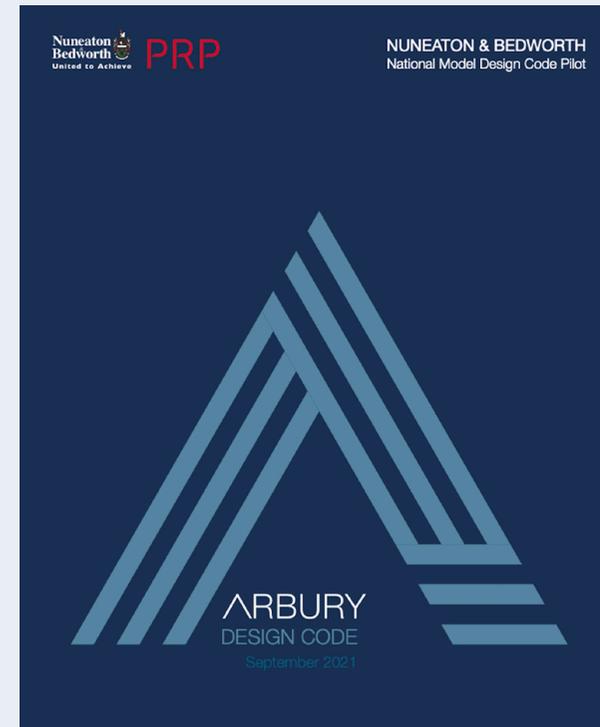


# Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council: Coding for suburban development

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|                      |                                                                                                          |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Scale:</b>        | Site specific                                                                                            |
| <b>Context:</b>      | Suburban                                                                                                 |
| <b>Focus:</b>        | New low density suburban development - learning lessons about raising design quality using a design code |
| <b>Project team:</b> | Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council, PRP                                                                 |
| <b>Region:</b>       | West Midlands                                                                                            |



## Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the process and outcomes of developing a design code for a new suburban housing development for a large allocated site. The process involved developing a clear and considered engagement strategy, and education and training on design codes for development managers, council members, developers, and the community. Key themes included the challenges of engagement in a low response community, the use of a regulating plan in lieu of a masterplan to enable the development of the code, and the selection of appropriate design parameters to raise design quality in this area with lower land values.

## Local Authority background information

Largely urban in character, the Borough has two market towns – Nuneaton and Bedworth – which are now surrounded by large areas of suburban housing. In the past, residential development has not always been well-designed and has failed to positively contribute to the character of the area and to local distinctiveness. In recent years, design quality has improved, however the majority of housing has been delivered by major housebuilders seeking to maximise density on site and to use standard house types where possible. With relatively low land values and often significant s106 payments to go towards infrastructure requirements (education, transport, leisure, open space etc) viability is often cited as a reason not to deliver a higher quality design.

The Council's Local Plan – the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan (Local Plan) (2011-2031) - was adopted in 2019. The plan allocates sufficient land to deliver 14,060 dwellings over the plan period. Of the 14,060 dwellings total, 4,020 dwellings were accommodated as 'overspill' from the Coventry City area. Eight strategic housing sites were allocated in the adopted Local Plan, which required removal from the green belt to deliver the housing need.

## The context for coding

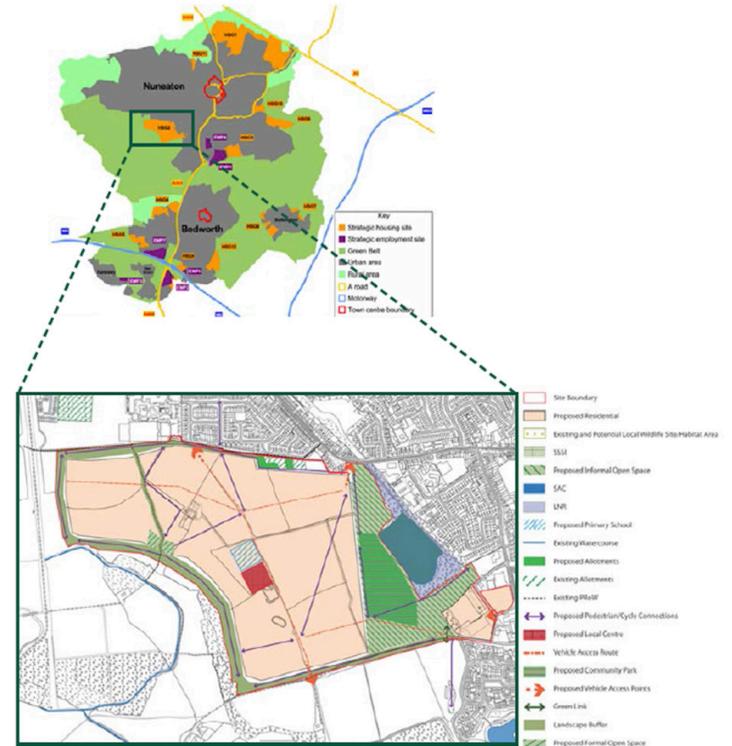
The focus for the design code is the HSG2 Arbury site which has a housing target of 1,525 homes, alongside provision of a local centre, primary school, community uses, and significant open space. The Borough is testing the use of design codes in order to improve the quality and character of future development across the local authority area. The Borough, therefore, aspires to use the final output from this pilot programme as a guidance document for developers who will bring forward applications on sites in the future.

## Why code?

In the past, residential development has not always been well-designed and has failed to positively contribute to the character of the area and to local distinctiveness. In recent years, design quality has improved, although the majority of housing is being delivered by major housebuilders seeking to maximise density on site and to use standard house types where possible. With relatively low land values and often significant s106 payments to go towards infrastructure requirements (education, transport, leisure, open space) viability is often cited as a reason not to deliver a higher quality design.

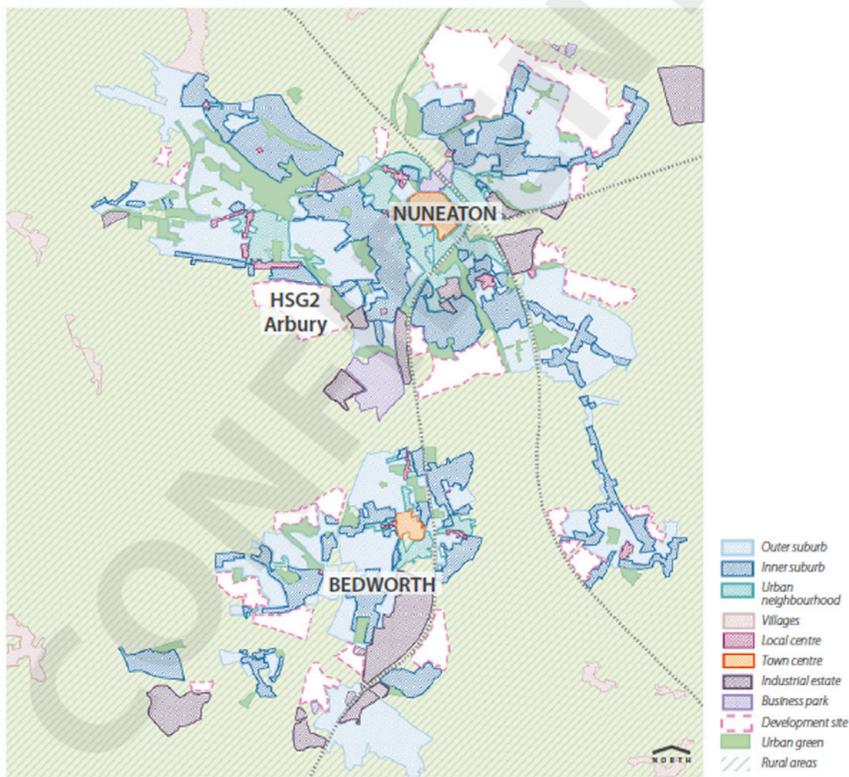
With this design code pilot, there is an opportunity to produce and test a design code, either at Borough level, or for a specific allocation site. For the former, this would help to provide a comprehensive framework for any speculative planning applications that may come forward in the future and give comfort to local communities that the highest possible standards of design can be required and/or delivered.

The final decision was made to focus on a specific allocation - the Arbury site, with a masterplan which would include a focus on landscape strategy, open space provision, homes and other uses, access and connection to the wider street network with primary and secondary streets, and the location of the local centre. The area types would apply to different parts of the site, which would in turn reference rules on density, height, and street building line. A design code was seen as a key planning tool which would specify clearly the design requirements for the site.



Site location, on the edge of Nuneaton

**“ Poor design is a persistent issue within the borough so there has been increased interest in the ideas of better place making and raising the quality of design in the built environment generally. A design code would be a tool that the local authority hopes could help them see an improvement in design standards. ”**



A coding plan with Area Types for the borough

## What was the coding process?

Consultants PRP were commissioned to produce the design code and undertake the engagement as the local authority did not have the resources or the time to do this in-house. Although the area types were not used directly in the design code, a coding plan that mapped existing area types within the borough was produced which proved useful for both the council and in community consultations.

In producing the design code, there were two main challenges:

### 1. Illustrative concept framework plan

There was only a schematic masterplan (also referred to as a concept plan) for the site in an SPD so there was no actual design in relation to the road layout, or the location of dwellings and open space to respond to in the code. Also, in the absence of an outline application for the site, which would have provided detailed baseline information and proposals, an 'illustrative concept framework' plan was developed to help inform the coding (later included in an appendix to the code).

The aim was to give some sense of the requirements for the site without prescribing the layout of roads and location of open spaces for which there could be a number of design solutions. This would then allow developers to creatively prepare their design proposals for the site. This plan was included in the Site Analysis and Testing Report, September 2021, which accompanied the design code. The use of an illustrative concept framework plan was seen as an acceptable solution, which also saved on time and resources.

**2. Community engagement** was challenging as there was a low response, despite the use of both online and face-to-face events. This affected the ability to find out from the community what was locally popular. The consultants developed event boards for both the virtual and in-person consultations and some feedback was obtained although this was not from a wide cross-section of the community.

## What form will the code take?

The Arbury design code incorporates some of the 10 characteristics of a well-designed place, which are identified in the NMDC, combining them into four main chapters: Open Space and Nature, Movement and Connectivity, Built Form, and Character Narrative. In each of the thematic chapters, the mandatory coding principles are set out in solid-coloured boxes, while advisory coding principles are indicated in grey.

There is more detail in sections such as Open Space and Nature where the code also builds on existing policies. In other areas such as building heights, the coding principles are dealt with at higher level. The element of Identity is relevant across the main chapters, especially Open Space and Nature, and Built Form, so it is dealt with in each section.

The pages contain text, illustrative or reference images, and drawings, arranged in a clear format to assist in understanding the code. There is also a checklist at the end, for use by development managers and other stakeholders.



### 1.5. Illustrative concept framework

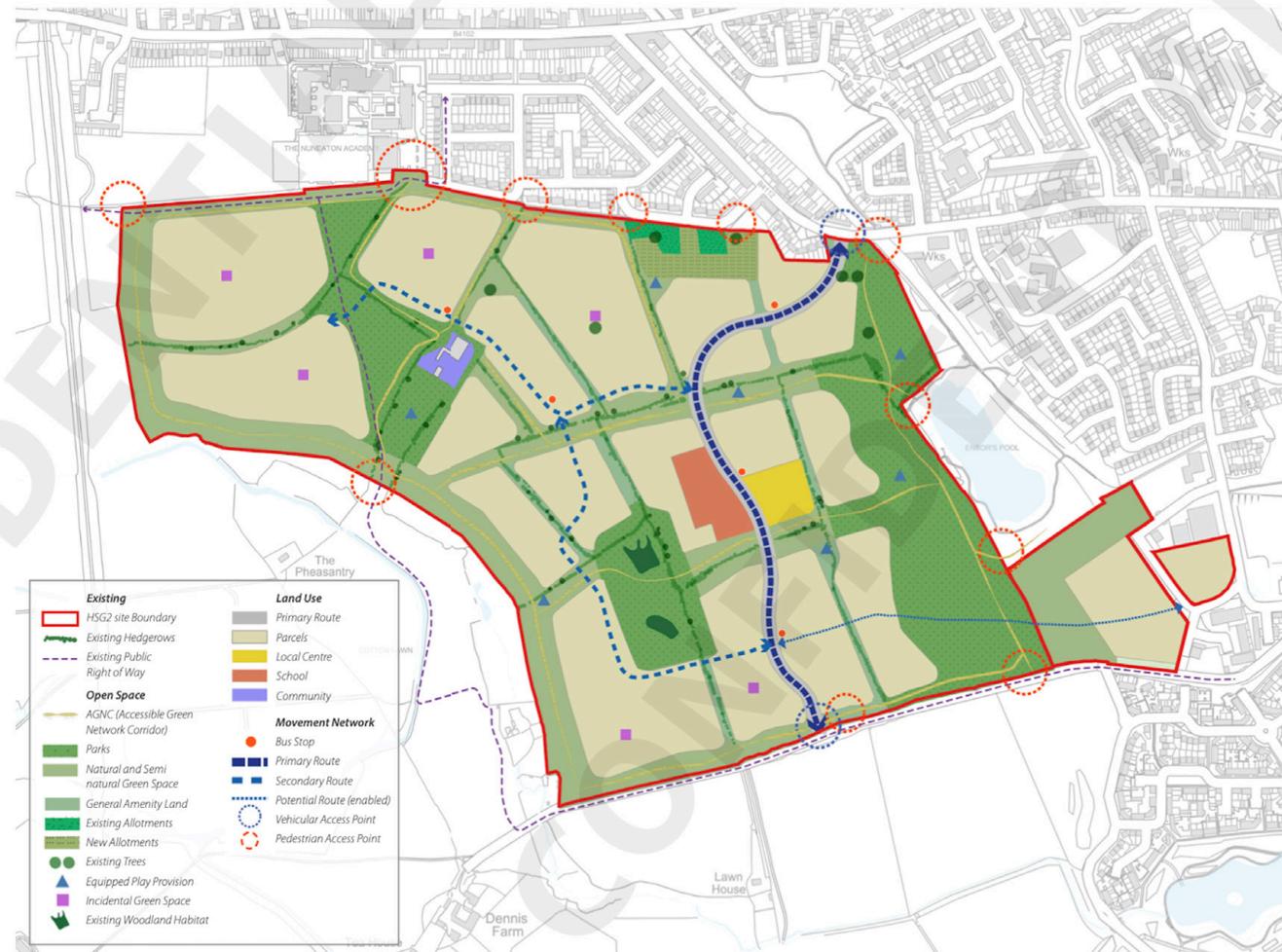
This Illustrative Concept Framework is intended to test the principles and policy set out within the Arbary Design Code. It demonstrates one way in which the site can be designed spatially, meeting these principles and policies and responding sensitively to the surrounding context.

Whilst the framework addresses such matters it should be noted that further technical work is needed to fully understand the technical constraints that the site presents. This will include the collection and assessment of technical surveys and other information.

Some of the key principles of the Illustrative Concept Framework are set out below:

- + Sets out development parcels that provide an overall net density of 35 dwellings per hectare
- + Provides new local centre, school and community hub
- + Provides required quantum of open space including Local Park, Neighbourhood Park and equipped play provision
- + Provides series of Accessible Green Network Corridors
- + Retains existing trees and hedgerows
- + Provides strategic north-south route with indicative access from Heath End Road and intersecting Harefield Lane to facilitate onwards connectivity to the A444
- + Presents indicative bus stop locations with routes along primary and secondary streets
- + Outlines potential vehicle and pedestrian access locations
- + Provides sensitive approach in relation to site edges
- + Accommodates existing Public Rights of Way
- + Retains existing allotments and provides space for new allotments as a site extension

| ARBURY MASTERPLAN - LAND BUDGET AREAS                                     |                                        | Total space (hectares) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Movement</b>                                                           |                                        |                        |
| Primary road                                                              |                                        | 1.85                   |
| <b>Open Space</b>                                                         |                                        |                        |
| Publicly Accessible Greenspaces (PAGs) include Parks, AGNC and ASUDs/SUDs | Parks                                  |                        |
|                                                                           | Land for Active Recreation             |                        |
|                                                                           | Highly Formal Park Provision           | 17.90                  |
|                                                                           | Equipped Play Provision                |                        |
| Other                                                                     | Natural/semi-natural Habitat Provision | 12.5                   |
|                                                                           | General Amenity Land                   | 4.70                   |
|                                                                           | New Allotments                         | 1.00                   |
| Other Greenspace / Landscape Buffer / Hedgerows                           | Existing Allotments                    | 0.82                   |
|                                                                           | Hedgerows                              | 2.90                   |
| <b>Land Use</b>                                                           |                                        |                        |
| Total Parcels Area + (0.70 above Local Centre)                            |                                        | 41.90                  |
| School Land                                                               |                                        | 0.97                   |
| Local Centre Land (Primary Route)                                         |                                        | 0.69                   |
| Community (Reused Farm)                                                   |                                        | 0.38                   |
| <b>Total</b>                                                              |                                        | <b>85.61</b>           |







## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This current chapter introduces the Arbury Design Code and sets out its purpose and how it should be used. Current policy guidance which has been used to inform the Code and will further inform applications is outlined. The site and its existing and historical setting provide an overview of the site.



## PART 4: BUILT FORM

This chapter provides guidance on the form of built components of the future masterplan. This builds upon the Area Type analysis of the local area. A set of general block principles are presented in accordance with good urban design practice. Frontage characters, dwelling typologies and parking typologies are included.



## PART 2: OPEN SPACE AND NATURE

This chapter outlines how the vision for a landscape-led masterplan for Arbury is to be achieved in practice. It provides the open space requirements and expectations for the site alongside how these should be applied in order to develop a green vision for the site.



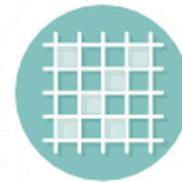
## PART 5: CHARACTER NARRATIVE

This chapter presents a design narrative for Arbury; drawing upon the local context and the historic transformation of the surrounding area. This is intended to guide a locally distinctive development, which combined with the principles of good urban design and built form will create a distinct neighbourhood identity.



## PART 3: MOVEMENT AND CONNECTIVITY

This section provides guidance and minimum requirements for the streets and connectivity within the future masterplan. It also provides principles for the implementation of sustainable travel, accessibility and inclusivity.



## PART 6: OTHER MATTERS

The final section of the Design Code provides some additional principles on technical matters for consideration in future applications. In addition, a Design Code Compliance Checklist is provided to aid officers with reviewing planning applications against the Design Code.

### 3.2. Street Types

#### 3.2.4. SHARED SURFACE, PRIVATE DRIVES AND CAR FREE STREETS

Shared surface streets and spaces are permitted within the masterplan and where provided, should be paved and designed as a shared space where the pedestrian and cyclist has priority over vehicles. These spaces should consider opportunities for informal play and pocket parks and aid in community interaction. Shared surface streets will not be adopted by the County Council and their use should be considered with this in mind alongside maintenance and servicing requirements and the tenure of homes accessed from these streets. Affordable homes should be located on adopted routes where feasible.

+ Developers must include a detailed management strategy for non-adopted streets at RMA stage



Chocolate Quarter, Bath (Taylor Wimpey)



Trumpington Meadows (Barratts Eastern Counties)

IMAGES FOR REFERENCE ONLY

| Overview                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Street type                               | Shared surface and private drives                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Location                                  | Within residential parcels, landscape edges and intended to serve a limited number of properties. Private drives to serve a maximum of 6 homes                                                                 |
| Direct access to properties               | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Street Design                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Total adopted width                       | Varies                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Carriageway width                         | 4.2m for private drives. 5.5m (+0.5m service strip) for shared surface (where footway provided)                                                                                                                |
| Footway / cycleway                        | No                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Verge                                     | No                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Bus route                                 | No                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| On street parking                         | Potential provision for on-street parking to be confirmed in detailed design. To be limited for visitor parking. 2.5m parallel                                                                                 |
| Design speed                              | 10mph                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Traffic calming measures                  | Alignment to be designed to be a low-speed environment                                                                                                                                                         |
| Statutory services                        | Utilities under shared surface/private drive. To be confirmed at detailed design                                                                                                                               |
| Road markings                             | No                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Adopted                                   | No (car free streets may be adopted where forming part of a strategic path network)                                                                                                                            |
| Street landscaping                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Street trees                              | Yes. Where the street is adjacent to open space trees are anticipated to be outside the carriageway                                                                                                            |
| Defensible space                          | Yes. 1-2m. Boundary treatment to be defined by landscape narrative                                                                                                                                             |
| Street lighting                           | Private Drives - no. Shared surface to be confirmed at detailed design stage                                                                                                                                   |
| Street Level Design Principles (Advisory) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Building relationship                     | Detached and semi-detached properties. Frontage character will vary with a more informal character towards the landscape edge and more formal towards the local centre and existing residential neighbourhoods |
| Character and density                     | Shared surface approach with a less formal character than tertiary streets subject to character area                                                                                                           |
| Uses                                      | Residential with habitable rooms facing the street to maintain active frontages                                                                                                                                |
| Building heights                          | Typically 2 storey with habitable attic space subject to design, Some single storey would also be suitable                                                                                                     |

### 4.6. Edge Conditions

#### 4.6.1. EDGE CONDITIONS

Development should be sympathetic to the edge conditions of the settlement area. Edge conditions should respond to the surrounding landscape context by using recessive colours for roofs and brickwork to help reduce the prominence of the urban edge. This principle should in particular be considered along the western and southern boundaries, where the new development will transition to the wider Arbury Estate, including the Registered Parks and Gardens and remaining green belt context.

The edges to the north of the site are largely urban in character, as defined by Charnwood Avenue and Atholl Crescent, with houses fronting onto the site boundary. The eastern edge of the site is defined by an existing landscape buffer which extends along the perimeter of Ensor's Pool and the existing industrial estate.

##### Front to landscape edge conditions:

- + Frontages must address formal and informal public spaces, including green corridors, parks, incidental green spaces and the peripheral landscape
- + Avoid blank, undifferentiated or untreated walls at ground floor level, in particular alongside main paths and open space
- + Provide a defined frontage and sense of enclosure, with sinuous street arrangements and varied set backs permitted along park edges and frontages with the peripheral landscape
- + Provide appropriate additional buffer adjacent to existing landscape context considering habitats, existing trees, hedges and watercourses in addition to Public Rights of Way
- + Where plots form a direct boundary with natural landscape / woodland, applications must provide detail of boundary treatments that suitably address this interface

Illustrative front to existing landscape edge condition section



##### Back to existing edge conditions:

- + The general approach is to close existing 'open' back gardens of properties by abutting the backs of new properties against them to improve security and privacy
- + The back garden must seek to enclose and maintain the privacy of the neighbouring rear gardens
- + Public foot or cycle paths are not allowed between two rear gardens
- + A back-to-back minimum distance of 20m must be provided

Illustrative back to existing edge condition section



##### Front to existing front edge conditions:

- + The general approach is to address existing open spaces or streets fronted by existing homes by fronting them with new development to give definition and enclosure to the space in addition to improving natural surveillance, safety and security by providing overlooking
- + Address the space with continuous building frontage with minimal gaps
- + Building height should respond to the existing built form and scale of the open space
- + Retain existing trees and hedges currently providing aspect and amenity to properties

Illustrative front to existing front edge condition section



Sample pages from the design code indicating the level of detail for design requirements



## Lessons learned

**The engagement process: time and resources** - Throughout the testing period it was noted that the time and resources required to plan, prepare and execute the engagement events were significant, especially in relation to the public consultation events and schools' programme. In future a project website – or alternative event promotion tool - should be developed at the earliest possible stage in order to ensure maximum exposure, attendance and input from the community.

A lesson to be learned at this stage is to have a clear engagement strategy and engage with the community and key stakeholders such as landowners at the earliest possible opportunity. In addition, some of the deliverables within the project can be dependent on completion of other aspects of the pilot process; for example, the vision and masterplan elements of the project can only be finalised following feedback from the early engagement.

**Designing the code to suit the area** - A lesson learned for the future would be to determine the nature and level of the final outputs at an earlier stage to streamline deliverables and workstreams. It was first anticipated that the final output would be a complete draft Design Code; however, due to timescales and practicalities, the final output was an emerging document that would be subject to further amendments. There was also the issue of tailoring the design code requirements to the nature of the area acknowledging that some design aspirations would not be deliverable in this lower value area. The emerging codes were viability tested as they developed and might be further refined once developer inputs are received.

**Political support** - Having councillors on board as early as possible can provide a valuable conduit to the local community by promoting the engagement events and keeping them up to date on the project which complements what the project team are already doing.

**Area types worksheet** - This was not used to form a coding plan as per section 2B of the NMDC. Nonetheless the area types worksheet was completed and used to inform sections of the design code including built form and character narrative. The exercise also helped develop a greater understanding of the site in the context of the wider area and could be used to inform other sites across the borough in the future.

## 2.10. Private and Communal Amenity

### 2.10.1. PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL GARDENS

Private amenity space will be provided to all homes, appropriate to the scale of the dwelling it serves. As a minimum, dwellings will be expected to have direct access to private amenity space according to their size and number of occupants as below:

- + Detached or semi-detached family homes with three or more bedrooms must have gardens capable of comfortably accommodating outdoor activities of a family - such as space for children's play and a shed or greenhouse
- + Smaller two and three bedroom houses should have sufficient ground-level private amenity to accommodate the activities of a couple or young family
- + Where bin and bike storage is to be provided within rear private gardens it should be in addition to the indicative garden sizes and must be directly accessible from the street
- + Courtyards and terraces will count towards the indicative garden sizes
- + Apartments must be provided with private amenity space.
- + Balconies should have a minimum width / depth of 1.5m to ensure they are able to accommodate a table and chairs

Gardens should be of a usable, rectangular shape and be accessible to everyone, including disabled and elderly users. Public and private spaces should be differentiated by clear boundaries.

| Mandatory Private Amenity Space |                   |             |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Typology                        | House / Apartment | Requirement |
| 1 Bed 2 Person                  | Apartment         | 5 sqm       |
| 2 Bed 3 Person                  | Apartment         | 6 sqm       |
| 2 Bed 4 Person                  | Apartment         | 8 sqm       |
| 3 Bed 5 or 6 Person             | Apartment         | 10 sqm      |

| Advisory Private Amenity Space |                   |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Typology                       | House / Apartment | Requirement |
| 2 Bed 3 or 4 Person            | House             | 50 sqm      |
| 3 Bed 4, 5 or 6 Person         | House             | 60 sqm      |
| 4 Bed 5, 6 or 7 Person         | House             | 70 sqm      |
| 5 Bed 6, 7 or 8 Person         | House             | 80 sqm      |

Walls, hedges and fences should be of an appropriate scale and suitable for the houses they surround. As a general principle, the more northerly the direction of a garden, the longer it will need to be in order to received a good level of daylight.

Innovative housing typologies which incorporate a range of external amenity typologies are permitted within the masterplan; in particular, opportunities to provide a mix of private and communal amenity in order to enhance a sense of community.

- + Where such typologies are considered it must be clearly demonstrated that the layout is well-designed and respects the residential amenities of the occupiers of all dwellings and have suitable levels of privacy, daylight / sunlight a communal spaces are usable and adequately overlooked

Private gardens should be considered as part of the wider biodiversity strategy for the site to maximise opportunities for ecological benefits. Inclusion of fruit trees within private gardens, bird-boxes, bat boxes etc. should be encouraged within homes prior to occupation.



Small gardens with shared communal amenity space (Marmalade Lane)



Wildlife-friendly gardens at Kingsbrook, Aylesbury (Barratt Homes)

## 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.

### Getting the engagement strategy right

The engagement process proved challenging, limiting the ability to determine what was popular locally to inform the design code. The focus of engagement has been very much on the site - the nature of the site and the green belt release, but, actually we didn't need that specific focus for the consultation. We could have taken a more general local area perspective for the consultation as a starting point. Obviously, we were trying to be transparent about the process but we could have consulted on what people see as beautiful in the area without having reference to the specific site at that stage. Therefore, it is very important to consider the consultation strategy at the outset. We put a lot of resources and energy into the consultation events but the focus got slightly shifted away from what we were trying to achieve.

### A masterplan is not essential at the start

The illustrative concept framework plan represents one way in which the principles within the design code could be set out spatially so that initially a comprehensive masterplan may not be needed. This approach enables the code to be less prescriptive and outlines the requirement for developers to undertake detailed analysis and masterplanning work in the future. An observation on this part of the NMDC is that the preparation of a masterplan at the start should be considered optional and is subject to the appropriateness of the site/area being coded.

### Preparing a design code for a site in a lower value area - being flexible

There were challenges in preparing a design code for a new development in an area where viability would be a significant issue due to lower land values. The aspirations of the community with regard to design has to be balanced against what the developer can realistically provide in terms of design quality. The design code therefore has to be flexible, with the requirements in the code being organised under 'must haves' and 'should haves' that leave room for negotiation.

### Gearing up to code

To prepare to code, three key issues need to be addressed: resourcing, working with members and engaging the public. From a staffing point of view, the local authority is not currently equipped to do coding and could not do it again without funding. Members need to be brought along with the drive for better quality development and that means convincing local communities of the benefits of more housing. There is also a job of work to be done thinking through how the public can be engaged in such processes, and explaining the benefits of coding.

### Raising the bar early

The principle of coding on an allocation site is not done commonly, as typically there is already an outline planning application to set parameters before a design code is prepared to guide reserved matters applications. So this has been an unusual challenge - raising the bar on design quality before a developer prepares a planning application is something that is really interesting through this process.

Case studies prepared by:

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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)