

# Hyndburn Borough Council: Coding the Huncoat Garden Village

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.

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<b>Scale:</b>	Site specific
<b>Context:</b>	Suburban
<b>Focus:</b>	Production of a design code for a major garden village development - Huncoat Garden Village
<b>Project team:</b>	Hyndburn Borough Council, Arcadis
<b>Region:</b>	North West



## Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the process and outcomes of developing a design code for one of Hyndburn's garden village developments - Huncoat Garden Village (HGV). The aim was to improve the design quality of the proposed development using a detailed design code which would be prepared by external consultants for the local authority. Key themes included simplification of the code for ease of use making it accessible to all stakeholders, viability testing of the draft design code, and development and use of a range of consultation and engagement techniques to seek the community's preferences on design.

## Local Authority background information

Hyndburn is a Borough where 55% of the housing stock comprises pre-1919 terraces and where good quality family homes are needed to rebalance the housing market. Located between Blackburn and Burnley, Hyndburn is situated at the heart of "Pennine" Lancashire. From the time of the industrial revolution, the towns of Accrington, Great Harwood and Rishton have developed a rich history and distinct character which can significantly influence the content and development of a strong Design Code.

“Hyndburn should be a distinctive, prosperous and vibrant area of Pennine Lancashire, recognised for the collective quality and attractiveness of its market towns and landscape setting.... High quality homes will be developed to provide a more balanced housing market comprising traditional and modern house types constructed using sustainable principles.”

Hyndburn Core Strategy, extract from Vision

## The context for coding

Until recently the township of Huncoat was over-shadowed by the cooling towers of the now demolished power station. Many local residents would have worked at the adjacent colliery that has also now become overgrown. Both sites have been identified as strategic development opportunities and form an integral part of the Garden Village proposals by the council.

Huncoat is a small village steeped in a rich agricultural and industrial history. It was proposed to test aspects of the NMDC process on HGV, which lies to the east of Accrington. This is a strategic growth area identified in the emerging Local Plan and Masterplan where new development will be designed to integrate with the existing community, bringing about transformational, long term change.

Huncoat is a distinctive settlement but acts as an outer suburb/peripheral village to the larger town.

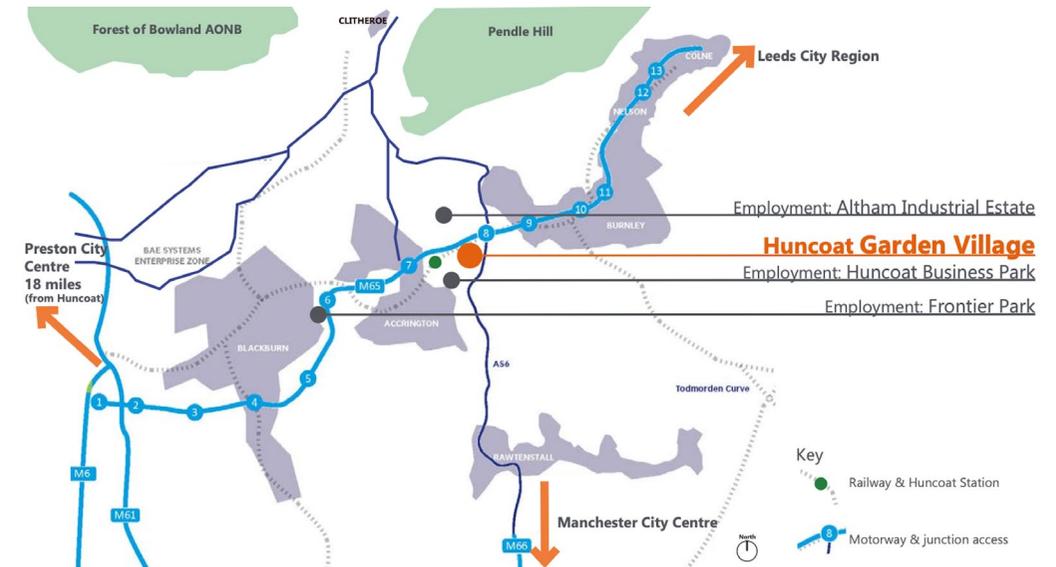
The ambitious vision for HGV benefits from being set in an existing strategic plan and is supported by developing policy. A Masterplan and Delivery Strategy was published in 2021 and sets out the framework for a detailed design code, with major landowners and developers already gearing up to start delivering the masterplan. Testing the National Model Design Code (NMDC) on Huncoat Garden Village would add value to the quality of the scheme, making it more attractive to developers, while helping to increase sales values.

An assessment of viability is being undertaken at the same time as the masterplan that considers all the costs associated with the delivery of infrastructure and this will also consider the costs associated with the delivery of good quality design as expressed through the National Model Design Code.

## Why code?

The design code will set high-quality and viable design standards for the HGV development by focusing on key principles first, and then detailed design.

The design coding process will involve collaborative planning and design by involving the community throughout the process, and this will help Hyndburn Borough Council (HBC) learn lessons on the most appropriate approach to take for community engagement on design. Additionally, viability in areas like Hyndburn is often used as a reason for poor quality outcomes – a design code will help to enshrine higher standards across the Borough.

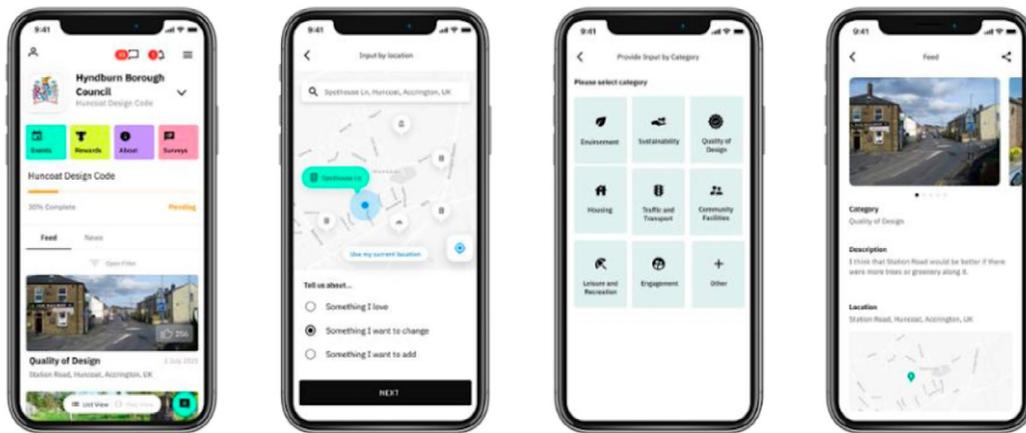


Huncoat Garden Village site location

The Borough is therefore in an ideal position to take benefit from of the NMDC testing programme for a number of reasons:

- The test-bed area of HGV has already been identified and actual development proposals are due to come forward which provide an opportunity for the real application of a design code;
- It provides an opportunity to test a design code for a Garden Village proposal in East Lancashire, which has historically suffered from high levels of deprivation and which is striving to improve its economic prospects and increase the amount of high quality housing stock;
- The area is subject to a masterplan and a large amount of baseline information gathering with detailed analysis has already been produced, both of which will inform a design code;
- The masterplan work means that there is a fully established engagement framework already in place with the local community and landowners/developers;
- The timing of the emerging Local Plan means the council is in a position to be able to take advantage of lessons learned from the design code work. This will be an early example of a plan which fully embraces the Government's priority to achieve high quality design and create beautiful places through the planning system.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes clear that the use of visual tools such as the NMDC will set design expectations early on in the planning and design process, reflecting the local character and aspirations of the community. A design code for HGV will be a valuable tool that sets out the rules for creating a high quality environment for landowners, developers, stakeholders and consultants. The design code will provide a single point of reference, as a material consideration in planning decision-making that translates the local authority's design quality objectives and policies into specific and tailored design parameters to guide and enforce the future development of sites such as HGV.



Pages from the IRYS app developed to facilitate community consultation

**“ The question was asked right from the outset: how does the council ensure [design] quality .... the design code route would be a really useful process ... to ensure the standards of design in terms of both the homes to be built and the street scenes and green spaces ”**

### What was the coding process?

An innovative aspect of the coding process was the development and use of a digital app, Irys, for community engagement. However, the app ran into data protection issues so an online website and engagement platform was developed and used along with traditional face-to-face events such as walking audits with the Huncoat Forum, landowners, and other stakeholders in the local community.

In developing the Huncoat Design Code, there was an aspiration to simplify aspects of the NMDC guidance. Consequently, the ten characteristics of a well-designed place within the NMDC were assigned to three themes created to highlight the key topics - Huncoat House, Huncoat Open Space, and Huncoat Street. However, the final design code, in attempting to follow the format and guidance set within the NMDC, is a complex document that is technically detailed and thus not as easy to use as the council would have liked. There will be ongoing work to simplify the code so that development managers will find it easier to use; this will also enable the local community to better appreciate the way in which it will help to raise design standards for new developments in the area.

Viability testing was done on the draft HGV design code to test the potential costs of the 'should have' over and above the 'must haves'. A preliminary estimate showed a small increase in overall costs (less than 10% on those aspects impacted) but for a significant increase in design quality. Viability testing was seen as an important aspect of the code, and an area where collaboration and negotiations with developers would be a key aspect of collective efforts to raise design standards in an area of low land values.

## What form will the code take?

The final draft design code follows the format and elements of the NMDC closely, with the ten characteristics assigned to one of three themes. It also contains a substantial level of detail.

The code includes a coding plan rather than a detailed masterplan, developed specifically for the code and based on the principles set out in the council's emerging masterplan for the site.

Character areas were also developed rather than area types as more character areas could be identified - six character areas as opposed to two or three area types - resulting in greater diversity across the site. The design code contains mandatory 'must haves' and expected (advisory) 'should haves' - elements to define what is required from developers.

### 2.2. Area Types and Character Areas

The National Model Design Code recommends various area-types based on land use, density, building height and urban form. As per which, three distinct area types have been identified within the site area:

- 1 Local Centres - This relates to the village centre with community facilities, typically consisting of 3-4 storey blocks with commercial uses at ground floor and residential uses above.
- 2 Suburbs - Neighbourhoods with net residential densities of 40-60 dph ranging from high to medium density units. A mix of low-rise apartments, short terraces, townhouses and semi-detached units.
- 3 Outer Suburbs - Lower density suburbs with net residential densities of 20-40 dph.

- Area Type: Suburb
- Area Type: Outer Suburb
- Area Type: Local Centre

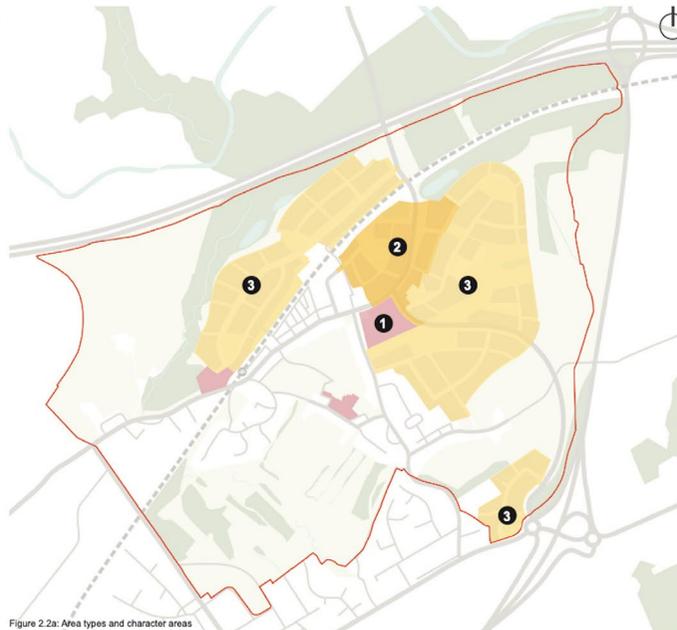


Figure 2.2a: Area types and character areas

Character areas were used instead of area types as there was greater diversity

### 2.3. Character Areas

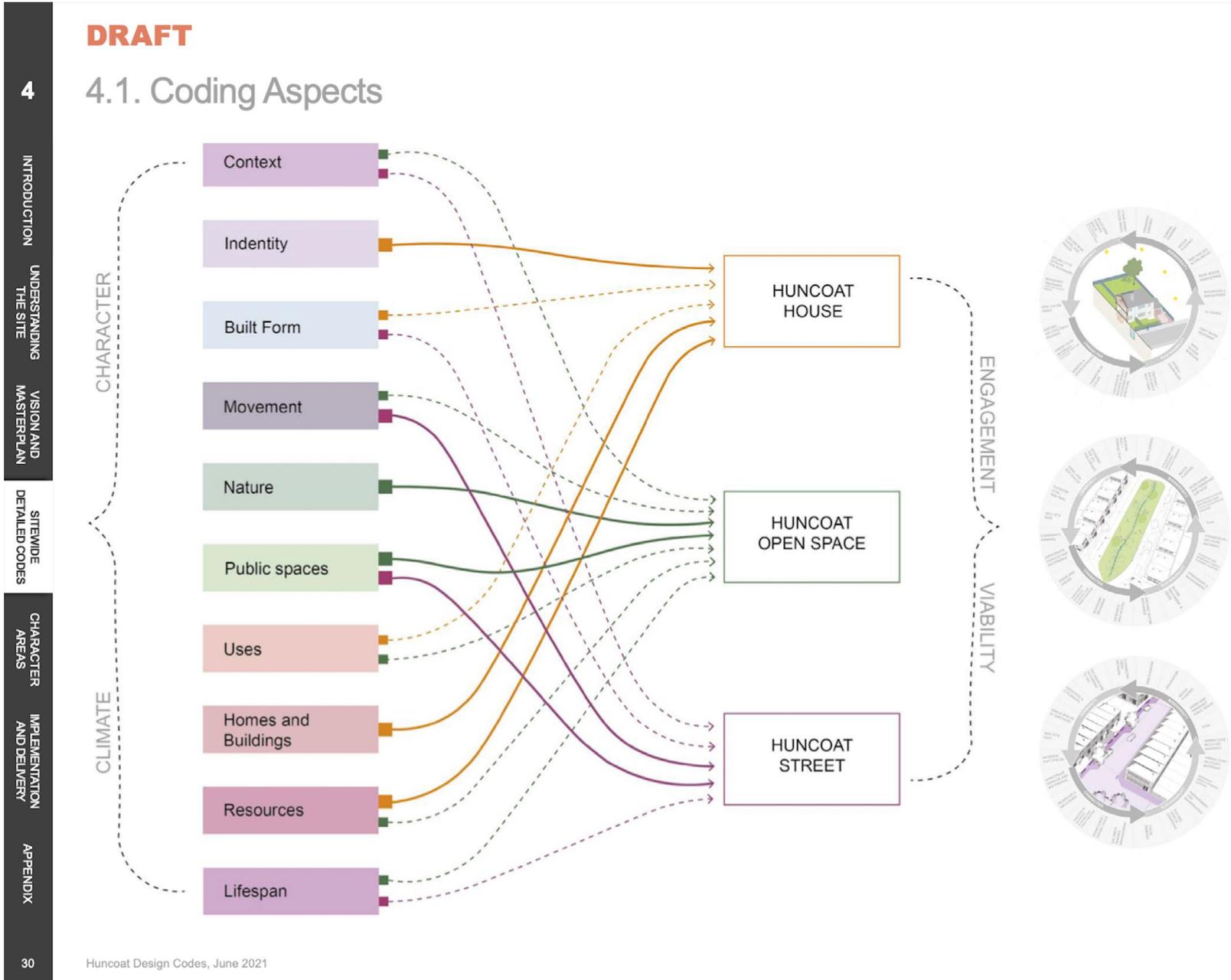
Character is defined by the positive features of a place, which contribute to its unique sense of identity. As the identified area-types are based on land use and density, to create distinct residential neighbourhoods, the identified area-types have been further subdivided as six character areas.

The following six character areas are identified as per the local history, character and landscape features outlined in Section 2.1.

- 1 **The Village Hub** is a proposed community hub of the development in proximity to the railway station. It is proposed to merge the old with the new to function as an urban style space with a local centre, a village square, school, local supermarket, cafe, hairdressers, other commercial uses and high density housing.
- 2 **The Mount** is the historic core of Huncoat Village, consisting of pre 1918 stone terraces and located on one of the highest points of the site. It is also defined by the undulating topography, war memorial and Burnley Lane to the south.
- 3 **The Brown Moor** is an area located partially within the green belt and comprises uncultivated upland. It is proposed to be a suburban residential neighbourhood. The area is also a former power station site and is defined by the railway line and mature woodland area to the north and high voltage lines.
- 4 **The Highgate Houses** area is a low density southern suburban residential neighbourhood consisting of existing houses from 1950s onwards. The area has spectacular views to the surrounding hills and derives its name from the existing Highgate Road.
- 5 **The Hollow**, as referred to by the locals, is the green heart of Huncoat Village and comprises existing playing field and play space, Bluebells Way development from the 1980 to 2018, and high voltage lines passing through the green space. This area is largely characterised by mature woodland area and wildflower planting interspersed with public rights of way connecting the residential neighbourhoods of Huncoat.
- 6 **The Clough Brook Woods** area is one of the low points of the site and was home to Huncoat Colliery. This area derives its name from Clough Brook, an existing watercourse that runs to the west of the proposed development and adjacent open space area which is characterised by areas of high ecological importance, including mosaic of wildlife habitats that is home to butterflies, wildflowers and others. It is proposed to be a suburban residential neighbourhood with connections to the countryside.



Figure 2.3a: Character areas



The 10 NMDC characteristics related to the 3 Huncoat design code themes of House, Open Space and Street - in an early version of code

**DRAFT**

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**4.4.1. Huncoat House Design Principles: COMMUNITY**

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

AREA TYPES, COINING PLAN AND STRATEGIES

CHARACTER AREAS

SITE WIDE DETAILED CODES

DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION

APPENDIX

**REQUIRED DESIGN PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:**

- Windows facing the street for natural surveillance
- Low level walls in front gardens
- Allocated car Parking
- Flexible internal space for conversion and extension
- Secure bin and cycle storage

**EXPECTED DESIGN PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:**

- Secure rear gates and fences

**WINDOWS FACING THE STREET FOR NATURAL SURVEILLANCE**

- Windows from primary rooms must face the street to promote natural surveillance.
- Front gardens must have low-level shrub planting, to allow a clear line of sight to the pavement and road is preferable.
- Housing plots need to include fences to the rear and defensible space/front gardens at the front with a boundary treatment or planting to keep people away from windows.



Figure 4.4f: Natural surveillance

**LOW LEVEL WALLS IN FRONT GARDENS**

- Front boundary walls must be a maximum height of 600mm to maintain views to the street, whilst ensuring privacy. Front boundary walls on tertiary streets can be designed as seating areas to encourage interaction.
- The materials used for front boundary treatments must reflect the local character and / or landscape features as indicated in the Section 4.4.4 (b).
- Hedges serve as an effective boundary function, and can be used to deliver street greening and ecological benefits.
- Clear boundary treatments must be provided for dwelling identification.

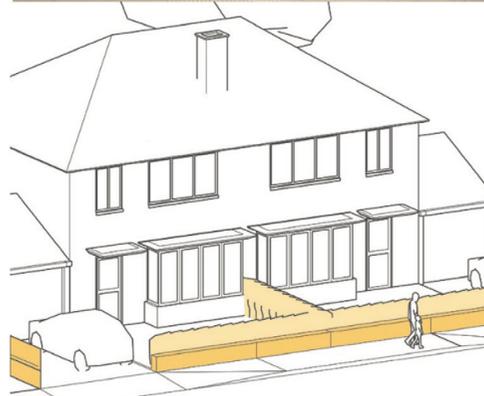


Figure 4.4g: Low level walls in front gardens

**ALLOCATED PARKING SPACE WITH ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINT**

Every house must be provided allocated parking space/s as per the parking standards in Section 4.4.3. The permitted type of private parking spaces are as follows:

- On Plot Parking - integral garages are encouraged where possible. All standalone garages and garages visible from the public right of way must have low pitched roofs.
- Courtyard Parking - public courtyards are accessible to everyone and must be designed to be directly overlooked by houses or flats for natural surveillance.
- Each dwelling must be provided with an integrated Electric Vehicle Charging Point.

Public and Visitor Parking spaces must be provided in line with the parking standards and can be provided as follows:

- On Street Parking - parallel parking should be min. 2.0m wide x 6.0m long. Where the parking spaces are adjacent to cycle lanes they should be a min. 2.4m.
- Local Centre Parking - Parking within the village centre will be shared between residents, visitors and workers.

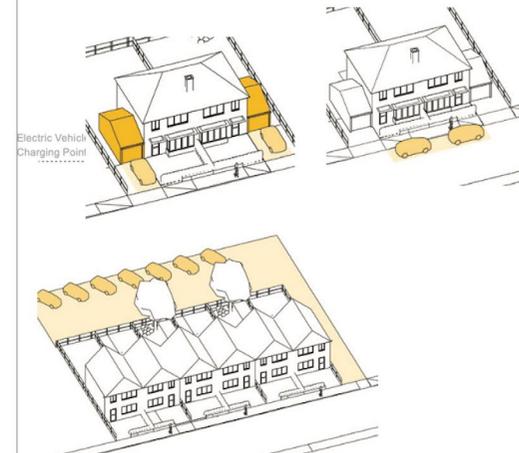


Figure 4.4h: Parking and electric charging points

HGV design code pages illustrating the 'Required design principles' and the 'Expected design principles' in the coloured boxes. The use of the words 'must' and 'should' are used throughout the text.

### 4.1.1. Street Design Principles

**REQUIRED DESIGN PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:**

- On-street parking management
- Home zones / shared space (to ensure pedestrian priority)
- Variation in materials, planting and street furniture
- Appropriately lit and safe streets
- Integrated footpaths & cycleways
- Inclusive and accessible to all
- Creation of connected street network
- Increased tree planting
- Integrate sustainable drainage systems (to mitigate flooding)
- Ensure stewardship and management
- Increased cycle parking



**ON-STREET PARKING MANAGEMENT**

- Management of on-street parking facilities must be ensured to avoid dominance of car in the streetscene.
- Public and Visitor Parking spaces must be provided in line with the parking standards - parallel parking should be min. 2.0m wide x 6.0m long. Where the parking spaces are adjacent to cycle lanes they should be a min. 2.4m.
- Residents parking permit zone should be allocated within residential areas.
- Visitor parking spaces for the local centre, including the school, should be allocated in and around the local centre.

**HOME ZONES / SHARED SPACE FOR MULTIFUNCTIONAL STREET SPACE**

- Special consideration must be given to create safe, multi-functional and generational streets that provide informal settings for activities, such as meeting, resting, playing and holding events.
- All Tertiary Streets and Homeways must be delivered as home zones with reduced speed limits (less than 10 mph) and change in surface to ensure pedestrian priority and safety. Cyclists and vehicles should share road space.
- Traffic calming measures could include chicanes with trees and planting, change in surface and raised tables.

**VARIATION IN MATERIALS, PLANTING AND STREET FURNITURE**

- Arrival Points must be highlighted through distinctive public realm through variation in materials, colour, planting mix and bespoke street furniture.
- A variety in public realm must be ensured throughout the village and new development, through variation in materials, planting and street furniture between primary streets, secondary streets and tertiary streets.
- Street clutter must be minimised on streets and the design should denote unity and harmony.
- Home zones could include shared surfacing but can also include low kerbs and separately marked pavements.

**APPROPRIATELY LIT AND SAFE STREETS**

- All streets must be appropriately lit to ensure the safety of the users.
- Care must be taken to ensure that street lights must not be blocked by trees.
- Street lighting in proximity to the areas of ecological importance must use appropriate lux levels to minimise the impact of lighting on natural habitats.

**INTEGRATED FOOTPATHS AND CYCLEWAYS**

- All proposed and improved streets must be provided with a minimum of 2m footpath on either side for pedestrians.
- All primary and secondary streets must be provided with either a two-way segregated cycleway of 3m or a shared cycleway and footpath of a minimum of 3m.
- All tertiary streets and homeways should be pedestrian and cycle friendly with points of access to the active travel routes and the surrounding landscape for health and wellbeing.



HGV design code pages illustrating the 'Required design principles' and the 'Expected design principles' in the coloured boxes. The use of the words 'must' and 'should' are used throughout the text.

## Lessons learned

**Wider range of communication methods needed during consultations, especially non-digital** – With regard to digital engagement and community access, across Hyndburn there are pockets of the community who do not have easy access to the internet and this was an issue raised during previous consultations on the masterplan. This meant that consultation on the design code should not rely solely on an online platform. Events including exhibitions and walkabouts were useful, but the constraints of the pandemic made this challenging.

*“ It was definitely challenging because there was a section of the community who were not very tech savvy and they probably don't have access to the internet or they have access but they are not very proficient at using it. So that was a concern that a better engagement strategy should be put in place ”*

**Education and training for all stakeholders on design codes** – It is important to appreciate how communities can actually shape the places they will live in and how they communicate their thoughts on design. The community and in fact all stakeholders need to be brought along the journey to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of a range of built environment aspects so that they can engage more fully with planning tools such as design codes.

**A process to engage people that do not have the knowledge to interpret the code** – The language used in consultation is important – there is a translation element in this type of engagement. With ongoing consultation that includes building capacity related to design in the built environment, it is hoped that the community will become better informed and this will help raise the quality of feedback on what is locally popular

**Being clear about aspirations, goals and expectations** – The council needed to be clear about their aspirations, goals and expectations for the design code from the outset, by doing work beforehand, and consulting internally to make these decisions. For example, different departments in the council such as planning or housing take a different perspective on design codes and this needed to be explored in greater detail so that the design code could reflect these different priorities.

## 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.

### Viability testing the draft design code

Acknowledging the viability aspect of new development in relation to the council's aspirations for higher design quality is a real challenge and the lesson throughout this design coding process is that there is a need to focus on the bottom line and really prioritise those design requirements that are absolutely essential. There may be aspects of design that cannot be realised in an area like Hyndburn in that it is difficult to get higher values for properties even though they are really well designed.

From the outset, we wanted to have an open and honest dialogue with developers about their standard products. Additionally, because this is a garden village development and it is aspirational, the quality of design needs to be part of this conversation. However; we also recognised the challenges for development in terms of two brownfield sites with a lot of ground contamination, exacerbating the issues of low land values around Hyndburn.

### **Range of engagement techniques for community consultations**

There were a range of both digital and in-person stakeholder engagements used during the pilot process aligning with the NMDC guidance. Initially the use of a community engagement app, IRYS, was explored to gain feedback on community preferences on design, then a community website took over which also provided information on design codes. Covid restrictions permitting, walkabouts and in-person exhibitions and events were held to continue the conversation on good design and positive placemaking. This must be an ongoing process of learning, training, and conversations about what constitutes good design and what design elements are popular locally.

### **Don't reinvent the wheel**

The design code should target issues that are not clearly covered in other guidance. One of the significant challenges has been trying to work out whether a lot of the guidance for the coding is covered elsewhere and perhaps it does not need to be repeated in the code. But then as a standalone document, the code might look like there are gaps in it. This means that there needs to be clear references in the design code to this other guidance.

### **Something that is set in stone**

With references to design coding introduced in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), it is something that developers can't really ignore. That is what we want - something that is set in stone so it is part of national and local policy, and something that cannot be challenged by developers.

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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)