

# Cornwall Design Guide



**Policy Name:** Cornwall Council Design Guide

**BwN Award:** Policy

**Applicant:** Cornwall Council

**Location:** Cornwall

**BwN Assessor:** Natasha Collings-Costello, Cornwall Environmental Consultants

**C**ornwall Council's Design Guide - 'Achieving quality in development for people, wildlife & the environment', underpins the Local Plan by offering a comprehensive guide to design quality in Cornwall. By providing clarity on what is expected from development, it helps achieve the delivery of high-quality places that respond positively to cross-cutting issues like climate change adaptation, nature recovery and creating healthy environments.

Informed by the Building with Nature Standards Framework, the Guide was assessed for the Building with Nature Policy Award, recognising its exemplary approach to defining high-quality green infrastructure, putting people and nature at the heart of policymaking and development management.

Cornwall Council identified four 'Golden Threads' which align well with the Building with Nature

Standards: 'Environmental growth and nature recovery', 'Health and wellbeing', 'Inclusivity' and 'Resilience to climate change'.

The Guide sits at the heart of the decision-making process, drawing from national policy and guidance e.g. the National Design Guide, supporting delivery of the Local Plan, Climate Emergency Development Plan Document and Neighbourhood Plans, and informing the emergent local Design Codes. The Guide will be used by a range of decision makers and key stakeholders, including planning applicants, officers, and elected members.

**A Building with Nature Policy Award externally certifies that a policy document meets the BwN Standards and will ensure delivery of high-quality green infrastructure.**

## Introducing Building with Nature

At Building with Nature our mission is to put high-quality green infrastructure at the heart of placemaking in the UK, maximising benefits for people and wildlife. By bringing people closer to nature and building great places for us to live, work and play, development can make a major contribution towards better health and wellbeing in our communities and tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.

Building with Nature is the first evidence-based benchmark for high-quality green infrastructure in the UK. The BwN Standards Framework has been created in partnership with planners, developers, and other key stakeholders, providing a shared understanding of ‘what good looks like’ throughout the whole lifecycle of green infrastructure – from the policy framework and early-stage design, through to implementation, and long-term management and maintenance. The BwN Standards are free to use and can be downloaded from the BwN website. Building with Nature also provide a voluntary accreditation process, helping developers and other stakeholders move through the planning process more effectively, and providing an independent verification of quality when it comes to green infrastructure assets.

This case study demonstrates how this policy’s green infrastructure requirements meet the BwN Standards, illustrated through the BwN themes of Core, Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife.

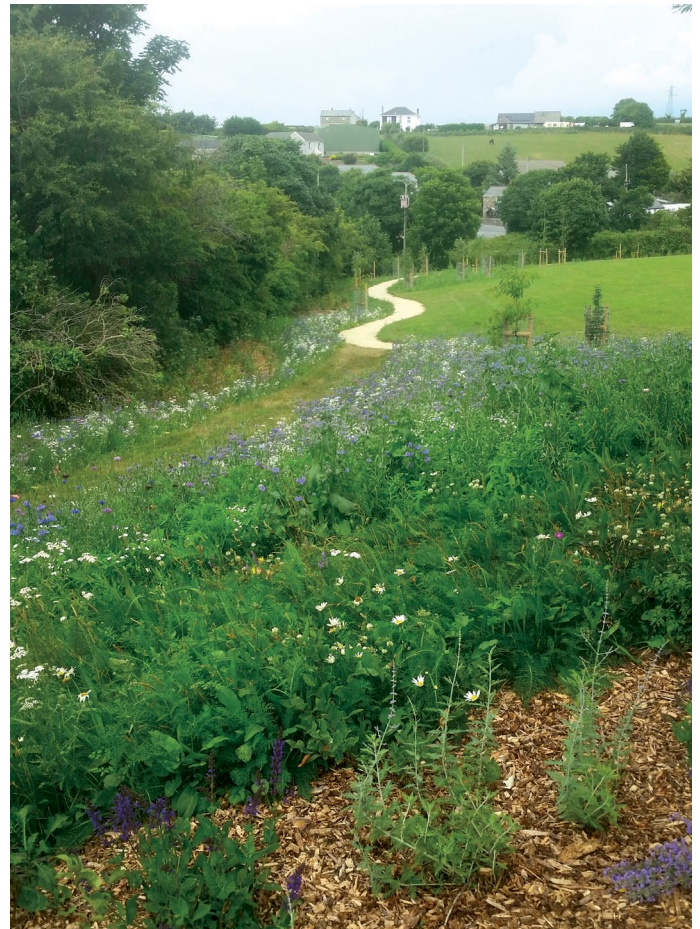
## Green Infrastructure Objectives

To establish a benchmark for good design, the Guide has been informed by a range of sources including learning from involvement in the Town and Country Planning Associations ‘PERFECT’ Interreg project, Building for Life 12 (now Building for a Healthy Life), and Building with Nature. It uses the structure provided by the National Design Guide’s (2021) ‘10 Characteristics of Good Design’.

By embedding policy guidance and industry good practice, the Guide aims to support the delivery of high-quality green infrastructure. It does this by informing the design of schemes and helping planning officers respond to development proposals; acting as a basis for more detailed design policies in Neighbourhood Development

Plans; and informing design codes being brought forward to support placemaking across Cornwall.

The structure of the Guide supports interpretation of green infrastructure objectives for every type and scale of development, by highlighting which sections will be most relevant to different applicants i.e. change of use and infill projects, small housing projects up to five new dwellings, and large residential and mixed-use projects. Up front guidance is given to manage applicants’ expectation about what green infrastructure provision will be commensurate and/or appropriate for different types and scale of development. For example, projects containing only a few proposed new homes may not need to consider implications of the scheme on landscape character, open space provision, or providing a mixed-use element.



**Image 1: Green infrastructure delivers functions and benefits at all scales of development. Through landscaping, planting, and trees, and through the provision of accessible and connected networks for walking and cycling, good design principles can secure high-quality places that support people and wildlife**

## CORE Standards

- Standard 1** Optimises Multifunctionality and Connectivity
- Standard 2** Positively responds to the Climate Emergency
- Standard 3** Maximises Environmental Net Gains
- Standard 4** Champions a Context Driven Approach
- Standard 5** Creates Distinctive Places
- Standard 6** Secures Effective Place-keeping

The Core Standards are addressed by requiring **green infrastructure-led development**, recognising the role that natural assets play in creating sustainable places and supporting environmental growth. By encouraging design professionals to embed environmental considerations into early-stage site appraisals, the Guide aims to support development proposals which are “in harmony with their surrounding landscape, responding positively to natural features”. This aligns well with design principles embedded in Standard 4, which requires policy to champion a context driven approach. In line with Standard 5, the Guide signposts to Cornwall Council’s Distinctiveness Toolkit: “enhancing distinctiveness means ensuring that the circumstances of today’s communities are represented, alongside what is inherited, not producing a pastiche”; and “**Cultural distinctiveness is not static**, and neither is it based in the past alone, but goes on developing as society changes and grows”.



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**Image 2: New development utilising green infrastructure and heritage features to create a distinct sense of place**



Kathryn Statham

**Image 3: Cornish hedges are a strong cultural and heritage feature, providing important wildlife habitat and local distinctiveness**

In line with Standard 2, the Guide cites Cornwall’s objective to become the first zero carbon region in the UK, **ensuring that the natural and built environment are resilient to climate change** and contribute to reducing the region’s carbon footprint. These ambitions are supported through clear guidance to deliver modal shift to active travel through provision of connected and accessible routes, people friendly streets, and cycle storage.

The role landscape can play in positively responding to the climate emergency is also addressed, recognising the role the carbon footprint of materials can play in achieving net zero, including soil management, choice of planting and hard surfacing.

# WELLBEING Standards

- Standard 7** Brings Nature Closer to People
- Standard 8** Supports Equitable and Inclusive Places

The design principles set out in the Guide support **accessible and inclusive placemaking**, to secure health and wellbeing outcomes for everyone, and ensure that nobody is unfairly disadvantaged, meaning that all ages and abilities are able to call Cornwall home and be included in society.

The role green infrastructure can play in creating accessible and inclusive places is set out in the Guide in regard to the role landscape and natural heritage can play in making sure that new developments can form a new communities, whilst embracing existing communities, in order to deliver successful places and enhance cultural distinctiveness.

One of the key placemaking approaches to support healthy neighbourhoods is **people friendly streets** which prioritise the movement of people through active transport modes such as walking, cycling, and scooting, and supports social interaction and play, through the provision of connected **active travel** networks, “slow ways” and “quiet lanes”. This will help to inform detailed



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**Image 4: The Guide will help deliver connected and accessible transport routes which encourage active travel, including cycling**



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**Image 5: Public realm design should embed principles that support access and enjoyment, for example step free access, tactile surfaces, and sensory planting areas that can provide accessibility and improved navigation for older people and those living with conditions such as dementia**

design, such as surface materials, as well as the layout and location of green infrastructure features at the neighbourhood and street-scale to optimise use and enjoyment, supporting more vibrant, and inclusive communities.

The Guide recommends a wide range of green infrastructure features to support **access to nature, close to where people live**, (including orchards, community gardens, allotments, spaces for games and events, and wildflower meadows), and highlights the benefits of including features that create opportunities for natural play, environmental education, and creativity in a natural setting.

# WATER Standards

**Standard 9** Delivers Climate Resilient Water Management

**Standard 10** Brings Water Closer to People

The Guide promotes the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) as the preferred approach to **sustainably managed water** in new development. With regard to water quantity, the Guide specifies SuDS should be used to reduce the overall level of flood risk for both the development area, and the surrounding area. In addition, the design of SuDS should be **climate resilient**, and integrate capacity to cope with more frequent and extreme episodes of heat and rain. In line with Standards 9 and 10, the Guide supports prioritisation of above-ground surface water management features to **manage flood risk**, maintain the nature water cycle and improve water quality, highlighting the opportunity for SuDS to create linked habitat and wildlife corridors, including the creation of wetlands and ponds, which can also provide amenity value for people.



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*Image 6: SuDS are designed to optimise the benefits to placemaking, following good industry practice at design, implementation, and maintenance stages, for example creating lower gradient slopes in the creation of swales to support their biodiversity and amenity value*



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*Image 7: Access to water for play, recreation and amenity is a vital part of Cornwall's natural heritage and place distinctiveness, and the green infrastructure design principles set out in the Guide support the protection and enhancement of existing natural assets*

Design guidelines support the creation of SuDS which will also meet the requirements of Standard 6, focused on **placekeeping**, such as stewardship, and long-term management and maintenance. By supporting a holistic approach to water management, the Guide requires green infrastructure to be designed to be drought resistant, and wherever possible, include measures for the retention and reuse of rainwater to minimise the need for artificial irrigation and the use of mains water supply.

The Guide emphasises the role **accessible water features**, such as canals, rivers, ponds, and wetlands, can play in creating great places for people and wildlife, highlighting the benefits that they offer for wellbeing, including play and recreation, and habitat creation.

# WILDLIFE Standards

**Standard 11** Delivers Wildlife Enhancement

**Standard 12** Underpins Nature's Recovery

The Guide makes it clear that all development projects should focus on the role landscape and natural heritage can play in supporting **biodiversity net gain**. The design principles embedded in the Guide encourage creative landscape design, for example the creation of wildflower meadows and areas with nectar rich plants for pollinators.

The Guide requires **all development to support wildlife enhancement**, in line with Standards 11 and 12. The Guide requires development follows the mitigation hierarchy, which serves to ensure existing planting, trees, tree groups, woods, copses and hedges are retained and enhanced, utilising existing green infrastructure features as the basis for creating new features within a connected and/or contiguous network e.g. filling gaps and understorey planting to create space for growth and protection, biodiversity and wildlife corridors. The principles of net gain are embedded by ensuring any unavoidable loss of habitat is replaced and enhanced.



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**Image 8: Existing green infrastructure features, such as mature trees, can be retained through careful design and proactive management practices, and new planting is introduced to support succession**

The principle of **supporting nature recovery** is embedded in an expectation that development will result in new linked habitat, including large areas such as wildlife corridors along site infrastructure, and smaller areas, such as planting to support pollinators, and features to support birds and bats at the building-scale, such as boxes and roosts within buildings and structure. In addition, the Guide emphasises the need for development to go beyond the protection of the most important landscapes or habitat types, such as Cornish hedges, by actively increasing environmental assets and increasing natural capital in Cornwall.



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**Image 9: Cornwall's most distinctive areas underpin the natural heritage of the county, such as coastal habitats, however the Guide sets out to support the creation of new habitats to support landscape character and nature recovery**

## Policy Applications

The Cornwall Design Guide is an exemplar of holistic and integrated design thinking at the local and regional level. The Guide aligns with national policy and guidance, by embedding the characteristics of good design from the National Design Guide, and it draws on industry good practice, by integrating the characteristics of good policy making from the Building with Nature Standards. By incorporating clear guidance for application to plan-making and development management at all scales of delivery, the Guide successfully supports a range of key stakeholders to create great places for people and wildlife.



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**Image 10: Design Guides can provide excellent guidance for context appraisals for new development, ensuring that development proposals consider key design principles around built form, materials, natural heritage, historic and local distinctiveness, and landscape character**

## Summary

Cornwall Council had one of the first Environmental Growth Strategies in the country. Pilot mapping of the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy is now available, making sure that the vision for nature recovery set out in the Guide will help to lead investment into the best locations for protecting, creating, and enhancing existing and planned for green infrastructure networks of multifunctional and connected features. The Guide will also ensure that these networks and features are designed and cared for in the long-term, to deliver a range of life supporting services including water purification, air quality, space for recreation and play, and climate mitigation and adaptation.

In summary, the Cornwall Design Guide sets out both a vision for development in Cornwall and a 'how-to' design guide that puts nature – through the delivery of green infrastructure – at the heart of design in a way that works for people, wildlife, society, and the economy.



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**Image 11: Cornwall Design Guide establishes the importance of protecting existing natural assets that make Cornwall such a distinctive place, whilst identifying opportunities to create new habitat that reflects and enhances this landscape character**

## Useful Links

**Building with Nature:** [www.buildingwithnature.org.uk](http://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk)

**Project website:** [www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/vzkd4iaj/cornwall\\_design\\_guide\\_v2-0.pdf](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/vzkd4iaj/cornwall_design_guide_v2-0.pdf)

**Applicant:** [www.cornwall.gov.uk](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk)

**BwN Assessor:** [www.cecenvironment.co.uk](http://www.cecenvironment.co.uk)

**Download the BwN Standards:** [www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/standards-form](http://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/standards-form)



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