

**intensification**

**section five**



## 5. Intensification

Policy Link – Core Strategy Policy KP1: Spatial Strategy  
Core Strategy CP8: Sport Recreation and Green Space

188. One of the key thrusts of Government Policy is to make the most effective use of land. The Core Strategy sets out how this will be applied to Southend given the limited land availability and infrastructure constraints. The most appropriate spatial strategy for future development therefore is to maximise the town's strengths and opportunities by focusing the majority of growth and regeneration on key regeneration areas, in particularly the Town Centre, Seafront (subject to the safeguarding of the biodiversity importance of the foreshore) and certain 'Priority Urban Areas' (areas identified in the Core Strategy as areas which have the potential to make a significant contribution to regeneration and growth such as district centres, shopping centres and industrial/employment areas (see Policy KP1)), including existing commercial / industrial areas. It is therefore anticipated that the majority of the intensification of the Borough through the provision of flats will occur in these areas. Outside these areas the intensification of development should be limited. The impacts of each proposal will be considered in detail for each application on a site by site basis to ensure that proposed development will make a positive contribution to the local area.

189. There are four ways that intensification can occur – redevelopment of existing buildings, backland development, infill development and conversions. The Council will determine on a site by site basis whether the proposed intensification is acceptable in principle, particularly in relation to local character and capacity.

### 5.1 Redevelopment of Existing Buildings

190. Redevelopment is defined to be the replacement of existing buildings with new buildings. When this is proposed the new scheme may be of a similar scale and accommodation mix to the original building but often the proposed seeks a more intense development either in terms of a larger scaled building or a greater number of smaller units.



A mixed use scheme in Southchurch Road combines a high density housing scheme with commercial development at ground floor. The intensification on this site has helped regenerate this local centre.

191. Where this form of intensification arises the Council will decide whether the proposed intensification is appropriate for the area. Outside the town centre, seafront and priority urban areas, significant amounts of intensification will not normally be considered appropriate.

192. When considering redevelopment, the merits of the existing building should always be considered as an alternative to redevelopment. In many cases the existing building makes a positive contribution to local townscape and refurbishment may be a viable and often cheaper option.

*See also Section 8.1 Redevelopment or Refurbishment*

### 5.2 Backland Development

Policy Link - Saved BLP Policy H10 - Backland Development

193. Backland sites are defined to be landlocked areas between existing development, usually with a single and often narrow access onto an existing street. They encompass areas such as disused garage courts, vacant sites and other odd shaped areas left over between housing blocks which may offer an opportunity for redevelopment. Where acceptable in principle, such development can take advantage of access to local facilities and infrastructure, provide natural surveillance and generally lift an area which may be susceptible to crime and disorder.



This courtyard house built on a backland site of Southchurch Road has high level windows at first floor to prevent overlooking.

194. Whether a backland site is suitable for development will be decided on a site by site basis. In some cases the site may be too constrained or the principle of development may be out of character. This particularly applies where the grain, density and openness of the area is uniform (this is likely to be the case in many of the Borough's conservation areas). It is recommended that the principle of development of a backland site is agreed with the Council at an early stage in the design process.

195. Where backland development is considered acceptable in principle, one of the key considerations in the design process must be protecting the privacy of adjoining residents. This means that new backland development should not give rise to any overlooking (or realistically perceived overlooking) of neighbouring properties or their private gardens.

196. In addition, the site itself must be of a sufficient size and shape to accommodate practical internal space, usable amenity space and sufficient off street parking for the new occupants. Squeezing too much development into to a small or awkward site will compromise the quality of life for the occupier and the surrounding residents, and may be considered over development.

197. Access will also be of key importance and should be designed to be safe and avoid creating unreasonable noise disturbance or inconvenience to neighbouring properties. All development must ensure that sufficient access is provided for the emergency services and that appropriate provisions are made for waste collection.

198. Development on these sites is likely to require a unique design solution that responds to the individual constraints of the site and protects the amenity of the neighbours.

*See also Section 2.2 Character and Context, Section 4.1 Density, Section 4.7.5 Access to Parking Areas and Section 5.3 Infill*

### **Development of Existing Rear and Side Gardens (including Corner Backland Sites)**

199. This type of development is different from backland development, where often, in the past, there has been a building or buildings on the land. Gardens are by their nature open spaces that have not previously been developed. Preserving gardens is as important as preserving open space between and around dwellings, as they provide amenity space for the dwelling, rainwater soak up areas and areas for wildlife.

200. There is a general presumption against the redevelopment of existing private gardens especially where they are a significant part of local character (for example in the Burges Estate in Thorpe Bay where the front and side gardens are key to its open leafy character). Piecemeal development of gardens in areas of strong uniform character would disrupt the grain of development and will be considered unacceptable. In exceptional cases, where the local character is more informal and where there are no issues of space and overlooking, subdivision of existing garden areas may be acceptable in principle.

## **5.3 Infill**

Policy Link - Saved BLP Policy H6 - Protecting Residential Character - i

201. Infill sites are development sites on the street frontage between existing buildings. These areas are usually spaces left over after earlier development or the redevelopment of small industrial units or garages. The size of the site together with an analysis of local character and grain will determine whether these sites are suitable for development. In some cases the site may be too small or narrow to accommodate a completely new dwelling (including usable amenity space and parking) and trying to squeeze a house onto the site would significantly

See also Section 10.2.3 Types of Extension - Garages

## 5.4 Conversions

Policy Link - Saved BLP Policy H6 - Protecting Residential Character – ii  
Saved BLP Policy C3 - Conversion of Historic Buildings

### 5.4.1 Conversion of Redundant Commercial Buildings



Infill housing in Park Street successfully blends with the existing townscape.

compromise its design quality and be detrimental to neighbouring properties and local character. In these circumstances, unless an exceptional design solution can be found, infill development will be considered unacceptable. Other options, such as an extension to an adjacent building or a garage may be more achievable. However, in certain situations, where the density, grain and openness of an area are integral to its special character, infill development of any kind will not be appropriate in principle.

202. Where it is considered acceptable in principle, the key to successful integration of these sites into the existing character is to draw strong references from the surrounding buildings. For example, maintaining the scale, materials, frontage lines and rooflines of the neighbouring properties reinforces the rhythm and enclosure of the street. This does not necessarily mean replicating the local townscape, although this may be an option.

203. Where the local character is for terraces or semi-detached properties, joining the new development with one or two of its neighbours should be considered. This enables greater design options, a more efficient use of space and reinforces local character. Whether the design matches the character of the surrounding buildings or is distinctive, all infill developments must be of a high quality and aim to enrich the streetscene.

204. In the historic environment, where the density, grain and openness of the area contribute to its special character, infill development will not be appropriate.

205. Changing retail and industrial trends and increasing demand for residential accommodation has led to an upturn in the conversion of shops and workshops to flats or houses. Whether this type of development is acceptable in principle will depend, among other things, on its location and relationship with neighbouring properties, the viability of its original use, amenity space and parking arrangements. Where acceptable in principle, the detailed design should take particular care to preserve any special character the existing building may have and to complement the neighbouring properties and the wider streetscene.

206. In the case of shopfront conversions, where only the ground floor is altered, strong references should be drawn from upper storeys - in particular proportions, structure, design and alignment of windows and materials. In these cases there are two options - where detailing from the original use of the building (e.g. fascias, cornices, and pilasters) may be integral to the character of the building, it should



This redundant boat building shed has been redeveloped as a restaurant in Leigh Old Town.



This former redundant seafront shelter has been transformed into a new restaurant and incorporates new public conveniences for the foreshore.



This conversion in Park Road retains some of the original features of the shopfront and draws on the character of upper floors.

be retained as features in the conversion. However, where this would be of no benefit to the character of the existing building or the streetscene removing all traces of the shopfront could be a better option. Each application for change of use is unique and will be judged on its merits.

207. The conversion of industrial units in residential areas can give rise to overlooking problems for adjacent residential properties. These schemes will often require an innovative design solution.

*See also Planning Advice Note 3 Retail to Residential which is available on the Council's website [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk) and see Section 6 Relationship with Neighbours and Section 5.2 Backland Development*

#### 5.4.2 Conversions of Houses into Flats

Policy Link - Saved BLP Policy H7 - The Formation of Self-Contained Flats  
 Saved BLP Policy H3 – Retention of small family dwelling houses

208. The conversion of single dwellings into two or more flats will only be acceptable where it does not place additional strain on the local amenity or harm the character of the existing building or the wider area and provides reasonable accommodation. All conversions will be expected to meet the Lifetime Homes Standards Where this cannot be achieved because the property is too small the principle of conversion is unlikely to be acceptable. This is in line with the Council's policy to protect the stock of existing small single family dwelling houses.

209. Where conversions are acceptable in principle the design must ensure that the character of the original building and the street is retained or enhanced. Where a house is converted into flats the original main entrance should be preserved and entrances to the individual units should be located within the entrance hall. Fenestration proportions, styles and materials must be retained between ground and first floors and amenity space must be either be divided between the individual flats or shared. Decoration between the storeys can be difficult to ensure continuity therefore the design process should seek to limit the potential for a mixed elevation. One of the biggest problems with conversions is providing adequate parking. Parking provision must not be to the detriment of the streetscene or existing boundary treatment. (Note: Sound insulation and separation needs to be explored in detail early in the design).



This redundant bowls pavilion in Clifftown Conservation Area has been successfully converted to a restaurant.

210. Applications for the conversion of houses into flats that include external staircases as a means of escape must have minimal impact on the streetscene, must not give rise to unreasonable overlooking of neighbouring properties or compromise openings at ground floor level.

### 5.4.3 Conversion of Historic Buildings

211. It is recognised that in some instances historic buildings become redundant and are no longer viable for their original use. Whilst the original use of the building is usually preferred, especially for listed buildings, it is accepted that, in some cases, a sensitive conversion is the best option. Where this arises early discussions with the Council are recommended, first of all to establish an acceptable alternative use and then to ensure that the conversion does not compromise the special character of the building. In most cases the Council would prefer to see historic buildings in alternative uses rather than lying vacant and deteriorating. The key to a successful conversion of a historic building is to celebrate its history not mask it.



The church hall and vestry at Crowstone Church has been sensitively converted into flats which have their own unique character.