Design Codes and the Pathfinder Programme

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1. What are design codes?

2. Design legislation, policy and guidance

3. NMDC Testing Programme and Design Code Pathfinders

What are design codes?
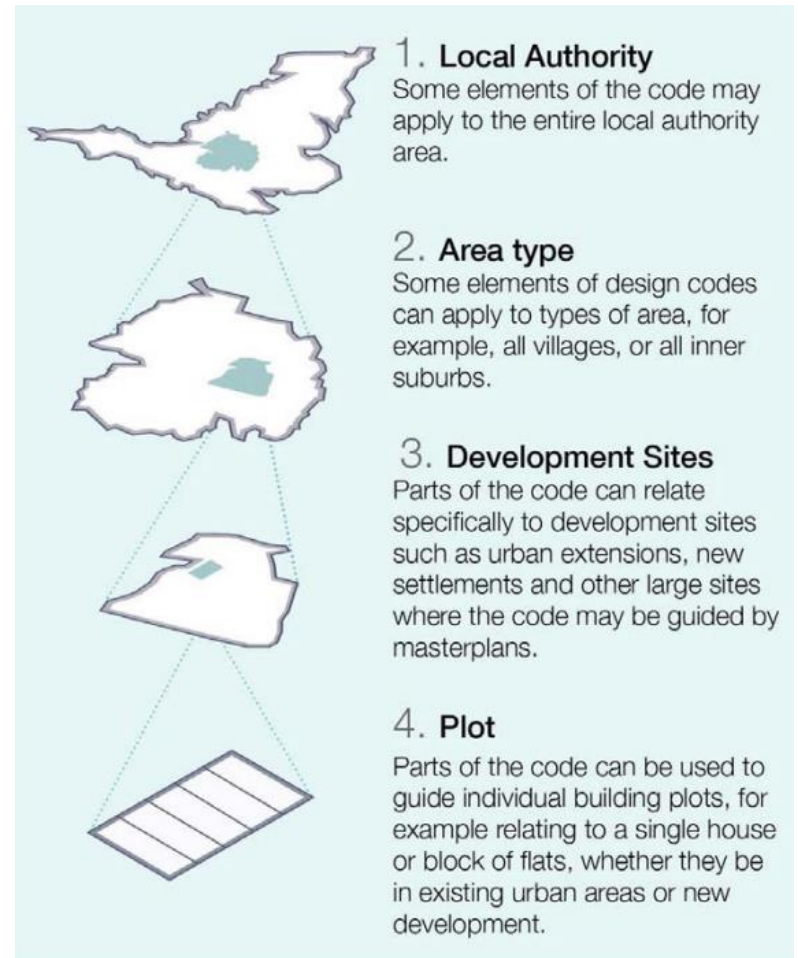
Design codes

"A design code is a set of simple, concise, illustrated design requirements that are visual and numerical wherever possible to provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area." National Model Design Code, p.1

- Different from design guides – but can include guidance!

- LPA-led

- Apply at different scales

1. **Local Authority**
Some elements of the code may apply to the entire local authority area.

2. **Area type**
Some elements of design codes can apply to types of area, for example, all villages, or all inner suburbs.

3. **Development Sites**
Parts of the code can relate specifically to development sites such as urban extensions, new settlements and other large sites where the code may be guided by masterplans.

4. **Plot**
Parts of the code can be used to guide individual building plots, for example relating to a single house or block of flats, whether they be in existing urban areas or new development.

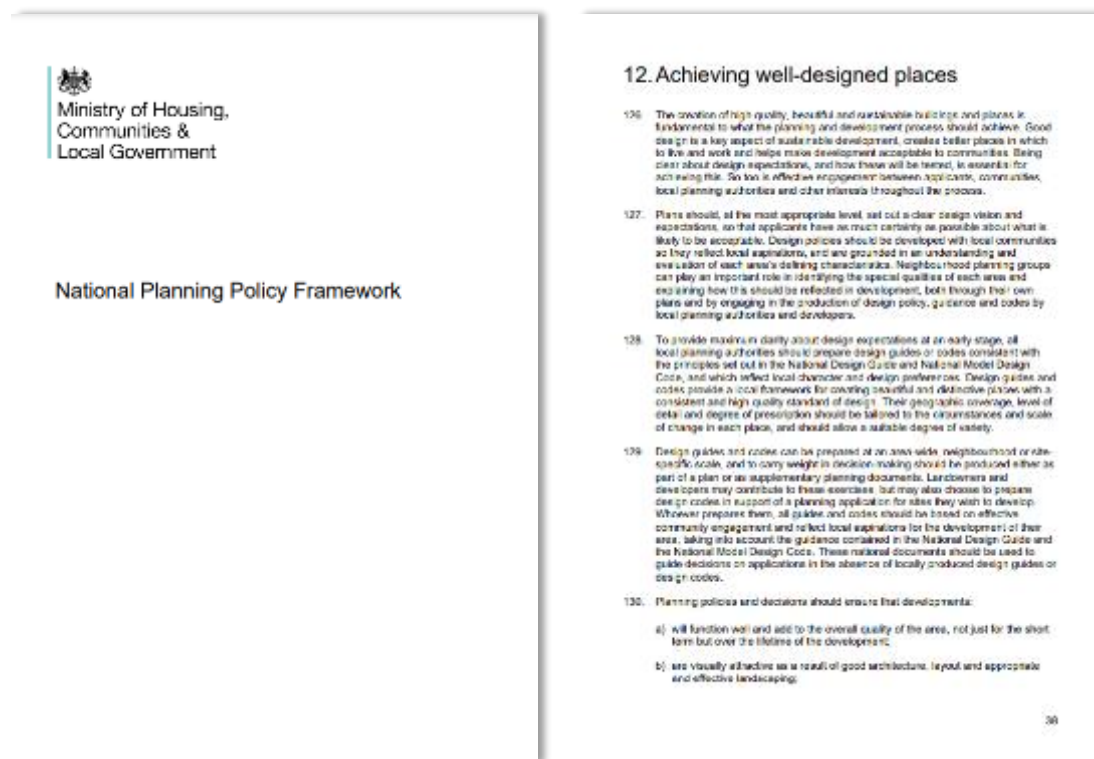# Background on design policy and guidance

- The importance of quality, as well as the quantity of homes was set out in the Housing White Paper in 2017.

- Design quality has been strengthened in the National Planning Policy Framework and associated guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code.

- The Secretary of State convened the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission in 2019 and announced the creation of an Office for Place, which will pioneer design and beauty within the planning system.

National Policy context

- 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
  - making beauty and placemaking a strategic objective of the planning system
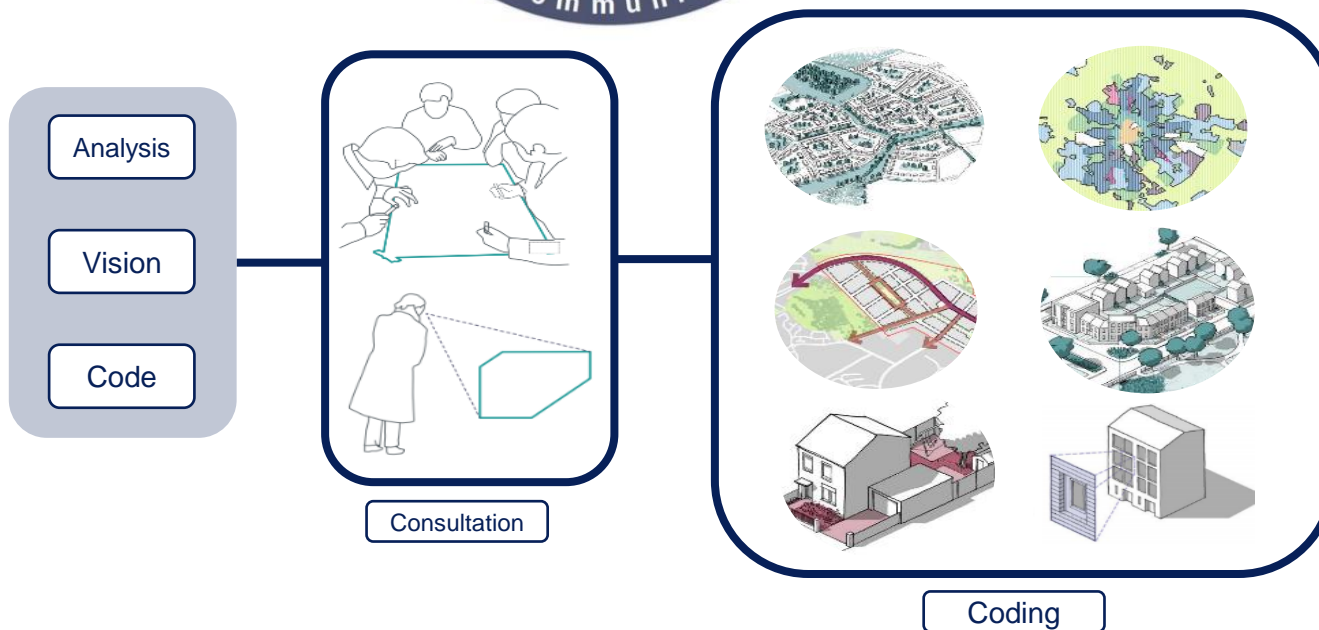 - an expectation that local authorities will produce design codes or guides.

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

National Planning Policy Framework

12. Achieving well-designed places

Planning Practice Guidance

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The National Design Guide

- Sets out 10 characteristics of well-designed places.
  - Context
  - Identity
  - Built form
  - Movement
  - Nature
  - Public spaces
  - Uses
  - Homes and buildings
  - Resources
  - Lifespan

- They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

National Model Design Code

- Direction on how to translate the 10 characteristics into a local design code.

A Well-designed Place

Analysis

Vision

Code

Consultation

Coding

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

- Requirement that all LPAs prepare a design code at the spatial scale of their authority area ("authority wide code").

  o Consulting on design codes as part of NPPF changes.

- Supported by a new plan-making framework, which gives greater weight to the plan in decision-making, and introduces Supplementary Plans.

- Looking to review and consolidate the national design guidance to reflect changes to policy and learnings from pathfinder programme.

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NMDC Pilot and the Design Code Pathfinders Programme

NMDC Pilot Testing Programme (2021)

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- The NMDC Pilot Testing Programme was designed to test aspects of the process and content of the NMDC in a range of contexts working with 14 local authorities.

- We learned that:
  - Producing a design code takes time, skills and resources, particularly when engagement is required
  - Some places are more challenging and complex than others and require different approaches
  - Understanding viability at the start of the process is critical
  - Community knowledge is a valuable resource

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-model-design-code-pilot-programme-phase-1-lessons-learned
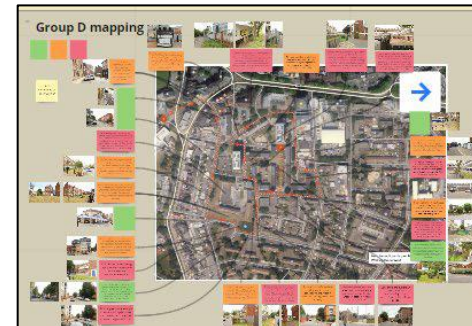
Herefordshire: guidance for NP codes

Rural authority-wide

Hyndburn: coding for garden village

Large sites and extensions

Portsmouth: Toolkit for estate renewal

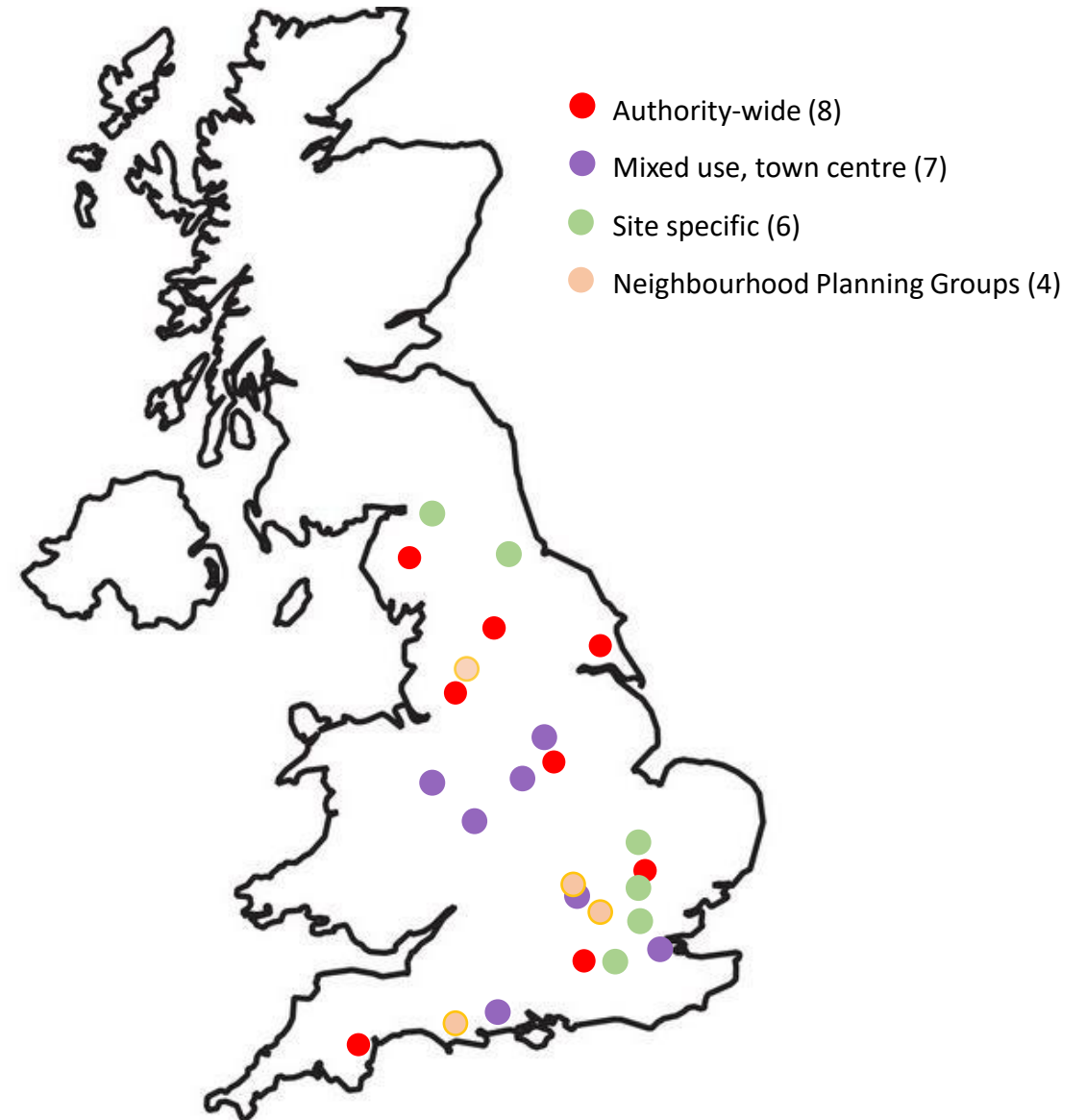**Town centres and neighbourhoods**

Southwark: Coding for opportunity area

City centre regeneration

Design Code Pathfinder Programme (2022-23)

In 2022 we selected 25 pathfinders and asked them to prepare a design code over course of a year:

- Pathfinders chose scale to code: local authority area, others area specific – town centre, some site specific

- They chose what to code: some focused on streets, others existing estates, new extensions, some to raise quality of development across whole LA area

● Authority-wide (8)

● Mixed use, town centre (7)

● Site specific (6)

● Neighbourhood Planning Groups (4)

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- This work is boosting the status of design within their authority, particularly among elected members.

- Challenge to decide on the level of detail needed in the code and making sure it is specific to their area.

- Developing a code that does not stifle design.

- The number of people to consult with.

- Ensuring it does not become too big and remains functional and useable.

- Time and resource is poor in most authorities. This is not just related to design, but to other necessary fields.

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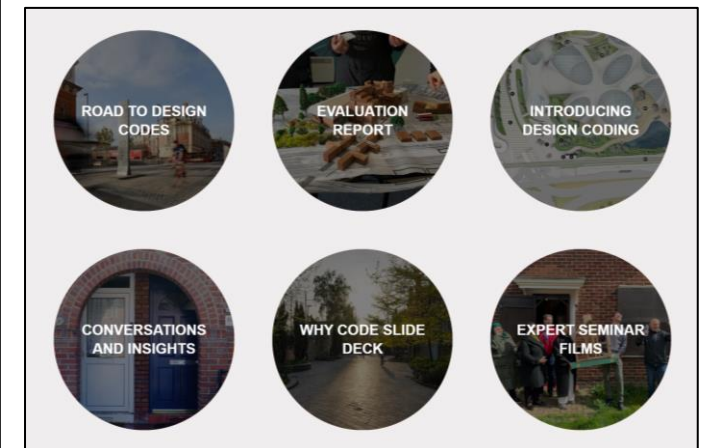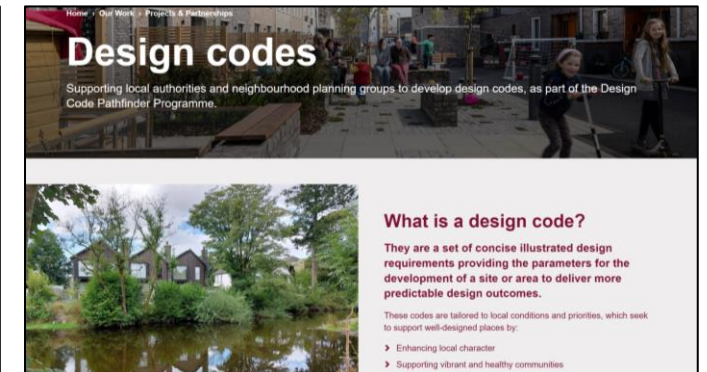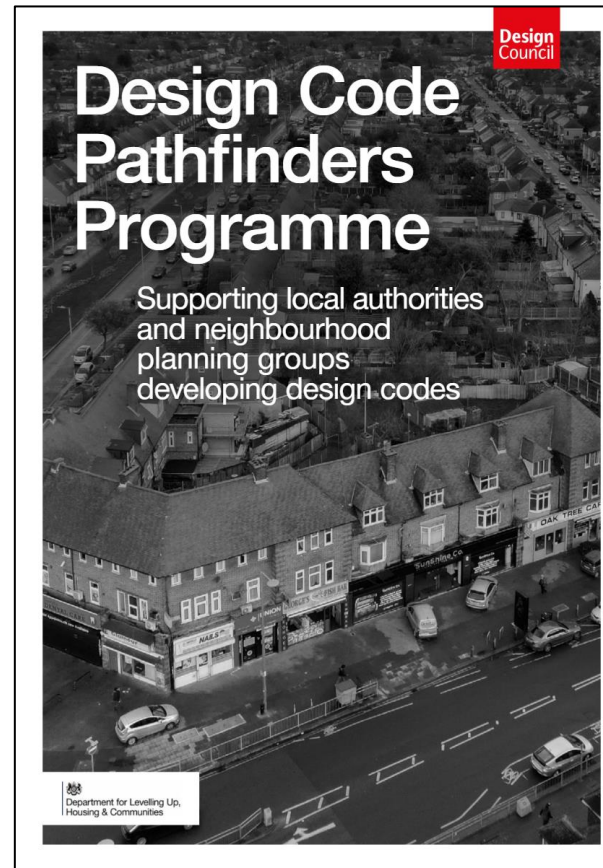Housing & Communities

- Development Management officers were key to determining the areas of focus for the content of codes.

- Multidisciplinary in-house teams, with urban design and DM experience.

- The need to test design codes from various user perspectives.

- The need and opportunities for compliance checklists.

- Training is essential to support implementation of the code.

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o Design Council have produced a selection of products sharing findings from Phase 2 Pathfinders Programme

o Materials include:

    o Evaluation Report

    o What is a Design Code?

    o "Why Code?" slide deck

    o Pathfinder Conversations and Insights
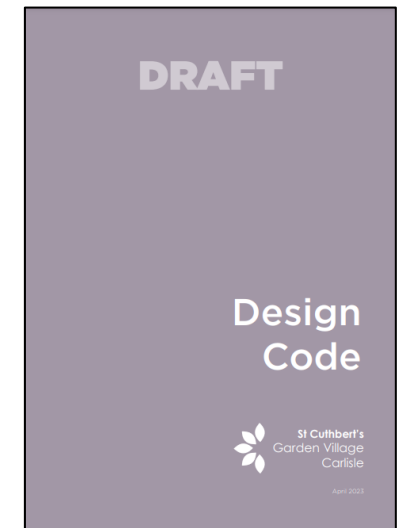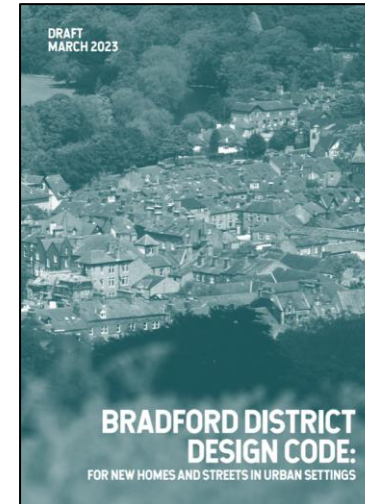
    o Case study film

    o Road to Design Codes

https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/projects-partnerships/design-codes/

Design Code Pathfinders Programme

Supporting local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups developing design codes

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Design codes
Supporting local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups to develop design codes, as part of the Design Code Pathfinder Programme.

What is a design code?
They are a set of concise illustrated design requirements providing the parameters for the development of a site or area to deliver more predictable design outcomes.

These codes are tailored to local conditions and priorities, which seek to support well-designed places by:
> Enhancing local character
> Supporting vibrant and healthy communities

ROAD TO DESIGN CODES   EVALUATION REPORT   INTRODUCING DESIGN CODING

CONVERSATIONS AND INSIGHTS   WHY CODE SLIDE DECK   EXPERT SEMINAR FILMS

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- Continuing to work with pathfinders to share learning, refine and improve codes and explore the use of digital.

- Greater focus on implementation, including testing and training.

- The Design Council have published additional learning materials, including on DM officer involvement in code production.

- Design Council seminars scheduled for October.

Thank you