

TIME FOR DESIGN



Juniper House, King's Lynn

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk rebuilt a corner site within the King's Lynn conservation area creating an imaginative mixed development responding to the council's Agenda 21 commitments. The building structure is an integral part of the heating and cooling processes and high levels of insulation and air tightness minimise heat loss through the fabric. Waste heat from occupants, lights and equipment is sufficient to heat the building for much of the year, saving 200 tonnes of CO₂ per annum.

There is growing support for local authorities to raise their design aspirations. The Prime Minister's *Better Public Buildings* report demands a step change in the quality of the buildings procured by all public sector bodies, while Best Value allows greater freedom to deliver this change in local government, allowing authorities to lead by example. At the same time, planning guidance such as *By Design* and *Better Places to Live* (the companion guides to Planning Policy Guidance notes 1 and 3) demand a more proactive approach from local planning authorities in driving up design quality.

The Urban White Paper identified the lack of urban design skills in local government as a barrier to the successful renewal of our urban areas, with subsequent research – outlined on the facing page – showing that less than half of local councils employ even a single urban designer. This design deficit must be addressed.

There are a range of new opportunities to enable the delivery of high standards by local authorities:

- the expansion of public capital investment
- increasing central government support for local intervention to demand quality design via stronger planning guidance
- greater freedoms through Best Value, with Ministers stating that good design is inherent to Best Value
- the development of Beacon Status for design and sustainability issues
- the availability of support from CABE and local Built Environment Centres
- the availability of performance measurement tools to allow clients to fully evaluate design and construction standards

Design is integral to the social, environmental and economic objectives local authorities aim to deliver, for example:

- The Urban and Rural White Paper objectives
- Transport White Paper objectives for integrated and more sustainable transport, encouraging walking and cycling where possible
- Community Strategies
- Neighbourhood Renewal
- Improved service delivery
- Agenda 21