



**SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL**

# DESIGN STATEMENTS HANDBOOK

A best practice guide



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**Produced by**

**Shetland Islands Council  
Development Plans  
Planning Service  
Grantfield  
Lerwick  
Shetland  
ZE1 ONT**

**Tel: 01595 744800  
[www.shetland.gov.uk](http://www.shetland.gov.uk)**

**Development Plans Officer: Jennie Atkinson**

**You may contact the Development Plans Team at:**

**email: [development.plans@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:development.plans@shetland.gov.uk)**

**This Guidance is just one of a suite of documents prepared by the Development Plans Team to help guide development:**

**Guidance Notes**

**The Shetland House**

*Guidance for Housing Development in Shetland*

**Housing & Colour**

*Guidance on using Colour in Shetland*

**Towards Sustainable Construction**

*Guidance on Sustainable Design and Construction for Dwellinghouses and other Buildings*

**Towards Better Design**

*Guidance on Design*

**Renewable Energy Technologies**

*Guidance on Domestic Renewable Energy*

**Reducing Carbon Emissions in New Development**

*Guidance for developers*

**Masterplan Development Handbook**

*A Best Practice Guide for Developers and Communities*

**Design Statements**

*A good practice guide*

**Interim Planning Policy**

**Towards Sustainable Construction and Better Design in Shetland**

*Location, design and amenity guidance and policy for housing and other development in Shetland*

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## Introduction

- 1.1 The importance of creating high quality new development and sustainable communities is established at the top of both the UK and Scottish Government's national agenda. The Scottish Government is determined that a shift in attitudes, expectations and practice is now needed to ensure that new development creates successful and sustainable places. Shetland Islands Council shares this view and is actively promoting Better Design and Sustainable Communities through its own guidance notes and updated policies. Quality design and sustainable communities will form the cornerstone of the local plan review.
- 1.2 This handbook aims to guide developers and individuals through the design statement process, in order to ensure that there is clarity about the role of design statements, and in order to ensure that they are used more effectively in the planning process to create places of lasting quality.
- 1.3 This Handbook sets out the step by step process of completing and presenting a design statement. It is intended to act as a series of prompts to thinking about how to achieve better quality places through Design Statements. It utilises best practice design guidance and is part of a suite of documents already prepared by the Shetland Islands Council to guide development.

- 1.4 It is intended that the Handbook should be used by:

- developers wishing to develop large or small sites
- in certain cases, the Council, for sites where it has assets under its own control

If a development requires a design statement, the applicant should arrange a pre-application discussion with the Planning Service.

There may also be a need for wider discussions with other Shetland Islands Council officials (Roads Service, Transport Service etc.) and outside agencies such as SNH and SEPA.

Such discussions give the applicant a useful opportunity to discuss the scheme and agree the level and scope and detail that will be appropriate for the design statement. This potentially saves time and cost on design proposals which could be inadequate and subsequently rejected.

## Designing Places

Successful places are:

distinctive

safe and pleasant

easy to get to and move around

welcoming

adaptable

resource efficient

Designing Places (2001)

## What is a Design Statement

A design statement is a written supporting statement which accompanies a planning application and shows how the applicant has:

- analysed the site and its setting,
- formulated and applied design principles in order to achieve good, inclusive design and
- how and who the developer has consulted during the process.

The scope and level of detail of the statement will be determined by the nature of the proposed development, the site and its context, but its specific role is to explain the background thinking that led to the development proposal being drawn up.

As the design statement is a supporting statement to the planning application and is not used for the determination of the decision (as, for example, application drawings) it offers the developer scope to present and express ideas without being bound by the requirements of the planning decision making process. However, Shetland Islands Council may grant planning permission with conditions linked to elements within the design statement

### When is a Design Statement required

A design statement could potentially be submitted with any planning application. Whilst it is good practice, and in the applicant's favour to submit a statement, it is not a requirement in all cases.

Shetland Islands Council will seek a design statement for:

- developments of three houses or more, or
- where design is a particular issue (for example designated areas such as Conservation Areas, sites with a National Scenic Area, etc.)

Even where a formal design statement is not required to be submitted, applicants should still have a clear and logical design philosophy which could be explained if required.

### What is an effective Design Statement?

A good design statement should:

- identify which policies are important and relevant but should not focus on policy alone;
- should mirror the design process, describing and explaining the process undertaken, including any consultation and public involvement;
- demonstrate how the context of the site has been examined and how the design has been developed in response to this; and
- be fit for purpose, ie it should not contain too much irrelevant detail and should make effective use of drawings and text to substantially reduce the size of the document.

A design statement should **explain** and **illustrate** the **design principles** and **design concept** of the proposed layout; landscape; scale and mix; details and materials; and maintenance.

It should show, as briefly as necessary, how these will help to achieve the qualities in

*Designing Places*

PAN 68

A good design statement will:

- promote constructive pre-application discussions;
- assist the decision making process by explaining the applicant's thinking;
- identify the applicant's design needs early on in the process;
- demonstrate how the various stages of the design process have been brought together from the early stages;
- act as a documentary record of the design process; and
- reduce conflict between different interests, resulting in better all round solutions and avoiding last minute design compromises.

A good design statement can achieve better development and design by:

- ensuring that inclusive design is properly considered from the very start of the process;
- encouraging developers to be more aware of the potential for good design;
- recognising the local sense of place and the positive qualities of the local landscape and townscape;
- informing the wider public, making it easier for local communities to understand the design process

**A design  
statement  
CANNOT  
justify  
poor design.**

### The Role of Shetland Islands Council

The Council's role is to ensure that all development is designed to make the most of its setting in the landscape. Five aspects of the built form help to deliver a successful place:

- layout
- landscape
- scale and mix
- details and materials
- maintenance

The Council's wider role is to develop the key concepts for the Development Plan, in particular integrating policies relating to:

Sustainable Development  
Economic Competitiveness  
Social Justice  
Environmental Quality  
Design  
Sustainable Transport

Evaluation of proposals against all these issues requires to be undertaken during the design process and developers are urged to engage with the Planning Service and Building Standards at an early stage of development.

### Policy Context

The Scottish Government has a single overarching purpose, and that is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. One of the Government's national outcomes in support of this purpose is the intention that we live in *well designed sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.*<sup>1</sup> Consequently Government

<sup>1</sup> PAN 83

policies on the built environment increasingly stress the importance of good design.

Design is a material consideration for all applications for planning permission and a local authority may refuse an application on design issues alone, and defend its decision at appeal.

The Scottish Government is placing great emphasis on design and believe it has a central role in delivering sustainable and social communities. The planning system and the consideration of planning applications are considered the means to delivering these qualities and aims.

Shetland Islands Council consider that the best way to meet these objectives is to develop a clear vision for design in Shetland which addresses and integrates each objective and has formulated policy in relation to the location, design and amenity guidance and policy for Housing and Other Development in Shetland<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Towards Sustainable Construction and Better Design in Shetland (2009)



**What is the Design Statement trying to achieve?**

**For Developers:**  
 assist in expressing design rationale  
 resolve conflict  
 speed planning decisions  
 increase certainty of outcomes  
 enhance reputation of good design

**For the Community:**  
 structure and record local consultation  
 ensure development proposals are clearly explained

**For the Local Authority**  
 provide structure and focus for negotiations  
 clarifies design and rationale

**The Design Statement Process**

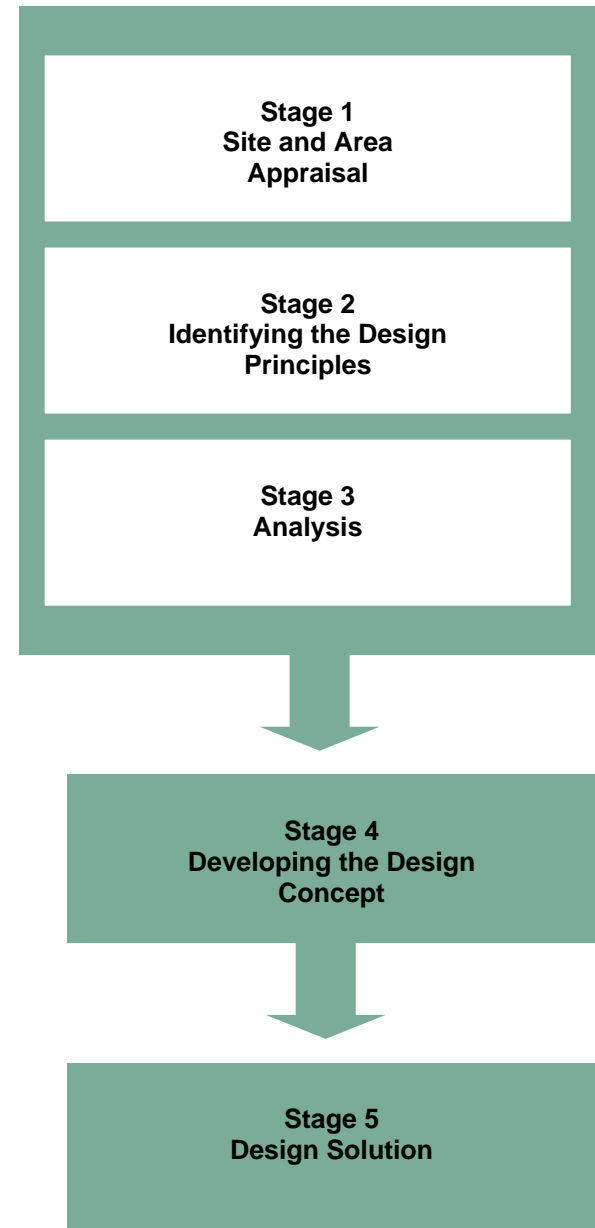
The design process can be set out in five stages with each stage informing the production of the design statement. Whilst each stage is presented separately, in practice, the design process is often more iterative. For example, a design concept may have implications which were not initially foreseen and may require further site appraisal and analysis.

Once all the stages have been completed the design statement can be assembled bringing together all the thinking on the design issues.

Depending on the nature and scale of the development, there may be a need for public involvement. This can occur at any stage, however, early consultation with the public or amenity groups should help to identify any key issues or concerns.

When the design concepts have been worked up, it is advisable to feed these back to those who were involved in any consultation in order to check that nothing has been missed or interpreted incorrectly.

Consultation at the design concept stage should also help to gauge any initial reactions to the preliminary design which may help to influence the final design.



## Stage 1 : Site and Area Appraisal

An area or site appraisal is a contextual assessment of the land uses, built and natural heritage, social and physical characteristics of an area. An appraisal can help identify the assets of an area, strengths, weaknesses and key constraints.

This involves a desk survey combined with observations made on the site – both during the day and in the evening. For example, the use of certain spaces, access to pedestrian routes and the impact of lighting will vary depending on the time of day.

The area to be assessed will depend on the scale of the proposed development and the extent of its influence. Topics to be addressed will depend on the features of the site and its surroundings and also the scale and complexity of the development.

The checklist opposite is a useful indicator of the type of information that will need to be investigated during this stage. The list is a prompt – neither inclusive or exclusive. The relevance of the topics listed will vary according to the nature and circumstances of each site.



### CONTEXT

**Local area** location of site  
 general description of surroundings  
 identification of any designated areas (SSSI, SPA, Conservation Areas etc)

**Site Description** planning history (if any)  
 ownership  
 adjacent land uses (including any proposed uses)  
 heritage conservation  
 focal points  
 landmarks  
 vistas  
 views/to/from/over site  
 topography (contours on site)  
 microclimate (wind, sun, orientation, exposure, shelter)

**Services** public utilities  
 public services (schools, transport, etc.)

### CONNECTIVITY

**Vehicular Movement** surrounding road/street layout  
 access/parking/circulation  
 bus stops and routes  
 areas of vehicular/pedestrian conflict  
 servicing arrangements

**Walking and Cycling Access** where are people coming from and going to?  
 linkages  
 disabled access  
 access restrictions

### IDENTITY

**Surrounding Buildings** building lines and groupings  
 scale and massing  
 windows/roofs: styles and sizes  
 appearance: details and materials

**Use of Space** between buildings  
 private/public  
 day/night, seasonal variation  
 restrictions

**Hard Landscaping** location of street furniture  
 condition and maintenance  
 how it is used  
 public art

**Soft Landscaping** landscape character  
 quality of landscaping  
 wildlife habitats  
 play/recreational space

**The main aim is:**

to examine the site in its wider and immediate context;

to assess its current identity; and

to check connectivity.

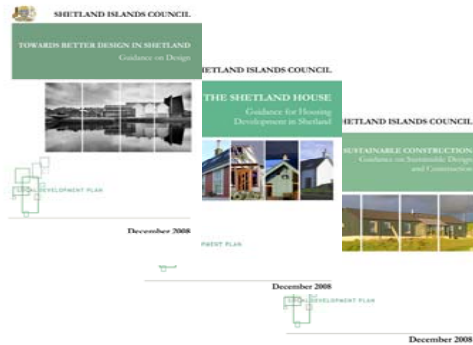


## Stage 2 : Design Principles

Design principles are not just a list of preferences, but a framework of ideas from which the detailed design will be developed.

Design principles will vary in number and complexity from one proposal to another, but whatever the final design, it should relate and respond positively to the principles.

Design principles will require to be consistent with the Council's own design principles set out in the development plan and any interim planning policy, in addition, any site specific principles, such as a development brief.



**The main aim is:**

to set out the main criteria that the design needs to achieve.

<b>Design Concept</b>	what is the central idea on which the design is based? what is the vision of the potential for the site and the surrounding area?	<b>Height</b>	what will be the height of the buildings and structures
<b>Uses</b>	how will a mix of uses be achieved? how will the uses be arranged?	<b>Massing</b>	how will the buildings, or building groups be arranged?
<b>Features</b>	how have adjacent buildings and/or landscape features influenced the design options?	<b>Details</b>	principles to be followed in designing the details of buildings, structures & spaces (building techniques, lighting, accessibility issues etc.)
<b>FORM OF NEW DEVELOPMENT</b>			
<b>Layout</b>	how will buildings, routes and open spaces relate to each other and their setting how will routes and spaces connect to the wider area how will the pattern of blocks and plot subdivisions be arranged?	<b>Landscape</b>	types of planting, hard and soft landscaping, public space, private space, enclosures, lighting; public art
<b>Density</b>	what mass or floorspace of a building (or buildings) be provided? how do the densities relate to the area's carrying capacity how will the density be expressed (plot ratio, number of habitable rooms, space standards, combination of above?)	<b>Movement</b>	principles to be followed to encourage integrated access, public transport, network of footpaths, cycle friendly facilities, disabled access traffic management, parking
<b>Microclimate</b>	how will the landscape be used to provide shelter, cooling, avoid frost pockets ?	<b>Safety/Security</b>	are measures required?
		<b>Energy</b>	how will the development make use of solar energy what is the potential for renewable technologies
		<b>Water</b>	principles for reducing water run-off, minimising flood risk
		<b>Waste</b>	facilities for waste collection
		<b>Management/Maintenance</b>	how will the development be managed and maintained

### Stage 3 : Analysis

When sufficient information has been collected from Stage 1 and Stage 2, the findings can be analysed

This will involve looking at opportunities and constraints of the site – important views, features worthy of retention or protection and any other features which may affect the proposals.

**The main aim is:**  
to identify the opportunities and constraints of the site



### Stage 4 : Developing the Design Concept

Combining the site investigation, design principles and analysis leads to the development of the design concept.

The design concept should show how the designer has understood, embraced and interpreted the site in its context and in the light of all relevant policies.

This stage of the process is likely to involve exploring more than one design option and provides a good opportunity to present and discuss the individual options and their merits with the Planning Service prior to detailed design work being undertaken.

The sustainability of the development (its impact on the environment now and in the future) should be considered in all cases

**The main aim is:**  
to identify the design options based on the design principles established following site appraisal

### Stage 5 : The Design Solution

This final stage involves deciding on the best solution and drawing it up. If all the stages have been followed, the subsequent process of producing a design statement to support the submission of the design solution, should be relatively straightforward.

Demonstrating this design process can be quite simple. Applicants and agents will already be undertaking this process as part of their design process, but not necessarily sharing the process and their final solution when the application is submitted for planning permission.

**The main aim is:**  
to identify the best design solution



Mird Yell School Visual :  
Gareth Hoskins Architects

## How should a Design Statement be presented?

There is no set format for the presentation of a Design Statement. The applicant should choose the most effective form of presentation, as the contents of a design statement will vary according to the nature of the development and the site's characteristics. The design statement for a major development will need to be detailed and comprehensive. A statement for a householder application may need to be only a page or two. However, irrespective of the scale of the development, the design statement must be supported by good graphics.

We would suggest the following

### Every design statement should include as a minimum:

- a short illustrated statement setting out the site and context appraisal, the purpose of the proposed development, a list of design principles and a description of the proposal explaining how the design responds to the appraisal and design principles.
- a plan showing the site, the surrounding built or natural form, and key features identified in the appraisal.
- annotated sketches and photographs to illustrate important elements of the context that has informed the design principles
- plans and elevations of the proposal.

Except for householder applications, design statements should also include:

- a short written statement indicating how the design responds to Shetland Islands Council development plan policy, any appropriate interim planning policy, design guides and any relevant Masterplan or development brief.
- a short statement on any consultations undertaken or to be undertaken.
- details of how the statement will be updated through the decision making process.

For more complex and large scale projects, it may be appropriate for the design statement to include:

- detailed analysis of the site, adjoining built or natural form and wider landscape.
- a review of the environmental effects for projects that do not require an Environmental Impact Assessment under the EIA Regulations 1999.
- design concept drawings to illustrate how the development will be integrated into the surrounding townscape and landscape.
- an outline of the feasibility evaluation and design states carried out including identification of the design team and any important design issues.
- conceptual design solutions including coloured plans of the proposals to illustrate the relationship between the existing features and the design; site sections, long sections to illustrate views, sketches, photomontages and computer generated visual simulations.
- an explanation of how the inclusive design principles have been translated into the design.
- a programme of meetings with Shetland Islands Council officers and other bodies

- a programme of community consultations undertaken
- a summary of pre-application consultations
- a short summary (in jargon free English) which could be used to inform the public.

The design statement should normally be A4 size in either portrait or landscape format. CD copies may be submitted, however, please check with Shetland Islands Council Development Management **before** sending a design statement either electronically or on a CD. The statement should be easily legible and reproducible.



*Sketch reproduced with the permission of  
Richard Gibson Architects*

Scottish Government guidance on Design Statements (PAN 68) provides the suggestion opposite as to the main issues to be presented within a design statement.

Illustrations must be easy to interpret and relate clearly to the text. They can consist of a mixture of photographs, sketches, figure/ground diagrams, photomontages, concept diagrams, computer based images and artists impressions. The scale and format of images will depend on the required level of detail.

The applicant may also submit models or photographs of models to illustrate certain aspects of the design.

**The aim is to explain the design approach**

**not to duplicate submitted copies of the drawings accompanying the application**

<b>Background Information</b>	Name of the scheme Applicant Architect/developer/agents/advisors, etc. Description of client brief (if there is one) Date
<b>Site Details</b>	Location and site plan (scale and north point) Description History Ownership
<b>Site and Area Appraisals</b>	Context Identity Connection
<b>Design Principles</b>	Shetland Islands Council development plan design policies Interim Planning Policy or Supplementary Planning Guidance Masterplan or site specific Development Brief Design Guides
<b>Public Involvement</b>	Outcome of consultation and public involvement
<b>Programme</b>	How the project will be phased
<b>Design Solution</b>	Explanation of proposed development with respect to  <b>Layout</b> (context, streets and spaces, access, safety and security, sustainability, energy efficiency) <b>Landscape</b> <b>Scale and Mix</b> <b>Details and Materials</b> <b>Maintenance</b>

## Pointers:

The Design Statement should not be a huge document, but should:

- show your thinking and the rationale of the approach – tell the story, not just in words but in diagrams
- identify clearly the shared vision
- include relevant details only
- use pictures effectively

Avoid:

- describing without explaining
- including too much detail
- overemphasising technical information
- writing in jargon
- including irrelevant illustrations
- including developer marketing
- promoting development that is undeliverable
- using the process to post rationalise a pre-determined design

Do:

- demonstrate that the development is part of a design process and not a proposal in isolation
- understand the relevant issues to be addressed
- consider the wider context and environment
- incorporate the principles of designing a successful place

All those involved in the planning process (developers, architects, designers and agents) should consider design as an integral part of the development process.

Although it will involve some additional work to present ideas and thinking, in many cases the production of a design statement can be achieved quite simply.

### It should not be an onerous task.

By providing additional information, which explains and illustrates the design principles and design concept, applicants are likely to benefit from a greater degree of certainty in the planning process, and quicker decision making. The result should be:

- improved quality of new development;
- lasting improvements to the built environment; and
- successful places.

The development process can be *complex* and often involves the *balancing* of a number of issues and stakeholders

Following an inclusive design process can *structure* the process into *clear and manageable stages*

ensuring

that *design standards* are kept *high* and is *consistent with design policy principles and aspirations*





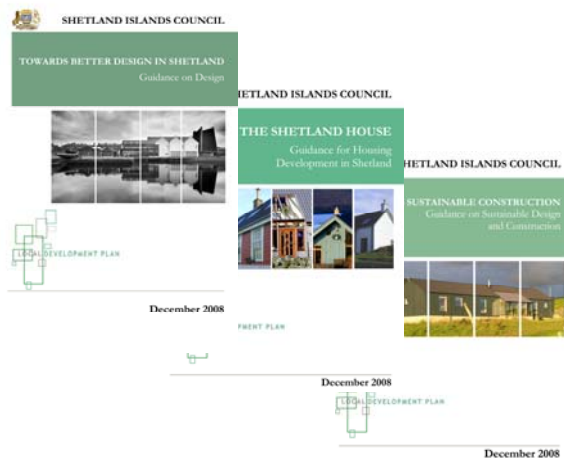
## The Planning Framework

All applications supported by a Design Statement will be subject to assessment against the Shetland Islands Council's development plan policies. Policies contained within the:

Shetland Structure Plan (2000); and  
Shetland Local Plan (2004)

and any subsequent adopted Interim Planning Policy will set the planning framework.

Shetland Islands Council have also produced a number of guidance notes to guide development and which provide the detail as to how adopted policy may be implemented. All adopted policy documents and guidance notes can be accessed on the Council's website: [www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/](http://www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/) or individual copies may be obtained from the Grantfield office. (Approximate cost £5.00.)



## Pre-Application Discussions

It is recommended that pre-application discussions with the Planning Service are undertaken at the earliest possible stage and **always** before detailed design has been undertaken. It is always advisable to make an appointment to see a planning officer or building standards surveyor in order to ensure sufficient time for discussions.

Advice should be sought from the outset with regard to the level of detail needed.

For major developments, we would suggest that a developer opens the dialogue at this stage with a draft design statement to explain the conclusions of the context appraisals and the design principles on which a development proposal in progress is based. This will enable officers within the Planning Service to give an initial response to the main issues raised by the proposal. A draft at this stage can be less detailed than the design statement which will be submitted with a planning application.

## Design Statements for Outline Planning Applications

One of the Scottish Government's aims of introducing design statements is to make outline planning applications more reliable in the face of criticism for them being too vague. The aim is to narrow the gap between outline and detailed planning permission.

A design statement must accompany a planning application whether the application is for outline or full planning permission. The design statement will

The existence of a design statement does not guarantee planning permission.

it supports a planning application

it does not replace it

PAN 68

be a material consideration in determining the planning application.

A statement accompanying an outline planning application may have less detail, but the essential elements leading to detailed design should be concluded. The fact that at the outline stage the detailed design has not been determined makes it all the more important to explain the appraisals and the design principles. Flexibility can be provided at this stage by indicating the parameters (maximum and minimum) of possible solutions.

It is essential that any design principles agreed at the outline stage are then "fixed". Any decision by Shetland Islands Council on an outline planning application will include a planning condition which will restrict the scope of reserved matters by reference to the design principles. Amendments



are still able to made to the design provided the design principles are not compromised. This highlights the need to ensure that the design principles agreed at the outline stage are achievable.

## Design Statements for Full Planning Applications

Applications for full planning permission require the submission of detailed design as only minor details are reserved for approval under condition. A full application should show, through its design statement, that the proposal is achievable and meets Shetland Islands Council's current design standards.

## Change of Use and Householder Applications

It is not the intention of the Scottish Government that design statements are submitted for change of use applications or householder applications, unless the house is located within a sensitive area. Neither are Shetland Islands Council requiring design statements for developments of single or two dwellinghouses.

However, appraisal of a development's context is essential whatever the scale of the development, and similarly design principles are an essential stage of the design process for all development. Consequently Shetland Islands Council would expect all proposals to have been undertaken

utilising a clear and logical design philosophy which could be explained if required.

## Planning Conditions

A good design statement can provide the basis for a planning condition. However, the condition may only relate to individual design principles set out in the design statement: for example, the height of the buildings, density, etc. A Planning Authority may not impose a condition requiring the development to be built in accordance with the whole design statement as this would be too uncertain and therefore impossible to enforce.

Planning conditions will only be imposed against the aspects of the design which are most important. The applicant may appeal against a condition if it is found to be unacceptable, or apply to vary a condition if unforeseen circumstances cause the development to be altered and which would prompt a revision of the design principles.



## References:

### Scottish Government:

Designing Places : A Policy Statement for Scotland

[www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/planning/dpps-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/planning/dpps-00.asp)

PAN 68 : Design Statements

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47133/0026407.pdf>

### Shetland Islands Council Policy Documents

#### Development Plan:

Shetland Islands Council Structure Plan (2000)

[www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/ShetlandStructurePlan1.asp](http://www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/ShetlandStructurePlan1.asp)

Shetland Islands Council Local Plan (2004)

[www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/ShetlandLocalPlan.asp](http://www.shetland.gov.uk/developmentplans/ShetlandLocalPlan.asp)

#### Interim Planning Policy:

Towards Sustainable Construction and Better Design in Shetland (2009)

Affordable Housing Policy (2006)

#### Shetland Islands Council Guidance Notes:

Shetland House (2008)

Towards Sustainable Construction (2008)

Towards Better Design (2008)

Housing & Colour (2008)

## Useful Contacts:

Shetland Islands Council

Planning Service

Grantfield

Lerwick

Shetland

ZE1 0NT

Tel: 01595 744800

[www.shetland.gov.uk](http://www.shetland.gov.uk)

#### Development Plans

email: [development.plans@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:development.plans@shetland.gov.uk)

*Prepares and maintains the Structure Plan and Local Plan, which set out the framework for development and regeneration, reflecting the priorities established by the Council and local communities with reference to national policy and regulations.*

#### Development Management

email:

*Seeks to ensure that proposals for new development are carefully considered, taking account of Council policies. It also follows up cases where development has proceeded in contravention of planning control.*

#### Building Standards

email:

*Checks that new buildings and alterations to existing buildings are constructed in compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations, for example ensuring that means of escape from fire, insulation and construction are satisfactory.*

