

Newquay Neighbourhood Plan

Design Workshop facilitated by Tim Kellett

At: The Newquay Centre

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Attendees:

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The purpose of the workshop was to:

- To work with stakeholders on the steering group and others who have indicated they can provide useful input to explore the issues of design quality.
- To identify examples of newer development in Newquay considered as examples of good and bad design
- To look at some examples of different types of design guidance and their effectiveness.
- To prioritise the areas under greatest threat, those with greatest scope for improvement, and those types of development which are considered to have the most significant impact.

Part 1: Planning background, useful resources and sample neighbourhood plans

Design Guides and Character Assessments

- TK presented a short review of current design guidance and character assessments, commenting on their context and their effectiveness. This led to some discussion on how they could be used in the NDP.
 - Raised question how many architects or applicants actually refers to Cornwall Design Guide, or CSUS etc in designing development proposals– TK view is that they are not that effective in encouraging good design at the outset and more often just referred to by Local Planning Authority at late stage to provide some evidence to a report. The content in the Cornwall Design Guide is good and follows nationally accepted good practice but its interpretation and practical use is not that effective or consistent.

- Elements of CSUS, Design Guide, Shop Front Guide and Pattern Book could be of use to the evidence base or guidance in the NDP but we need to define which elements and refer to them specifically.
- Duchy Pattern Book (DPB) assesses the character of historic Newquay and 'the pattern' of dwellings, townscape and landscape in different areas. [eg Style, scale, building forms, plots, materials, details, colour etc and has been used to inform their own developments. It presents quality factual and well observed info about historical Newquay and its essential qualities. However it clearly does not look at the more recent development of apartments and later suburban development. It does not look at the less successful patterns or even more successful modern development and so is not a complete picture of character assessment of Newquay. The CSUS guide provides a useful character appraisal of Newquay but does not cover all of the NDP area and has less to say about more recent development.
- The Newquay Action Framework also has a character assessment of the main town area but puts this into the context of regeneration and development opportunities. However it has a more realistic assessment of the modern characteristics of Newquay's tourism growth and economic development which are shaping the town.
- The Newquay shopfront design guide presents some good practice guidance which is common to many shopfront guides nationally. But in common with many of those guides does not have a great impact on the actual design of new shops and signs. Some individual schemes have been Ok but in general there is a a very low standard and poor environmental and design quality in Newquay retail area. Partly this is due to the dated presentation of the document and its content – it is unlikely to excite or encourage shop owners and designers, also due to the fact the planning authority has no design resource to interpret and follow through, and partly the fact there are no tighter controls such as conservation area status.
- CABE had produced a guidance document on design in neighbourhood planning which highlighted some key initiatives and projects unique to different areas and approaches used in the plans.
- The Building For Life assessment was regularly quoted as the best guidance for design of housing schemes of all scales. It was an award scheme with independent assessment but its questions and guidance was especially useful as a good and well-presented checklist of key design issues.

Design in the planning system – national and neighbourhood

TK presented a quick review of design policy and guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework.

It was particularly important to note that it recommends "local and neighbourhood plans should set out robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected in the area". It sets out subject matters that are relevant – sense of place / mix of uses / local facilities / safe and accessible environments / visually attractive / good architecture and landscape / connections between people and places / integration into natural built and historic environment / poorly placed adverts / scale / density / massing / height / landscape / layout / materials etc. Many participants were surprised at the subjects that the NPPF explicitly states are relevant. These cascade down to the local plan as principles but can then be specifically targeted at key issues in the neighbourhood plan.

TK presented examples from NDP's in other areas that included design policies and guidance. St. Ives, Bembridge [an early plan recommended by CABE], and Selsey and inspectors comments on their submission plans were discussed which will help guide the appropriateness of policies and guidance.

In discussion the following points of interest were noted:

- It is relevant to link specific policies to specific character areas.
- General design principles can be included in a development, design or design code policy but if they are too restrictive or subjective they will be challenged
- Policies to protect views, panoramas skyline etc. are valid - but they must be specifically identified, evidenced etc.
- Policies can refer to separate guidance
- Policies can ask developers to "demonstrate" how applications meet certain criteria or protect the identified character etc.

Part 2: Initial Exercise – reviewing examples of buildings, townscape and shopfronts in Newquay

Attendees asked to look at a selection of photographs (previously submitted by participants) provided and then classify them (pinning them on display boards) to show in scale the best to the worst developments.

Please note: this was not meant as an objective assessment, because clearly opinions differed depending upon people's experience and their opinions did change in some areas as the workshop proceeded. It was intended as a prompt for discussion on design, exploring some principles and listening to others views. During the session we gave the opportunity to revisit some of the buildings – suggesting they could slide them up or down the scale if they could give good reasons.

Some examples from the exercise:

Most liked examples

- Clearview – Modern / contemporary design
- Marcus Hill – Period Properties
- Pentire – Near Hotel California, adjacent to Lawton Close
- Great Western Hotel - period property
- The Cribbar – good contemporary design contributes to the street
- Watershed Bank St – Good shop traditional frontage

Middle range or different opinions

- Tesco Express – large building but reasonable design and focal point
- The Cinema- Modern / Contemporary building and setting
- Frankie and Benny's new glass building on Bank Street – different opinions
- Mount wise timber clad development – 'Verto Homes' different response but most thought not good for that location – not scale but use of materials biggest concern
- Along boating lake road new modernist house [see comment below]
- Beach Rd with Flavour skate shop. Poor signs untidy but some liked the building
- Terrace of small modern houses behind apartment development on Mount Wise

Least liked examples

- New Acorn development – (Old Hotel Riviera site) huge concern about the scale, impact on surroundings, not contributing to local distinctiveness
- Rip Curl Shop – Designed as Rip Curl and not in keeping
- Salt - Beach Road – awful design – not respecting buildings
- Hunters shop
- Balti House
- The red building apartments- Lys Noweth - huge concern about colour, the scale, elevation design and the roof
- Rocklands – not weathering well – huge imposing scale, impact on skyline
- Senor Dicks

Note 1: The impact of large apartment block development raised the biggest concerns of all. Many were far too large impacting seriously on longer views. Not contributing to local distinctiveness. Not contributing to community. Poor use of materials in many areas.

Note 2: Shopfronts were the next biggest concern. Many areas were very untidy and down at heel. Corporate shopfronts often didn't relate to the architecture above. Views above fascia level were lost for the same reason. Many businesses disregarded the quality of the buildings they were in.

Note 3: The new modernist building in the middle of Trenance Road was discussed at length. Attendees generally liked this building with some feeling that this would, in time, influence the future character of the road. Others felt that it was at odds with the 1920/30s bungalows that are predominantly in the area. Some liked the older properties – and feel they are part of the local character, giving a sense of place and this new design somehow disturbed the sense of place. Others felt the new design was of a much higher quality than the surrounding designs but of a different style. Old doesn't necessarily mean good design or worth preserving, much of this is standard suburban development seen anywhere. The debate focused on how there could be widespread support of an individual building design (as in this case) but conflict that it was not appropriate for its location. "A case of I love that building but not there".

Part 3: Presentation and more in-depth examination of design quality and impact

TK presented a slide show of buildings and townscape observed in his pre-workshop site visit and raised various questions and made various observations on the design impact, positive and negative aspects, and ways you might encourage or control these issues. The presentation allowed comments from the group and a lot of further discussion on the examples and issues shown.

Signage & Shop Fronts

- In many parts of the retail areas in the town centre – all agreed there was a general feeling of being run down, poorly maintained and many examples of cheaply and badly designed shopfronts and signs.
- Examples of a cottage changed to a shop with a 'newsagent look' – posters in windows, large plastic signs etc.
- Examples of odd extensions added to properties and original character lost

- Plastic shop canopies (some of which are mouldy, ripped etc.) and solid roller shutters all detracting from design and quality.
- Cheap signage that fills the whole frontage, recladding elevations, garish colours.
- However some signage and shopfront designs can be quirky and in keeping with visitor profile or 'youth culture' e.g. Fat Willy's Surf Shack even though they may break the "rules" of typical conservative shopfront guidance and were not so well maintained. Agreed they may also contribute to a certain local distinctiveness in Newquay that is not the same as St. Ives for instance.
- Big signage and illuminations that change the whole building frontage (eg SALT) were considered a step too far.
- I-Candy – a clear example of several shop fronts attempted to be linked together under this large box signage; definitely not appropriate.
- A key point was made here that maybe a design objective is about 'recovery' of the shopping environment.
- Corporate signage was discussed - many agreed Boots, WH Smith were not attractive and did not complement the historic buildings. Signage and window sections are ugly and the horizontal colour bar (for company name) splits the building. Colour can be good, but doesn't add to the character in this type of signage. WH Smith also gets a negative mention in the shop front guide.
- Agreed colourful shop designs and displays are part of the special character of a seaside town – all about how it is used – very few good examples were seen in Newquay and a preponderance of dominating colours in large fascias etc.
- Flavour skate shop - 1950s building on Beach Road which one of the participants remembered as a new building. This was considered a design of its time and could be an asset but some of the unsympathetic changes that have been made detract from overall look. While not part of the Victorian or Edwardian heritage it is just as important and deserving for restoration and enhancement. All believed there was great scope to work with this building to further enhance it, starting with shopfront and signage improvements.
- Hunters shop was very unpopular in terms of appearance but is housed in an interesting historic building and shopfront structure behind it which could be brought out more. Hunters is a local institution and as one business has a big impact in the retail area. Some thought it was cheap and nasty others thought it was a part of seaside culture. All thought it could be enhanced to have a much more positive image. There is scope for retaining the seaside character of its shopfronts and colourful displays but there is also great scope for enhancement if the owner could be encouraged. An improved scheme could even make it more exciting and distinctive.
- Amusement arcade – it was considered garish and not following normal good practice rules for shopfront design but reminiscent of 30's and 50's so has some form of appropriate quirkiness. Could be done better again; more about unifying as unlikely that it will radically change. This kind of establishment is typical of seaside resorts and if done with enough quality may be something that could add to the locally distinctive character. Wet weather trade is also important to the town.
- The new Frankie and Benny's pavilion style building elicited different responses but the majority thought it was good for its location. It sits within a more open space with streets all round and works well as a pavilion type building. People commented this design would not work well anywhere else on the main street. Looks a bit 'dead' on the side but o.k. generally. Design quality is good.
- Newquay has high quality late Victorian and Edwardian buildings in the centre, let down by poor shopfronts.

Placemaking opportunities

- Central Square was considered to be the most important “place” in the town as a key focal point of all movement. It was acknowledged to be very busy, cluttered and not pedestrian friendly. It did not have a good sense of place. It was noted that the majority of the area was owned by St Austell Brewery – originally a parking forecourt to the pub. Pedestrians are relegated to a narrow pavement on the other side. All wished to see some improvement but could not yet visualise what or how it could be done. Shared space was suggested and working with the brewery at a high level to achieve something special.
- Beach Road to Fore Street (near the bowling green area) felt by all to be an important and historic area, but also one important to visitors and tourism– and giving a sense of place that could be strengthened. This could be a good area to define and try to enhance through design elements. (CSUS might cover part of this area – although not the open space element but could be worth looking at).
- Top of Beach Road – beautiful buildings but accumulated clutter of signage and alterations [e.g. Salt]. Good street design should add to sense of place. Clutter & highway design problematic. Tarmac and white lines dominate here and lack of pedestrian space is an issue. Should be a place to pause, check out the views consider what direction they want to take, what they want to do etc. Can’t ban traffic but could be managed better – in this area it is one-way traffic so that is useful in looking at better design.
- Street clutter is excessive and spoiling the sense of place.
- Hard to redesign in terms of highways here – need to consider delivery needs; turning points but also need to think about ‘shared space’.
- Need to talk to owners and try and get on side. Can’t work to improve design without their co-operation.
- Cheltenham Place/Bank Street isn’t too bad but could be better. A bit flat in appearance and lack of greenery.
- Good placemaking in Newquay should celebrate or enhance character of area / improve legibility - easy to find your way to it and from it / should enhance a positive feeling of the space / could be active or relaxing / should encourage community interaction / could be applied to large or small places / should create a distinctive memorable space.

Outside Seating / Street Cafés

- Outdoor seating is usually in areas owned by businesses (originally some of these were gardens of the dwellings before they became retail)
- Design generally not very attractive and in many instances that were shown seriously detracted from the character of the public realm (i.e. accessibility; restricting pedestrians and giving no protection from traffic; concrete benches; fencing/barriers) does not create an attractive sense of place.
- Would be good to improve and co-ordinate street café seating. Need to engage with owners and research what mechanism there is to do something (if there is one) – speak to planning and highways.
- See note on parklets below.

New building design

- Poundland/Peacocks (old Woolworth's building) creates the most detrimental impact on the town centre skyline with its bland huge boxy form. Many have got so used to it they may not notice now.
- Think about impact on sky line and colour as well as design composition and materials. The Lys-Noweth apartments at Narrowcliff have a huge negative impact (in terms of scale, elevations, small windows and inexpensive materials jarring colour and roof line) there was criticism how minor amendments to the original planning app were approved without this consideration. It has no reference to its context whatsoever.
- Konzept Gym building [large black curtain glazed building] was another out of scale development completely alien to its surroundings and over dominates the street and beach below.
- Whereas the Tesco Extra (with flats above) nearby makes more of an effort.
- Headland Road was considered by some to be a hotpotch of contemporary designs taking over from the original character and scale. All of these designs were different but were interesting individually.
- Rocklands had a huge negative impact on the town skyline especially viewed from the East.
- Rocklands used materials that haven't weathered well – a big problem with other rendered apartment buildings – staining from the render aggregates and staining from slime and mould. This is not very sustainable use of materials in this environment.
- The apartment development on Mount Wise by Custom Developments was considered to be one of the best recent developments with good detail materials scale and addressing the street, and special mention was given to the terrace of small modern town houses fronting onto the alley to the rear.
- The adjacent development on the corner of Mount Wise was considered by some to be a good contemporary design, but completely inappropriate by others. The extensive use of timber cladding for this major urban site was the issue that caused the most concern.
- It was suggested that lot of change had now happened and it brought a new scale to many streets- Pentire, Headland Road, Mount Wise, Narrowcliff.
- Pentire apartment developments were generally disliked as much for their lack of good streets and community contribution as their lack of local distinctiveness as their poor weathering.
- It was noted that examples of contemporary apartment buildings or hotels were not at all contributing to a locally distinctive character and people were not sure at this stage what this could be like for these building types.
- It was recognised that Newquay was changing and outlying areas of small scale domestic housing [detached houses bungalows etc.] were being replaced by a conglomeration of unrelated big blocks that contributed little to placemaking and took away as much as they could from the beautiful views of the coast.
- Travelodge/Aldi building. Good example of a contemporary mixed use building. Tries to respond to corner location.
- Duchy development- these were generally recognised as good quality developments which although were focused on earlier historic character and precedents did create better communities and better response to scale and layout creating streets. It was noted the developments were improving with each phase. It was felt that the masterplanning and design code adopted by the Duchy was enough to ensure these developments were delivered well.
- The design and scale of new apartment blocks was considered to be the biggest design issue. How can apartment block development be managed in its visual impact on the town. It is establishing a new townscape character and a new

relationship to the landscape. So far there were few examples that were considered acceptable.

- It was noted that some of the large apartment blocks were often developments of sites that had derelict buildings on them for many years and these were addressing issues raised by the community in the past. The economic viability of dealing with these sites also came into play into establishing the scale and density.

Impact on skyline, town edges and long views

- Impact of these large buildings on the skyline was considered very detrimental
- In terms of skyline views – it was thought the policies should demand applicants demonstrate how the impact on longer views is not detrimental. We need to provide evidence with applications.
- NDP needs to identify which views are important. These are views of the town skyline from further away [dominated by the church], views of the towns edges that face onto open space or the coast, views from within the town that frame landmarks or views of the landscape or seascape.
- The impact of the building Zinc on the view of the war memorial down Fore Street was considered to be awful and not taken into account during the design and planning process. Zinc is on Headland Road
- The apartments on the old Riviera site were considered to have a detrimental impact on longer views but it did not block the coastline from the town.

Small Scale Development and Alterations to existing buildings

- There were many examples cited of buildings that have accumulated so many smaller insensitive changes that their character was lost.
- Poor design on small scale e.g. terrace at St Georges have had additional dormer extensions. Sometimes these can be good e.g. a single contemporary example of flat roofed dormer at Mount Wise that spanned the whole elevation was a good example. Some things that break rules can be good!
- Frederick Mews – good design, low key, parking, sensitive to area.
- Terraces on hills that retain the proportional slant to roof line is good but not always the case if lower properties extend height.
- Reflecting the topography in the roofline was considered important.

Beach Design

- Beach design, with timber clad lightweight structures (beach huts/café) should be recognised and encouraged to develop quality and creativity in design - not just to accept the cheapest sheds.
- Beach architecture is a distinctive part of Newquay's local character and has a big impact on its most public spaces!
- Timber cladding as an architectural solution in contemporary design was very successful on beach facing design but not so successful in the more urban or suburban areas.

Part 4: Other design initiatives that could complement neighbourhood plan policies to improve design quality

TK presented a number of opportunities that could be considered and linked to the plan.

There were questions about whether part of the town centre could become a **conservation area**. This was considered by many as worth pursuing. The CSUS study has provided good evidence of historic development and quality with some more analysis produced by the Duchy Pattern book. This could be an approach in the NDP to “seek conservation area status” for a specific area. Conservation area status will bring the additional weight of legal control over many alterations that currently are degrading the areas character. St Ives for instance is a tourist town in a similar coastal context, but is a conservation area. St Ives shopfronts – more sensitive to character. Need to also consider a different visitor profile – plus in a conservation area so they have more control over this.

TK presented images of successful types of **shopfront designs** that can work well in retail environments. They cover distinctly different design approaches styles and characters but all can be successful if done well. These included restored historic shopfronts, very decorative historic shopfronts, pastiche shopfronts [often inaccurate copies], contemporary shopfronts but respectful of historic context, colourful and creative contemporary examples, typical seaside design and displays, contemporary and arty.

The **Cornwall Design Review Panel** was also a useful resource to review major design proposals as they are developed and the NDP could encourage developers to use this to improve and support their projects. Please note: use of the Panel was voluntary had to be paid for by the developer. Cornwall Council can encourage developers to have their plans reviewed by Cornwall Design Review Panel (i.e. peer review of scheme). Development of the Riviera Hotel at Barrowfields would have been unlikely to get through planning (in its present design) if it had gone via the Panel.

Identifying focal points for a **place-making initiative**. Selecting key sites as priority areas to be a focus for improvement work and a priority for policy design input and other initiatives. Consider the holistic approach – architecture, shopfront design, signage, paving and street design, traffic management, accessibility, shared space. Maybe one or two priority sites could be identified as priorities for this plan period. The two most likely areas were suggested as Central Square and Beach Street.

Parklets are an initiative to allow private sector businesses or other sponsors to adopt a section of highway and deliver a high quality piece of urban streetscape that can be used by all the community. It may provide a seating area for a café for instance or a green space for food growing or just a place to chill out. Examples were shown which created some interest especially around the idea of getting the local community and local business community to buy-in to improving the town.

Public Art installations an example was illustrated from Vancouver where the authority sponsored an installation each year in the public realm to act as a focus for community use eg seating / kids play areas. These were very high quality but useful for residents and visitors.

Place making examples good street design should analyse space and respond to needs – Brighton New Road was seen as a good example of a **shared space** (albeit a larger busier area).

TK showed a good example of a **shopfront improvement initiative** with the Waltham Forest shopfront improvement initiative. This demonstrated how shopfront design guidance was used alongside public funding to engage local businesses in a very successful series of improvements across many local retail areas. It may form a model to support future funding bids and a couple of target projects e.g. around some of the areas mentioned above. The combined effort seemed to succeed in improving vitality pride and economic benefits as well as design quality.

Summary of Key Points

- Existing guides generally have some good content, but are many and too wide ranging and complex to be effective all of the time. We need to define which elements are useful in specific issues and make clear references to them.
- The shopfront guide could usefully be refreshed to support the NDP
- Need to accept a range of architectural approaches and would have to provide a lot of evidence about restricting certain scales / forms in any areas. It is not feasible to restrict any type of architectural style, it is more important to guide how it responds to the context.
- **Large scale apartment development that does not respond to context is the biggest issue.**
- Shopfronts in the town centre are generally considered very poor and hugely detracting from the quality of the retails and visitor experience.
- Some level of mapping character areas could be done, but it important not to do just for the sake of it. It is no use unless linked to a clear policy. E.g. areas that could be under pressure for change, areas of character we want to protect, areas of poor character we want to recover or enhance.
- Newquay is changing considerably and we need to manage growth. Can't stop development everywhere but need to focus on managing it – and define which areas of character need to be preserved. This would be a big piece of work mapping these. Need to consider the building design, topography; views/skylines – defining and consulting on these.
- Defining what is good design and bad design very tricky – hard to get consensus, different opinions tend to focus around style, similar opinions tend to focus around scale, use and visual condition – could concentrate on the latter.
- Town Centre improvements. Lots of potential but would need business owners on board. NP could be a foundation for this work (possibly to attract funding) but have to be realistic about what can be achieved. Town Centre improvements about signage, street cafes, street scape; design of highway/pedestrian spaces. Some beautiful architecture in town centre marred by what you see at eye-level.
- Issues over weathering and inappropriate use of materials in this exposed coastal climate – this is a sustainability issue.
- Need to consider what can be achieved within the plan, what are the most important things to focus on.
- A design objective may relate to 'recovery' of quality of town centre, another about managing large scale development, or protecting key views.

Workshop group and images used in discussion and exercise





