surfaces are conspicuous from the street or public vantage points.



[left] the salt warehouse at Brimscombe Port is very charming and displays many typical features of Thames & Severn canal warehouses.

This building is a much-needed piece of ‘human scale’ in an environment that is dominated by vast open expanses and big buildings. Although it is an industrial building, it has a domestic scale, which can be psychologically comforting and welcoming. Most developments can benefit from the inclusion of varied sized buildings.

Scale and proportion is so important to little buildings. Things like storey heights, window head heights, the pitch of the roof and the proportional relationship of the roof to the body of the building can turn an ordinary little box into something locally distinctive, with enormous character.

[right] Extension to a listed building in the IHCA, showing great care and attention paid to proportion and scale. The new addition is fragmented in form and sits very subtly askew from the original house, giving it an appealingly casual ‘organic’ appearance.



[left] This new house in Frampton on Severn has an attractive form, consisting of several distinct wings and sections, which appear as ‘add-ons’ to the relatively modest core. This lean-to successfully reflects the traditionally modest proportions and simple form of many traditional extensions, which are often attached at the side or rear **[as right]**



[above] Traditionally, extensions and add-ons to many historic houses in the conservation area are quite modest. Anything larger should be well tucked away from conspicuous views, especially from the front.

7.13 **Characteristics of the ‘Vale’ vernacular:**

Refer to VOLUME 1, Chapter 7 (7.9 and 7.11) for more detailed information and illustration of key characteristics. Many houses and small agricultural buildings in the West of the IHCA study area (on the ‘Vale’, west of Dudbridge and Ebley) are based on the brick or timber frame vernacular, often having a distinctive long, low building form with a steep roof. The later vernacular (Georgian and early Victorian) also developed into a slightly more ‘upright’ appearance – very much like a classic dollshouse. Houses and cottages are generally wide-frontage and shallow plan-depth (commonly only one room deep, so roof spans are often only 4–6m, front to back). Most are only two storeys, while attics and roof spaces tend to be lit and ventilated via openings in the gable-end wall, rather than by using dormers. Traditionally, extensions tend to take the form of simple single-storey lean-to ranges to the rear or the side, housing additional ground floor rooms. Most houses and cottages were built without porches and, where subsequently added, these tend to be simple timber canopies, rather than enclosed brick structures, which should generally be avoided.



7.14 **Characteristics of the ‘Valleys’ vernacular:**

Refer to VOLUME 1, Chapter 7 (7.10 and 7.12) for more detailed information and illustration of key characteristics. While early buildings in the valleys (with their distinctive steeply pitched stone roofs and stone mullion windows) can be tall and narrow, cottages from the later Georgian and Victorian period are generally wide-frontage and shallow plan-depth (again, commonly only one room deep, so roof spans can be as little as 4–6m, front to back). Traditionally, single storey lean-to ranges, to the rear or the side, were the most common way of extending (perhaps surprisingly, brick is quite commonly used for such additions, and this can be a good alternative if a good match for the original stone would be difficult). Most are only two storeys, and dormers were less common than may be imagined (where they do exist, they are generally quite small, with pitched or sometimes hipped roofs). As in the Vale (and unlike elsewhere in the Cotswolds), porches were not a common feature; where they do exist, they are very rarely ‘solid’ stone or brick structures.



Cottages typical of the late Georgian and early Victorian periods (about 1780 – 1850). The early decades of the 19th century saw something of a local mill- and house-building boom; hence styles of the period make a strong contribution to the character of the conservation area.
[top] a canal cottage at Framilode, built for the canal basin supervisor c.1815. A relatively grand cottage, with a panelled door and arched fanlight. The ‘core’ of the cottage has a wide, shallow plan – only one room deep. But additional rooms are houses to the rear and side, under lean-to roofs.
[bottom] A more modest row of cottages at Dudbridge, probably built c.1820s by a mill owner to house workers at one of the nearby mills. Again, a very shallow plan form, just one room deep (two-up-two-down), with a shared washhouse under a lean-to roof at the side.

Porches

- 7.15 Where subject to planning controls, a porch will not be permitted in situations where it would be likely to disrupt the original design concept of a house - particularly where it would contribute to the break down of uniformity and architectural coherence on a terrace, semi-detached pair or matching group.
- 7.16 It may be surprising to consider how few houses and cottages in the conservation were originally built with porches; and solid masonry-built enclosed porches are historically an exception rather than a rule. Certainly the 'Vale' and 'Valleys' vernaculars described above and in the Character Appraisal volumes (see particularly VOLUME 1, chapter 7) were commonly porchless. The earlier 16th-18th century valley vernacular (which is so recognisable for its steep gabled roofs and stone mullion windows) also tended to rely more on the simple stone drip moulds (or 'hood moulds') over doors to divert rainwater, rather than a porch. Many porches that do exist were Victorian or Edwardian additions, often simple painted timber canopies or enclosed glazed designs, which can have enormous charm and character of their own.



Porches can be extremely damaging to the character of buildings which have a strong sense of uniformity, particularly terraces.

[left] Here at Avenue Terrace in the western leg of the IHCA study area, almost every single house has had a porch added, where originally there were none. This has been enormously damaging to the architectural character of the terrace – not least because of the variety of roof pitches, sizes, orientation, mis-matched brick and door designs.



[left] Off-the-peg porches
 This fibreglass off-the-peg porch bears no relation to any common traditional building vernaculars in the Stroud Valleys or the vale – if any historic prototype like this does exist in the conservation area, it is an exception rather than a rule. This cornice canopy draws vaguely on 'polite' architecture, but it is like a mixed metaphor, when combined with a cottage-style door and casement windows. Off-the-peg products can be perfectly acceptable, particularly on newbuild projects, but they *must* be selected carefully for their relevance to local character, the traditional vernacular and the chosen style of the building itself.



[below] Design guidance in the IHCA Management Proposals SPD

IHCA PDG33	<p>Porches New porches should be designed to be in keeping with the age, style and historic status of the particular building. The addition of a porch is not always appropriate to the character or appearance of a building, particularly on terraces. Traditional porches should be retained and not altered.</p>
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Fully enclosed, solid masonry porches are rarities rather than common features of most of the conservation area's building vernaculars. Often, porches were added to older buildings by the Victorians and Edwardians. The lightweight character of such porches can often allow the original architectural concept and proportions of the building behind it to be 'read', much more clearly than a solid stone or brick structure. In many cases this may be a more sensitive option than a solid, enclosed design.



FAÇADE AND INTERFACE

- 7.17 Very different effects can be produced on a building, using the same floor plan, but simply arranging openings differently: how the building is designed and detailed should express how it functions and how it interfaces with its surroundings... is this the front, or the back? Is this the main entrance or a secondary entrance?
- 7.18 The publication *Manual for Streets* recognizes that “in general, it is recommended that streets are designed with the backs and fronts of houses and other buildings being treated differently”. The basic tenet is ‘public fronts and private backs’. Ideally, and certainly in terms of crime prevention, back gardens should adjoin other back gardens or a secure communal space. Front doors should open onto front gardens, small areas in front of the property, or streets. The desirability of public fronts and private backs applies equally to roads with higher levels of traffic, such as those linking or providing access to residential areas. If such streets are bounded by back-garden fences or hedges, *Manual for Streets* suggests that security problems can increase, drivers may be encouraged to speed, land is inefficiently used, and there is a lack of a sense of place. This principal can apply equally to development that incorporates non-residential uses.
- 7.19 However, there are instances in the conservation area where key “frontages” to public spaces (roads, streets, the canals) traditionally behave contrary to this rule. The manner in which many industrial or agricultural building groups turn inwards, effectively turning their backs to the roads or canals that pass by them, means that many places in the conservation area are characterised by blank road-facing or canal-facing elevations. Even in these cases though, the fronts of the buildings (the more private, inward-orientated elevations) are definitely articulated as such: it is clear from the design of the buildings which is the front and which is the back.
- 7.20 Moreover, it is possible to design ‘active’ elements into these traditionally ‘blank’ frontages, as has been explored already in **Chapter 4 (Priority 3)**, in relation to canalside development. (See also **Chapter 5: Edges**).



[above and below] The fronts and backs of these houses on the canalside at Chalford are treated very differently, to great effect. The front is very obviously the front, while the sparsity and informality of the fenestration at the back, announces that this is certainly not the building’s principal elevation.





[below] A 'double buffer': new houses, segregated from their street.

These new houses at Cainscross (**below, left**) sit behind a tall brick boundary wall, with steel railings inset as panels. In some ways this reflects traditional boundary treatments, typical of 19th and early 20th century roadside development. Opposite, these attractive roadside houses are clearly orientated to address the road, but set back by 3-6m from the back of the pavement. The interface is 'buffered' by this private space, traditionally demarked and enclosed by low walls, hedges or railings (although some boundaries have been flattened to allow private car parking). Further up the street, the 'buffer' is less, with terraced houses set back behind only minimal front yard areas (1-2m), or commercial buildings opening directly onto the pavement.

But behind this development's brick wall is a further 'buffer', a second private footway, segregating the occupants from the street. The houses are accessed from the parking court behind them and residents have to walk up steps to the front doors, and along the footway.

This poor street interface appears incongruous and confusing, because it breaks with a very strongly established convention on the street. This is partly an issue of layout, which should be resolved earlier in the design process. But the appearance of the buildings (and their boundary treatments) should express and respond to how they function. This arrangement tends to alienate the new houses from their setting, rather than allowing them a proper interface with the street, and appearing visually in keeping with the character of buildings around.

[above] Mixed messages: fronts or backs?

This development at Dudbridge has successfully provided some much-needed enclosure and human scale to a part of the conservation area that has previously had its close-knit character blighted by highways alterations.

The development sensitively incorporates some surviving 19th century houses and cottages and has enabled the restoration of a listed 'building at risk'.

The scale and massing of the new buildings, together with their domestic form and individual proportions, allows the development to sit very snugly in its context (particularly in terms of roofscape – which is important in long-range views). It provides a neighbourly setting for the surviving historic buildings on the site.

However, the detailing (particularly the arrangement and design of windows and doors, and the mix of materials applied to each individual building) does mean that the development as a whole is less locally distinctive and sensitive to its context than it might have been.

But additionally, the detailing and distribution of windows and doors gives off mixed messages ... in this picture, the one historic cottage (stone fronted) is facing the road: it is obvious that this is the front. The new houses either side are more ambiguous. The buildings' interface with the road is ambiguous and confusing: is this the front or the back?



Where buildings open directly onto a public space, particularly a street, the interface between public and private can be made less abrupt by designing a narrow 'buffer' strip as part of the hard landscaping. This could be planted, if appropriate [as here at the Poundbury development in Dorset, **right**]. Alternatively, a simple change in ground surface material can be an effective psychological barrier – the rough, uneven surface of traditional limestone cobbles [**left**] would effectively discourage passers by from walking close-up to the building.

