Introduction, Approach and Design Principles

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1 INTRODUCTION

This document is the first in a series of Planning Policy Guidance. It focusses on various aspects of development design. Other Planning Policy Guidance will be issued in due course.

1.1 Land Use Design Guidance

Design Guidance has been produced for a range of key land uses, including:

- Residential Development
- Commercial Development
- Industrial Development
- Hotels and Integrated Resort Development

The objective is to create a set of performance criteria and design standards that are applicable to most forms and scales of development for use by individual site owners, developers of large schemes and for assisting Government and local authorities when considering permit applications.

Design Sheets have also been produced that consider special design circumstances and supplement the key land use Design Guidance. The Design Sheets include:

Residential:
- Individual Household Development
- Design For Sloping Sites
- Residential Coastal Development

Commercial:
- Tall Buildings

Industrial:
- Industry Adjacent to Sensitive Sites
- Industry in the Countryside

Hotels and Integrated Resorts:
- Resort Hotel Development
- Eco Tourism Development
- Golf Development
- Marina Development
1.2 Technical Sheets

Although the design guidance is based on performance criteria where possible, there are situations where certain standards or technical requirements must be maintained, for reasons such as health and safety. A series of Technical Sheets has been produced and reference should also be made to these. The Technical Sheets include:

- Residential Roads
- Industrial and Commercial Roads
- Access for People with Disabilities
- Drainage
- Water Supply
- Mains Sewerage
- On-Plot Sewage Disposal
- Electricity
- Telecommunications
- Combined Utilities Summary Plans

1.3 Context and Support

Design Guidance is meant to be used alongside various other Government advice that set out policy and guidance relating to land use and development. This guidance should be considered with:

- The National Development Strategy, 2003;
- Outline Schemes/Local Plans
- Action Area Plans
- Subject Plans.
2 APPROACH

2.1 Quality and Design in Planning – a Design Led Approach.

Achieving good design depends upon the skills of the designer and a commitment to sound design principles by all those concerned with development. Better practice guidance can assist skilled designers to analyse places, to understand how they are used and experienced and to design with flair and sensitivity.

Unfortunately, many development proposals in Mauritius are currently prepared and submitted without the assistance of skilled and qualified designers such as architects, which means that the planning system has a fundamental role to play in ensuring acceptable standards of design. By setting out a clearly related structure of location, layout and design principles, design guidance can help planning authorities assess proposals, facilitate the creation of acceptable planning schemes, and where necessary to refuse obviously poor schemes. Design guidance can also help promoters of schemes establish an early understanding of and commitment to design quality.

A design led approach to new development seeks to bring the aspirations (and various development disciplines) together in an inter-disciplinary way. It is hoped for example, that the series of Design Guidance sheets will encourage more developers to re-examine their approach and employ architects and other professionals to achieve an acceptable standard of design.

2.2 Status of the Design Guidance

Planning Policy Design Guidance is a National Planning Instrument under the terms of the Planning and Development Act 2004. Applicants for development permits should demonstrate how they have taken account of the requirement for good design in their development proposals and that they have given due regard to relevant plan policies and design guidance.

There are many other controls on development (The Building Act, The Environment Protection Act, and the Roads Act, amongst others) and conformity with design guidance will not imply acceptance of the proposals by any of the other regulatory authorities.

2.3 Purpose and Aims of Design Guidance

As a series of working documents, the Design Guidance is intended to serve as a common source of design information by:

- Translating the National Development Strategy policies and principles at the local and site specific level, and
- Equipping all those involved in development in Mauritius with appropriate guidance on designing and assessing new development and regeneration projects.
The aim of the Design Guidance is to encourage a more positive emphasis on performance criteria rather than rely on rigid standards and norms. Standards specify strictly how a development is to be designed (by setting out minimum distances between buildings, for example). Performance criteria are the means of assessing the extent to which a development fulfills a specific planning requirement (such as privacy). Imaginative designers can respond to performance criteria with a variety of design solutions.

2.4 Who Should Use the Design Guidance?

The overall message is that there is a need for everyone involved in land development to contribute to a culture of high quality design in Mauritius:

- Government and Local Authority officers will use the Design Guidance to enable the practical application of national and local planning policy and the management and control of development.
- Project promoters, developers, designers and individual property owners should use the Design Guidance to prepare proposals using appropriate design principles.

2.5 How to Use the Design Guidance - Flexibility

The Design Guidance has been prepared against a changing and evolving land development background and therefore cannot be over-prescriptive:

- Fundamental changes are taking place in public policy, technological development and environmental thinking, which will continue to have significant implications for planning and development design.
- Each site is different and there can be no standard or pre-determined design formula.
- Achieving an acceptable form of development involves a balance of issues. Each solution involves a compromise between competing ideals.

The Design Guidance does not prescribe rules and should be applied with a measure of flexibility. Development design is not a “tick box” exercise. Rather, the Design Guidance sets out a range of design issues and corresponding principles that are regarded as necessary to consider in formulating acceptable design responses.

The Design Guidance should be seen as a solid basis of practical design solutions to stimulate developer innovation and local interpretation. However, it is the developer’s responsibility to demonstrate sound reasons for any proposed departure from the guidance.
3 URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

3.1 Design Principles

The description opposite provides an understanding that the urban design process should include consideration of the following key aspects:

- The creation of schemes that are safe, comfortable, distinctive, varied and attractive.
- The creation of schemes that improve their surrounding environments.
- The creation of schemes that are easy to get to and move through, and that offer a range of choices as to the preferred mode of travel.
- The creation of schemes that are integrated with the natural and manmade landscape, and that respond positively to climate, landform, and ecology.

This section provides a broad introduction to the key principles of urban design and the process of creating quality places.

It should be noted that the term “urban design” does not necessarily imply only places that are characterised by high intensities of development, or that are located in town centres. The qualities and processes apply equally to out of town situations where lower densities might be needed in developments or that are predominantly single use in character.

3.2 Urban Design Qualities

The following elements combine to make memorable places that are lively and distinctive:

- character
- continuity and enclosure
- permeability
- legibility
- quality of the public realm
- ease of movement
- robustness
- diversity

These qualities are described in the following diagrams.
DESIGN GUIDANCE Urban Design Principles

**Permeability**
The degree of physical and visual accessibility; more specifically, maximising the number and variety of connections with surrounding streets and activities, and making their roles clear to potential users.

**Continuity and Enclosure**
The degree to which the built form succeeds in clarifying the distinction between public and private realms. The creation of distinct edges for an area is also a means of enhancing legibility.

**Legibility**
The extent to which people can understand the layout of an area and find their way around it. This includes cues from three-dimensional forms, and the way in which the appearance of buildings and places allows people to understand their context and function. It also includes the establishment of a coherent visual and physical character for an area.

**Quality of the Public Realm**
The creation of an accessible, active and clearly defined public open space system.

**Ease of Movement**
The creation of sustainable movement systems that permit maximum choice of mode and direction of travel, plus strong connections with the surrounding environment.

**Character**
The positive features that make a place special and memorable. This includes the specific character of building traditions and materials, landscape, patterns of life, and similar factors that serve to differentiate one place from another.

**Robustness**
The ability for a set of buildings or places to be used for more than one purpose or to change their function over time, in both the short and long terms.

**Diversity**
The provision of a range of experiences, in both spatial and activity terms, including the creation of a variety of land uses within close proximity.

**Landmark Structure**

**Corner Treatment**

**Gateway**

**Continuity and Enclosure**

**Legibility**

**Permeability**

**Quality of the Public Realm**

**Ease of Movement**

**Character**

**Robustness**

**Diversity**
**District and Block**
Districts and blocks are defined by the distinctiveness of their grain and character, and by the continuity of their edges (see below). When the edges are not relatively continuous the district loses identity, and there is a lack of clear distinction between public and private spaces. This also applies at the scale of a street block, where the building spacing should be such that private space is clearly contained in the depth of the block.

**Nodes**
Nodes are places of focus within a district or block, that exercise a pull for the local community. They are commonly the places where community facilities such as shops, clinics and community halls, are located.

**Edges**
Continuous edges help to define the boundaries of the district or block. If the edges are broken by excessive spaces between buildings the distinction between inside and outside, or public and private space, becomes blurred, leading to loss of identity and potential lack of security.

**Corners and Gateways**
By paying careful attention to the design of significant corners and gateways it is possible to enhance the legibility of the edges and therefore of the block or district.
3.3 Urban Design Process

The process of urban design involves four elements:

- Appraisal of the context in which the development is to be located
- Defining the framework within which the development will take place
- Connecting the development to movement and utilities systems
- Designing the details that make the place unique

3.3.1 The Context

The context of a development is the character and setting of its surrounding environment. It comprises natural and human elements, including the form of the built environment and its open spaces, history, culture, location, patterns of movement and local community identity.

An understanding of context informs the design process and assists with the creation of new places that are distinct from, but also compatible with, existing built environments and communities.

Context analysis includes the following elements:

- Appraisal of existing community
- Assessment of physical and visual character
- Appraisal of natural and manmade environments
- Assessment of linkages – movement and utilities systems

3.3.2 The Structure

The structure is the pattern of blocks, streets, buildings and open spaces that work together to create an identifiable development. When considering the structure it is the relationships between these elements, rather than individual details, that work to make a place unique and complete.

The object of designing a coherent structure is to create a framework that forms the basis for the detailed design of individual elements. The design of the framework should take into consideration the qualities of urban design described in the previous section.

In particular the following elements should be studied:

- Pattern and grain - both internally and in relation to any existing context
- Movement and utilities framework - providing connections
**Urban Design Principles**

- Legibility, landmarks and views - making the place legible, and linking it with significant external vistas
- Blocks and plots - creating meaningful development packages
- Density and form - determining appropriate intensities of development
- Mixing uses - providing vitality, robustness and sustainability
- Landscape - considering the role of natural and manmade open space

The new structure builds a framework of blocks that are compatible in terms of intensity of development, pattern and grain. Gateways and nodes are established, and vistas to significant landmarks are protected. A major node is created, and an appropriate mixture of uses created around it so that it acts as a focus for the community that has been created.
3.3.3 Connections

Developments cannot exist in isolation – they depend on linkages and interactions with the movement and utility systems of the surrounding context. These connections are also an indication of the character of an existing context, and they play a key role in physically and visually integrating a new development.

Successful integration with existing connections therefore determines functional performance and contributes to the quality and character of the new development. The following elements are significant in this context:

- Linking and connecting (roads and services)
- Movement choices
- Modes of travel
- Parking capacity and layout
- Traffic management

3.3.4 Detail Design

In urban design terms this means the composition and detailing of building masses and the open space that binds them. Successful application of detail design principles will assist in the creation of places that are coherent and memorable and that enjoy their own unique identity, while functioning effectively in the wider context of their surrounding environments.

The elements of detail design that should be considered include:

- The Public Realm - creating public spaces that are active, safe and unique
- Massing - arranging building massing to create focal points and emphasise important locations
- Robustness - designing for change over time
- Building and Open Space Design Details - using design elements that make a place unique