



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
**Design Quality**

**District Councils Network Annual Conference**

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Head of Design and Planning Reform



## Design Quality

Department for  
Levelling Up,  
Housing  
and Communities  
**Design Quality  
Team**

### Purpose:

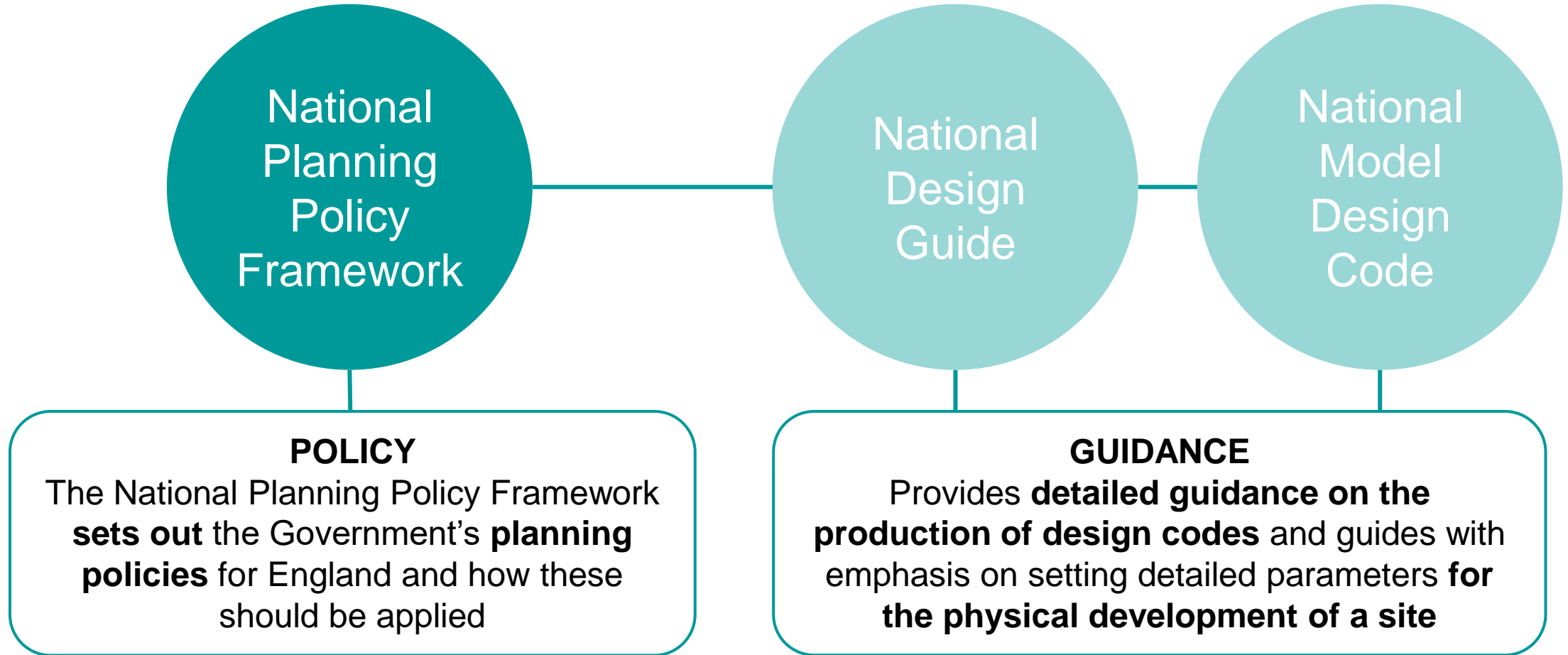
Responsible for **promoting design quality, placemaking and beautiful development** through planning policy and reform, supporting the wider sector and embedding design quality and placemaking in government housing programmes

### Policy and delivery priorities:

- **Embedding design quality** in national planning policy and associated guidance, including publication of the National Model Design Code.
- Running pilots of the new National Model Design Code with local authorities
- Establishing a new Office for Place
- Supporting design in Government housing and economic growth programmes including the Levelling Up agenda



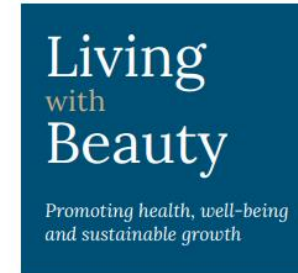
## Context





# Commissions

- **Building Better Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC)**  
– set up following Policy Exchange report, co-chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith and the late Sir Roger Scruton.
- The recommendations seek to **embed beauty and high-quality design in the planning system.**
- Government is **taking forward the majority of their recommendations**, including revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, the publication of the National Model Design Code and establishment of an Office for Place.



The report of the  
Building Better,  
Building Beautiful  
Commission

JANUARY 2020



# National Policy Context

- Updates to the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.
- Updates to the NPPF **provide greater emphasis on granting permission for well-designed development and refusing it for poor quality schemes.**
- Chapter 12 focuses on *Achieving well-designed places*.
- Other updates to the NPPF reflect design quality and beauty, for example making beauty and placemaking a strategic objective of the planning system and **an expectation that local authorities will produce design codes or guides**



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

National Planning Policy Framework

## 12. Achieving well-designed places

126. The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.
127. Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers.
128. To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should 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. Design guides and codes provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places with a consistent and high quality standard of design. 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.
129. Design guides and codes can be prepared at an area-wide, neighbourhood or site-specific scale, and to carry weight in decision-making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents. Landowners and developers may contribute to these exercises, but may also choose to prepare design codes in support of a planning application for sites they wish to develop. Whoever prepares them, all guides and codes should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area, taking into account the guidance contained in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. These national documents should be used to guide decisions on applications in the absence of locally produced design guides or design codes.
130. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
  - b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;



## Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

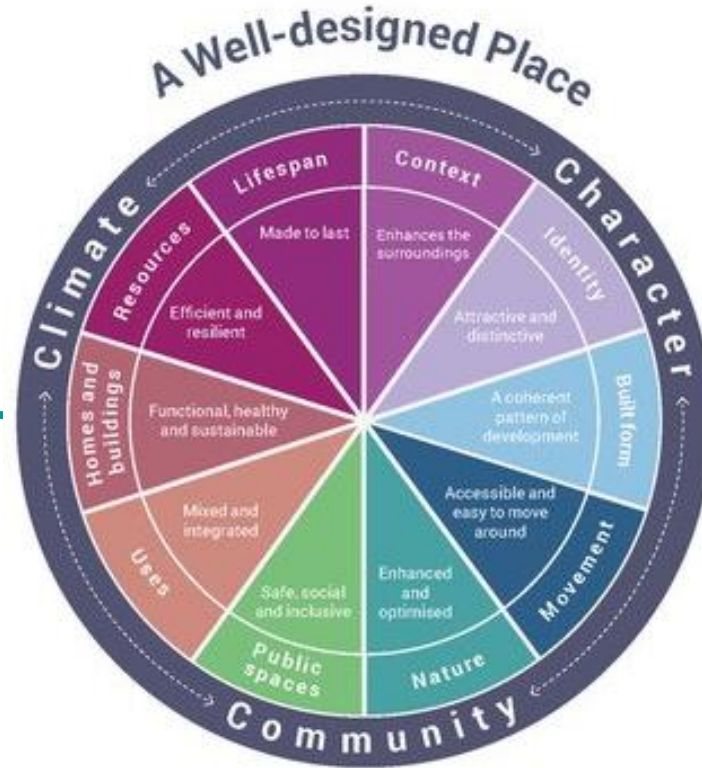
- **10 characteristics** of well-designed places.
- **Process for developing local design codes** that set the rules for the design of new development which reflect local context and community preferences.
- Toolkit for **local councils to develop their own design codes**, to shape and deliver beautiful places for communities.
- Based on **genuine community involvement**.





# Planning Practice Guidance

National  
Design  
Guide



**Design guide:** A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with good design practice, often produced by a local authority



# NMDC Testing Programme – Phase 1

- The Testing Programme was **designed to test aspects of the process and content of the NMDC in a range of contexts**
- Over 70 EOIs were submitted to test the application of the NMDC in practice in local areas
- The Secretary of State **selected 14 local authority teams** due to quality of proposals and range of contexts being tested across the nine English regions
- Scale ranged from authority-wide to specific site testing

- Buckinghamshire Council
- Colchester Borough Council
- Dacorum Borough Council
- Guildford Borough Council
- Herefordshire Council,
- Hyndburn Borough Council
- Leeds City Council
- Mid Devon District Council
- Newcastle City Council
- North West Leicestershire District Council
- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- Southwark Council

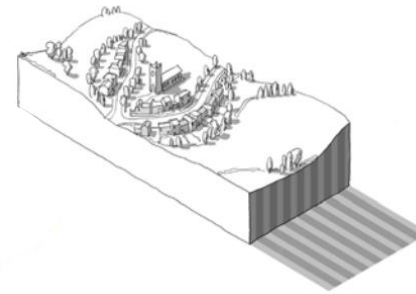




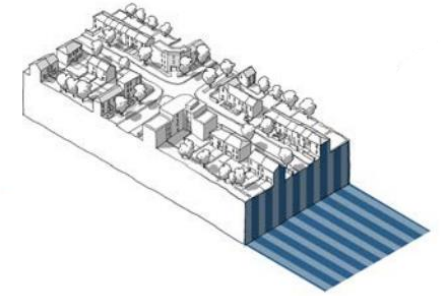


# NMDC Testing Programme – Phase 1

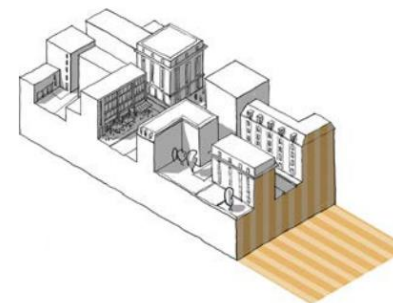
- **Testing covers rural, suburban, town and city contexts**
- Development types include new settlements, urban extensions, allocated sites, area-wide regeneration and area intensification and infill
- Various stages of design coding were tested, from early community engagement to assessing existing design guidance
- Outputs include coding plans, bespoke area types, masterplans, draft design codes and 'how to' guides



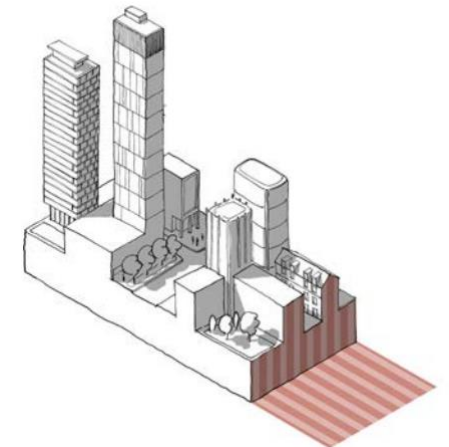
Rural and area-wide



Large sites and extensions



Town centres and neighbourhoods

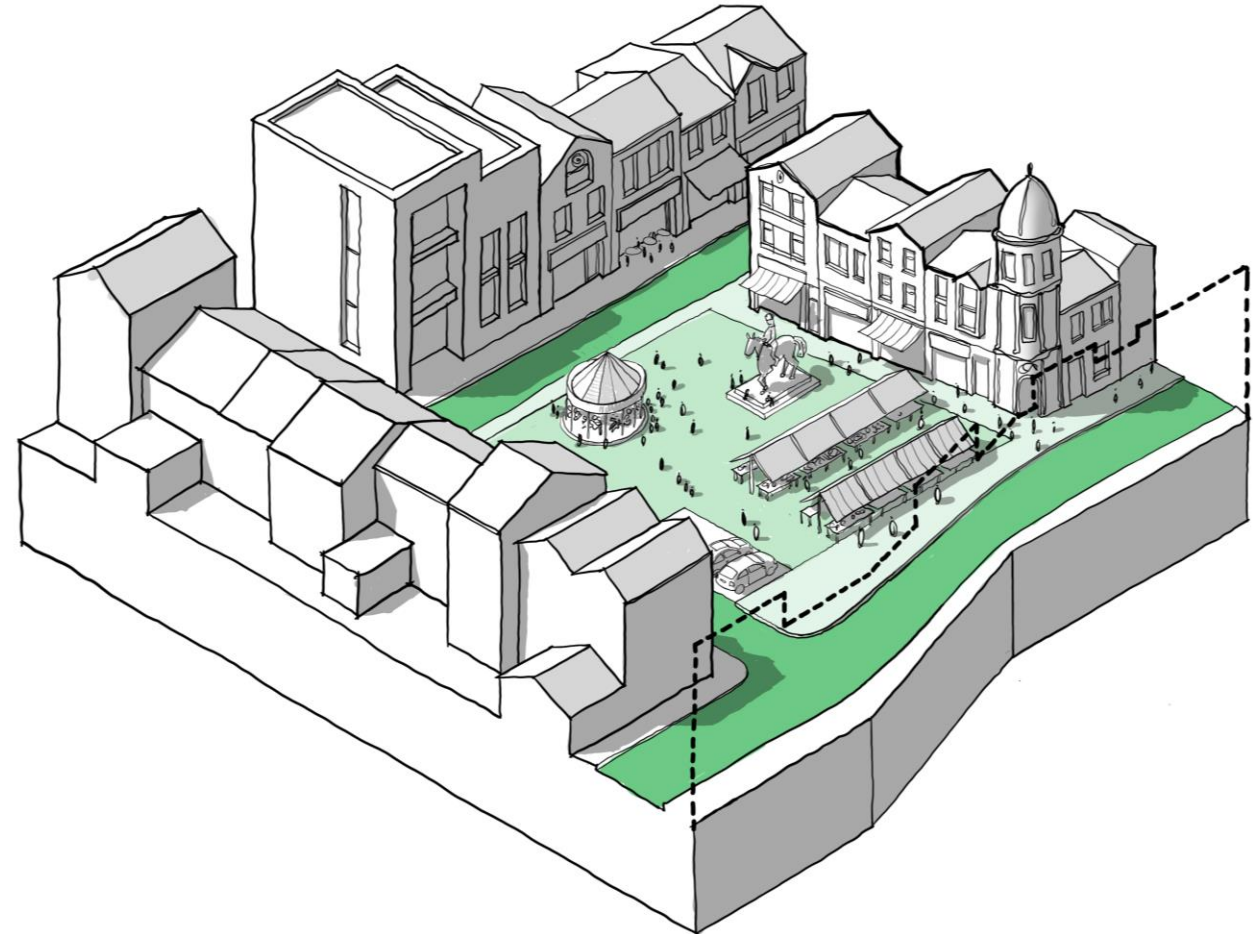


City centre regeneration



## NMDC Testing Programme – Phase 2

- Expression of interest for **Phase 2 of the NMDC Testing Programme** closed in September and submissions are currently being assessed
- Seeking interest from local authorities, from county to district scales, and designated neighbourhood planning groups
- Successful teams will **work with their communities and the *Office for Place* to develop best practice design codes and processes to serve as exemplars for others**





*'The response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report, along with the reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the National Design Code, the intention to establish the Office for Place and our wider proposals to reform the planning system, will ensure that for the first time design is established as a core pillar of the planning process.'*

- Draw on Britain's world-class design **expertise to pioneer design and beauty within the planning system.**
- **Support local councils** to work with communities to set locally popular design standards for new development in their areas.
- Advised by board of experts, chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith.

## Office for Place





**Design quality is a key aspect in planning reforms.**

- **The *Planning for the Future White Paper* proposed to prioritise and emphasise design quality**, to achieve beautiful, sustainable places and communities and improve design quality by setting clear and predictable design standards using **design codes**.
- *Planning for the Future* also proposes **the establishment of a design body to support** local councils and communities to set expectations for design locally.

## Planning Reform

