

How to: Write a Successful Design and Access Statement



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There are many different definitions and guides on how to write a Design and Access Statement (DAS) and what it should include. Local Authorities may have their own individual requirements for a DAS. However, one size does not fit all. A DAS for a large, mixed-use, strategic site will be quite different to a DAS for an extension to a Listed building. A DAS for an Outline Planning Application, where the design is only illustrative, will be different to a DAS for a detailed planning application where the detailed design is to be approved.

The National Design Guide states:

“Well-designed places and buildings come about when there is a clearly expressed ‘story’ for the design concept and how it has evolved into a design proposal. This explains how the concept influences the layout, form, appearance and details of the proposed development. It may draw its inspiration from the site, its surroundings or a wider context. It may also introduce new approaches to contrast with, or complement, its context.

This ‘story’ will inform and address all ten characteristics (of the National Design guide). It is set out in a Design and Access Statement that accompanies a planning application.”

Writing a quality Design and Access Statement (DAS) for either an outline or detailed planning application for a residential development project is essential for effectively communicating the design rationale, objectives, and compliance with planning policies to decision-makers. Here is a short guide on how to write a good quality DAS. It is set out under the DAS chapter headings:

Chapter 1 - Introduction:

Begin by providing an overview of the proposed development and its context. Describe the location of the site, its relationship to the surrounding settlements, and the site’s characteristics such as size, topography, and existing land uses. Set out the planning context of the site and include any relevant planning history. Introduce the key objectives and principles that have guided the design process.

Include the following illustrations:

- Location Plan
- Site Plan
- Aerial Photograph of the site within the wider context
- Plan showing existing land uses

Chapter 2 - Analysis

Describe the analysis work carried out and in particular show the landscape, townscape, scale and massing of the surrounding settlements. Try to find key townscape characteristics that are common to the area. These may include buildings on the back edge of pavements, tree-lined streets and small, irregular shaped village greens. Look at historic maps to see how the surrounding settlements have developed over time and why. Are they at cross roads, around market squares or around historic castles or churches? What are the focal points of the towns and villages. This information may help to shape the layout. Being able to describe how these



historic settlement patterns have influenced the layout design is effective and usually successful. Analysis work should, of course, also include details of the site itself, including boundaries and views into and out of the site (taking note of focal points in the wider landscape such as church spires, significant trees etc).

Include the following illustrations:

- Site Constraints Plan
- Site Opportunities Plan
- Connections and Desire Lines Plan
- Existing Vegetation Plan
- Figure ground study of the wider area
- Photographs and sketches of surrounding settlements to show key townscape and landscape character
- Photographs and sketches of local vernacular buildings (if appropriate)
- Photographs of local materials and architectural details

Chapter 3 - Design Rationale:

This is the most important part of the document. Explain the design approach and rationale behind the proposed development. Discuss how the design responds to the site's context, respects the character of the village, and enhances the local environment. Clearly show how the analysis work has shaped the design. Highlight key design features such as building layout, architectural style, landscaping, and open space, and explain how they contribute to the overall quality and sustainability of the development. Explain how the design is unique to its location. A good test is to imagine you could pick up the design (which should always be drawn in 3D) and could put it anywhere in the country. Would it be appropriate? *It should not be.* It should only be appropriate in the location for which it has been designed. A Design Rationale Framework Plan is a good drawing to include in a DAS. It shows the building frontages, locations of key buildings, gateways and vistas as well as movement routes and open spaces. This section should also include a description of the consultation events, any pre application meetings and any feedback from Design Quality Review Panels.

Include the following illustrations for an Outline Application

- Concept Plan
- All the Key Iterations of the Layout
- Final Illustrative Layout *
- 3D model of the illustrative Layout
- Design Rationale Plan
- Parameter Plans (see next section for further details)
- Street Elevations
- Street Scenes - in perspective
- Green infrastructure Plan
- Shadow Study Plans and Models
- Sections through each Street Typology
- Landscape Planting Plan
- Affordable Housing Plan
- Refuse Vehicle and Fire Tender Tracking Plan



- Refuse Collection Plan
- Materials Palette

Include the following *in addition* to all of the above for a detailed application

- Detailed Site layout Plan
- Plans and Elevations of each house type, apartment building and garage
- Landscape Planting Plan
- Street Lighting Plan
- Parking Plan, including visitor parking
- Dog Bin location Plan
- Artist impressions and CGIs to help convey how the development will look.

**Illustrative Layout - In an outline application the purpose of this drawing is to show how the development could be laid out on the site within all the parameters set by the parameter plans.*

Parameter Plans would usually be included in the DAS for an outline planning application. They may be set as parameters for a detailed application if the detailed application is part of a wider masterplan or is in the form of a reserved matters application for part of a larger site. Parameter Plans are legally binding so great care must be taken when producing them.

1. Land Use Parameter Plan

The Land Use Parameter Plan shows the different land uses within the site. Each land use is shown as a measured area with set dimensions to ensure that the precise amount of land is given to each different use. In a residential development, with no other uses (schools, local centres, employment etc) The Land Use Plan will usually show public open space, residential area, existing vegetation and site features. It may show proposed access and movement routes, detention basins and swales as well as locations of play areas.

2. Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan

This Parameter Plan will show the different types of green infrastructure including public open space, buffer planting, tree-lined streets, incidental green space, play areas, sports pitches, protected habitats and dog walking routes (if required). It may also be combined with a Blue Infrastructure Plan and show SuDS features such as basins and swales.

3. Access and Movement Parameter Plan

The Access and Movement Parameter Plan sets the exact location for the access into the site from the existing highway network and the pedestrian, cycle and vehicular routes within the site. It will show the different road and street typologies and the different Pedestrian/cycle route typologies. The dimensions of each typology must be shown on the key to this parameter plan. This is because the movement routes themselves may not be drawn to scale on the plan because of the size of the site and/ or the scale of the drawing.



4. Storey Heights and Density Parameter Plan

These two plans may be drawn as separate drawings. They are the only binding plans which set out three dimensional parameters - yet are the least understood.

The purpose of the Storey Height Parameter Plan is to control the volume of the development in three dimensions. This needs careful consideration and should be the result of Landscape Visual Impact Assessments, proximity to existing settlements and sensitive habitats, and appropriateness of scale. All of these points should have been recognised during the analysis work and the subsequent design development (in 3D). However, all too often the Storey Heights Parameter Plan is an after thought and worst of all is given 'flexibility' by setting a site wide parameter, for example 'up to 3 storeys'.

The Purpose of the Density Parameter Plan is to control the density of different parts of the site which will contribute to the character of the development. Again this is a much misunderstood plan and is also given 'flexibility' by setting very wide density parameters, for example low density at 15-30 dwellings per hectare (dph) and high density at 30-45 dph. These two ranges will not in any way assist in creating variation in character because both the low density parcel and the high density parcel can be built out at 30 dph and remain within the binding parameters. These ranges are significant when it comes to housing typologies.

An average 4 bed detached house with double garage will typically plot at a MAXIMUM of 15 dph. A typical 3 storey block of 2 bed apartments with associated parking will typically plot at a MAXIMUM of 42 dph.

A developers chosen housing mix for a greenfield site would usually be something like this:

- 10% 1 and 2bed Apartments (40% 60% split)
- 30% 2bed Semi
- 40% 3bed Semi and detached (50% each)
- 20% 4bed Detached

With a policy compliant layout(in terms of parking, back to back distance, garden size, road and footpath sizes) this mix will plot at a MAXIMUM of 23 dph and when looking at a housing layout with this mix of house types, it is generally perceived as medium density. However, many local authorities have policies which require a MINIMUM of 30 dph to 'make best use of land'. A density of 30 dph may not be appropriate for its location. Your analysis will show if it is or not and that will help you to present your case for a lower density than 30 dph.

Chapter4 - Access and Connectivity:

In this section you will need to provide details on access arrangements and connectivity to the site. Describe the proposed vehicular and pedestrian access points, including any improvements to existing roads or footpaths. Discuss how the development promotes sustainable



transportation modes such as walking, cycling, and public transit, and ensures safe and convenient access for residents and visitors.

Include the following illustrations:

- Existing Access Plan (if applicable)
- Proposed engineered access plan showing radii road width, and visibility splays
- Site sections showing vertical alignment of roads
- Plan showing walking and cycling routes from the site to the wider area
- Plan showing distance to amenities and services (doctors surgery, school , shops etc)

Chapter 5 - Sustainability and Environmental Considerations:

Outline the sustainability measures incorporated into the design of the development. Set out strategies for energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, and biodiversity enhancement. Highlight any green infrastructure features such as green roofs, rain gardens, and permeable paving, and explain how they contribute to the ecological resilience of the site. Include biodiversity net gain calculations and conclusions. Show how the layout has been designed to provide safe play areas, meeting places, over looked green-space and so forth all of which contribute to social connections, security and sense of ownership.

Chapter 6 - Community Benefits:

Describe the benefits that the proposed development will bring to the local community. Discuss how the development addresses housing needs, creates jobs, generates economic opportunities, and enhances local amenities and services. Explain how community engagement and consultation have informed the design process and resulted in a development that reflects the aspirations and priorities of local residents.

Chapter 7 - Heritage and Cultural Considerations:

Address any heritage or cultural considerations relevant to the proposed development. Discuss how the design respects and preserves the historic character of the surrounding settlements, protects significant landmarks or heritage assets, and contributes to the cultural identity of the area. Explain any measures taken to mitigate potential impacts on heritage assets and ensure their long-term preservation.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion:

Summarise the key points of the DAS and reiterate the merits of the proposed development. Emphasise how the design aligns with planning policies and guidelines, responds to community needs and aspirations, and contributes positively to the sustainable growth and development of the village. Provide contact information for further inquiries or feedback.



By following these guidelines and structuring the DAS effectively, you can create a quality document that demonstrates the thoughtfulness, integrity, and merits of the proposed development to all decision-makers and stakeholders involved in the planning process. It should not only assist in achieving a planning consent but will ultimately ensure a good quality design is delivered.

A Successful Design and Access Statement will take the planning committee by the hand and carefully guide them through the design development in a clear and logical manner.

