5 Fundamental design principles

The ADF plan indicates just one of many possible scenarios for the future of the town centre. It reflects the key objectives outlined above and illustrates the sort of development to which the people of Dudley aspire, as confirmed through overwhelming public support for the draft proposals.

The plan has evolved through a design process which has examined known opportunities and constraints, current and emerging development proposals, local opinion (gleaned through consultation) and market potential. A number of key opportunities have been worked up to a level of detail that is sufficient to begin to assess development impacts and outputs. Although illustrative, the framework plan is therefore realistic. Nevertheless, considerable further work would need to be done to bring forward detailed proposals for planning consent.

New ideas will emerge in response to the ADF and as projects are progressed they will inevitably evolve in response to detailed technical work on issues such as utility requirements, land ownership, transport impact, archaeology, ecology and visual impact.

The important pre-requisite for achieving the overall objectives is that what is eventually implemented adheres to the fundamental design principles that will ensure that the impact on Dudley town centre as a whole is a positive one. Adhering to the following principles, described in more detail below, will help to ensure the framework objectives are met:

- A traditional pattern of streets and public spaces
- Connected quarters
- Pedestrian priority
- A compact retail core
- Perimeter block development and active frontages
- Balanced and discrete parking provision
- Integrated public transport
- Mixed use
- Distinctive and robust architecture
- High quality hard and soft landscaping

In reviewing planning applications and working in partnership to bring forward development proposals the Council, particularly through its development control function, will have a vital role to play in ensuring that schemes adopt these principles. Through adoption of the ADF as Supplementary Planning Guidance this checklist of design principles will become a more effective development control tool.

A traditional pattern of streets and public spaces

The layout of streets and spaces in the north-west of the town centre must be maintained and a similar approach adopted to the provision of a new street network south of King Street.

The streets and public spaces of the town centre, as well as the built form that defines and contains them comprise the ‘public realm’. The town centre should have a fine grained, interconnected pattern of streets and open spaces. New streets should be planned as a natural extension of the existing network in the north of the town.

A public realm of the highest quality will create long term value and underpin investment in Dudley town centre. The character and feel of the public realm has potential to leave a lasting impression upon visitors and potential residents and will therefore play a large part in the “branding” of the town centre. The priority is to maintain a distinctive, human scale environment punctuated by a series of high quality public spaces and landmarks.
The pattern of medieval ‘entries’ that connect through development blocks in the medieval parts of the town centre (such as Long Entry between King Street and the High Street, and Green Man Entry between Castle Street and Tower Street) should be retained to increase pedestrian connectivity but also maintain the historic character of the town centre area. Where new development is proposed opportunities for new connections of this kind, that are well designed and overlooked, should also be considered.

The elevations of new buildings, the associated hard and soft landscape, paving, street furniture, bus shelters and all other features contributing to the public realm should help to reinforce identity and a sense of place, with key features highlighted to provide a memorable pattern of streets and spaces. The quality of finish and maintenance of the public realm is paramount. The first joy of being in the town should be the experience of strolling, driving and sitting within its street and spaces.

Streets should be well lit with surfacing materials that unobtrusively guide pedestrians and cyclists, signalling changes in movement or priority, through texture, tone and pattern. A consistent palette of high quality materials applied and maintained across the town centre will help to firmly establish the character and identity.

Connected quarters

New areas of development must be connected into the existing fabric of the town centre and other attractions on the periphery (including the castle, the zoo, Priory Park and Castlegate). This should be achieved by connecting streets and ensuring continuity of built frontage so people can walk and cycle directly, without obstacle, through and between the quarters of the town; and are encouraged to do so by the quality of the surrounding environment and active uses along the way.

The network of streets should be appropriate in scale and design to the town centre environment. This means generous pavements, minimum carriageway widths and compact junction arrangements appropriate for both vehicular traffic and public transport (integrating Midland Metro where appropriate). Streets should be designed to ensure that people can walk easily and conveniently to where they need to be without being diverted from natural desire lines and minimising the need to cross busy roads. Where vehicular routes do present a potential obstacle to pedestrian movement unobtrusive traffic calming and pedestrian crossing facilities should be incorporated into the street design.

Pedestrian priority

Access to the centre by car is welcomed but within the heart of the town speeds should be kept slow and the movement of people on foot should be given priority.
A compact retail core

There is potential for new retail investment in Dudley and it should be located and designed to reinforce the continuing role of the market place as a principal retail destination and create a compact, vibrant and integrated retail core. If significant retail development occurs that does not effectively relate to the established retail core then the vitality and potential for revitalisation of this area will very likely be threatened.

If significant new retail development is brought forward south of King Street (as provided for in the UDP) the layout should contribute to the creation of a legible and logical circular pedestrian route that connects the main shopping anchors, including the market and the churchill centre.

As the retail core consolidates around and to the south of the market place, change of use of some peripheral and outdated retail accommodation (such as at the end of the High Street and Castle Street), will be inevitable.

Balanced and discrete parking provision

Surface car parking represents an extremely inefficient use of valuable land within a town centre. Condensing surface parking into bright, modern, multi storey car parks, positioned behind other uses away from the street frontage, will free land to make way for new development without impacting upon the overall provision of car parking.

In reinstating a concentric plan for the town it becomes logical to re-distribute parking around the town centre, easily accessible to the retail core (reduce predominance of parking on the south side). The framework provides clear guidance on where large car parks should be located. As the options for accommodating large ‘public’ car parks are limited there is little flexibility in this element of the framework and new development will need to accommodate parking in the locations indicated.

Perimeter block development and active frontages

Town centre users want to experience a well defined, interesting, varied and safe environment. The relationship between buildings and the public realm is the critical factor in creating these conditions.

Blank frontages create monotonous and hostile environments, as do large, featureless surface car parks.

Buildings should be positioned around the edge of development blocks with ‘private’ space (such as gardens, car parking and service yards) located discretely behind the buildings in the centre of the block. Streets and spaces will then be enclosed by the facades of buildings. Main entrance points should be taken from the street and windows positioned overlooking it to create an intimate, active and attractive streetscape. A higher frequency of doors and windows creates a busier street, reveals activities going on inside buildings and increases surveillance onto the street, thus promoting a safer pedestrian environment.
Integrated public transport

The infrastructure associated with access into the centre by bus, and in the future by Midland Metro, should be designed as an integral part of the street scene. It should not interrupt or present barriers to pedestrian movement and the quality of materials and finishes should be in keeping with the prevailing character of the street or public space in which it is located.

Mixed use

The ADF is founded upon reinforcing the main existing activities within the centre, particularly the shopping, education and civic functions, whilst introducing an equally strong component of urban living. These principal land uses will support existing and bring potential for new secondary uses, particularly bars, restaurants, cafes, leisure and other small commercial enterprises which should be intermixed, within individual buildings, blocks and streets, with other activities to add to the vitality of the centre.

In designing mixed use environments careful consideration should be given to potential conflicts between activities, particularly in terms of residential amenity. Environmental considerations such as noise, air quality, vibration and access to day light should be considered early in the design process.

Distinctive and robust architecture

There are many fine buildings within Dudley town centre which contribute greatly to its character. A mixture of styles, through which its history from Medieval origins can be traced, is evident. While the historic town plan should be respected, there is considerable scope for new buildings to complement this character providing high quality, contemporary additions to the existing built form. The aim is to promote a progressive design philosophy ensuring that new development is of the highest quality and enriches the architectural stock.
Particular attention should be paid to creating an articulated roofscape within new development which does not detract from existing views and vistas, especially to the castle, but adds interest and variety where appropriate. Servicing structures, such as lift shafts, telecommunications equipment, or air conditioning units, should be hidden from view or carefully integrated into the design of the building.

Adaptable buildings and layouts, constructed of long lasting materials with shallow floor plates which are naturally ventilated and lit, will provide opportunities for changes of use to occur over the longer term and increase flexibility and choice. This means that, should the need arise, the use of an office building could be changed to residential, for example, instead of demolishing and rebuilding. This robust approach is exemplified through the recent redevelopment of the former Court House and British Telecom building within the town centre.

Hard and soft landscaping

Ground surface materials add variety and visual interest through texture, tone and pattern. A high quality standard has recently been set by the Stone Street Square environmental enhancements, and this should provide the benchmark for development across the town centre. Other features, such as boundary walls, railings, and entrance gateways also provide containment to development and can contribute towards establishing identity and a sense of place.

Street trees are an important asset in any town and there is an established tradition of street trees in Dudley, notably in Stone Street, Stone Street Square and Priory Road. They contribute to the appearance and character, filter dust and pollution, and help make streets feel quieter and calmer.

There is a significant opportunity to introduce further street tree planting particularly where existing areas of the public realm are to be enhanced (such as King Street and the area around Porter’s Field and Birmingham Street) as well as in more comprehensive areas of redevelopment, such as the area around Flood Street. Species that have been successful locally and grow well in urban areas include london planes and aphid resistant species of lime (such as *tilia* *cross euchlora*).