

## Our Planning Principles

*These principles set out our broad beliefs for the benefit of Cheltenham's planning and architecture, and thus for the benefit of the town.*

1. **Planning should be done *with us and for us, not to us*.** Planning and architecture can have a range of public benefits, which everyone has a right to enjoy. It is this that makes them a matter of legitimate democratic concern. Buildings have a public face. They contribute to the places we live and work in. Indeed, as we can see in Cheltenham, they help make places distinct. So, we are entitled to expect buildings to make a positive contribution to our habitat, enhancing a sense of well-being, delight and confidence. It follows that everyone should have a right to a voice in this conversation, from pre-application discussions to final judgment.
2. **Buildings – and often the uses to which they are put – must evolve** so that they remain relevant and in gainful use. We don't want everything preserved in aspic. This is particularly important for heritage buildings, including listed buildings. Good planning should aim to give life to historic assets.
3. **But a building's value should not be compromised** by inappropriate alterations. This applies to all buildings, not only those in conservation areas or protected by listing and local indexing.
4. **We don't favour one style over another.** Cheltenham is a glorious mix of all sorts of architectural styles. Traditional and contemporary architecture are not in competition. But new buildings should take inspiration from and complement existing buildings to enhance our town's unique character and sense of place.
5. **Context and setting are critical.** It is more important that new buildings should help achieve coherence rather than that they should stand out. Cheltenham is renowned as a Regency town and the significance of that architectural style should be respected. That relates to the local palette of colours and materials, which differ between character areas – as well as proportion, details, height and mass. Cheltenham is unusually beautiful and that beauty deserves to be retained and demanded of new buildings and alterations to existing ones.
6. **Just because something is new does not make it better.** We shouldn't be seduced by a building just because it's new and shiny: the fabric of a new build may weather badly with age (there are many examples in Cheltenham). High-quality design stands the test of time, doesn't date and, at its best, may merit listing in due course. The Vitruvian principles of strength, utility and beauty are probably a good test.

7. **Equally, just because something is a mess now, it doesn't follow that almost anything new would be welcomed as an improvement.** Excellence is absolute, not relative. And excellence is what we should strive for, not 'it's a bit better than what was there before'.
8. **If something is worth protecting, we should take a firm, consistent line to do so, and we should encourage opportunities also to 'enhance'.** Local listing, formal listing and conservation areas must benefit from the application of best practice to ensure that the principles of protection are met fairly, transparently and consistently.
9. **Land is scarce and valuable, so we should use it as efficiently as possible.** Brownfield (in planning terms, Previously Developed Land) should be favoured over new greenfield sites – whilst avoiding brownfield sites that have acquired high nature conservation values. Infill development can make a valuable contribution by tidying up scrap pieces of land or the backs of buildings. Land should be used well by applying gentle density, efficient layouts, multiple storeys including subterranean parking and the addition of top storeys. New homes do not necessarily require new buildings: we should take every opportunity to reuse and subdivide buildings, especially in the town centre. This will prevent sprawl and minimise vehicle use, concentrate populations around sustainable communities, and enable better sharing of resources.
10. **Environmental performance is as important as aesthetics.** There are several aspects of this which are well covered in Cheltenham's Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document. This guidance should be followed and developed further. Our existing built environment embodies a lot of carbon, so if Cheltenham is to be an exemplar, options for retrofitting and reuse should always be exhausted before demolition is considered. This is especially the case with heritage buildings.
11. **Trees, landscape, waterscape and biodiversity considerations often matter as much as the building.** Planning has an essential contribution to saving and restoring nature, for example, by planning for nature protection through biodiversity corridors, and protecting and creating large-scale green spaces. Natural features provide a setting for, and humanise hard structures, but vegetation should not be used to disguise poor design in new schemes. Some larger schemes will need to be 'landscape-led' in terms of design, and all should be planned with biodiversity needs in mind. These 'green' (vegetation) and 'blue' (waterways) aspects should be planned as an integral part of schemes from the outset, and to the same high standards: they should not be treated as afterthoughts or cosmetic features. Like buildings, they too will need maintenance, which needs to be planned for.

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