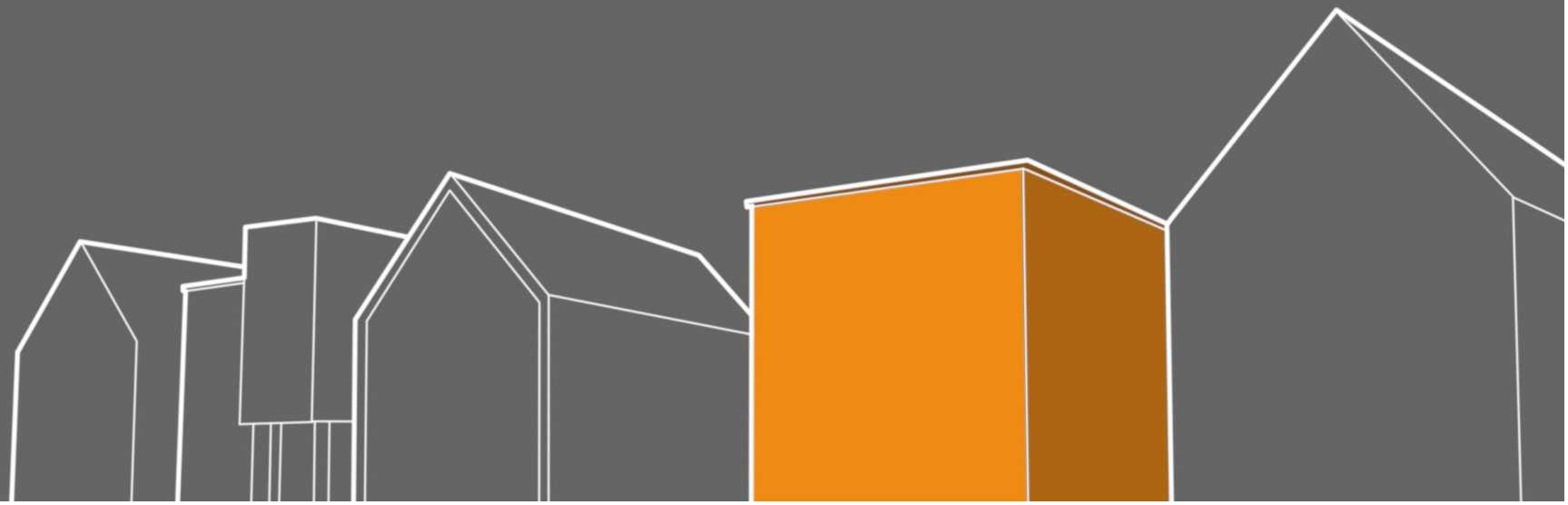
Self-build and Custom Build Design Code Template

PL039

January 2021

Design Code Guidance for Strategic Growth Sites and Sites with Multiple Serviced Plots



Chelmsford City Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 Commitment to self-build and custom build homes

The development of self-build and custom build homes by individuals or community groups can help to meet the need for additional housing and provide a more diverse housing stock. Based on Chelmsford's current self-build and custom build register and projected demand until 2036, 5% of new homes on larger housing schemes will need to be built on self-build/custom build plots. **Policy DM1** within the Local Plan therefore requires 5% self-build homes (which can include custom housebuilding) within all developments of more than 100 dwellings.

1.2 Purpose of this document

The Self-build and Custom Build Design Code Template has been prepared in support of the **Planning Obligations** Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD). The Planning Obligations SPD states that sites with multiple serviced plots or other forms of self-build and custom housebuilding provision, will be required to be supported by a Design Code at outline planning stage.

The purpose of the current document is to provide a template and supporting guidance to developers to ensure consistency across development sites and give developers greater certainty in the preparation of site-specific Design Codes.

The focus of this document is principally the structure and broad content of Self-build and Custom Build Design Codes. The detailed design parameters within each Design Code will vary depending on the scale and context. For more detailed design guidance, please refer to the Council's **Making Places** SPD.

1.3 Definition of self-build and custom housebuilding

Self-build and custom housebuilding means the building or completion by (a) individuals, (b) associations of individuals, or (c) persons working with or for individuals or associations of individuals of houses to be occupied as homes by those individuals. But it does not include the building of a house on a plot acquired from a person who builds the house wholly or mainly to plans or specifications decided or offered by that person.

1.4 Why use a Design Code?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 124 states that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

Self-build and custom housebuilding offer the chance to deliver neighbourhoods that have a greater level of variety with homes that are personalised and tailored to individual lifestyles. While the size and setting of self-build and custom build plots may vary, and individual aspirations will likely differ, the homes built will contribute collectively to the character of a place and it is therefore important that guidance is given to support good placemaking while allowing the greatest level of flexibility.

A Design Code is a form of design guidance that assists with the delivery of high-quality new development and is particularly useful for complex scenarios involving multiple parties. A Design Code is a set of written and visual directions that translates the aims and vision of a masterplan into a specific set of detailed design parameters without establishing the overall outcome. This can give stakeholders, designers, developers and contractors more certainty and help to make high quality places.

2. Approval and Implementation

2.1 When is the Design Code required?

For Strategic Growth Sites, the Council expects that a masterplan will be submitted for approval prior to the submission of an application for outline planning permission. The approved masterplan should communicate the vision for the development and outline how each site will satisfy the requirements of the respective Site Policy.

An application for outline planning permission will need to include the proposed number of Self-build and Custom Build plots and their approximate location within the proposed development. The delivery of the proposed Self-build and Custom Build plots will be secured through a Section 106 Agreement.

A Design Code will be required through planning condition and should be submitted and approved prior to the marketing of any Self-build and Custom Build plots. The detailed design of each plot can then be submitted through an application for reserved matters. These applications will be assessed against the approved Design Code and relevant Local Policies (see **Figure 1**).

2.2 What are developers expected to provide?

For Self-build and Custom Build plots, developers are expected to:

i) Define the location, layout, size and number of Self-build and Custom Build Plots;

ii) Deliver highway works and access to each plot;

iii) Provide landscaping and public realm works outside of the proposed Self-build and Custom Build Plots;

iv) Provide utility and drainage connections; and

v) Prepare design guidance in the form of a Design Code.

2.3 Design Code Structure

Design Codes should adhere to the following structure:

a) Introduction

b) Site Wide Vision (required for strategic scale sites)

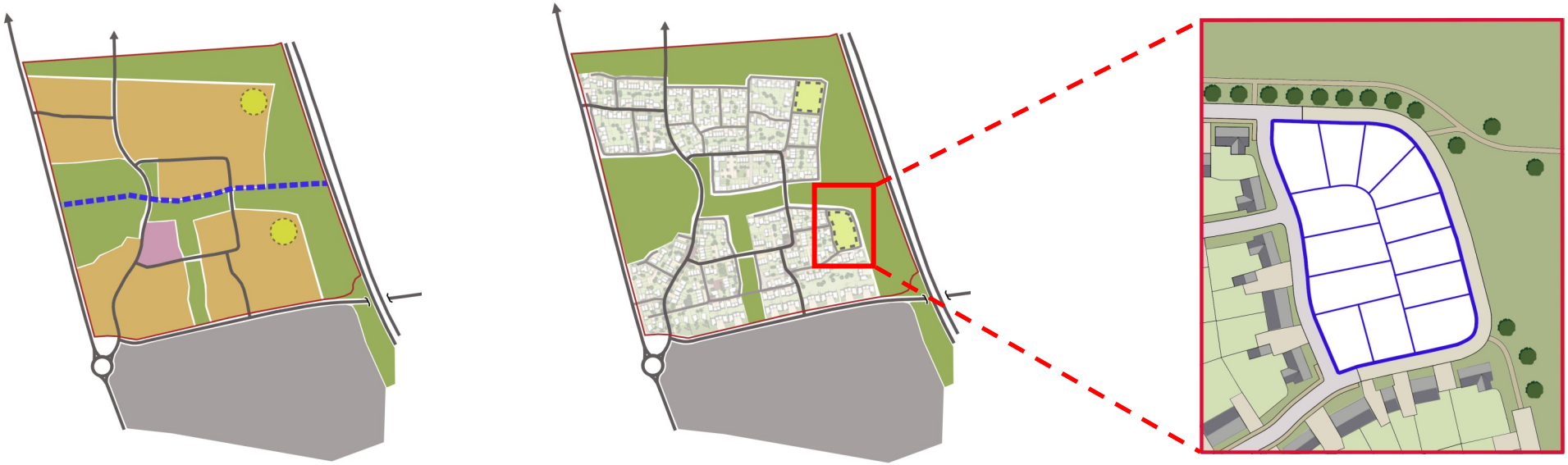
c) Site and Context Overview

d) Self-build and Custom Build Character and Delivery Approach

e) Design Code (General Design Guidance)

f) Plot Passport (Plot Specific Design Parameters)

Figure 1: Indicative process for Self-build and Custom Build planning approval



Masterplan Submission

All potential Self-build/Custom Build areas indicated with high level consideration given to:

- General approach to delivery (e.g. individual self-build/custom build, group self-build/custom build, developer-led self-build/custom build).
- Character Areas
- Potential Phasing
- Construction Management

Outline Planning Application

All Self-build/Custom Build areas shown on indicative layout plan and relevant parameter plans.

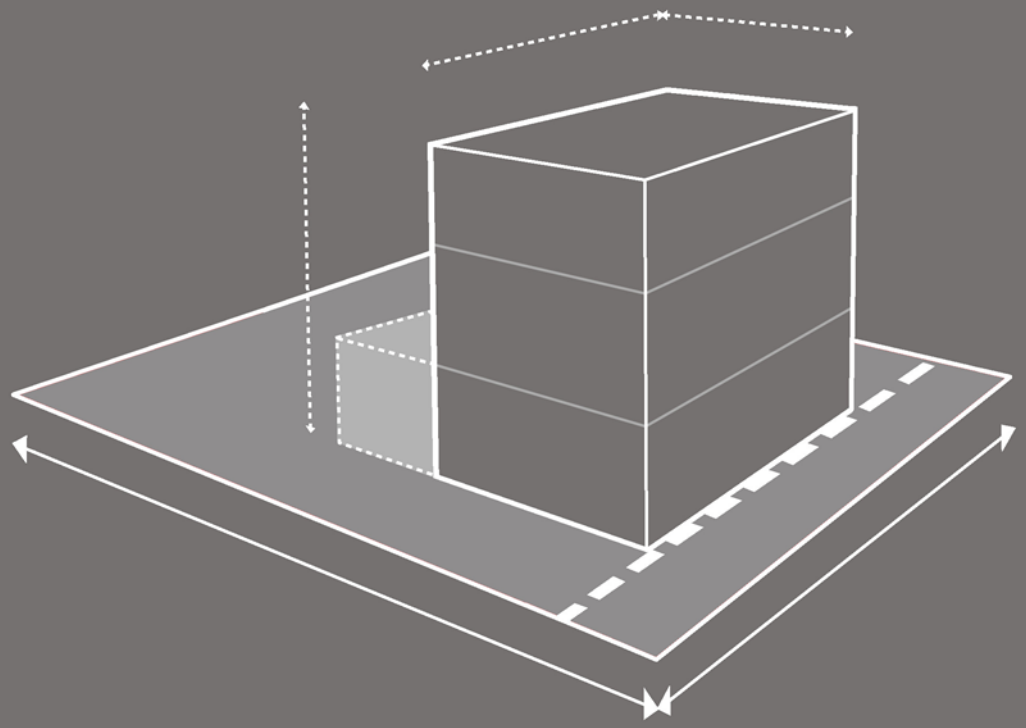
S106 Agreement will secure delivery of Self-build Custom Build plots and a planning condition will require the submission of Design Code/s.

Reserved Matters Application

Reserved Matters Application/s to establish detailed layout excluding Self-Build/Custom Build plots but plot areas are defined. This must be established before the submission of the proposed Design Code.

Following the approval of the Design Code, Reserved Matters Applications can be submitted for individual plots.

3. Design Code Template



3.1 Context and Self-Build Character

3.1.1 Setting the Context

The masterplan approved for each strategic growth site will set out a clear vision for the wider development that will ultimately guide the preparation and assessment of outline and reserved matters applications. The role of a design code is to operationalise the vision for a particular site or area. In this instance the area/s identified for the provision of Self-Build and Custom Build plots.

The first section of prepared Design Codes should set out the context of each Self-Build and Custom Build area including the wider vision, character areas, and the surrounding physical features.

This should include reference to the wider masterplan or outline planning approval, the location of the Self-Build and Custom Build area/s, details of existing and/or proposed adjacent development and the roads and landscaping to be delivered around the Self-Build and Custom Build plots.

Almere, Netherlands

3.1.2 Defining the character

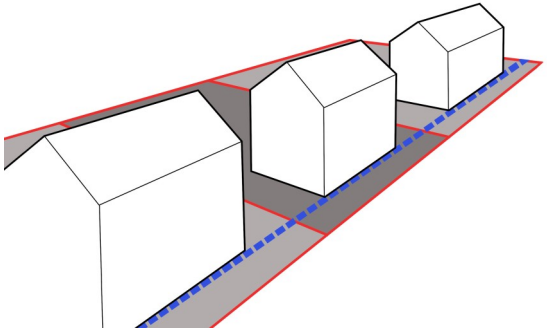
The intended character of the Self-Build/Custom Build area/s must be clearly defined. This may vary if the plots are delivered in more than one location.

The context and setting of each Self-Build/Custom Build area and intended method of delivery should inform the intended character. While the character of the Self-Build/Custom Build area will need to be coherent and appropriate with the wider masterplan vision and surrounding context, it can be distinctive and innovative.

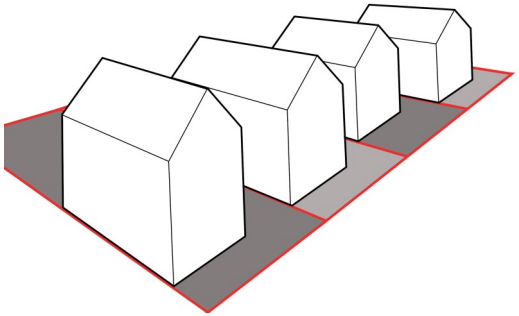
Identifying the intended character is essential to the remainder of the design code. This should inform all remaining sections of the document and ultimately determine which sections within the design code allow a greater or lesser degree of design flexibility.

3.2 Plot Parameters

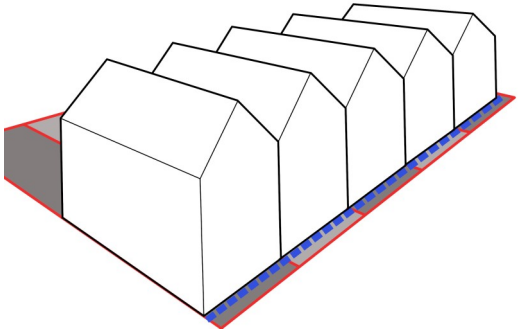
Example: Impact of Design Code criteria on character of development



Plot Form: Generous plots
Plot Orientation: Fronting public realm
Density: Low
Building Types: Detached
Building Line: Minimum Setback



Plot Form: Narrow plots
Plot Orientation: Fronting public realm
Density: Average
Building Types: Detached
Building Line: Not defined



Plot Form: Narrow plots
Plot Orientation: Fronting public realm
Density: High
Building Types: Terraced
Building Line: Tight to public realm

After establishing the context and intended character, the Design Code will need to define the plot parameters. This should include; Plot Form, Plot Orientation, Density, Building Types and any requirements in relation to building lines. These do not need to be mentioned specifically but should be communicated clearly through written guidance and the use of simple diagrams.

Diagram Example

Plot Form – Plot form is defined by the width and depth of the plot. While this will likely vary from plot to plot, the size of plots within each area should be largely consistent as this will be informed by the masterplan vision, character area and the surrounding context including the proposed street type, landscaping and adjacent existing and proposed development. For example, more generous sized plots would be appropriate for development with a rural character and generous landscaping.

Plot Orientation – The design code should define the orientation and key frontages of each plot. Plots must all face the public realm and plots located on the corner of blocks should turn the corner to ensure that an active frontage is presented to the street.

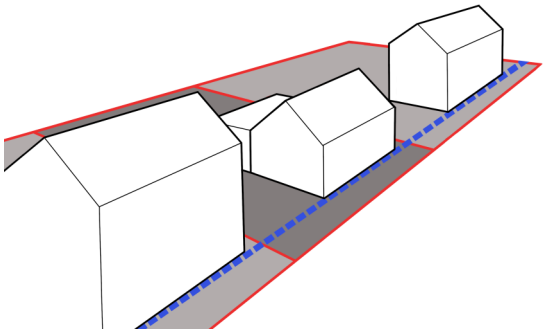
Density – This will be indicated by the Plot Form and grouping of plots. As with Plot Form, this should respond to the surrounding context and self-build and custom build vision.

Building Types – Like density, the building types should be indicated by the plot form and grouping of plots. However, this will also be guided by the intended approach for implementation. For example, terraced homes may be more suitable for a custom build approach to delivery.

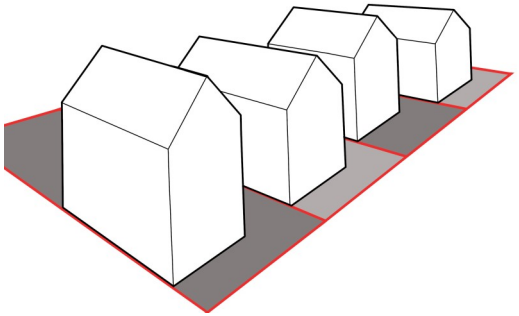
Building Lines – Setting a building line can have a significant impact on the character of the development. This should be informed by the existing and proposed context. A strong building line can be achieved by setting a minimum or maximum setback. A looser arrangement may be achieved without setting a building line but instead defining a build area to ensure that buildings are not set too far forward or back.

3.3 Building Mass and Scale

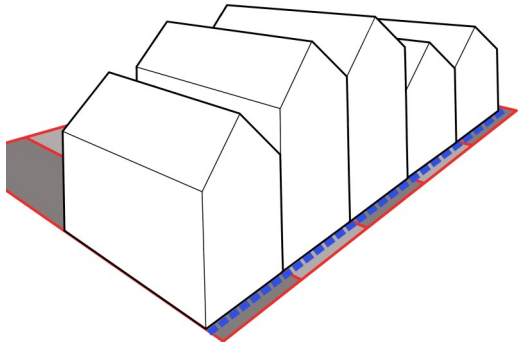
Example: Impact of Design Code criteria on character of development



Single storey development allowed and maximum eaves height defined.



Restricted to two storeys but variation in height allowed.



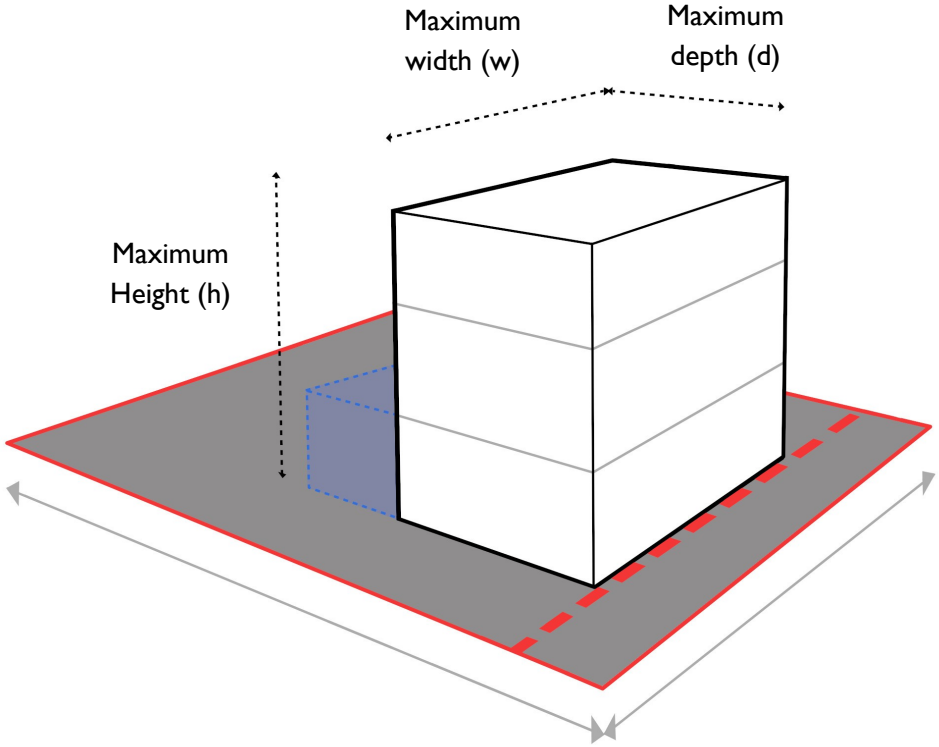
Three storeys allowed but no development below two storeys.

The Design Code should set criteria relating to the mass and scale of the development. It is possible that this may change depending on the plot. While the detailed measurements may be defined within the individual plot passports, the design code should communicate the overriding approach.

Developable Footprint – This can be defined in a number of ways but should seek to establish a build zone or area. This might be set using a minimum setback from the rear and sides of plot boundaries or through the use of a maximum internal floor area.

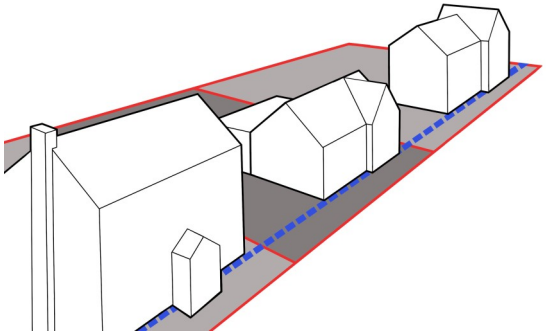
Building Storeys and Height – The design code must define the scale of development. The code should first establish a maximum or minimum number of storeys. It can then detail any restrictions on height e.g. maximum or minimum height, maximum eaves height etc.

Diagram Example

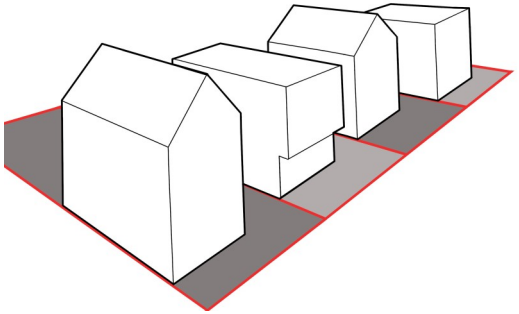


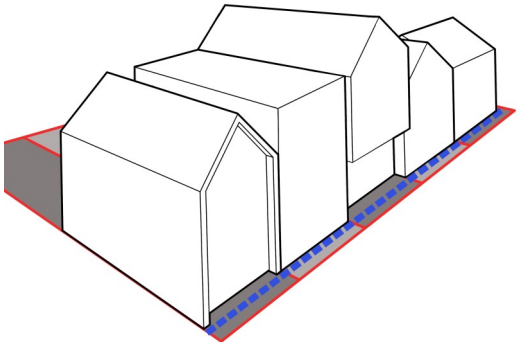
3.4 Streetscape Features

Example: Impact of Design Code criteria on character of development



This section of the Design Code should establish features that will define the streetscape. It may consist of only a few key defined elements, a general guide or a more thorough list of design features and accepted approaches.





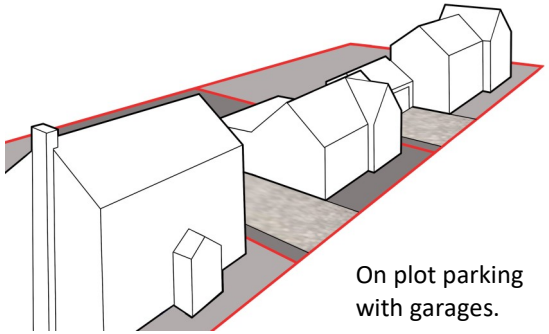
Roof types – Does the design code need to define the approach to roof design? Are pitched or flat roofs accepted? Should the pitch of the roof be controlled?

Proportions and Articulation – The developable footprint will define the build area or zone but it may also be necessary to provide further guidance on the articulation of the built form.

Architectural Details – Any criteria relating to specific details, e.g. Porches, Projections, Windows.

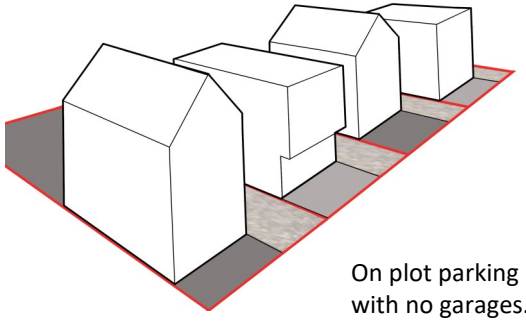
3.5 Parking and Cycle Storage

Example: Impact of Design Code criteria on character of development

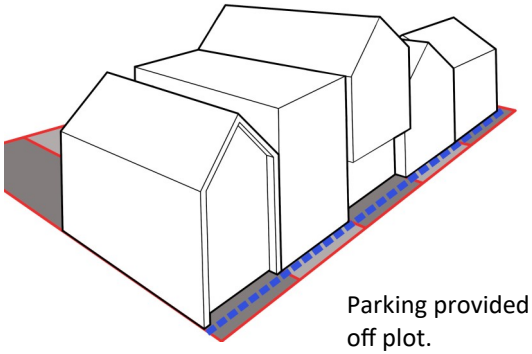


On plot parking with garages.

The Design Code must define the approach to vehicle parking and cycle storage. The level of provision will be defined by local policy but the guide should establish how these spaces will accommodated for each plot. Please see Making Places SPD for further guidance.

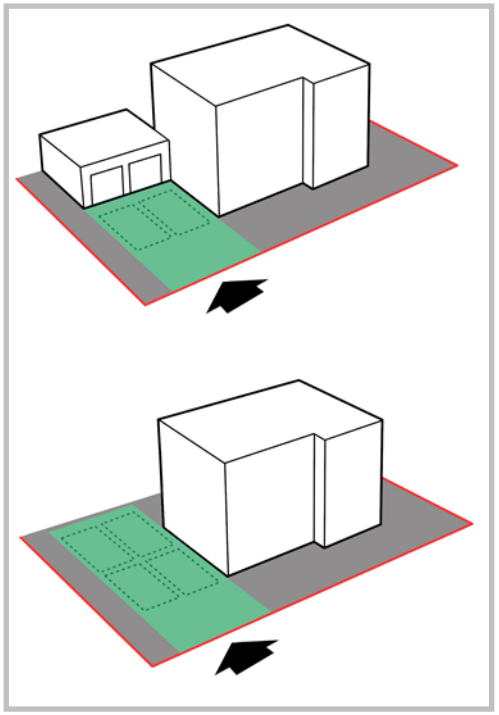


On plot parking with no garages.



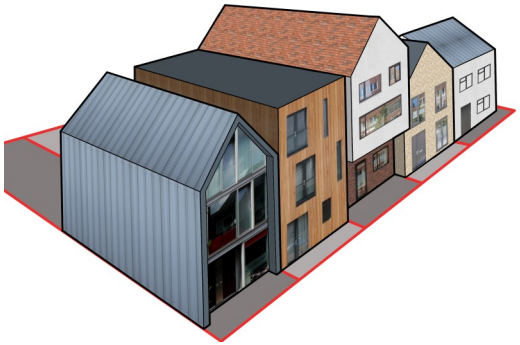
Parking provided off plot.

Diagram Example



3.6 External Materials

Example: Impact of Design Code criteria on character of development



The Design Code should provide guidance in relation to material treatment of the walls and roofs. This can be represented in a material palette. This should only seek to guide plot owners and should not be overly prescriptive. For further guidance on external materials please see the Making Places SPD.

Diagram Example

Wall Materials

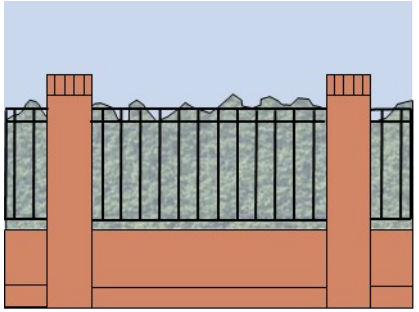
Roof Materials

3.7 Boundary Treatments

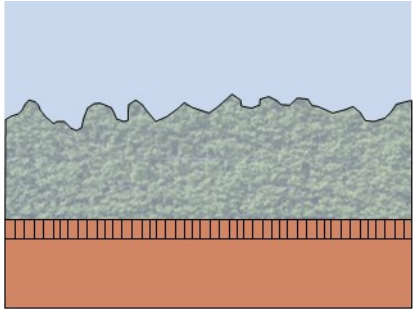
The Design Code should define the criteria for boundary treatments, especially boundaries with the public realm. This should include parameters such as:

- **Boundary Treatment Type**
- **Materials & Planting**
- **Location**
- **Dimensions (e.g. maximum height)**

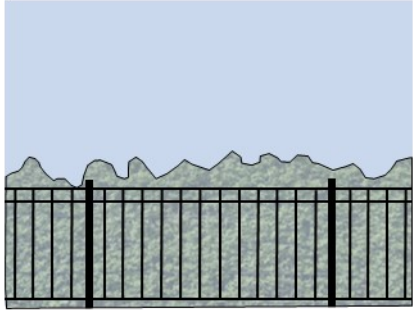
Diagram Example



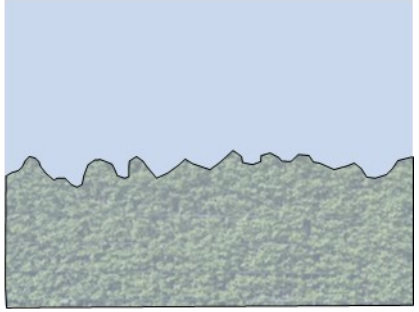
Wall and Railing



Wall and Boundary hedge



Railing and Boundary hedge



Boundary hedge

3.8 Other Guidance

Depending on the delivery approach, house types and context further guidance may be required. This may include:

- **Refuse Collection (see Making Places SPD)**
- **Water Use and Renewable Energy**
- **Sustainable Design Features**
- **Landscaping**

Diagram Example

3.9 Plot Passport

The Council will support the use of Plot Passports for self-build and custom housebuilding development where supported by a Design Code.

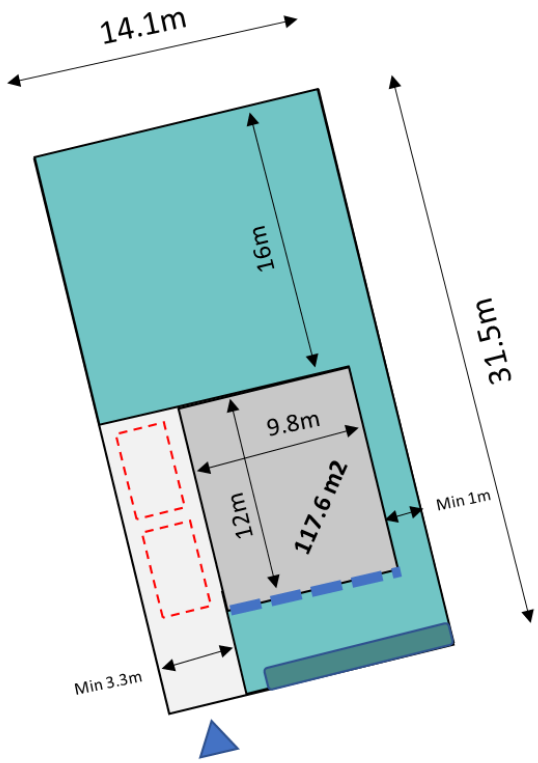
Plot Passports should provide potential plot purchasers with a simple and concise summary of the design parameters for a specific plot. It should clearly show the location, permissible building lines, heights, footprints and access to services as well as separation distances to adjacent plots. A Plot Passport should also be clear about the number of dwellings that can be built on a single plot as well as specifying car parking provision and access arrangements. Plot Passports will need to state how, and for what period, purchasers that reside or work in the administrative area of Chelmsford City Council are prioritized.

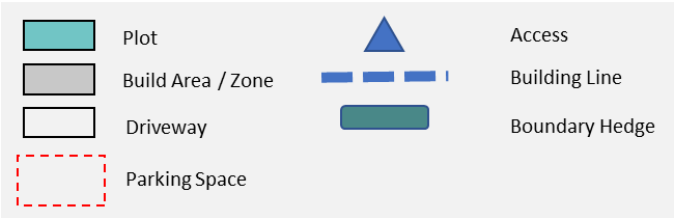
Plot Passport Example

PLOT NUMBER: 5
PLOT AREA: 117.6m2
HOUSE TYPE: Detached 3 Bedroom House
PARKING PROVISION: 2 spaces
MAXIMUM NUMBER OF STOREYS: 2
MINIMUM NUMBER OF STOREYS: 1

BUILD RULES

All relevant rules should be detailed in accordance with the approved Design Guide.





4. Summary and Interpretation

This document aims to provide a framework and supporting guidance to ensure consistency across development sites, giving developers greater certainty in the preparation of site-specific Design Codes and aid Council Officers in their assessment of these following submission. The Self-Build and Custom Build Design Code Template has not been produced to limit the parameters considered or present an exhaustive list of content. The level of detail and criteria identified will depend on the scale of the development, the approach to delivery and the existing and proposed context of the proposal site.

While the detailed parameters and level of design control will vary between sites, all presented criteria needs to be clear and easy to understand, and should be informed directly from the defined vision/character and the site context. Self-build and custom housebuilding offer the chance to deliver neighbourhoods that have a greater level of variety with homes that are personalised and tailored to individual lifestyles. Each design code must therefore seek to strike a balance and provide sufficient detail and design control to deliver a cohesive high quality new development without overly constraining the flexibility and design freedom that makes Self-build and Custom Build an attractive prospect.

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