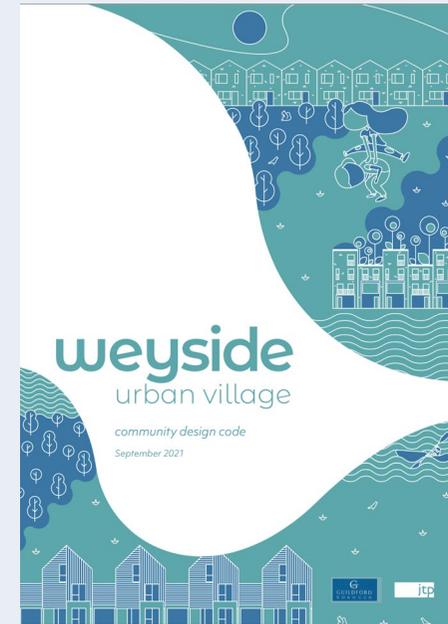


Guildford Borough Council: Weyside Urban Village Community Design Code

This case study was prepared as part of the six month testing programme for the draft National Model Design Code (NMDC), run by DLUHC (then, MHCLG) from April to September 2021. Not all participants prepared design codes and all the pilot projects were at different stages when the pilot started. This case study is not a recommendation of best practice but seeks to highlight the work the local authority did as part of the pilot programme and the local authority's reflections on the programme and the design coding process.

Guildford Borough Council: Weyside Urban Village Community Design Code

Scale:	site specific
Context:	suburban
Focus:	brownfield regeneration
Project team:	Guildford Borough Council, jtp - architects and masterplanners



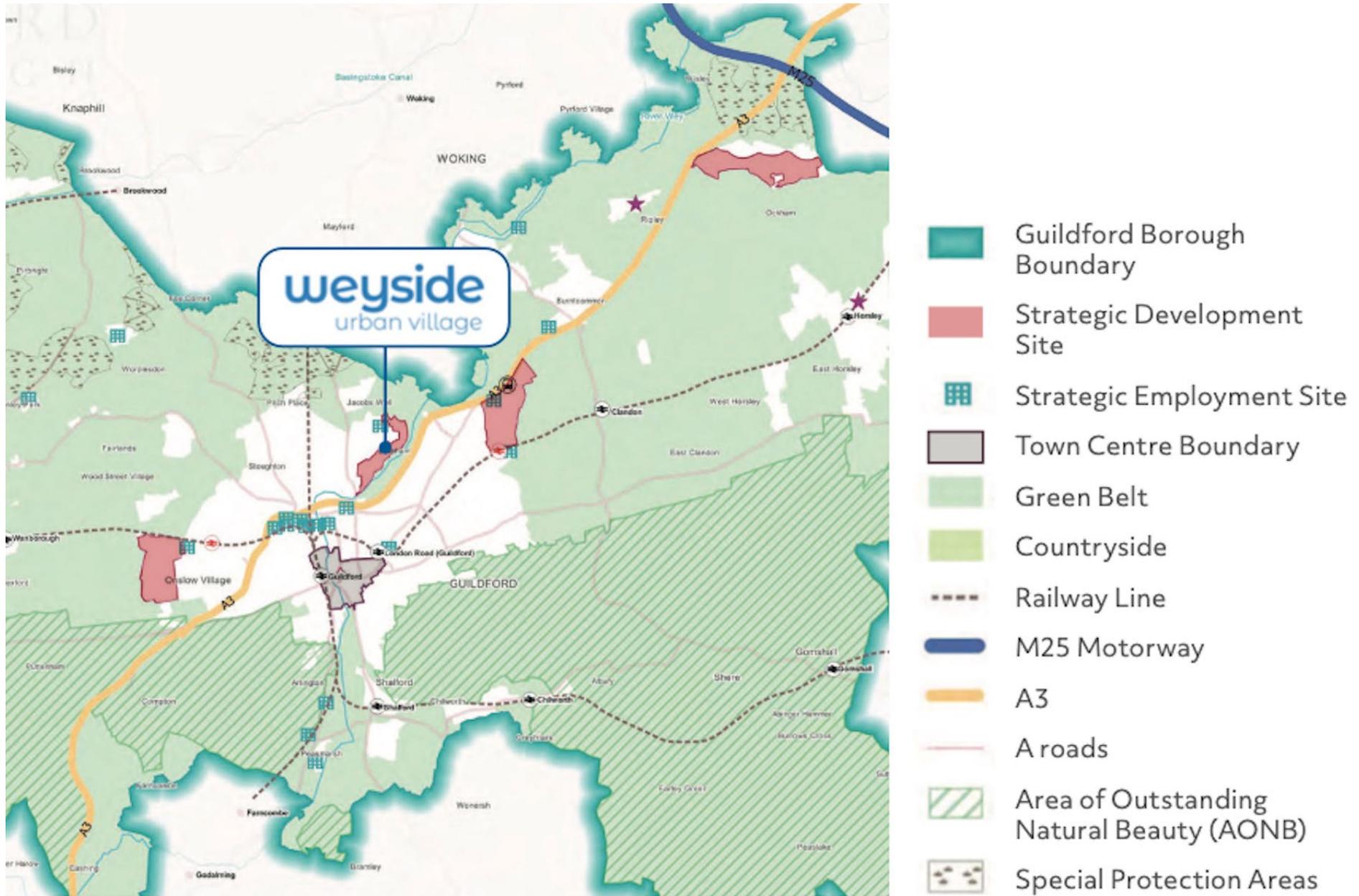
Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the process and outcomes of developing a community design code for phase 1 of Weyside Urban Village (WUV) - a large suburban development on brownfield land on the urban fringe of Guildford. The key themes included the role of engagement in building community capacity to enable effective participation in the design code process and in future consultation on the delivery of this major project; and the use of an invited Community Review Panel for the engagement, with representatives from the local residents and a range of local organisations.

Local Authority background information

Guildford Borough is located within the county of Surrey, with Guildford being the county town, known for its historic buildings and landscapes. Situated in the south west of the county the town is surrounded by Green Belt and countryside. Guildford has its origins where the River Wey flows through the North Downs ridge. This constrains development and creates a clear sense of separation between the town and outlying settlements, protecting the highly valued environment that is a distinctive part of the borough's character.

The key objective of the recently adopted Local Plan is to balance the protection of the borough's valued environment whilst accommodating development needs.



Guildford Borough map locating the town of Guildford in the centre and Weyside Urban Village on the urban fringe

The design code site and its context

The site chosen for the pilot code is a small section of Weyside Urban Village (WUV), which forms part of an allocated Strategic Development Site (SDS), known as the Slyfield Area Regeneration Project (SARP), within Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) adopted Local Plan area.

The objective of WUV and the SARP is to redevelop a brownfield site to create a mix of uses including up to 1,550 dwellings, 6 Gypsy and Traveller pitches, a local centre (comprising retail, healthcare, community, nursery, and flexible employment uses) as well as 6,600 sqm of flexible employment space and a new Council Depot Site. This will make a significant contribution towards meeting the borough's housing and employment needs and create a sustainable new community alongside the River Wey.

The proposals for WUV were already supported by a Design Code, which had been prepared to take account of responses during the pre-application consultation. The aim of the Design Code for WUV is to ensure that the quality of housing and building design remains high and consistent across the whole site, which will be delivered on a phased basis over a 10-15 year period. However, as the hybrid planning application was under consideration by the LPA, at the time of the pilot, the design code had not yet been tested. A thorough local character assessment had been undertaken and an illustrative masterplan with distinct character areas prepared for the site as part of the planning application.

Periodic review of the Design Code will be agreed by the Council, to assess the quality of development to date against the original vision. Consideration will be taken into account of any changes to legislation, technological advancements or other matters which may affect the design. The document will be updated accordingly to ensure the design quality is maintained.

The location of the WUV site on the urban fringe means that it has to respond to both the range of adjacent urban uses to the west as well as to the natural environment and historic landscape features to the east. Both have been significant influences in developing the masterplan framework which has been landscape-led. The proposals draw from the influences of surrounding natural features and encourage cohesion between new and existing communities, through improving access to key landscape features whilst ensuring their enhancement and protection. These adjacent features will therefore impact on the design code testing as the ability of existing and new communities to access these areas will be significantly affected by the built form, public realm, movement corridors, and siting of uses within the WUV development.

There will be particular focus on design aspects to ensuring positive conditions in relation to WUV's river-front location.

This is a key driver of character. Achieving a high quality living environment, considering the higher densities being proposed for the site; and supporting strong and attractive connections for walking and cycling between the site and the town centre, are paramount. Furthermore the council are seeking high standards with regard to climate change, sustainable design and construction, and energy efficiency.

Why code?

The decision to use design codes was part of Guildford's strategic ambition to improve design quality and placemaking. WUV was also one of four strategic sites in the borough experiencing substantial development pressure, thus the aim to create an exemplar new environment on this site. Additionally, because WUV had been promoted by the council as a significant development, there was a strong desire to ensure high design quality. The Council's intention for the pilot programme that focused on phase 1 of the WUV site, was to establish a process to engage with the community and secure design quality, setting the standard to be applied on the remaining strategic sites and creating a new community design code as a companion to the existing detailed design code.

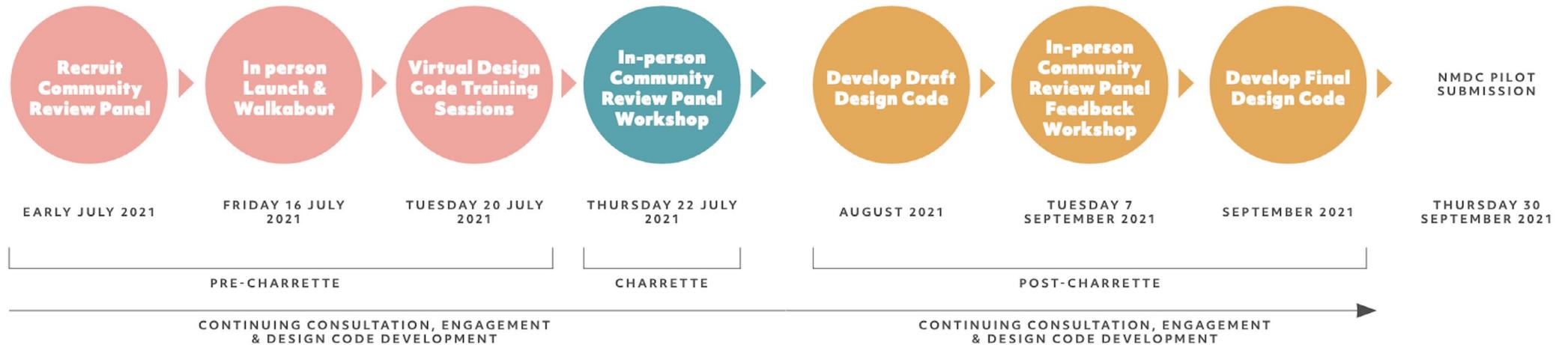


Weyside Urban Village Phase 1, shaded in red, is the NMDC testing area

Developed through community engagement and using the NMDC process, the new community design code provides design guidance on community priorities for the future development of WUV. The pilot testing process will also have an influence on the evolution and stewardship of the original Design Code for WUV, which will be used over a 10-15 year period.

What was the coding process?

The most innovative aspect of the design coding process was the approach taken by the consultants to community engagement. The Community Design Code was developed with an invited Community Review Panel (CRV) that included representatives from a range of local organisations as well as local residents.



Community consultation and engagement timeline

Due to the relatively short time frame of the pilot programme, the panel was asked to focus on Phase 1 of the WUV development, although broader issues were also discussed. The design principles in the code were developed as a direct response to the issues raised at the engagement events and reflect those priorities.

Training and support were provided, tasks were assigned to those willing to commit the time, and a true sense of dialogue seems to have been established. However, this required substantial time, resources and commitment from all parties.

JTP organised a series of events in July and September 2021, which were divided into three phases - pre-charrette, charrette and post-charrette. The pre-charrette included a walkabout and an online training workshop on design codes. There followed an in-person workshop on the development of the design code focusing on design issues and preferences. These were developed into a series of design principles and a draft design code which was tested by JTP at a further event before being finalised.

The Community Review Panel also compared the existing Design Code submitted with the formal planning application to the NMDC and identified the differences.

The resulting Community Design Code will have no formal status as part of the planning process but will help to influence subsequent reserved matters applications for WUV and also future reviews of the site-wide Design Code which forms part of the outline planning application. The intention, as a result of the process, is that the recommended Community Engagement Strategy will set a benchmark process and help form a design brief for future planning applications for the three remaining strategic sites.

2. summary of engagement process

key themes

To help further refine the outcomes from the community planning events the following six key themes were developed which represent a summary of comments received through the summer engagement process. These key themes were used to inform the draft design code in the next section.



close to nature

Less formal, more naturalistic/ rustic planting (orchards and wildflowers) – encouraging wildlife to flourish

Views to greenspace from homes and within streets – reinforcing more rural character

Soft edges and buffers SuDS features that allow people to access the water

Smaller green spaces nearer home and street trees to soften the masterplan

Private external amenity space for all



distinct local identity

Draw on the character of the wider Guildford area

Respond to the character of the river and riverside buildings

Incorporate water into the landscape design

Limited palette of good quality materials based on local precedents

Timeless design principles to ensure longevity

Finer grained distinctiveness within character areas, but the whole must be cohesive



landmark spaces not buildings

Avoid taller buildings that are 'inappropriate and out of keeping' with the local area

Focus height away from the 'edges'

Green features and community art/sculptures creating meeting places and acting as navigation points

'Special' buildings working in harmony with spaces

String of pearls along the river (buildings and spaces)

Clear wayfinding strategy in place from the beginning, with easy-to-read maps and clear and relevant naming of streets and spaces



built to last

(Flexible and adaptable to change)

Housing for all with good mix of tenures and sizes

Zero Carbon Ready - homes that enable net zero impact across their lifetime, this includes energy, materials and waste from construction to end-of-life

Implement passive design principles and design for the integration of renewable

Design-in space for batteries within homes

Buildings and parking spaces adaptable to other uses in the future

Room for workshop spaces, working locally and working from home

Secure cycle stores for all homes to encourage transition away from the car

Deliver meanwhile sustainable transport services ahead of delivery of the SMC – bus service and car-sharing hub



ageing gracefully

(Long term management & maintenance)

Buildings, landscape, roads and public realm should be specified to age well and be easy to maintain

Deliver the aspirations of the architect's drawings

Ensure the whole neighbourhood is well maintained in perpetuity and clarity on who is responsible for maintenance

Deliver adequate parking and a managed parking strategy – including consideration of larger spaces for bigger vehicles – and manage it well to avoid damage from inappropriate parking in other areas



clear governance

(of the Design Code)

The status of the Design Code and the guidance it contains should be crystal clear

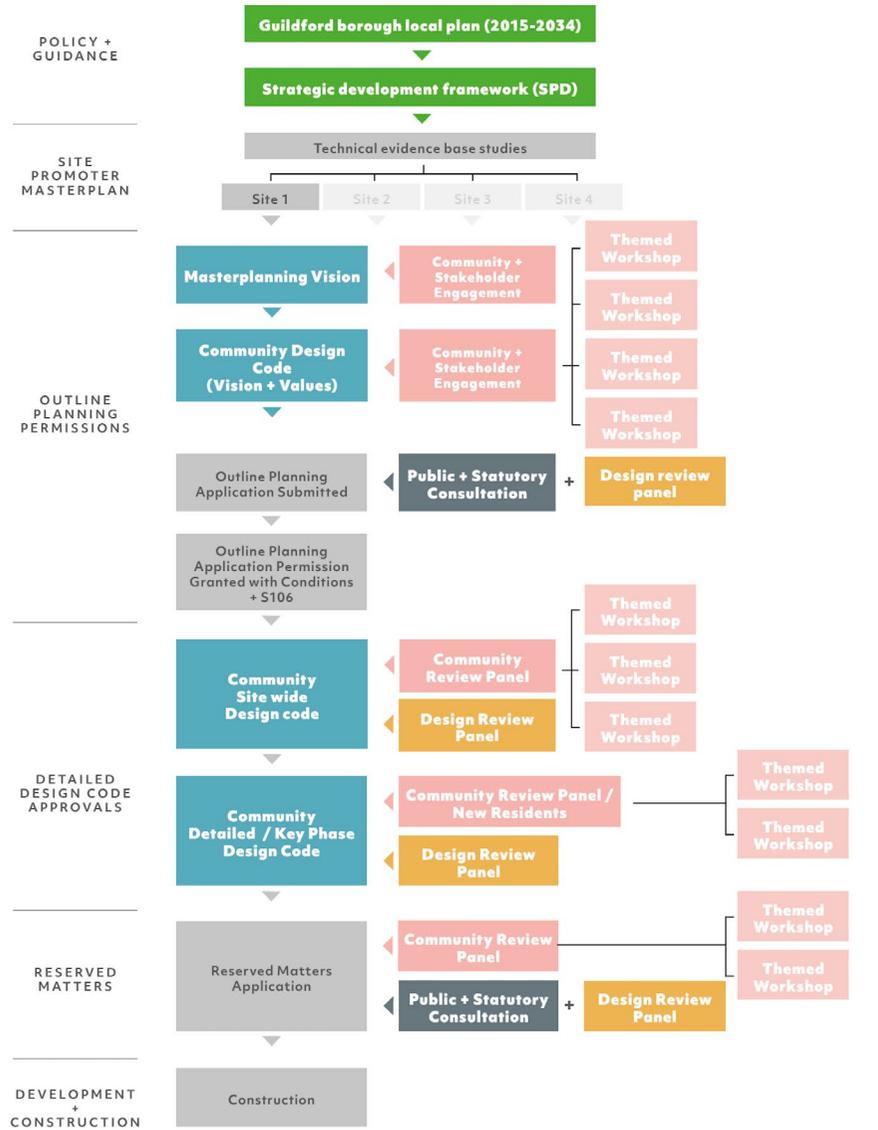
Be clear about how it relates to other documents such as the Neighbourhood Plan and local planning documents

Be clear about how much flexibility there is and who gets to decide what level of departure is acceptable

Set out how and when future revisions will be made and how the community will be kept informed and involved in the process

Who 'owns' the code? Need someone to champion it in the local authority and make sure it is implemented

recommended process for strategic masterplanning sites in Guildford



What form will the code take?

The WUV Community Design Code is a simplified, high level design code that reflected community input and could be used easily by a wide range of stakeholders. It is clearly related to the themes in the NMDC, while addressing the issues raised in the community consultations. There are the same chapter headings as in the NMDC but in a slightly different order: The Vision, Masterplan Framework, Context, Movement, Nature, Public Space, Built Form, Identity, use, Homes and Buildings, Resources, and Lifespan. The particular design principles in each section are clearly set out, with key statements that describe what needs to be achieved and why that is important. This is followed by a series of bullets beneath which is explained the way in which principles will be delivered through specific designs.

masterplan framework plan



WUV schematic Phase 1 masterplan in the Community Design Code

The Community Design Code with its clearly-stated principles is supported by clear and simple diagrams, precedent images, and relevant quotes taken from the community engagement process. There is also a schematic masterplan for the phase 1 part of the site. The images are all annotated so that it is evident what is important about them and why the image is being included – to emphasise the elements that the reader should focus on. Additionally, everything contained within the code is deemed to be essential or mandatory, with the expectation that it will be complied with.

public space

Community Hub

New and existing residents will be brought together by...

- designing central green space as a 'community hub' and providing a range of facilities and activities (e.g. coffee shop, benches, book exchange)
- creating flexible spaces that encourage gathering and opportunities for community events
- designing play spaces for all ages (including adults)

"There's a need for a focal place to socialise, which is not too sanitised, where children might have to deal with thistles and corners."

Natural play features



Communal growing area integrated with play features



- Retained trees
- Trees
- Orchard planting
- Wildflower planting
- SuDS feature
- Key views out to green space
- Landmark Space
- Playable mound
- Focal tree
- Play area (LEAP)
- ★ Community focal feature
- Vehicular movement
- Pedestrian movement
- Access to primary school

A page from the Community Design Code showing the indicative sketch plans, precedent images, quotes from the discussions - all in a clear and simple format

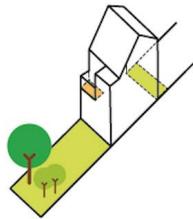
homes + buildings

Amenity Space

The development will ensure quality living for all residents by providing adequate private external amenity space for all dwellings. Homes will comply with minimum amenity space requirements set out below:

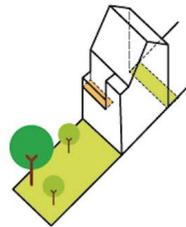
Houses

2 bed / 3/4 person



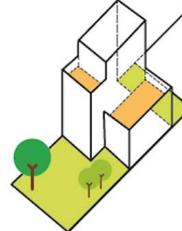
35m² front/back/side gardens & terraces

3 bed / 4/5 person



50m² front/back/side gardens & terraces

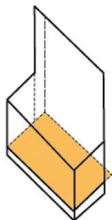
2 bed / 3/4 person



60m² front/back/side gardens & terraces

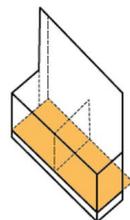
Apartments

1 bed / 2 person



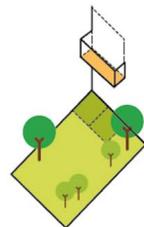
5m² private balcony

2 bed / 3 person



6m² combined total area of private balconies and serving dwellings

2 bed / 4 person



8m² 6m² of private balconies & 2m² communal space

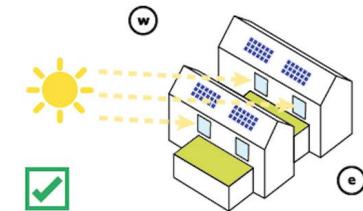
The homes+buildings and resources pages in the Community Design Code

resources

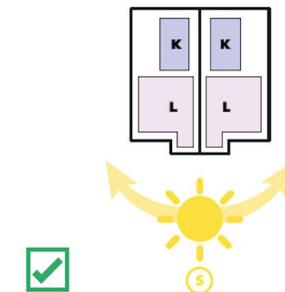
Energy

Weyside Urban Village will be forward looking and ambitious in its energy strategy, as a pioneer for sustainable development. This will be achieved by, but not limited to...

- maximising opportunity for passive design that reduces energy demand
- exceeding Building Regulations regarding energy efficiency
- demonstrating a road map to zero carbon
- building homes that are Zero Carbon Ready that enable net zero impact across their lifetime, this includes energy, materials and waste from construction to end-of-life
- considering optimisation of roofs for integration of renewables, amenity and biodiversity
- designing in space for batteries within homes



Optimise building orientation for passive energy gains, e.g. installing PV panels on south facing roofs and considering the use of linked typology on east-west facing houses.



Design floorplans so that principal living spaces benefit from access to sun. E.g. reception/living room to face south, and kitchen/bathrooms to face north.

Lessons learned

Building community capacity to engage in design codes

Condensing the community engagement process into a short period of time helped to ensure that momentum and interest levels were maintained. Local knowledge and aspirations are best harnessed around the broader aspects of design and vision where they can bring added value. The ability of local people to engage with more detailed/technical elements should not be overestimated. It is important to build capacity in the community through education and training so that engagement is positive for all stakeholders and yields useful results while creating an informed community.

The Community Review Panel process

The formation of a Community Review Panel for this pilot process created a successful foundation for engagement in the larger development over the next decade. It delivered a breadth of representation and quality of engagement. There was a desire from the community to establish a clear set of rules that are easy to follow and easy to police reflecting strong views on vision and values while trusting to the professionals to determine detailed requirements and rules for delivery. Therefore, communities are likely to need professional, technical support through most, if not all, of the engagement process to ensure that the resultant design code adequately represents their aspirations but also has the “teeth” to be enforceable.

Philosophy of Design Codes

Community input highlighted a need for design codes to respond to a wider vision that is forward looking, ambitious, and striving for higher quality placemaking. A design code should not focus on just best practice design approaches; it should aim to redefine the rules in line with the shared ambitions that have been agreed for the place, including more social aspects alongside the physical attributes.

Role of the community to guide delivery stages of a large masterplanned site

The community can set a vision for a site but they need to understand the realities of deliverability. This requires ongoing education, training and support. Continued consultation with the community on the progress of delivering a development is based on their capacity to understand the issues, the role of viability, and the stages in the delivery process. This requires ongoing commitment by the local council to this process.

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.

Community engagement strategy: building capacity, using a Community Review Panel

The design code pilot has provided a unique opportunity to really engage with the community in a meaningful way and allow the community to express their ideas and preferences about the WUV site.

The first stage in the engagement process was to form a Community Review Panel (CRP) to facilitate this short-term engagement programme. We targeted an identified list of local stakeholders who already had an interest in the area rather than the wider community. We were pleased with the breadth of representation and quality of engagement achieved through this process, but had we had more time, we would have sought to gain input from a wider audience including typically hard to reach groups. The second stage was to inform, educate and build capacity within the CRP so that we could obtain informed and meaningful feedback from them on key design issues that would be relevant to the design code.

“ *The process was about building community capacity* ”

Focus on the big picture, not the detail

The way we ran the design code consultations was not to over-focus on the design code initially but to focus generally on the issues and aspirations for the area – such as green solutions for the new development in relation to the existing area. Then we focused on three themes - movement, landscape and open space, and buildings, and on the elements of good design in the places that they liked. After this extensive consultation in workshops and when we had the contents of the draft design code set out, we went back to the community for further feedback and comments. The community said that this was very helpful and it showed them that we had listened to what they had been telling us about good design.

We consciously decided that we wanted to have the community design code focus on the larger scale and the broader issues - the key vision for the site that was set out as an aspiration by the community - and not to go into too much detail. Overall, we were very conscious of the amount of time that it could take to do this work properly or in enough detail, and also the amount of time that people had available to give to this process; therefore; you need to focus attention and get the most out of the time available.

The language in the design code – flexibility versus prescription

If the design code is to have teeth and to have meaning, then it needs to have quite a bit of thought put into it, particularly in terms of the specific wording. It is often quite easy to pull together the list of priorities and principles but actually spending the time to make sure that what you are writing is clear and not ambiguous is where it takes quite a bit of time in editing and review. We did go back and change the original WUV Design Code in response to a review by the local authority who felt that our previous version had too much flexibility so went back and made sure there was a stronger emphasis on 'musts' rather than 'might' or 'shall', or 'should'. That was one reason why the Community Design Code is all mandatory.

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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