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When the Urban Design Compendium was first published in 2000 it noted that quality of design was becoming one of the most important criteria in determining whether a project should be eligible for public funding. Since this time understanding of the importance of design quality in creating places people want to live and work in has grown. All development proposals – whether for new development or redevelopment of small infill sites – need to demonstrate that they will be delivering quality places.

It is therefore vital that those evaluating the quality of design proposals have some guidance on what forms of urban design work well and why. Similarly those developing proposals need information on what will be expected of them in terms of their investment in project design.

The purpose of the Urban Design Compendium is to help equip all those involved in the delivery of places with guidance on achieving and assessing the quality of urban design in developing and restoring urban areas.

It is not an exhaustive text. The Compendium provides an analysis of core design issues through the different stages of the project process, from assessment of overall context to deciding the detail of proposed developments. It is principally about the substance of urban design in creating the product. In other words, how do we change the urban landscape to create places where people want to live, work and socialise, from the street corner to the brand new settlement. The Compendium is not generally intended as a guide on how design relates to the detail of the planning and management process. However, we address these issues in the new companion publication 'Urban Design Compendium 2: Delivering Quality Places'.

The material within the Compendium reflects good practice both in the UK and overseas, relying on the stream of new and rediscovered approaches to urban design that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. The regeneration movement has been at the forefront of producing this new wave of thinking about how design can position development in the market, change perceptions of place and create value. There is also a strong body of research to be drawn upon what constitutes urban quality.