

# Inspiring planning - local planning and development awards

## The aim of the awards

The aim of the awards is to recognise good everyday design in developments. There are many awards schemes for the exceptional and the outstanding. This scheme complements those by recognising the more modest developments in a locality eg. householder developments such as the dormer window, rear extension, porch or granny flat. A new building might win and even a scheme to provide parking in front of a house might win, if done well. It need not even be development requiring planning permission. Suitable materials and good building work will be recognised too. Individually such schemes may not be significant but collectively they can change the character of an area. As densities rise, so the problems of extending in a good neighbourly way increase and design becomes even more challenging. As the scheme would be administered locally by councils and their partners (including the local media-which might be encouraged to sponsor them?) it would build the capacity of a wide range of those on the ground to encourage well mannered developments.

## A modest commitment

No huge resources or big trophies are needed, rather councils might work with their civic society for the judging of completed developments and a framed Certificate would suffice. An award could be presented at the beginning of each Planning Committee to the applicant and designer. This should only take five minutes yet would be a very public show of success, a

demonstration that sensitive, well mannered development is something to celebrate. Some councils or societies already operate such a scheme but generally they operate only annually or bi-annually and focus on the outstanding or unusual rather than the everyday. The householder development is where the volume of applications is generated and where the levering up of standards is most required. A framed Certificate in a hallway would become a talking point and should act as a pathfinder to others considering extending. An illustrated Register of Award Winners on a browser terminal at the Town Hall and libraries would be a useful starting point for people seeking to extend. The Register could be part of the 'front-loading' provision-offering benchmarks and assistance to applicants who ask, sometimes with some frustration, 'What does the council want?'

## For the many not the few - 'The people's planning awards'

90% of the planning applications processed by a council are householder applications. They may not be critical to the prosperity of the borough or landmark developments that will put a district on the map. However, they consume vast amounts of time within the council, diverting resource from dealing with the fewer but arguably more important applications that are critical to the sustainable development of an area.

Although many applications are delegated to Officers for decisions a single objection from a neighbour is often sufficient for an application

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to be listed for Committee. So, a full report needs to be prepared, printed, circulated and considered by councillors. It is not unusual for householder applications to comprise three-quarters of the items on an Agenda.

Under the new 'front-loading' arrangements, councils are encouraged to negotiate well in advance to ensure that proposed developments are well designed and considered to reduce the likelihood of objections and produce a more satisfactory design from the outset. Because of staffing constraints and the need to hit targets, councils are finding it difficult to fulfil that requirement. It is clear that if the quality of householder applications could be improved at first base *before they even come into the machine*, then it should release resource right through the system. It offers the opportunity for planners to get onto the front foot and has the potential to engage the public on planning and development in a positive way at a scale they can appreciate. Publicity which celebrates planning and development as a community good can also only be beneficial.

Some councils have established Forums or Panels which bring together councillors, developers, the civic society and others. The awards scheme fits well with such an arrangement and provides a focus for celebration.

## The next steps

It should not be a lengthy or expensive task to establish an awards scheme in your area. The attached notes give a model which can be followed but it is not a case of one size

fits all. Local planning authorities will see what works best for them. Local variations will occur, indeed this is to be welcomed.

## Toolkit for a local Planning and Development Award scheme

What will the awards cover?

Awards will be given to developments within the council's administrative area and should have been completed within the previous year.

Entries will be considered for the following types of schemes:

New buildings

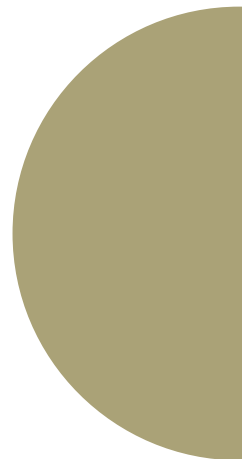
- Alterations to buildings such as extensions, refurbishment, conversions or restorations.
- Landscaped areas (hard or soft) including parking areas and walls.
- Signs, shopfronts or lighting.
- No scheme is too large or too small.

The scheme may not even need planning permission.

Who can enter or apply?

Anyone who has undertaken development within the past year whether owner, builder, architect or agent, but the owner of the land or buildings must give written consent to their entry going forward. It would also be courteous to inform the designer and builder that an entry was under consideration. You can make an entry by either:

- Completing the application form on-line
- Downloading the application form and sending it to the Town Hall, or by
- Completing a leaflet at any council office and sending it in.



What will the judges be looking for?

- Quality of design and local distinctiveness
- Appropriate materials and good construction
- Context, scale and neighbourliness

Special recognition will be given to developments which have wider applicability or demonstrate a clever approach to a difficult design problem.

Who will be the judges?

A team of judges including councillors, local civic society, parish council and others advised by the planning officer and an independent expert drawn from the planning panel. They will meet quarterly to select award winners. The scheme will be administered by the council.

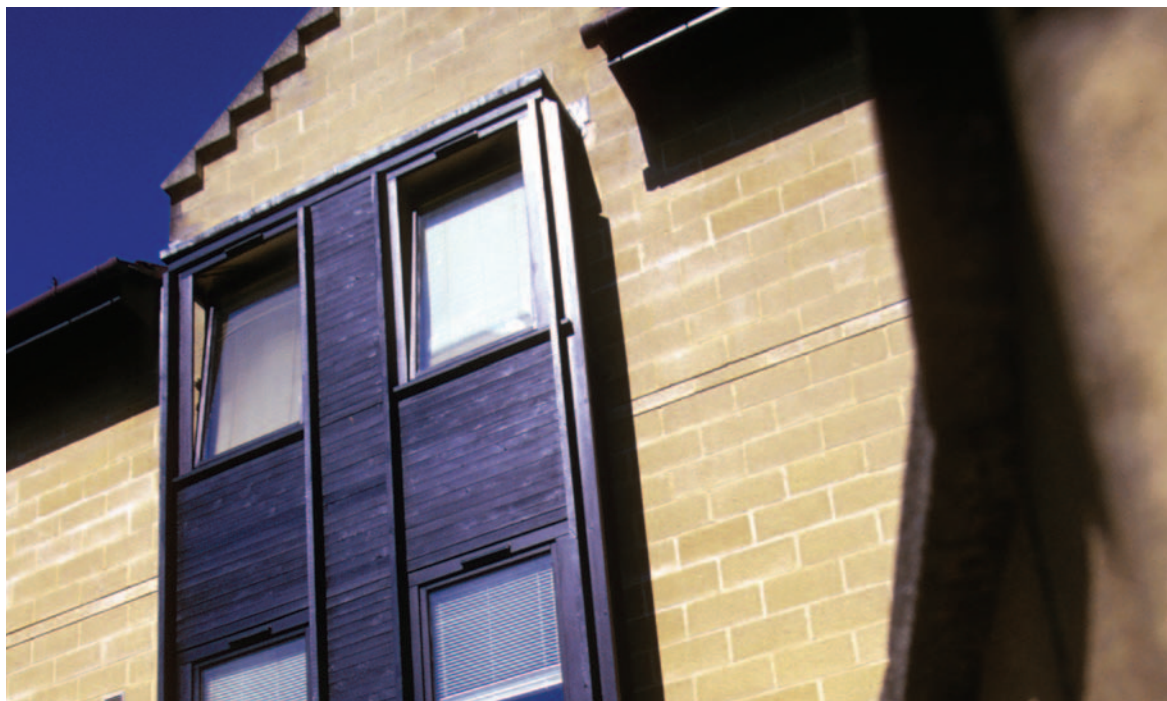
I've won! What happens next?

You will be notified in writing and invited to attend at the Town Hall. The presentation of

a Certificate will take place at the outset of the Planning Committee when a drawing and photograph of the development will be on display. The Chair will announce the Award and say a few words about the development and what makes the scheme special and then present the Certificate(s). A photograph will be taken and the ceremony will then be over and you are free to go. The local press reporter may ask for a short statement from the winners.

Is that the end of it?

Not quite. The purpose of the award is to recognise and celebrate good planning and development. So, the council will want to include photos of your development on their web site and in publications as an exemplar to others. It is in everyone's interest that standards are raised and this is a simple, direct and accessible way to spread the message to others thinking of carrying out building work.



The National Planning Forum is the largest cross-sectoral forum in England focusing on town and country planning.

The NPF has a membership drawn from:

- Not for profit and voluntary organisations
- Local government
- Government departments
- Government agencies
- Government regional offices
- Private sector
- Professional institutes
- Regional development agencies

The work of the Forum includes the preparation of and agreement to good practice notes to promote better outcomes for everyone seeking to develop or change the use of land or buildings in England.

For further information please visit our website at [www.natplanforum.org.uk](http://www.natplanforum.org.uk) or contact the Secretary at [secretary@natplanforum.org.uk](mailto:secretary@natplanforum.org.uk)

This award scheme is endorsed by the Planning Officers Society, the Civic Trust, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Prince's Foundation and the Local Government Association.

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