

Planning for Beautiful Placemaking

The recent consultation on amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), saw the introduction of the new objective 'creating beautiful places'. The origins of this new objective emerged from the Living with Beauty report prepared by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission published in January 2020. The report was particularly critical of developments that have neglected to recognise their context, local character, or introduce vital facilities to support the new or existing community.

As landowners looking to release land for development, land agents, town planners, urban designers, housebuilders and in fact the whole development industry, we all set out with the aim of creating high quality and ultimately beautiful places, even if historically the reality has fallen somewhat short of the initial good intentions. This is why, at Catesby Estates, we have a specialist in-house urban design team focused on the achievement of planning consents which support developing well design housing development, with a focus on the environment and local community, whilst also maximising land value for landowners.

The introduction of the word beautiful has seen significant debate amongst the planning, design and legal community. There is a general consensus that the achievement of 'beautiful' is enormously difficult to define, and raises a range of far-reaching questions such as: how will it be measured; who will measure it; are

resources and skills available to support creation of beautiful places, and indeed will we all agree that the final outcome is beautiful if there is no fixed definition?

The consultation of the NPPF has recently ended, so we now wait to see whether the term beautiful will remain unchanged. Perhaps a definition in the next published version will shortcut much of the legal debate.

Notwithstanding that view, the government's objective of enhanced design and place making has never been clearer. Fully engaging local government planners and communities in the design debate has been woven throughout its recent consultation draft of the National Model Design Code (NMDC). It places a strong emphasis on the importance of consultation at every stage of the design process. For the planning process to work effectively, land promoters, housebuilders, councils and residents need to work together in partnership to achieve a positive outcome from residential development for local communities.

We believe the key to our planning success rate is our collaborative approach and commitment to delivering sensitively designed housing developments tailored to the character of the local area and providing real community benefits. As a result, our landowners are justifiably proud of the legacies that they leave for future generations.

The NMDC offers a toolkit of design guidance to support local authorities and communities in the pursuit of design quality. It suggests a variety of methods to firstly understand the nuances and characteristics of a local area and how to make meaningful recommendations to guide design in a locally specific way. The intention being that there is a common, published, understanding and set of expectations that development should achieve thereby smoothing the way for planning permissions.

However, recognising that skills and resources are not always available in local authorities, the NMDC also acknowledges that a code can be prepared by a Neighbourhood Plan group, or the landowner(s) selected team. Catesby Estates have a strong track record of leading local character analysis and preparing design guidance and coding with local communities to successfully deliver planning permissions that will deliver high quality and beautiful places of the future.

Acknowledging the significant roles local stakeholders play in the planning process we have an in-house communications team who engage directly with stakeholders, rather than using external third-party agencies.

Could your land have development potential?
Find out more about land promotion:

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