

# Colchester Borough Council, Tendring District Council and Essex County Council: Testing coding for a new garden community

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<b>Scale:</b>	Site-specific
<b>Context:</b>	Suburban
<b>Focus:</b>	Exploring the design code process; producing a Strategic vision
<b>Project team:</b>	Colchester Borough Council; Tendring District Council and Essex County Council. With assistance from Hvas Associates Ltd; Prior and Partners; itp; Gillespies
<b>Region:</b>	East of England



## Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the National Model Design Code (NMDC), focusing on the analysis and vision stages of the coding work, with the objective of establishing high quality ambitions for a new garden settlement. Key themes included establishing a Community Liaison Group, to provide continuity and depth of engagement throughout the process, alongside a wider engagement strategy, including digital/online engagement, paper-based consultation, and workshops. A Strategic Vision for the new garden settlement was developed as one of the outcomes of the pilot process.

*“ We are trying to use design coding as a way to not limit design but to encourage creativity instead. ”*

## Local Authority background information

The county of Essex provides a varied landscape from vibrant urban centres, international ports and airports, universities and world class firms, alongside beautiful rural countryside and villages, and the longest coastline in England. Tendring District is located in the north-east of the county and the town of Colchester (within Colchester Borough) lies to the west of Tendring District.

## The context for coding

A key element of the spatial growth strategy for North Essex is the development of a new garden settlement. Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCB project) is located across two local councils and comprises a major new settlement of between 2200 and 2500 homes, 7 hectares of employment land and provision for Gypsies and Travellers within the Plan period (by 2033). It is expected that overall between 7000 and 9000 new homes and 25 hectares of employment land will be delivered by 2050.

Tendring District Council and Colchester Borough Council have both adopted a shared 'Section 1' Local Plan, which provides strategic, cross-boundary policies and includes a range of guiding principles for the garden settlement. One of the main requirements of the shared Local Plan is the production of a Development Plan Document (DPD), which will establish a detailed planning framework for delivery of the TCB project.

The proposed site lies to the eastern edge of Colchester, close to the towns of Wivenhoe in Colchester Borough, and Alresford and Elmstead Market, within Tendring District. While the exact site boundary is yet to be established, the land is predominantly undeveloped agricultural land, with isolated homes in the hamlet of Crockleford Heath and farms located across the area, a working minerals and waste site, in addition to properties and small-scale employment uses along Harwich Road to the north of the site.

**“ This is a very long-term project – it could be in development for a generation. The governance structure that has been put in place will also be responsible for the oversight of any process of amending the design code over time. ”**

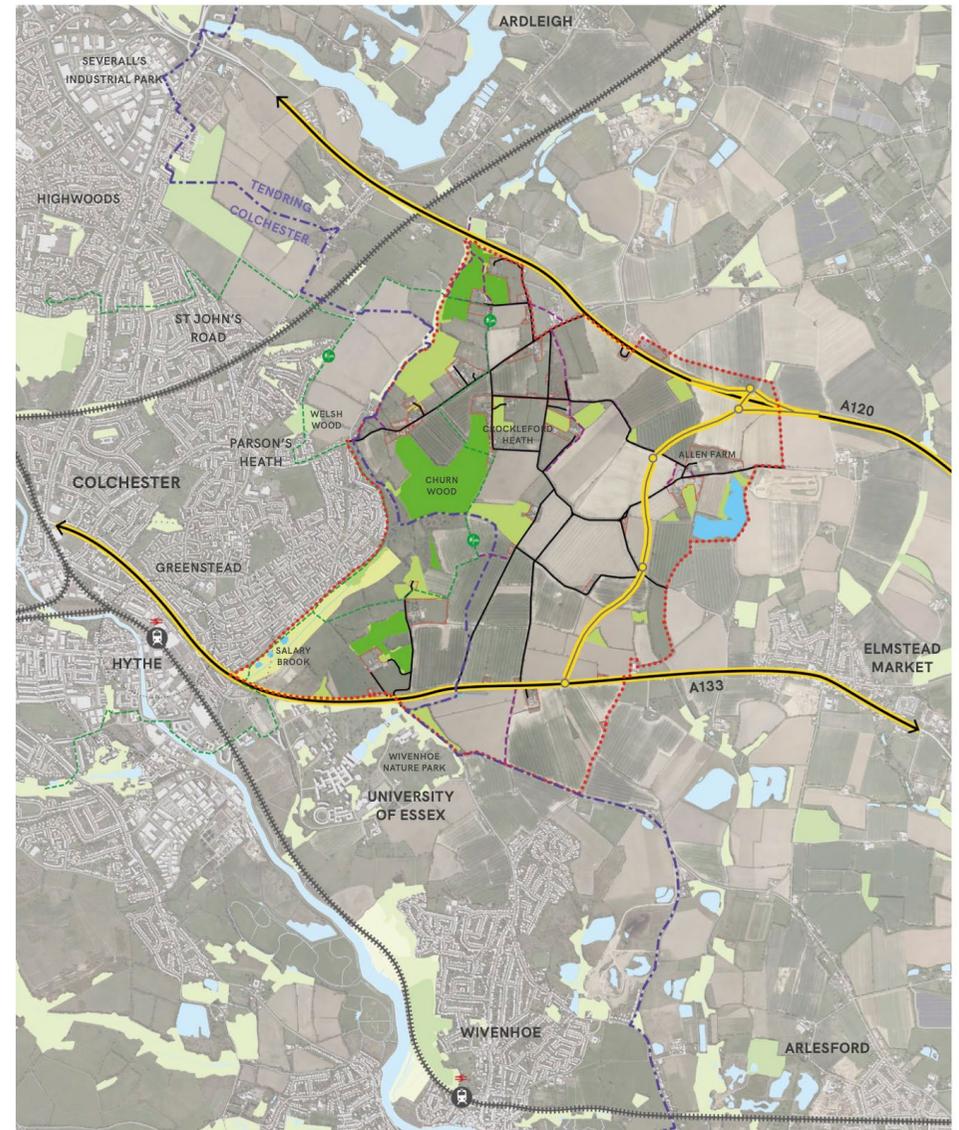
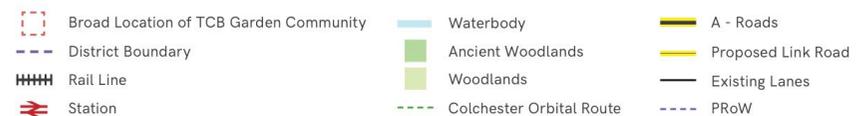


FIGURE 2 Local Context



Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community site: local context

## Why code?

The Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community is a strategic, complex and sensitive project to deliver new homes, new employment land, open space, and all associated infrastructure in North Essex. The councils are dedicated to improving quality of place, not only to establish a strong sense of place that can guide development over future years, but also to reassure local communities that high quality ambitions will be achieved in practice.

The project has provided a unique opportunity to apply the NMDC approach for a strategic new settlement site, at a relatively early stage of plan making, and as part of a comprehensive approach to community engagement, co-design and masterplanning.

## What was the coding process?

The process focused explicitly on the analysis and vision stages of the coding work, rather than the production of an actual code. An important part of activity has been engagement with the public and stakeholders, to inform the vision. The approach set out to be inclusive, comprehensive and accessible. Key officers and working groups from all three councils were working alongside external consultants (Hyas Associates Ltd, Prior and Partners, itp and Gillespies) to undertake the work.

*“ There were lots of people involved which required lots of management and programme management. ”*

The key aspects of the coding process included:

### 1. Community Liaison Group

An independently recruited Community Liaison Group was established, including bringing on board younger people. This group had numerous sessions with officers and the masterplanning consultants, including being given training in planning terminology and the planning process. It is anticipated that this group will have a long-term future throughout the project.

### 2. Digital Engagement Platform

A Digital Engagement Platform was established to host background information and implement a range of engagement tools online, with the aim of determining what local people thought were successful examples of place. Various activities were undertaken online including an open call for ideas, stories, send a picture, pin on a map, and a survey. The engagement website was translatable into over 100 languages and was compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1.

### 3. Paper-based and in-person consultation

While much activity was through online processes, parallel services were put in place to give equal access to those who wish to use traditional paper-based communication methods. Copies of the material were distributed locally to community meeting spaces (such as local churches) with a return Freepost address, and on-street interviewing has been undertaken.

### 4. Communication teams

Seldom heard groups were identified and approached directly by dedicated communication activity, including people with disabilities and long-term health issues, those over 65, and minority religions.

“What can we do to engage more people? We constantly strive to do better - and want people to feel empowered to have a say. We have many very informed people locally, but we want to talk to those who don't know what a DPD is. Their voice is valid too.”

### 5. Workshops

A series of workshops were undertaken – these were initially focused on themes and to help get input to shape the vision. Multiple workshops were offered for different audiences, including officers from across the different councils, statutory stakeholders, Town & Parish Councils, council members, seldom heard groups and general access to local residents/communities. There were two workshops with statutory consultees, the first comprising Essex County Council officers (highways, schools and green infrastructure), and the second with attendees from a range of bodies including Natural England, Historic England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and a number of water companies. A health and wellbeing workshop was also planned.

### 6. Social media and local press

A social and traditional media communication strategy established content on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Spotify, and in print advertising in the local press and magazines.

## What form will the code take?

The outputs from this pilot testing programme included: a baseline report covering the understanding of the site constraints and opportunities, covering a range of key themes and influences; a defined Engagement Strategy output – including engagement material and activities to stimulate thinking, promote engagement and provide evidence for future stages of work - and a Strategic vision. The Strategic Vision was intended to establish a unified vision, and a set of development principles and objectives. It is anticipated that the Strategic Vision, the baseline report, and the engagement materials will provide a strong foundation for the future development of a site-specific Design Code. <https://talk.tcbgardencommunity.co.uk/12145/widgets/41917/documents/23931>

At pre-masterplanning and pre-preferred option stage the Strategic Vision is structured around five key themes that have emerged from the consultation process and the masterplanning team's work. These five themes broadly echo those in the NMDC. The Strategic Vision explores each theme, setting out a vision statement and strategic principles and defining how each principle will be achieved with illustrations, statistics and figures that back up the statements. The Strategic Vision, the masterplan and design code will play a role alongside the suite of DPD documents, which are the formally adopted policy of the council.



*A layered set of design guidance/control mechanisms*

# MOVEMENT AND CONNECTIONS

THE GARDEN COMMUNITY WILL BE STRUCTURED AROUND A DENSE NETWORK OF WALK AND CYCLE ROUTES, RAPID PUBLIC TRANSIT WILL BE PRIORITISED AND SUPPORTED BY A RANGE OF INNOVATIVE MOBILITY MEASURES MEANING DAY TO DAY TRIPS WILL BE SHORTER, QUICKER AND CHEAPER WITHOUT A CAR.



## STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES



### A PLACE WHERE ACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IS THE NATURAL CHOICE

Journeys will be different. The streets will be designed for people not cars, while dedicated traffic-free links will make walking, cycling and shared transport the natural choice for most trips – whether this be going to work, dropping the kids off at school on the way or meeting friends at the weekend. It will more direct, quicker and cheaper to travel by active and sustainable modes – linked by Mobility-As-A-Service – and therefore there will be no need to own a car.



### A PLACE WITH RAPID, EFFICIENT AND COST EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

A new Rapid Transit network will link the Garden Community to Colchester on high quality vehicles, operating at high frequencies with priority over general traffic. This will make Rapid Transit the first choice for trips into town and for those taking the train to London and elsewhere. This will be a huge benefit for existing communities and for those travelling in to use the Park and Choose site, making the area even more attractive as a place to live, work and visit.



### A CONNECTED PLACE

The Garden Community will have excellent strategic connections to Colchester, London and beyond, recognising the chance to grow a new corridor of opportunities on a national scale. Locally the Garden Community will be seamlessly connected with local assets such as the university and residents will find it easy to connect to neighbours, both on- and off-site.



### A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE HAVE PRIORITY

The starting point for the design of the Garden Community will be a network of people-focused streets and traffic-free routes that ensure it is quicker to walk, cycle and scoot than use the car. The streets will be for play and enjoyment first, with traffic and deliveries carefully managed such that the streets are seen as a key setting for community life.



### A PLACE WHERE THE CAR DOES NOT DOMINATE

While the Garden Community will not design out the car it will purposefully be planned for a different future where reduced private ownership and shared modes are efficient, safe and cheaper. While access will be possible to every house by car, the design of the streets will mean that cars will move slowly and be understood as guests in the streetscape. The streets will be designed such that parking spaces, car parks and car courts can be repurposed as community spaces as car ownership falls in the future.

## OBJECTIVES

### A PLACE WHERE ACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IS THE NATURAL CHOICE

- + Transit oriented development with higher density around mobility hubs corresponding to reduced car parking levels
- + Network of mobility hubs with a range of facilities connecting RTS to first/last mile options on-site
- + Demand Responsive Services will be available from day one
- + Plentiful secure and covered cycle parking at key destinations and residential areas
- + Cycle and scooter hire docking stations at key destinations and community centres
- + Robust travel plans in place, linked to mode share targets
- + Horse riders will be provided for with a network of bridleways

### A PLACE WITH RAPID, EFFICIENT AND COST EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- + RTS routes given priority through the Garden Community and off-site, linking local centres and putting most residents within 800m of services
- + RTS stops as part of mobility hubs in all centres and residential areas
- + RTS running from day one with high frequency
- + Park and Choose to complement the function of RTS
- + Integrated ticketing for RTS and other bus services

### A CONNECTED PLACE

- + Link Road providing good connections to A120 and A133
- + Walking and cycle routes connected to ROW and on high quality and direct link to the University and Colchester

### A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE HAVE PRIORITY

- + Dense network of traffic-free walking and cycling links making use of existing country lanes
- + Residential streets designed with 10mph design speed with off-plot and sensitively incorporated car parking
- + Non-residential streets designed with 20mph design speed, with segregated cycle links
- + All movement routes and corridors will be through attractive, landscaped, tree-lined corridors for amenity, air quality mitigation, biodiversity, mental health

### A PLACE WHERE THE CAR DOES NOT DOMINATE

- + No access through residential areas for general traffic
- + Off-plot car parking paid for separately to house purchase/rental
- + Car parking levels below the 'minimum' ECC standards
- + Car club promotion to reduce the need for car ownership
- + On- and off-street car parking designed flexibly with future non-car uses in mind
- + Design of streets to discourage informal parking
- + Vehicle access and loading restrictions to manage servicing needs
- + Hierarchy of street types to provide for the different routes, vehicular types and places
- + Streets designed for all users including those with mobility impairments
- + Emergency and service access throughout the street network

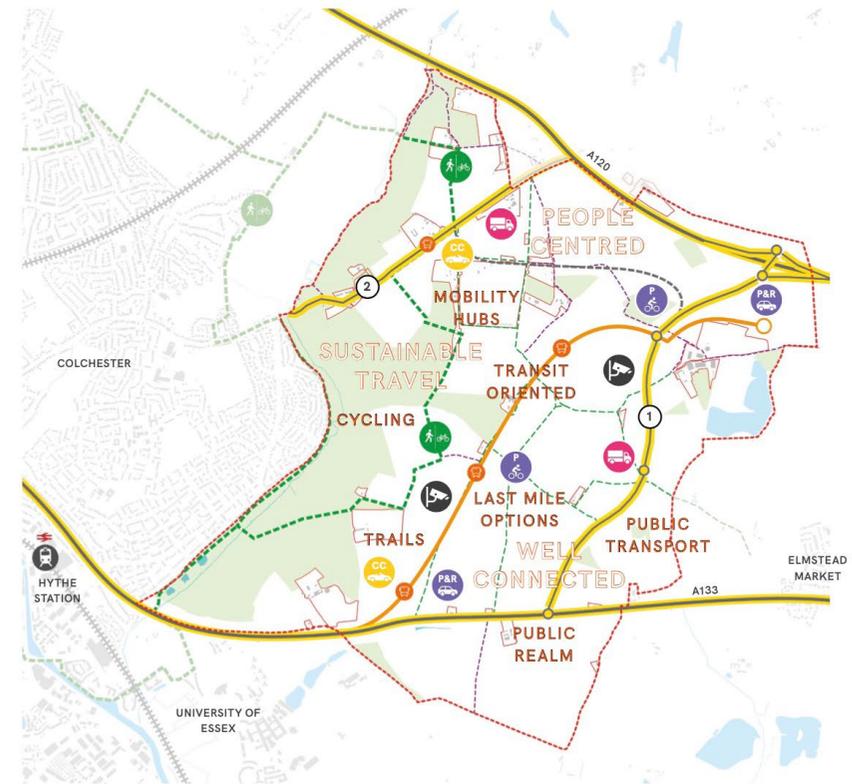


FIGURE 4 Movement and Connections



## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

### Parked cars waiting

In the UK our cars are parked for 96% of the time (80% at home and 16% elsewhere).

Source: *The International Garden Cities Institute*



### Cycling for commuting

Recent analysis of data from the Active People Survey has shown that people who cycle for travel purposes (i.e. rather than simply for recreation) are four times as likely to meet physical activity guidelines as those who don't.

Source: *Public Health Matters, Public Health England*



### Investment in public transport

Investment in buses generates significant social, economic and environmental benefits to passengers, other road users and the wider community with every £1 spent generating benefits of up to £8.

Source: *The 'true value' of local bus services. Greener Journeys, 2017.*



### Benefits of car share

Car clubs providing access to a vehicle without the expense of ownership, with every car club taking 18.5 private cars off the road. Freeing up road space that would otherwise be required for parking improves social cohesion, increases space for children to play and helps contribute towards vibrant communities.

Source: *CoMoUK*



### CO<sub>2</sub> and the private car

Transport produced 27% of the UK's total emissions in 2019. Of this, the majority (91%) came from road transport vehicles (111 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e). The biggest contributors to this were cars and taxis, which made up 61% of the emissions from road transport.

Source: *Transport and Environment Statistics 2021 Annual report, Department for Transport*



### The future of deliveries

Four models are predicted to dominate last mile delivery in the future: Autonomous Guided Vehicles (robots!) with parcel lockers, drones, and bike couriers.

Source: *Parcel delivery: The future of last mile. McKinsey & Company, 2016*



## LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM OTHER PLACES

### BELFAST GLIDER

The Glider operates a direct cross-city service between east and west Belfast and between Belfast City Centre and Titanic Quarter.

#### Lessons for the Garden Community

- + **High quality service** providing people with **better access** to jobs, hospitals, shops, schools, colleges, and entertainment
- + Glider routes consist of both **dedicated bus lanes**, that are operational from 7am to 7pm, and **mixed traffic lanes**, which are available to all traffic
- + Priority given at **signalised junctions**
- + **More reliable** than normal bus services and **cut public transport journey times** by as much as 25%
- + 18 metre articulated buses with a capacity of 105 people which provide a **greater capacity than that provided by current double deck buses**
- + Major stops and interchanges provide **secured cycle parking**



### HOUTEN, NETHERLANDS

Filtered permeability a key traffic management tool used in locations that achieve lower levels of car use.

#### Lessons for the Garden Community

- + **Car driving is restricted on internal roads**, meaning that most car journeys are required to use the external ring road, making them significantly **longer than walking or cycling**
- + **Reduces the ability for motorised vehicles** to travel through the centre of an area while maintaining access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport
- + While car ownership is reasonably high in Houten (415 cars per 1,000 population, compared to the UK average of 488), the **layout of the streets has successfully increased the attractiveness of walking and cycling** with over 60% of trips shorter than 7.5km made by these modes



### LOCAL INSPIRATION



### CAMBRIDGESHIRE GUIDED BUSWAY

Dedicated busway, pedestrian and cycle route providing reliable, fast and direct links to connect new and existing neighbourhoods with employment and services

*“ We always look to produce good practice. It has made me think about the order that we do things, so that they align with any planning reform that takes place. There is an increased role for this sort of document in the future. ”*

## Lessons learned

**A focus on engagement, from an early stage** – Focused and strategic community engagement (and the creation of a Community Liaison Group) were underpinning themes within this case study. Engaging and involving communities – including traditionally seldom heard groups – from the very start of a project can help to establish a strong sense of place within new development, while reassuring local communities of the ambitions for high quality. This is particularly important when planning a large new settlement in a high demand area where there may typically be community scepticism to development.

**A 'layered' approach to scope and level of detail** – The approach to design codes will need to emerge in a proportionate and layered way, increasing in scope and detail over time to avoid inappropriate or restrictive detail arising too early in the process. The process for such a large project cannot be rushed and time must be allowed for ongoing engagement and involvement of important stakeholders, particularly elected members.

**Resources and project leadership** – The scale of this garden settlement project is significant and has drawn in a large number of authority officers and external consultants. This places specific demands for effective project leadership and management capability and resources to be in place from the outset. Councils also need to be an intelligent client to get the best from consultants.

**External consultants** – There is likely to be a reliance on external consultants to undertake certain tasks and processes as there is unlikely to be capacity within local authorities to undertake all necessary work. This could include matters such as: technical inputs (transport, engineering, utilities, etc); urban/landscape design & preparation of plans, maps & diagrams; and expert facilitation & engagement support.

**Engage with landowners / promoters at an early stage** – When working with landowners / promoters it will be important to consider at an early stage how design will be ultimately managed and controlled, at what stage in the process, who ought to lead/input and in what way.

**Applying the approach in different local contexts** – When thinking about applying the process, sufficient thought needs to be given to how the approach may be applied locally. The Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community project is unlike any other within the councils' areas, and as such the process is unique, albeit it can provide valuable lessons for places elsewhere regionally or nationally.

## In their words

As part of the NMDC pilot project research, interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders involved in each of the pilots. This section summarises some of those reflections.

## **Development in a greenfield location**

Building a new development from scratch in a greenfield location is a very sensitive endeavour. Design coding is a way to show commitment to securing high quality design outcomes, it is a well understood measure and aligns with the councils' agenda – helping to demonstrate that they are serious about achieving high quality design. It is about putting it into practice and being aligned to a national programme about achieving design quality. The benefit of the code is that you get the scheme through the system with the right controls so there are benefits in terms of speed and in achieving the right outcomes.

## **Policy context and status of the design code**

Both authorities have Local Plans that have recently been adopted in each council – they both share the same Section 1 on strategic housing growth and have identified the broad location of this new garden community. They are now producing a site-specific development plan document. The Local Plan sets out that they need to evolve a masterplan and an approach for this community; the design code will sit alongside the masterplan process. Coding makes it more tangible and should streamline the process to get the right design controls in place alongside the policy development. The councils are clear that design codes will have an important role to play in the future. They will continue to consider what specific level of design guidance and design coding will be included in the DPD, or whether the level of detail is best set out separately and accompanying the high level DPD policy, for example as separate design guidance, potentially as an SPD.

## **The Strategic Vision**

The Strategic Vision is not strictly spatial – it is pre-masterplan. It sets the context for the whole site, leading into the masterplan phase, then there may be more local subdivision of the site. The five themes (in the Strategic Vision) are the umbrella under which issues sit, that broadly echo those that are set out in the NMDC ten characteristics of well-designed places. However; grouping into five themes (rather than ten) felt appropriate at this stage. It is really about principles at this point rather than detailed design, and at each milestone it will get more 'flesh' and detail. It is flexible but it raises an expectation of a level of ambition, a direction to be as ambitious as it can possibly be. There are some key things that will be enshrined from the start, for example protection of key green assets.

## **Stewardship**

Stewardship is quite difficult to deal with at this stage; the ideas that the councils may have on stewardship cannot be talked about with any degree of certainty. It is a level of detail for when you know what the assets are and when you are much further along the process.

## **Time and resources**

It does take time and resources to deploy. It needs time to apply properly and to bring everyone along without things appearing rushed, premature or lacking in stakeholder or public input. The project benefits from defined programme resources and a budget to address its specific needs. This includes a small, dedicated team of council officers. There is some distinction between programme related activity (which is funded equally by the three councils) and planning related activity (which is a statutory responsibility of Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council). The programme budget is covering the team/resource, masterplan, communications and delivery/governance costs associated to the project, as these are considered to be additional to standard council activity. The programme budget is supplemented by other funding secured either from Government (such as through the Garden Communities Programme) or from developers (such as via PPA/equivalent).

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The full National Model Design Code (NMDC) Pilot Programme Monitoring and Evaluation can be downloaded here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1083852/NMDC\\_M\\_E\\_final\\_report\\_v5.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1083852/NMDC_M_E_final_report_v5.pdf)