

Chapter 5
Urban Design
Framework



5. URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 The quality of the built environment is vital in ensuring the success of the Borough's town centres.
- 5.2 In order to achieve high quality, the plan does not intend to set out rigid design standards but emphasises key design objectives and principles. These will lead to good urban design and will enhance the particular character of the Atherton Centreplan area.
- 5.3 **The key objectives or principles of Urban Design can be described as:**
- (a) **creating a place with its own character and identity;**
 - (b) **ensuring that public and private spaces can be clearly distinguished;**
 - (c) **making places with attractive and successful outdoor areas;**
 - (d) **ensuring ease of movement through the area and connecting people and places;**
 - (e) **creating a legible environment with recognisable routes and landmarks;**
 - (f) **promoting adaptability in buildings and areas;**
 - (g) **making places with variety and choice that respond to local needs.**
 - (h) **ensuring quality of architectural detail and materials.**
- 5.4 The embracing of these principles, which are taken from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environments 'By Design' publication will help to promote sustainable development, attract business and investment and reinforce civic pride.

The above principles will have varying degrees of relevance to Atherton Town Centre. The following section attempts to relate these principles to the

Atherton Centreplan area and sets out a broad framework for Urban Design

within the area.

- 5.5 The town has a number of positive townscape features which help to forge the area's individual character and which should be reinforced and enhanced. These include:
- (i) **The Market Place Conservation Area** - Proposals should seek to improve the setting of the St John the Baptist Church. Modifications to shop fronts should be of a style which is sympathetic to the age and character of the building as a whole.
 - (ii) **Bolton Old Road/The Valley** - The mixed character and scale of this area should be preserved and enhanced. The relationship between the listed chapel, former Minister's house, terraced housing and the larger Victoria Mill creates a visually interesting area which reflects the development of the town and its industrial heritage.
 - (iii) **The presence of stone setts** in several streets is an attractive traditional feature and also has a traffic calming effect. These should be preserved wherever possible.
- 5.6 The Centreplan area is characterised by terraced housing and shops, many of which are built up to the back of the established footpath. New infill developments should maintain this strong urban form, clearly define the boundaries between public and private space and maintain a suitable sense of enclosure. There are a number of sites where improved boundary treatments will help to emphasise the boundaries between public and private areas.
- 5.7 The most important public realm areas are probably Central Park and the main shopping streets around Market Place and Market Street. Both these areas require improvements to make them safer, more attractive, better used and to restore civic pride.

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5.7 The key principles to be considered when carrying out works to these areas (and other public spaces) are:

- a clear relationship between the space and the buildings around it;
- its use and purpose;
- areas should feel safe with natural surveillance;
- high quality appropriate materials and street furniture should be used;
- public art should be considered where possible.

5.8 The convenience, safety and comfort of people using the town centre is of particular importance given the identified conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles within the main shopping streets.

Whilst the urban structure of the centre is not expected to change significantly, there is scope to modify transport routes and redesign Market Street and Market Place as public spaces rather than purely traffic routes.

The existing close urban grain created by the traditional terraced housing and shops has created a strong network of footpaths and this should be enhanced through measures such as better lighting, drop kerbs, pedestrian signage, etc.

5.9 Existing landmark buildings such as Atherton Town Hall, Ena Mill and Victoria Mill and St. John the Baptist Church and adjacent obelisk help people find their way around the area and create a unique 'sense of place'.

Views of these buildings, together with important routes that lead to them, should be safeguarded and enhanced.

5.10 Planning policies must be flexible enough to allow the town centre to adapt. In particular, the lack of demand for small retail units around the periphery of the town centre has created problems of vacancy and dereliction. The conversion of these properties to residential use can help to bring these buildings back into use and improve the vitality of the centre.

5.11 The principal shopping area is dominated by small scale retail units and is well used during the daytime hours of Monday to Saturday. At other times the limited range of leisure facilities limit the use and vitality of this area. The

relative lack of evening activity is not helped by the extensive use of solid steel roller shutters along Market Street which creates an uninviting dead frontage.

Planning proposals should seek to create the right mix of uses within the area which increases evening activity and vitality, improves personal safety and creates more sustainable patterns of development. The use of suitable alternatives to the solid roller shutters to commercial premises will help to achieve this aim.

5.12 Attention to detail and the use of high quality, sympathetic materials are particularly important within the Centreplan area, where the appearance of buildings, individually or as a group, is part of the overall visitor experience. Developments and modifications to buildings should use high quality sympathetic materials and incorporate features which provide a high level of detail and visual interest.

5.13 The following chapter translates the broad objectives of the plan and the key urban design principles into detailed proposals and opportunities within the plan area.