



Responding to local context – applying a palette of materials and architectural features unique to the North-East Region



Studies of local vernacular in and around Ashford



1919 Today
Devonport street grid

Part of the urban design lexicon is the “genius loci”, the prevalent feeling of place. Perceptions of a place are made up of layers of understanding - the settlement in the landscape, its overall structure, the district, the street, the building. They arise from understanding the physical and human geography, the history and morphology of past uses, the natural landscape and buildings, both on a site and around it.

This analysis is essential for both regeneration and new build schemes to make them distinctive and to halt the production of endless, almost featureless, estates which look the same throughout the country.

Everywhere is somewhere

An assessment of the roles and relationships of the area or site to its strategic context, together with an appreciation of the individual characteristics of form and the way a place is used, will lay the foundations for a unique design response.

Table 2.2 provides an inventory of considerations in undertaking a character appraisal.

The key components are:

1 Regional identity

Start by identifying the common characteristics of the region or sub-region. This may relate to climate and physical geography (see Table 2.2), as well as to socio-economic profile (see Table 2.5).

2 Linkages to surroundings

How do connections define the settlement characteristics - is it a linear structure along a main route or part of a grid of streets?

3 Local character

Establish the elements of local distinctiveness, both the form of a place and the way it is used. How can these be built into a project? Are there particular local materials, building forms and features that can be used as a source of inspiration?

4 Morphology

Define what gives shape to the local morphology (historic routes, block patterns, building heights and massing, local vernacular, for instance), and how this provides cues for appropriate design forms.

5 Natural features

Are there particular ecological or geological characteristics, for instance, that give a place its essential character? (see Table 2.2)

6 Socio- economic profile

What are the demographics of an area and are there particular local traditions and events to draw influence from? (see Table 2.3 and 2.5)