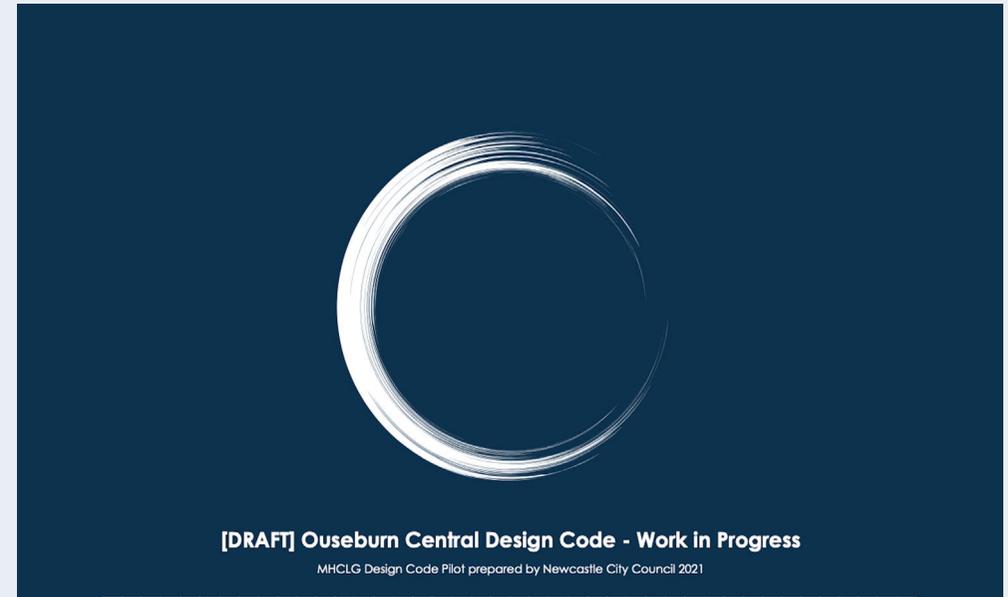


Newcastle City Council: Coding multiple sites across a historically sensitive regeneration area

Newcastle City Council: Coding multiple sites across a historically sensitive regeneration area

Scale:	Area based/ site specific
Context:	City centre
Focus:	Ouseburn Central as a large historically-sensitive regeneration district, is the focus for the design code covering five small sites
Project team:	Newcastle City Council, North East Design Review Panel, and Northumbria University
Region:	North East



Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the process and outcomes of developing a design code as a planning tool in the regeneration of a site within an historic inner city area. Key themes included the production of the design code by the city's extensive and experienced in-house design and planning teams within their Place Directorate, development and use of a 3D virtual model to test elements of the design code, and the use of community partners such as the North East Design Review Panel, Northumbria University, and the Ouseburn Trust to facilitate consultations and engagement.

Local Authority background information

Although they are separate cities, Newcastle and Gateshead have a joint local plan - the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) - which was formally adopted in March 2015 and reviewed in March 2020. The CSUCP's Vision Statement for the city states that "*The Urban Core will continue to be the economic hub of the North East, fulfilling its role as the leading retail, entertainment, employment and learning centre for Tyne and Wear*". It highlights that having an appropriate range, mix and quality of employment sites, and housing opportunities is key to sustain growth and achieve economic prosperity. Ouseburn Central plays a key role in contributing to this urban dynamic.

“*The vision is to create an urban village that appeals to a cross-section of people; to attract families to live in the area, to provide resources to support growth of existing businesses and to encourage new businesses to the area.*”

Lower Ouseburn Regeneration Strategy 2003

The context for coding

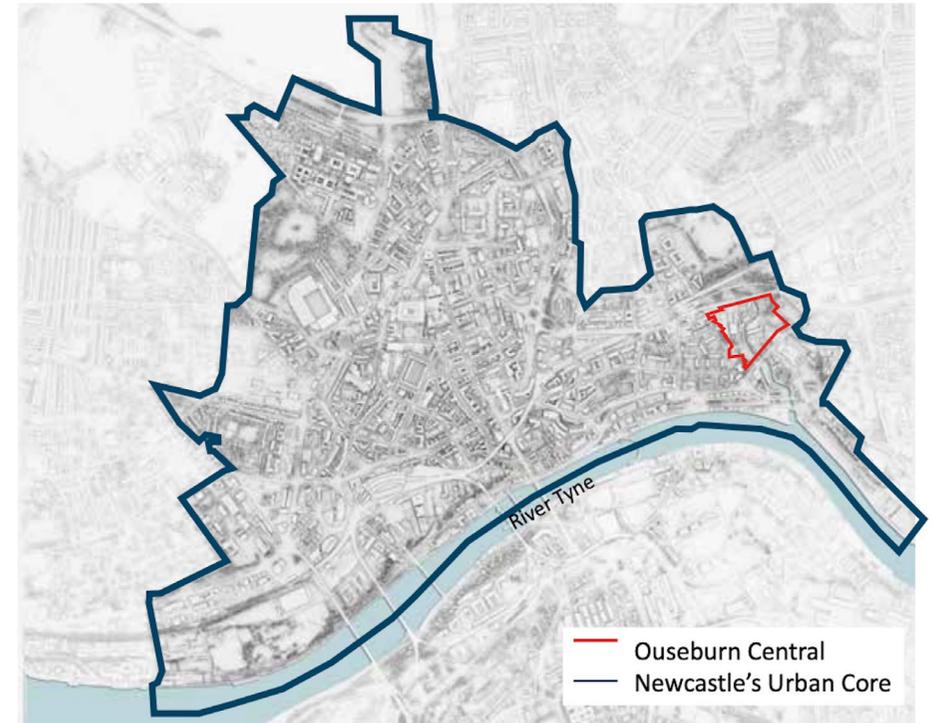
Ouseburn Central is located within Newcastle's Urban Core and is the cultural and economic heart of the city. The Ouseburn forms part of a continuum with the Quayside that is broadly defined by historic legacies, topography, and a riverside setting. Fostering mixed land uses in the Ouseburn and promoting it as a place to live, work and visit are important to long-term strategic planning at the local level.

Recent regeneration has transformed Ouseburn into Newcastle's cultural quarter and one of the most vibrant creative communities in the North East. It hosts a diverse collection of artists and makers, has provided the setting for many successful start-up businesses and is at the centre of the city's independent food and drink scene. As a result, the Ouseburn has attracted considerable development interest and has become a desirable place for local people to live, work and socialise.

Ouseburn is a special place recognised at national level as an exemplar of successful city centre regeneration in a historic setting. The designation of Lower Ouseburn Valley Conservation Area in 2000 has protected the essential character of the place while allowing a greater level of control over architectural quality and spatial planning as new development has progressed. A design code would be a welcome planning tool to add to the existing policy guidance.

Ouseburn Central has been divided into five character areas. Character Area 2 was chosen as the focus for the design code as this was the area with most potential for new development. There are five sites within this area to be covered by one code with five variations for the separate sites. The focus for development and their design codes will vary – some will focus on the public realm, others on the buildings alongside a hierarchy of streets, or on the riverside walk and connections to it.

The design code team and the specialists within the council's Place Directorate, are trying to uncover as much as they can about the area's character and local distinctiveness and “bottle it all up and use this to say this is what we call Ouseburn-ness”. The area is very unique and distinctive, with hints of places that you see in other parts of the country but a combination of elements that are unique to the area.



Ouseburn Central, outlined in red, in Newcastle's Urban Core

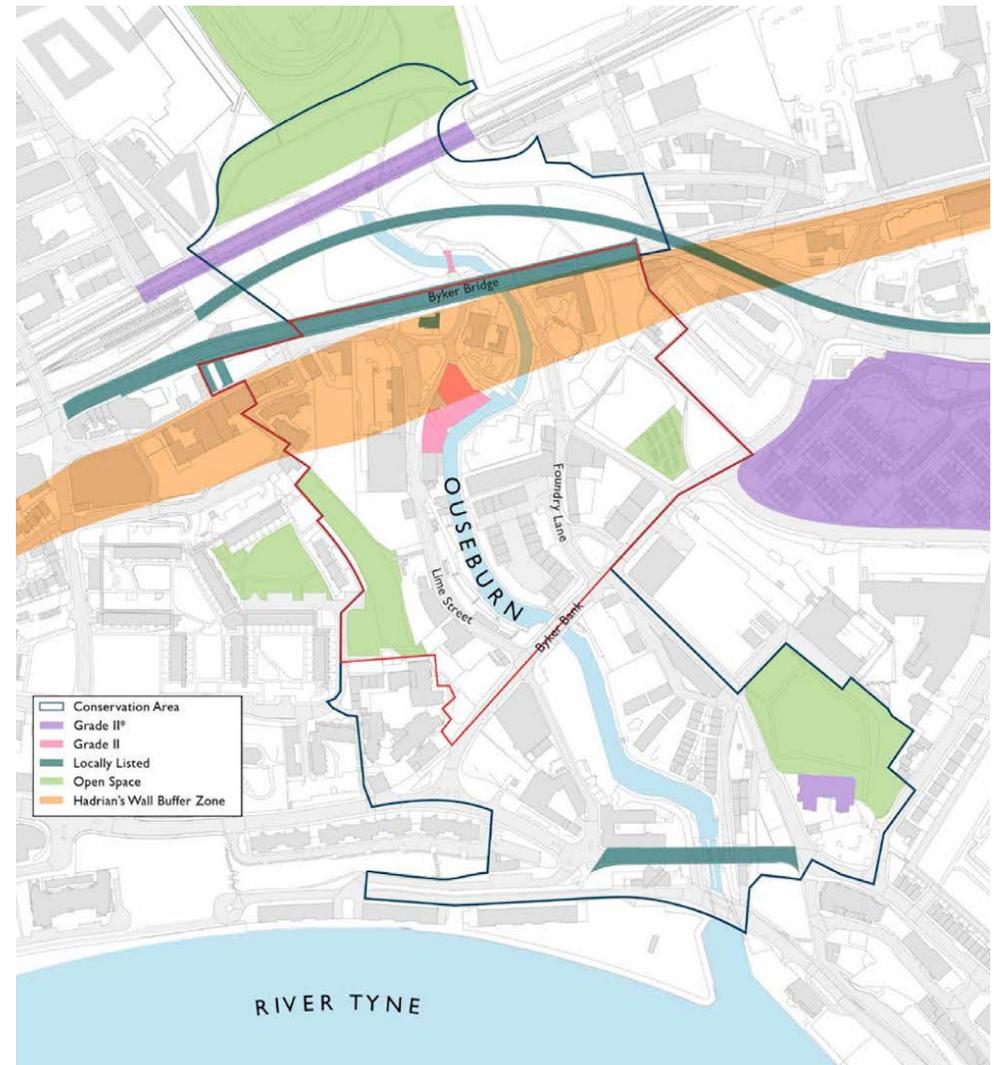
Why code?

There is significant scope for testing the design code in Ouseburn Central. As well as the richness of its built heritage and natural environment, the area represents a unique opportunity for significant new build in the heart of an historic yet ever-evolving setting. Notable development opportunities are to be found at Grieveson's Yard, Foundry Lane Industrial Estate, McPhee's Yard, the west side of Lime Street, and the land to the rear of Woods Pottery.

Not only is it imperative to protect the character and appearance of the conservation area, it is also important to conserve and support the contemporary social, creative and entrepreneurial scenes that have made Ouseburn so attractive in recent times. Careful planning of future development within the central core is therefore critical to retaining the unique culture of the wider area – its 'Ouseburnness' – and the creation of a design brief and a design code that meets this challenge while attracting the interest of commercial developers was considered to be the ideal way of achieving this objective.

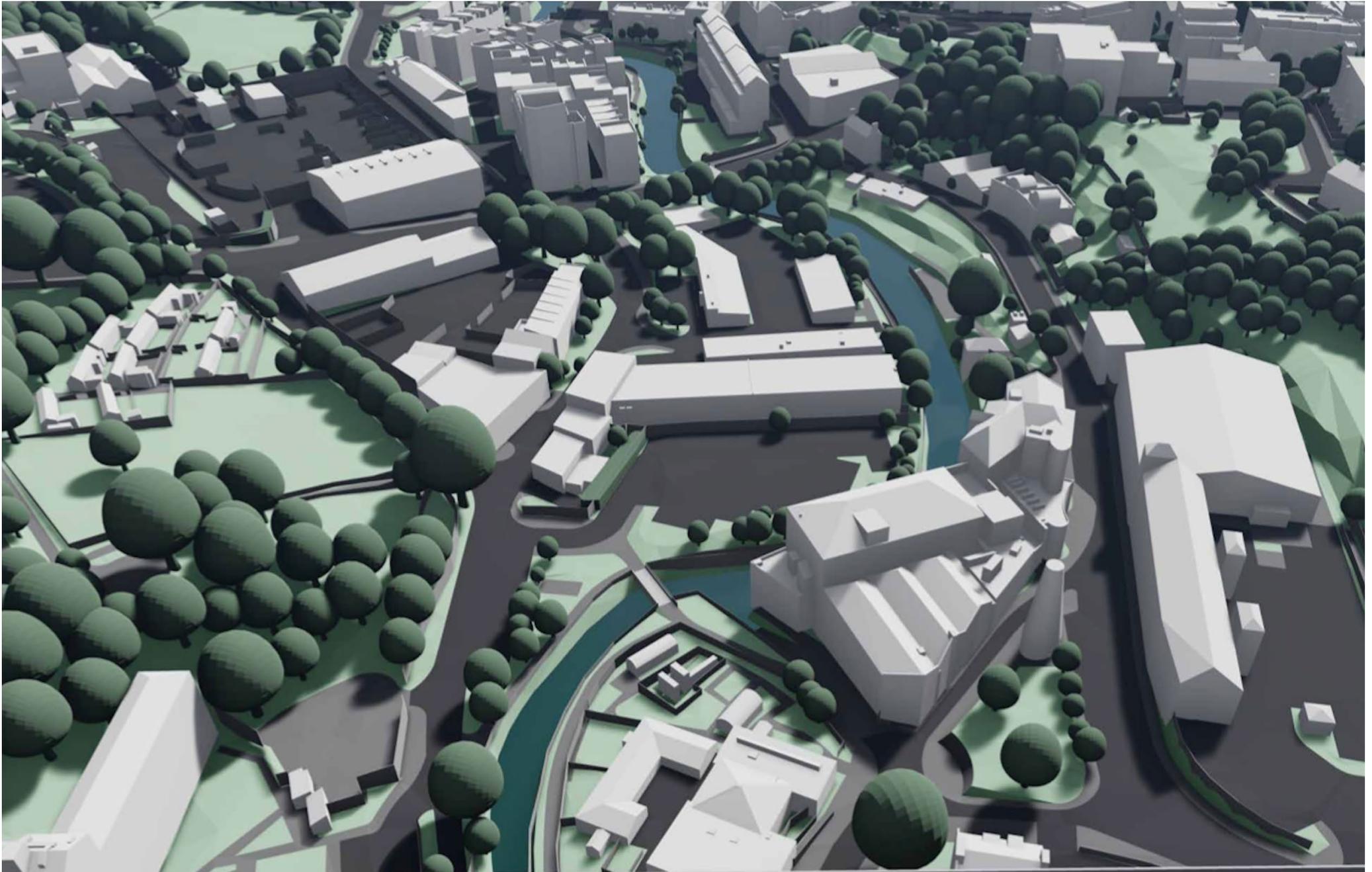
Newcastle City Council had seven key aspirations for NMDC testing programme:

1. Focus on a specific area only - Character Area 2.
2. facilitate the comprehensive development of five small sites in the area, two of which are in council ownership.
3. Putting design at the heart of the Council's strategic planning for an area in which it is a major landowner.
4. Allowing a variety of built environment compositions to be considered and tested in response to overarching ambitions for the area.
5. Using the 3D model Virtual Newcastle Gateshead (VNG) as a key tool to test height, scale and massing.
6. Allowing consideration of how to achieve an appropriate overall mix of uses.
7. Informing longer term Design Code aspirations for the Urban Core as part of emerging policy work.



Ouseburn Central outlined in red

“ Anything that puts good design on the agenda and moves it up the agenda, especially in the north of England, is a good thing ”

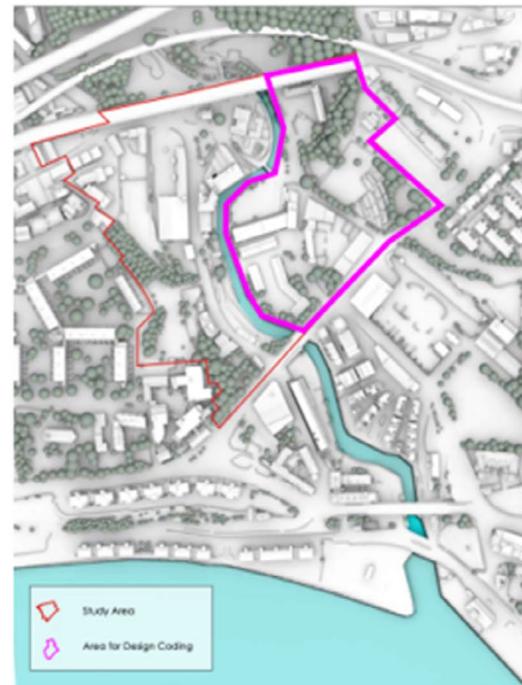


Option testing with Northumbria University using the 3D Virtual Newcastle Gateshead (VNG) model. Proposals can be inserted into the model to test the impact on the existing built environment.

What was the coding process?

The design code process was undertaken in-house, with assistance from external support groups. The four most significant aspects of the process included:

1. **A workshop facilitated by the North East Design Review Panel on Ouseburn-ness** with 26 attendees representing the council, Homes England, the developer 'igloo', landowners, agents and other professionals, Newcastle University, the Ouseburn Trust, and interested community members. One of the many outcomes of this process was a summary document that became part of the baseline studies for the site, while the workshop was a significant success through bringing a wide group of stakeholders together to tap into their expertise.
2. **A 3D virtual model** was developed by Northumbria University to allow testing of planning applications during the planning approval process. This will also be used in the design code testing.
3. The **Ouseburn Trust community group undertook their own baseline research**, with a document submitted to the council as part of the design code baseline research. The council's relationship with the Ouseburn Trust has provided substantial benefits in the ongoing engagement of the community in the design coding process, and they were a critical contributor to the community engagement.
4. The **coding process was undertaken in-house** with various groups within the Place Directorate as well as team members from Property, Major Projects, Policy, and Development Management. Also consulted were Historic Environment, Landscape and Ecology, Urban Design and Architecture, Consultation, and a transport specialist. The Council fortunately has a large range of specialisms and expertise to carry this work forward but it is also a challenge to coordinate input from all the interests active in the area. This is an iterative process, with outcomes from engagement back into the baseline information and the vision.



Ouseburn Central location maps: left, the five character areas; centre, Character area 2 Foundry Lane, the design code site; right, the five smaller sites within the Foundry Lane district

In the approach to coding and using the NMDC documents, there has been a theme by theme correlation between the National Design Guide, the NMDC, and the new design code which has seven thematic chapters. These documents are also used as a checklist for the key principles developed during the design code process. This was especially important in the absence of a masterplan for the area. The three stages of baseline, vision and code also structured the process.

The council are determined that the vision needs to be honoured - for an urban village with a vibrant mix of uses – and this requires a balance that allows for flexibility in new uses on the site as well as rigidity in terms of the principles of design being put forward. The intention is to ensure that the requirements in the code do not stifle development and retain flexibility on the mix of uses while respecting the historic context, in relation to issues such as key views, setting and significance. The goal is to make sure there is this vibrant mix of uses, resisting inappropriate development from chipping away at the essence of Ouseburn.



Community engagement with workshops and 4 walking audits, some organised by the Ouseburn Trust

What form will the code take?

The chapters in the Newcastle design code follow, to a large degree, those in the NMDC but exclude Resources, Lifespan, and Homes and Buildings. The chapters are arranged in a different order to those in the NMDC as this was deemed to better suit the site context, the priorities, and the type of development.

The seven themes or chapters in the design code are Context, Movement, Nature, Built Form, Identity, Public Spaces and Uses. A design code checklist indicates the components under each theme and is intended to be useful for development management when assessing planning applications.

Each chapter sets out a series of Design Principles in coloured boxes. These principles are the codes for the development of the site and are a mix of both mandatory and advisory elements. The themes of character, identity and built form are covered within the design code chapters and include improvements to the public realm while also complying with the policies of the conservation area.

One of the significant challenges is getting the balance right between flexibility and prescription to allow a creative response in proposed designs to support the distinctive character of the area. As a result, the wording and language used in the design code is important and, according to the council, should not be too prescriptive.

The design code will sit alongside other design guidance documents, each with a role and status. Therefore, even though a subject is not covered at length in a design code, if it is part of the broader suite of planning policy, developers will still need to have regard to it. As a result, the design code does not have to cover everything. The fundamentals of sustainability, for example, can be cross-referenced in the design code to the existing sustainability planning guidance.

II) Movement

Introduction

Successful places enjoy clear, safe and understandable movement patterns with good access to local services and public transport.

The Ouseburn has an established networks of connections with access to public transport, parking and local services. It is considered these connections can be strengthened to enhance the quality of routes throughout the area.

Objectives

- Promote high quality movement
- Safety
- Parking and servicing
- Public transport
- Promoting sustainable forms of transport

Policy References

- CSUCP CS13 (Transport), UC6 (Cycling), UC7 (Public Transport),
- DAP DM10 (Pedestrian and Cycle movement), DM11 (Public Transport), DM12 (Parking and Servicing)
- National Design Guide
- National Planning Policy Framework

Design code principles

Development within Ouseburn Central must provide the following:

M.1.i Street Network

(a) Enhancements to Foundry Lane - Recognizing the importance of this route through the site, and proposing a suitable Highway layout to accommodate safe provision for pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles and servicing requirements.

(b) Connecting to the River – Create clear new connections to the river east/west providing greater permeability and legibility within Ouseburn Central.

(c) Leighton Street Improvement - Provide a new pedestrian link along Leighton Street retaining cobbled street and sympathetically using materials to complement the streetscape.

M.1.ii Public Transport

Improve connections to existing public transport infrastructure.



The Design Code Principles are indicated in the coloured boxes and included in each of the seven themes within the draft design code

Lessons learned

Communication and Engagement - Get the message out early, internally and externally. It takes time to conduct successful communications initiatives, so it has been challenging to move forward fast in relation to community engagement for this pilot. Use the assistance of key partners where possible.

Use of new digital tools - New digital tools such as virtual models can present a new way of illustrating and testing proposals and their use could be prescribed in our design code.

Engagement at the right time, with the right type and amount of information - Developers want certainty and things to happen quickly leading to an ongoing challenge to balance developer and community needs. For example, considerable time is needed to properly organise, collate and assess stakeholder views. Heading into this, there is a need to have the appropriate amount and type of information to share, and on which to get feedback. The Ouseburn Trust has been very useful as an established partner, helping to ensure constructive engagement and feedback on the big strategic issues such as the mix of uses, noise, and transport.

IV) Built Form

Introduction

The built form of Ouseburn has developed incrementally over time deeply rooted in its industrial heritage. This includes important buildings of national and local significance protected by statutory listing; whilst new contemporary schemes in the area are providing positive additions to the character of the area - acknowledged by recent national design awards for excellence.

Ouseburn Central provides a unique opportunity for significant new build development to be sensitively integrated into the heart of the conservation area to help combine reinforcing sense of place and placemaking. Exceptional design quality of new development including bringing back to life existing buildings of merit is considered essential.

Objectives

- High quality design and architecture
- Working with best buildings
- Sustainability design principles
- Protect and enhance setting of heritage assets
- Successful integration of new build in the built environment
- Mixed use development with appropriate height, scale and massing
- Acceptable levels of noise and acoustic performance

Policy References

- CSUCP CS15 Place-making
- DAP DM20 Design
- National Design Guide
- National Planning Policy Framework

Design code principles

New development must ensure the following:

B.1.1 Density

- (a) Ouseburn Central must provide a mix of uses as reflected in CSUCP Policy Q01 - this includes the provision of creative, small business, residential and leisure.
- (b) Ouseburn Central should provide medium to high density range appropriate in the Urban Core. All ranges of density must ensure residential amenity, daylight sunlight, privacy and overlooking are protected and where possible enhanced.



[Diagram for illustrative purposes only - to highlight potential for a mix of uses across area]



[Diagram for illustrative purposes only - view of Ouseburn Central highlighting breakdown of 6 key areas]

Built Form includes the codes in coloured boxes, reference images, and a 3D representation of built form on the site.

V) Identity

Introduction

The character and identity of Ouseburn is a result of complex layering made up of its dramatic topography and landscape, use, historic buildings and structures throughout the ages valley combining to form a memorable and instantly recognizable place.

Ouseburn has an established and much celebrated identity. The Ouseburn River creates a very tight, enclosed, intimate character which still contains many striking former industrial buildings on small plots along the river.

Whilst new development to the south of Ouseburn continues to develop and mature, opportunities exist within Ouseburn Central for further enhancement to it reinforce its identity, sense of place with new placemaking in the heart of the area.

Objectives

- Local Character
- Legibility
- Placemaking and reinforcing sense of place.
- Strategic Masterplan for a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach
- High quality design of built environment

Policy References

- CSUCP CS15 Place-making, Policy DM23 Amenity, Policy CS18 and UC15, CS15, UC12, UC13 DM20
- DAP DM20 Design
- National Design Guide
- National Planning Policy Framework

Design code principles:

1.1.1 Local Character - Made in Ouseburn

New development must ensure the following:

- (a) A bespoke design response rooted in context to help preserve or enhance character of conservation area
- (b) Design must provide capacity for change over time and encourage innovation in design
- (c) Show a commitment to detailed design which celebrates the use and application of materials in terms of finish and craftsmanship.
- (e) Encourage the use of local artists, designers and makers where possible within the design of the built environment to reflect the creative character of Ouseburn.
- (d) Use materials that are appropriate in the conservation area. (See 1.1.1 Local Character - Made in Ouseburn)



Identity page in the draft design code indicating a Policy References section

“ Therefore, engagement must be done at the right moment, at the right level with the right amount of information to get useful and appropriate feedback – too much information is not necessarily best ”

III) Nature

Introduction

Ouseburn Valley enjoys a beautiful natural landscape setting which has developed incrementally over time.

The landform in and around the Ouseburn contributes enormously to the diversity of landscape. An opportunity to optimise the benefits of nature for people and wildlife exist by enhancing green infrastructure assets whilst contributing towards the delivery of new green infrastructure assets.

Objectives

- Nature and green spaces should be woven into the urban fabric.
- Health and wellbeing
- Biodiversity
- Climate and flood mitigation.

Policy References

- CSUCP - CS16 (Climate Change), CS17 (Flood Risk and Water Management), CS18 (Green Infrastructure and the Natural Environment)
- DAP - DM26 (Flood Risk and Water Management), DM27 (Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure), DM28 (Trees and Landscaping), DM29 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Habitats), DM30 (Protecting Open Space), DM31 (Provision of Open Space, Sports and Recreational Buildings)

Design Code principles:

N.1.1 Network of Spaces

New development should contribute towards the creation of a network of green spaces. This includes, but not limited to: parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, wetlands, road verges, allotments and private gardens.

N.1.1.1 OS Provision

Developments are expected to provide a variety of open spaces which contribute to the wider green infrastructure and benefit both people and wildlife.

N.1.1.1.1 Design

The use of ecosystems, green spaces and water in development is required to deliver environmental and quality of life benefits.



N.2.1 Working with Water
Schemes should make the most of their Ouseburn River waterside location, facing onto the water and retaining and creating public access to the water's edge. Where appropriate, 'green enhancements' to the Ouseburn will be required.

N.2.1.1 SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems)
These should be integrated into the built environment, whilst making use of natural/landscape features.

N.2.1.2 Flood Risk
All schemes should take account of flood risk and the need for active flood resilience measures in the form of soft landscaping embed within sustainable urban drainage systems.

N.2.1.3 Net Gain
All schemes will be expected to follow national policy by achieving a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

N.2.1.4 Biodiversity
Schemes should incorporate biodiversity design principles, e.g. creating and enhancing habitats.

N.2.1.5 Street Trees
All new private and adopted streets should include street trees and new street trees should be retrofitted into existing streets where appropriate.



A range of visuals are used in the design code - maps, images, and drawings - along with colour and a clear format

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.

Use of a design review panel for both advice and help with engagement events

The North East Design Review panel helped to facilitate a workshop on 'Ouseburnness' in June 2021. There was a good cross section of attendees and expertise with 26 people attending. There were council members and key stakeholders including Homes England, the developer, landowners, agents, and people from Newcastle University, as well as architects, designers, and academic researchers who had been involved in investigating the area.

Most people know what good design is, therefore having the opportunity to discuss and articulate it may help to make it evident and enrich our understanding. However, it is always a challenge to reconcile differing opinions, especially on design issues, so measuring public preferences should be acknowledged as a complex process. Additionally, for Ouseburn and the design code, the council want to focus more on the placemaking side of things and not get side-tracked by dealing with only aesthetic or stylistic preferences. In terms of measuring public preferences, the council see the visioning events facilitated by the design review panels as a way to do this.

“ The design code and the masterplan will be better for it - as a result of this engagement ”

Visuals work well to explain the design code

The visuals in the design code certainly help lay people and professionals understand it. A lot of our other policy documents are more text-based so the visual elements - concept diagrams and precedent images - make the design code different. They are particularly successful in illustrating concepts, principles and requirements.

Case studies prepared by:

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Based on research commissioned and facilitated by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) on behalf of the Department for Levelling up, Housing Communities (DLUHC) and Office for Place (OfP)

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