



Design quality in the planning system

Good quality design of the built environment is key to securing better outcomes for places and communities.

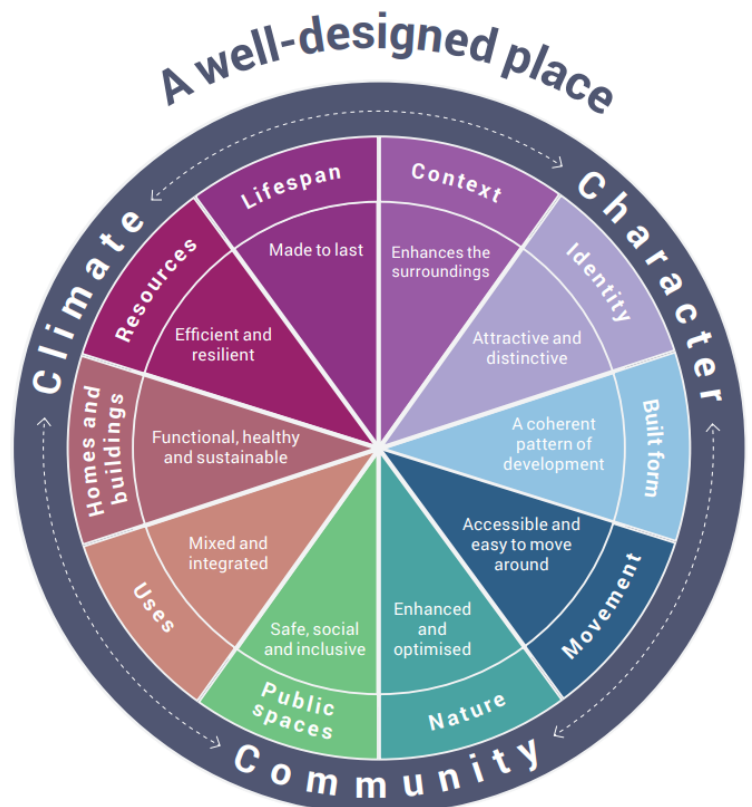
Our policies and programmes aim to ensure that new homes and neighbourhoods are beautiful, environmentally responsive, well-designed and locally led, reflecting and enhancing the character of local areas across England.

Design quality, placemaking and sustainability should be driven by local communities who will be setting the standards for development in their local area. High-quality places should consider design at various scales from the settlement where integration with infrastructure and landscape should be considered, to the neighbourhood where design should facilitate access to public spaces with streets and parks that support health and wellbeing, right down to the detail of individual homes and buildings.

In line with our 25-year environment plan goals, our approach should lead to more energy efficient buildings, enhancing nature, integrating with the natural environment and delivering progress towards the net zero carbon target by 2050.

We convened the **Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission**, a group of independent experts co-chaired by the late Sir Roger Scruton and Nicholas Boys Smith, to advise the Government on embedding beauty, high quality design and placemaking in the planning system and make practical recommendations that will help ensure new housing developments meet the needs and expectations of communities.

The Government is taking forward their recommendations, including changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, publishing a National Model Design Code and establishing an Office for Place within Government to lead this work going forward.



The ten characteristics of well-designed places

Our changes to the **National Planning Policy Framework**, which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied, will help ensure the planning system creates more attractive buildings and places. It refocuses the relationship between development and the natural environment, whilst maintaining the Framework's existing strong focus on delivering the homes and other development which communities need, from the regeneration of the Bourne Estate in London to the community-led Marmalade Lane in Cambridge. The changes include:

- Making beauty and placemaking a strategic policy in the Framework
- Setting an expectation that local authorities produce their own design codes and guides setting out design principles which new development in their areas should reflect
- Local authorities should ensure that new streets are tree-lined
- Improving biodiversity and access to nature through design
- An emphasis on granting planning permission for well-designed development and refusing it for poor quality schemes

We have also produced a National Model Design Code, which provides a framework for creating healthy, sustainable and distinctive places. The National Model Design Code is a toolkit to help local councils and communities produce their own design codes, which will set clear standards and expectations for the design of new development and clarity for developers about what they are expected to deliver.



Excerpts from the National Model Design Code

We are establishing an **Office for Place** which will draw on Britain's world-class design expertise to pioneer design and beauty within the planning system. The Office for Place and its advisory board, which includes experts in this field and is chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith, are already working to drive up design standards. The Office for Place is working with local authorities, providing support and conducting research, to understand how the National Model Design Code can be used by councils to create user-friendly, but effective design codes in a variety of contexts. The application of the National Model Design Code is currently being tested with 14 local authorities across England. Building on the testing programme, a second phase of pilots are getting underway which will model best practice

approaches to developing a design code, in a range of different contexts with demonstrable support from communities, to produce an exemplar design code.

FAQ

What is a design code?

Design codes are simple, concise, illustrated design documents that set the standard of design for a local area. A design code combines text and diagrams, setting out requirements for the physical development of a site or area. They should be published online and easily accessible.

Design codes can specify baseline requirements around street pattern, landscaping, facades or the environmental performance of places and buildings.

They should be prepared by a local planning authority as part of their policy or guidance, or by neighbourhood planning groups, sometimes in partnership with developers. Developers can also prepare their own design codes that meet local requirements in support of a planning application.

Every community can now use the National Model Design Code to set the standards for new development to help and protect the local character and heritage through their involvement in developing a local design code.

As set out in Planning for the Future, we propose to bring democracy forward and giving people a greater role in shaping how their communities will look through their local plans and design codes. We will replace lengthy documents with easy to access digital tools and map-based local plans – allowing people to visualise local plans for development and participate more fully in the planning system. The updated National Planning Policy Framework and National Model Design Code are an important step towards this ambition.



Excerpts from the National Model Design Code

Are local planning authorities required to produce design codes?

The revised National Planning Policy Framework asks all local planning authorities to prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences.

Their geographic coverage, level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety. They should be produced either as part of a local plan or as supplementary planning documents.

Are local authorities properly resourced to produce design codes?

We want to ensure that local authority planning departments have the right support to produce local design codes.

The Office for Place will begin the work to support local authorities to drive up design standards. This year it will be piloting the National Model Design Code with communities across England. The first phase is underway as we test the application of the National Model Design Code with 14 local authorities.

We are now seeking expressions of interest from local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups who want to work with us to develop an exemplar process for developing design codes which others can draw upon in developing their own design codes.

What further changes have you made to the National Planning Policy framework?

Most of the changes relate to policy on the quality of design of new development and take forward the Government's response to the recommendations of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission.

The National Planning Policy Framework changes also include:

- Changes to environmental policies – including those arising from our review of policy for building in areas at flood risk with assistance from Defra
- Changes to remove or amend out of date material (for example; the early thresholds of the Housing Delivery Test)
- An update to reflect a recent change made in a Written Ministerial Statement about retaining and explaining statues.
- Clarification on the use of Article 4 directions

How do the National Planning Policy framework changes relate to wider planning reform?

These are interim amendments, to incorporate recommendations made in the report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, ahead of further amendments to the National Planning Policy framework.

The importance of design codes was highlighted in Planning for the Future, and today's Building Beautiful Places announcement gives codes greater teeth: the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will give authorities more power to refuse schemes which fail to reflect codes - something which is further reinforced by the publication of the National Model Design Code.

Our work in piloting the National Model Design Code also provides a strong platform from which to build and lays the foundation for ensuring that design codes are a key part of both the current and reformed planning systems. We will announce more detail on planning reforms in due course.

How do you assess beauty?

A series of studies have shown that it's possible for communities to come together and produce clear expressions of what fits with local character and what is popular. We think that it is possible to assess beauty and set standards for design quality. The Government has provided a clear framework, through policy and guidance, to enable this to be decided locally by local planning authorities, working together with developers and the community. This should be reflected in local plans, neighbourhood plans, design guides and codes, taking into account government guidance on design.

Clear design expectations are set through national planning policy, and this is supported by our National Design Guide which sets out the 10 characteristics of a well-designed place, and the new National Model Design Code.

Further Information

Revised National Planning Policy Framework

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

National Model Design Code

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-model-design-code>

Office for Place

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/office-for-place>