





# Design codes and the historic environment

Briefing Report : Summary of Key Findings

December 2020





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## "A design code is ...

... a set of design specifications for both buildings and streets. The cookbook that sets the recipe for a place."

Create Streets Foundation 2020

... a set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area. ."

National Planning Policy Framework 2019

... a set of three- dimensional, site-specific design rules or requirements for development. It is informed by a spatial masterplan or other form of urban design proposals and describes the rules through words and graphics. "

CABE 2004

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# Introduction and methodology

- 1 Introduction and methodology
- 2 Key lessons
- 3 Recommendations for Historic England

# 1. Introduction and methodology

## **Background**

'Design codes and the historic environment' is an Historic England commissioned research project.

The overarching aim of the project is to understand how the historic environment has been reflected in design codes to date, drawing conclusions on good and bad practices to guide Historic England and partnered organisations.

The purpose of this document is to present a summary of the key findings of the research and provide recommendations to Historic England to use this learning to best effect.

#### Context

The project has been commissioned in response to the recent emergence of design codes as a central pillar of place-shaping in England. The case and ambition for design codes is outlined in 'Planning for the Future', the August 2020 white paper by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG).

As part of this commitment to design codes, MHCLG commissioned the production of a 'National Model Design Code' which, at time of this report's publication, is due for release in January 2021 for public consultation. This project is seeking to provide relevant, evidence-based guidance regarding design codes to Historic England to allow the organisation to engage with this process and positively shape outcomes.

## Scope

Given the breadth of existing research and publications for design codes, and the ongoing work of others tasked with delivering the ambitions of 'Planning for the Future', it is important to clearly define the scope of this project:

## This project does seek to:

- Undertake research into the potential role of the historic environment and heritage expertise within design coding.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
   associated with the use of design
   codes to date in respect to the historic
   environment and distil these into key
   lessons for the heritage sector.
- Provide an evidence base to Historic
   England of case study design codes
   that relate to the historic environment,
   identifying their role and influence
   (positive or negative) on historic places.
- Make recommendations to Historic England as a result of the key lessons and identify next steps.

## This project does not seek to:

- Provide guidance on the overarching philosophies of design coding or instruction on general principles of best practice for their creation, content, and dissemination.
- Repeat work tasked to those creating the National Model Design Code, or those undertaking other research and pilot studies on behalf of MHCLG.
- Create an overarching design code for the historic environment.
- Be considered as an adopted Historic England strategy for design codes.

## Method

This project has included wide-reaching study of design coding practice to date, both domestically and internationally.

Detailed analysis of individual case studies has been combined with consultation with a diverse selection of stakeholders engaged with design coding across the private, public and third sectors.

Close collaboration with a steering group of Historic England experts has guided the research at all stages. Evidence and lessons learned were presented through a phased programme of reporting, allowing ongoing critical review to inform the direction of further research.

Two reports have been produced. This document includes a summary of key findings for dissemination to Historic England's partners and wider audiences. A separate report, for internal Historic England circulation, provides detailed critical analysis of individual design codes, forming an evidence base from which the organisation can draw upon in future (e.g. for training purposes).

## **Case Studies**

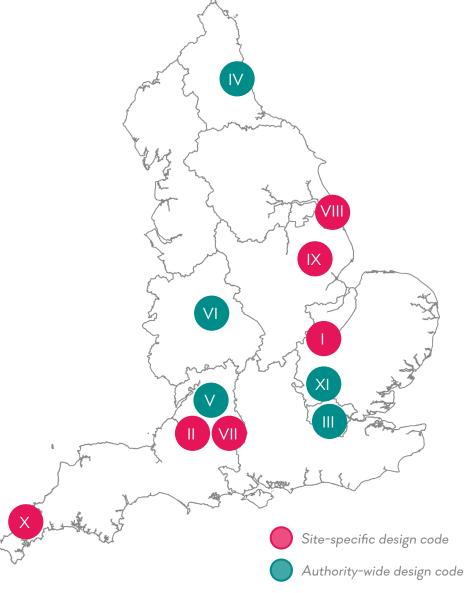
Insights into the existing and potential uses of design codes for the historic environment has been informed by analysis of case studies from across the country.

Over thirty design codes have been examined. To provide a representative sample, case studies were selected to reflect a variety of development scenarios, locations, contexts, scales, and authorships.

A shortlist of ten were chosen for detailed investigation (mapped overleaf), including structured interviews with those involved in their creation, assessment, or delivery.

## Map of detailed case studies

Ref Case Study Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1 Design Code Bath Quays North Design Code ||Lambeth Design Code SPD |||IV Gateshead Residential Design Code  $\vee$ Cirencester Town Centre Public Realm Design Code  $\vee$ I The LPA view - Birmingham City Council  $\forall \parallel$ Wichelstowe District Centre Design Code  $\forall |||$ Grant Street, Cleethorpes Local Development Order Woodhall Spa Local Development Order IX Χ Nansledan & Tregunnel Hill, Newquay ΧI Look! St Albans







# Key lessons

- 1 Introduction and methodology
- 2 Key lessons
- 3 Recommendations for Historic England



# 2. Key lessons

## **Overview**

This chapter distils the findings of research undertaken by the project team into the design coding process, together with analysis and consultation with experienced practitioners and stakeholders.

Fifteen key lessons are presented across four themes.

## **Purpose**

The lessons learned are intended to:

- Improve understanding of the potential role the historic environment may play in the development of design codes.
- Outline how the heritage sector could positively support the design coding process, at both national and local levels.
- Form the basis for discussion between those responsible for establishing Historic England's strategic position on design codes.
- Support those tasked with producing a new Historic England Advice Note (or similar resource) for design codes and
  the historic environment.

## The lessons learned:

Reuse	e, restore, recycle: Preserving, enhancing, and embracing existing heritage assets through design codes				
	Design codes offer new opportunities to promote good practice for heritage within place-shaping				
2	National- and local authority wide design codes could raise the benchmarks for high quality design in historic environments				
$\exists$	Site specific design codes could provide the blueprints for successful design solutions which embrace heritage assets				
Buildi	ing in context: Design coding for local character and distinctiveness				
Н	Reflecting local character within place-shaping can be a shared ambition of a new national design framework and the heritage sector				
5	High quality evidence on the character and significance of existing places is the foundation of many successful design codes				
Ь	Design codes can prescribe contextual development of both traditional and contemporary forms				
	The heritage profession must take a proportionate approach to promoting local character within design codes				
$\Box$	Well intentioned, but misinformed design codes can enable development that is harmful to local distinctiveness				
'Prova	ably popular' design : Community engagement and design codes				
: <b>Н</b>	Design codes can increase local community support for development in sensitive areas				
$\square$	The heritage sector is well placed to enable meaningful community engagement with design codes				
	Care must be taken to ensure design codes neither create nor exacerbate divisions within communities				
Deliv	ering on ambition : Skills and resources for design coding within the heritage sector				
12	The heritage sector can be a key player in successful design coding by using existing expertise for new purposes				
E	Local planning authorities will require urgent investment in skills and resources				
1.4	Historic England's training programmes can 'level up' the heritage sector to support design codes				
15	Renewing key guidance could demonstrate the potential value of the historic environment to the modern place-shaping agenda				

## Reuse, restore, recycle:

Preserving, enhancing, and embracing existing heritage assets through design codes

## Recommendations: (see page 35)

#### Lessons learned:

- 1 Design codes offer new opportunities to promote good practice for heritage within place-shaping.
- 2 National and local authority wide design codes can raise the benchmarks for high quality design in historic environments.
- 3 Site specific design codes could provide the blueprint for successful design solutions which embrace the value of existing heritage assets.

## Design codes offer new opportunities to promote good practice for heritage within place-shaping

The historic environment is valued across society for its role in creating distinctive places. Individual heritage assets make vital contributions, with the significance of over 600,000 buildings, monuments, townscapes, and landscapes now legally protected. Millions more 'non-designated' assets blanket the English landscape. Together these features form a rich tapestry, with a unique value felt acutely by their local communities.

It is now firmly established that true place-shaping embraces existing heritage assets. Many recent examples illustrate the potential to harness their inherent qualities to enhance new places, whilst carefully balancing the requirements to pay special regard to their significance.

'Planning for the Future' (MHCLG, Aug 2020) quotes Williams-Ellis as a guiding principle: '... cherish the past, adorn the present, build for the future...'. The retention of heritage assets within new development would seem the perfect response.

To date, however, design codes have rarely embraced the opportunities to do so, with a constraints focussed approach much more common. The legal requirements to preserve and enhance designated heritage assets has incentivised some positive outcomes, but opportunities to prescribe retention and reuse of non-designated features, many of which are valued locally, are rarely taken. Looking ahead, a two-tier approach may provide the best outcomes:

- At a strategic level, new national and local authority wide design codes can reinforce the growing evidence for the benefits inherent in positive approaches to heritage assets within place-shaping.
- At the local level, site specific design codes can go further, defining the criteria by which assets can be reused in a manner that amplifies their special qualities.



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## National and local authority wide design codes could raise the benchmarks for high quality design in historic environments

Amongst the most valued and distinctive elements of England's historic environment is its great diversity in form, age, and character. Good design for heritage assets therefore requires an understanding of the distinctive significance and setting of individual heritage assets. As such, it may unsuitable for national and local authority wide design codes to prescribe detailed criteria for specific asset types, potentially stifling the required local response.

There is great opportunity, however, for 'top-level' design codes to provide new platforms to promote high quality design for heritage. Codes could prescribe best practice for understanding significance during the development cycle, adding weight to what are, at present, only advisory elements of design and decision making. Codes could provide practical direction on translating the principles of good design laid down in policy and legislation into practice. The objective should be to raise the benchmark and reinforce a message that success for the historic environment should be more than 'doing no harm'.

New development within 'growth' and 'renewal' areas **must** identify and take opportunities available to preserve, enhance, and embrace the significance of existing heritage assets by:

- Obtaining and demonstrating a detailed understanding of the presence and significance of heritage assets (both designated and non-designated) within and adjacent sites at the earliest opportunity.
- Undertaking historic area assessments of the site and its surroundings at the outset.
- Creating detailed, site-specific design codes outlining positive approaches to individual heritage assets and historic environment features located within development sites.
- Applying the 'Building in Context' framework and relevant good practice guidance and advise throughout design stages.
- Proactively engaging local community members in identifying and characterising local distinctiveness.
- Demonstrating how design of development aligns to sustainable practices.



## Site specific design codes could provide the blueprints for successful design solutions which embrace heritage assets

Large-scale development sites often include a range of heritage assets, from individual buildings to archaeological monuments. Historic landscape- and townscape features also bring environmental value, and collectively contribute to local character (e.g. hedgerows, trees, woodlands, waterbodies, footpaths). Heritage assets may also often be affected by development within their setting.

All such features can be assets to development, if adopted for new social, economic, or environmental benefits. Heritage assets can form physical landmarks, situated prominently in the public realm to celebrate their qualities, and help anchor new places within existing landscapes. Assets can be social focal points, repurposed to host new amenities that bring communities together. The retention and recycling of assets can be an effective means of reducing carbon impacts. Networks of historic landscapes features can be the anchoring foundations of new developments' green-infrastructure frameworks.

The inherent costs, and resulting restrictions, of detailed design and planning stages (often needed to address heritage concerns) can be a disincentive for developers to address such issues at an early stage. At present, outline applications can therefore be vague as to whether such opportunities are to be embraced, reducing confidence within stakeholder groups as to the eventual quality of the scheme for the historic environment.

Site-specific design codes may offer a new solution, if they are founded on a robust understanding of areas' heritage significance. Codes could act as design briefs for heritage assets within sites, prescribing essential and desirable criteria for their retention and adoption. Through an appropriate balance of prescription and flexibility, greater confidence could in turn be obtained for all stakeholders - 'de-risking' perceived constraints. Codes cannot guarantee high quality design solutions, but could form a blueprint for success.

## **Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1**

Alconbury Weald is an ongoing major mixed use development covering circa 580 hectares of land encompassing the airfield at RAF Alconbury, in west Cambridgeshire.

RAF Alconbury includes legacies of military operations undertaken between 1938 to 1995, including airfield infrastructure and numerous buildings of architectural and historic interest. Some features are of national significance, including bunkers and the airfield's watch tower.

Each key phase of development is controlled through a design code of a broad scope, covering the majority of design considerations from macro to micro scales. A key component must be a dedicated design brief for of how development will respond to the significance of specific assets within the site. Some will form a dedicated 'heritage area', whilst others will act as local landmarks and amenities.

The approach set clear expectations on developers from the outset and established a high benchmark for quality design and engagement with the site's heritage assets. Whilst the transformation of these assets' setting from military to residential will inevitably bring high degrees of 'harm', the coded approach has ensured they can be celebrated to the greatest possible extent within their new context.

NB: Images overleaf

For more information see: www.alconbury-weald.co.uk; Huntingdonshire District Council planning reference 14/8285/COND

#### 3.8 Watch Tower Green

#### Character and Form

Watch Tower Green is intended as a green open space which provides an appropriate setting for the listed Watch Tower building. The space holds a strategic position within KP1, located along the main approach boulevard at the interface between the commercial and residential areas.

Opportunities exist to continue the broadleaf tree avenue proposed around the Cricket Park to provide visual continuity between the two spaces and reinforce connections.

The building itself could perform a number of community functions with complimentary uses serving both the residential and commercial areas, see Chapter 7 Community Uses Built Form. As such, the Green offers opportunities to establish a flexible, open space, functioning as a setting for the building and an open lawn space to compliment the building's day-to-day uses, while also catering for potential community events such as local fetes / fairs, farmer's markets, etc.

#### Function

Alconbury Weald KP1 Design

development of 'Watch Tower

anchored on the grade II listed

watch office and observation

Green, a dedicated amenity space

Code specifications for

- → Appropriate setting for the Listed Watch Tower building:
- → Community focus;
- → Open space serving the commercial area.

#### Size/Scale

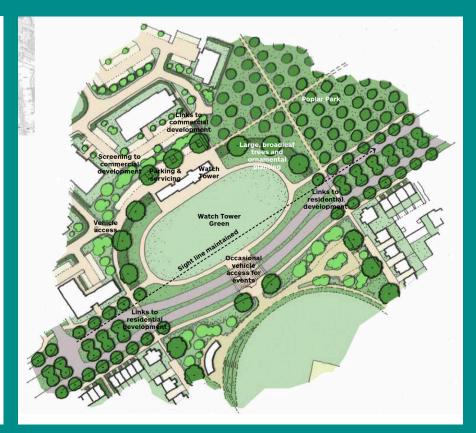
→ Defined by the building to the north, approach avenue to the south and links to the Cricket Park to the east and west (c.0.8Ha)

#### Location

→ South of the existing Watch Tower building.

#### Features

- → Leisure community uses and events;
- → Recreation connecting footpath links, seating;
- → Heritage historic interpretation, public art;
- → Good quality pedestrian links should be realised to connect the Green with commercial areas to the north, residential areas (via the Cricket Park) to the south and through to The Hub in the east (via the Poplar Park);
- → The Green should have an ordered yet restrained character. A formal lawn to the south of the building will maintain views to the listed structure from the approach avenue and provide a flexible, south facing open space;
- → Servicing and parking should be located on the northern side of the building with structure planting helping to screen commercial areas and provide a green backdrop to the building;
- → Provision for safe crossing of the Boulevard (Park Route) to be made to allow for pedestrians and cyclists to cross between Cricket Park and Watch Tower Green;
- → Water and Electrical points should be included in Infrastructure for events and community use (e.g. associated with Watch Tower building);
- → Potential opportunity to integrate public art.







# **Building in context:**

## Design coding for local character and distinctiveness

# Recommendations: (see page 35) 1 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7

## Lessons learned:

- Reflecting local character within place-shaping can be a shared ambition for new national design frameworks and the heritage sector.
- 5 High quality evidence on the character and significance of existing places is the foundation of many successful design codes.
- 6 Design codes can prescribe contextual development of both traditional and contemporary forms.
- 7 The heritage profession must take a proportionate approach to promoting local character within design codes.
- 8 Well intentioned, but misinformed design codes can enable development that is harmful to local distinctiveness.

## Reflecting local character within place-shaping can be a shared ambition for a new national design framework and the heritage sector

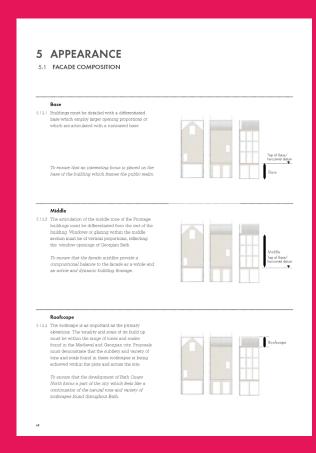
Great places have heritage at their core with every settlement across England having a unique and distinctive history.

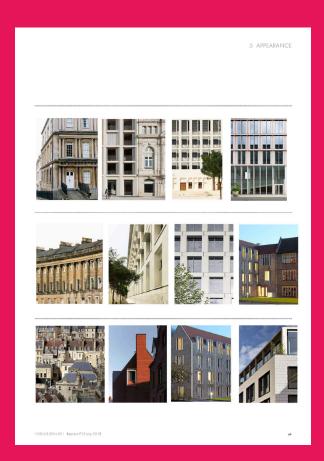
Great place-shaping recognises this value of heritage by incorporating the best qualities of the historic environment into new schemes, creating a dialogue between the old and the new. This dialogue may be through reflection of traditional features, such as street patterns and street furniture, or through reinterpretation of historic forms, including locally distinctive architecture.

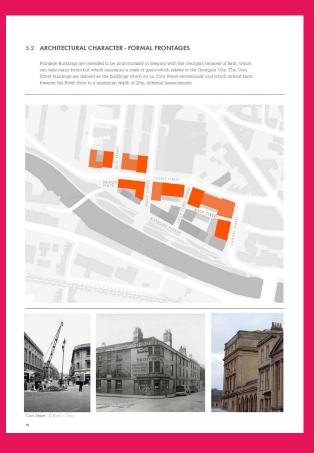
'Planning for the Future' (MHCLG, Aug 2020) promotes design codes as a means to '...reflect local character and preferences about the form and appearance of development...'. Examples to date have shown that design codes can indeed be a positive factor for design for sensitive historic areas, where an appropriate response to local character and significance are key concerns. In other circumstances, where development has affected areas of lesser heritage value (e.g. major brownfield sites) the historic environment has also played a role as a source of evidence and inspiration for key components of design code (e.g. materials).

In either scenario, whether integrating with the old or creating anew, a new opportunity to promote the historic environment and the heritage sector as a valuable resource for place-shaping is welcomed in principle.









## **Bath Quays North**

The Bath Quays North design code was created in collaboration between Allies and Morrison and Bath & Northeast Somerset Council. Of all the design codes studies, the Bath Quays North example operates in by far the most sensitive historic environment - the site being within a World Heritage Site, a conservation area, and contributing to the setting of a great many designated heritage assets. Yet, the code was also amongst the most explicit in its intention to deliver contemporary design solutions. The balance was struck through an overarching vision to deliver the best practice in modern urban design, underpinned by robust evidence base on the special qualities of the surrounding townscape, created through detailed characterisation studies. The evidence was used to inform both the code's contents, but also relative degrees of prescriptiveness, defining the essential ingredients for heritage but also giving room for modern reinterpretation. Should the code be enforced, and the development delivered to a suitably high-standard, a heritage-sensitive outcome may well be achieved.

For more information see: https://www.bathquaysnorth.com; Bath & Northeast Somerset Council planning reference 18/00058/EREG03

## 5

## High quality evidence on the character and significance of existing places is the foundation of many successful design codes

A popular analogy is that design codes form the 'recipe' for new development. The key ingredients for quality place-shaping are now widely recognised, recently set out within the National Design Guide (MHCLG, 2019) across ten core characteristics of well-designed places. Many of these characteristics are applicable across all development, regardless of context, and range from the ample provision of environmental amenity through to appropriate approaches to enclosure, layout and density. The ingredients that make places 'local', truly distinctive in the eyes of communities, can be far more variable.

In some areas, local character may be dominated by a small but significant collection of elements. For instance, where specific building types and materials are prevalent, creating a uniform aesthetic (e.g. The Cotswolds); a broad consensus is more easily achieved as to its value. In such areas, design codes appear more likely to succeed, with fewer elements requiring prescription to ensure clarity and confidence in outcomes.

In the majority of places, local distinctiveness is more nuanced, formed of a subtle blend of many characteristics. In these areas, design codes and guidance have more often failed to deliver contextual design, with new development seen to pay 'lip service' to the local environment, without truly embedding within it.

In short, character can be simple, or it can be highly complex. In either scenario, a careful and considered approach is required to define it, ascertaining the form, quantities and arrangement of its base ingredients. The authors of many of the most successful codes to date have understood this, anchoring their work on a robust evidence base, created at an early stage through a combination of professional assessments and community engagement. The heritage sector can be a key player in obtaining such evidence, applying its existing expertise for new purposes (see item 12).

## Nansledan & Tregunnel Hill, Newquay

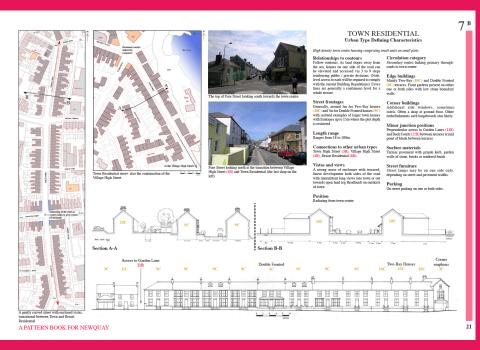
Nansledan is a 540 acre urban extension by the Duchy of Cornwall, currently within the early stages of development immediately east of Newquay. The estate is being developed in accordance to the architectural and urban design philosophies of the Prince of Wales. Ten core principles have been established, including 'Local Identity', to ensure "the development will... capture the spirit of Newquay's urban fabric yet not be afraid to re-interpret it".

The response to local identity is anchored on a long-standing commitment to understanding and recording the distinctive historic townscape qualities of Newquay prior to Nansledan's design and development. At the very outset, the Newquay Growth Area Pattern Book was created by Adam Architecture, in collaboration with the Duchy of Cornwall and Cornwall Council. The pattern book provided detailed analysis of the form and key ingredients of local urban patterns, building typologies, streetscapes, and landscaping.

The evidence outlined across the pattern book has formed the foundation for detailed design- and street character codes, including elements of co-design between the developer, council and local community. The pattern book has a role into the future: used to create a "live" design code to enforce the "Estate Stipulations", controls on future alterations and additions to the exterior of all new properties, in a manner much akin to the famed Bourneville estate.

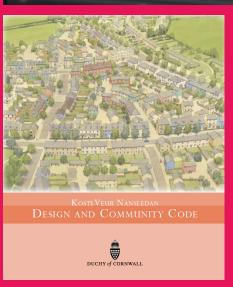
Nansledan's sister site, 'Tregunnel Hill' graces the cover of the 2020 planning white paper, 'Planning for the Future', within which is the ambition to create a "fast-track for beauty... to automatically permit proposals for high-quality developments where they reflect local character and preferences." The Nansledan example illustrates that the "fast-track" must first be paved by upfront investment in local research, assessment, and consultation.

For more information see: www.nansledan.com; Create Streets 2018 'A Place to Call Home: Creating Streets in Cornwall with Consent. The story of the Nansledan urban extension.'

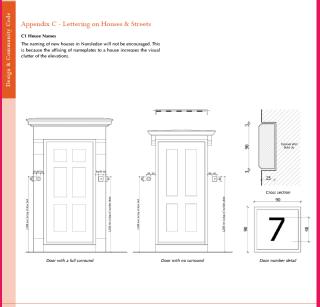








Extracts of the Newquay Pattern Book (topand bottom-left), and an example of coding controlling alterations within the 'Estate Stipulations' (bottom right).



# Design codes can prescribe contextual development of both traditional and contemporary forms

To date, design codes have responded differently to local vernaculars, broadly divided between those replicating traditional forms and those pursuing more modern interpretations. In both scenarios there have been successes and failures. High quality traditional aesthetics have often proven popular with the public, but can easily stray into the realms of poor pastiche if detailed or delivered to a low standard. Similarly, highly contemporary schemes have integrated successfully within sensitive historic areas, but illinformed modern development can create an incongruous imposition into longvalued places.

The heritage sector can champion the merits of either approach, recognising that both have a part to play in sustaining the country's rich and diverse built character. Ensuring this message is clearly articulated by Historic England will be helpful in ensuring heritage professionals are not 'pigeon-holed' - only approached to contribute where traditional aesthetics are preferred.



The terraced house is a useful example of both the potential opportunities and pitfalls of design codes for traditional building types. The building type is amongst the most prevalent and celebrated elements of England's historic environment, with its development spanning centuries and occurring across the country. The result is a great range of styles and aesthetics. The terraced tradition continues apace today, with many modern developments choosing to replicate and reinvent the form for the modern market.

Certain characteristics are essential to the terraced form: proportions; uniformity; building and roof lines; and the relationship to the street. Other criteria define their local character, with key elements including: vertical and horizontal scale; roof forms; solid to void ratios; window size and detailing; materials and colours; ornamentation; and roof forms. When too many of these elements are not respected, the results are often recognised as inappropriate, including by non-experts. Design codes could set the required standards, but care will be required to ensure the correct controls are levelled at the appropriate levels.

(continued overleaf...)



National or regional design codes could address the essential characteristics of terraced houses, and other building types, but must ensure the scope of prescription does not go beyond basic criteria. Straying too far into detail will stifle the ability to tailor designs to the nuances of the local environment, whether that is achieved in traditional or contemporary forms.

Site specific codes offer greater opportunity for prescription. Whether through written codes or pattern books, local codes can more accurately reflect the local nuances, controlling essential ('must haves'), advisable ('should haves'), and desirable ('could haves') components of their form, whilst allowing flexibility to adapt to modern demands (e.g. bicycle storage).



# The heritage profession must take a proportionate approach to promoting local character within design codes

In the ideal scenario, heritage professionals will influence many components of a design code, informing the specification of elements from the large (layout, scale, landscaping etc.) through to the small (materials, ornamentation etc.). For those within the sector, the priority will often be to promote development which is designed to reflect the existing qualities of a local area, whether in traditional or contemporary forms.

# The ability to strike a careful balance between prescription ('must haves') and flexibility ('should haves' and 'could haves') will be a key skill.

Where elements are pivotal to local character, strong controls should be championed to consolidate the existing qualities of a place. Where they are of lesser significance, a pragmatic mindset will be needed, promoting integration of such characteristics as desirable outcomes, but allowing room for alternatives that offer other design- and public benefits.

Doing so will not only improve the deliverability of a design code, but also be an important factor in ensuring the sector is not seen as a 'single issue' stakeholder, overly concerned with (e.g.) aesthetics at the expense of wider, overarching objectives of good place-shaping.



Level of significance



## Well intentioned, but misinformed design codes can enable development that is harmful to local distinctiveness

The overarching objective of heritage management is to preserve and enhance the distinctive qualities and significance of the historic environment.

'Distinctive', by definition, is the 'characteristic of one person or thing, and so serving to distinguish it from others' (OED). For the built environment, distinctiveness emerges from the unique local qualities of an area's character, formed from many elements and the product of millennia of human interactions.

Without careful consideration, replication of distinctive elements can erode what makes them special. In some areas, particularly where the character of the built environment is uniform, repeating traditional forms may be appropriate. In others reinterpretation, or even juxtaposition, may be more appropriate.

In some areas, replication of a traditional aesthetics will only be successful if due respect is given to the inherent qualities of the traditional materials used, and/or the high standards of historical construction practices. Codes may also need to address local methods of delivery, accordingly.

A national 'one size fits all' approach for character should be approached with due caution, therefore, to ensure the rich and varied nature of many areas' local distinctiveness is reinforced, not diluted.

# 'Provably popular' design:

Community engagement and design codes

## **Lessons learned:**

- 9 Design codes can increase local community support for development in sensitive areas.
- 10 The heritage sector is well placed to enable meaningful community engagement with design codes.
- 11 Care must be taken to ensure design codes neither create nor exacerbate divisions within communities.

## Design codes can increase local community support for development in sensitive areas

Design codes can prove popular with local communities affected by development, including development of both large and small-scale sites within highly sensitive locations for historic environment.

Key advantages of design codes for communities include:

- Higher levels of certainty that local character and heritage significance has been integrated into the design and planning processes.
- Greater clarity on the form and aesthetic of developments that receive outline consent.
- A more accessible and impactful means of scrutinising developments, compared to technical plans and reports.

A positive outcome is not guaranteed, however. To date, codes have been most popular where the principle of development has already been established, such as within brownfield sites. Reactions to codes relating to greenfield development, such as sustainable urban extensions, has been more mixed. Opposition to a development can readily translate into hostility to a design code.







# The heritage sector is well placed to enable meaningful community engagement with design codes

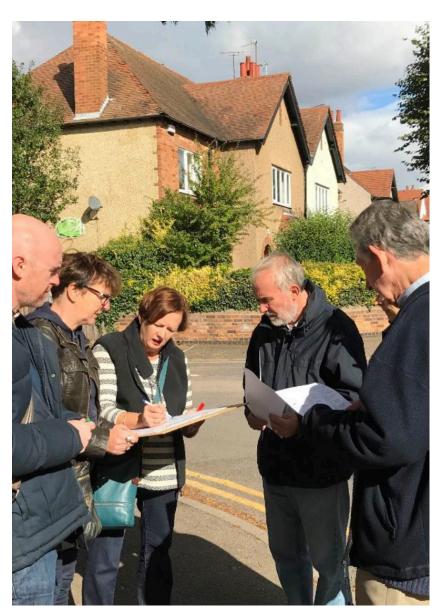
The sector has a wealth of existing practical resources and professional expertise that support the engagement of communities in planning and design.

Within the built environment professions, heritage specialists are amongst the most well-versed at collaborating with local communities to identify the qualities and character of places.

The sector's strengths was recently illustrated through Neighbourhood Planning, where support from heritage professionals was pivotal to the success of many communities' plans.

Historic England have a track-record for delivering projects engaging communities with place-shaping. This includes national guidance (e.g. 'Knowing Your Place') and long-standing support for local initiatives (e.g. the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit).

These established techniques could be adapted and renewed to support community-led design codes.





Community groups of the West Midlands undertaking 'notation analysis', identifying the character and quality of the local area to support neighbourhood planning and conservation area appraisal initiatives. The events pictured were funded by grants from Historic England, part of a long-standing legacy of positive engagement of communities with place-shaping.

## Care must be taken to ensure design codes neither create nor exacerbate divisions within communities

The appearance of new development is often a concern for local communities, but views can be diverse, and sometimes conflicting, as to what constitutes positive or contextual design. In areas where the local built form is uniform, a design code will most likely be popular. In areas where there is greater complexity, an ill-judged one-size-fits-all approach could undermine community support. Professional guidance may need to be prioritised for the latter scenario.

Whilst championing the local vernacular could be a laudable objective, it may also not be possible to replicate traditional forms in all areas. For instance, where the required materials costs would make development unviable. Heritage professionals must be cautious to manage expectations amongst communities, ensuring that they do not build up aspirations that cannot be matched in reality. Failure to do so may further exacerbate existing tensions between developers and communities.



#### Look! St Albans

Look! St Albans is a community initiative established by the St Albans City Centre Steering Group to promote meaningful community planning and co-design.

In 2013 the group collaborated with the Prince's Trust, as part of the DCLG-led 'Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning' programme. The objectives was to actively engage the local community in key development issues through expert-led consultation and the creation of a new local design code. Whilst the code would not be adopted policy, the principles and practices behind its creation were supported by St Albans District Council through a memorandum of understanding.

The design code is used as the basis for design charrettes, facilitated by Look! St Albans on the request of developers. The approach has been recognised through regional planning awards, highlighted as an exemplar community engagement exercise. To date there have been successes, but also frustrations.

The 'Oak Tree Gardens' development, a small residential scheme was received favourably by the group and its partners following a co-design process between the community, the local authority, and Kirby Cove Architects. The scheme involved the adaptation and extension of a local heritage asset, the former Museum of St Albans.

The ongoing 'City Centre Opportunity Site' development appears more contentious. Again, a community design charrette led to recommendations, including application of elements of the design code. Later alterations to the proposal have, however, placed the development on a different path. There are mixed views as to the merits of the current scheme, but there is clear disappointment that the community engagement exercise no longer appears to have had "meaningful" results.

The case study illustrates the great potential, but also risks, of community-led design coding. Good intentions can have negative outcomes, should expectations be raised but not met. The exercise of community engagement has many benefits, building knowledge and understanding within local stakeholders, but this cannot be the 'end' in itself. For many communities, meaningful engagement requires meaningful results.



Extracts of the Look! St Albans and Prince's Trust community design code (top and middle), and the completed Oak Tree Gardens development (bottom).

B2 ADAPTABLE BUILDINGS B2

The fundamental design principle is Those fit long life'. This approach challenge the applicant and corround architects to millicarthy demonstrate the ability of the building to respond and along to the changing needs and apatial requirements of inhabitants/users over time. Building generally, and in particular in city curary locations, shall be designed to that they are adaptable and flexible consigning out our specific contents. The disassemposphic does were of the possible configuration of curs archardle whilm three basic types of building emerged, as Applicants shall demonstrate that the building types they propose to be built are designed in the standard of the flowbook of the propose of the built are designed as a minimum. He flowbook of the expected to be incorporated in all buildings.

821 All buildings should have a minimum flow-to-ceiling height of 3.7 ms a ground flow and 2.7 ms on upper flows (scalading settacks). Town boates and founds houses with an actifity meres building and court year buildings (TH, THM, CTI) have a minimum flow-to-ceiling height of 4.7 ms and ground flow and 2.7 ms on upper flows (scalading settacks). Town boates and flows houses with an actifity meres building and court year buildings (TH, THM, CTI) have a minimum flow-to-ceiling height of 4.7 ms and ground flow and 2.7 ms on upper flows (scalading settacks). Town boates and flows house with an actifity areas building and court year buildings (TH, THM, CTI) have a minimum flow-to-ceiling height of 4.7 ms and ground flow and 2.7 ms on upper flows (scalading settacks). Town boates and flows and the propose of the surface of court years and the set of the court of court years and court year building and court year building set on the propose to the surface of consposures.

823 Extensive use of demonstrable internal partitions, standardised elements and other medular components to allow for changes in internal room, upperade and revise of components.



# Delivering on ambition:

Skills and resources for design coding within the heritage sector

# Recommendations: (see page 35) 3 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8

## Lessons learned:

- 12 The heritage sector can be a key player in successful design codes by using existing expertise for new purposes.
- 13 Local planning authorities require investment in key skills and resources to deliver design codes.
- 14 Historic England's training programmes can 'level up' the heritage sector to support design codes.
- 15 Renewing key guidance could demonstrate the potential value of the historic environment to the modern place-shaping agenda.



## The heritage sector can be a key player in successful design coding by using existing expertise for new purposes

The most successful design codes are anchored on a detailed understanding of the existing area (see item 5).

The heritage sector is perhaps uniquely positioned to support this objective. The ability to systematically identify the qualities of a place are central to the sector's principles for good practice, with the definition of measurable elements of heritage significance and local distinctiveness key to the sector's engagement with the planning and design processes for decades. As a result, the sector has a wealth of experienced technical specialists in area-based analysis, ready to be deployed to support the creation of high quality design codes.

The heritage sector has also already investigated and championed a great many places. In doing so, a wide-range resource of existing evidence-bases has been established, from conservation area appraisals, to historic areas assessments, and landscape character assessment. Too many of these resources lie dormant, stuck 'on the shelf' and lacking weight in the planning system. **They could find renewed life as key evidence informing a design code.** 



External support for local planning authorities (LPAs) can bring positive results, but the most successful codes to date have relied on significant input from in-house specialists.

Codes must tie in to the local planning framework to be effective. They must reflect the nuances of local context, both in terms of physical characteristics, but also the social, political and economic variables affecting development. Officers will also be responsible for measuring compliance, with their understanding of the code key to securing design quality in delivery.

At present, it is unlikely that sufficient heritage and design skills exists within many LPAs. A decline in specialist positions and increase in part-time roles leaves many authorities with little capacity for new initiatives, such as design coding. Resources also vary markedly between LPAs, which may result in significant disparities in the quality of codes nationwide. Targeted investment in skills and resources will be required.



48.7% in specialist conservation provision ...

... within local planning authorities since 2009.

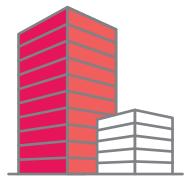
Source: IHBC - 2020 - 'Local Authority Conservation Staffing Resources in England'

## < 50% LPAs have dedicated urban design roles

Of those that do, most have a single officer covering design as part of wider responsibilities, including conservation and landscape. Just 10% of authorities have dedicated design teams.

Source: Urban Design Group & Place Alliance - 2017 - 'Design Skills in English Local Authorities'





## Approximately 3% of registered architects...

... are estimated to work in local planning authorities.

**Source:** Based on a survey sample of one-third of local planning authorities undertaken by the Architects' Journal in May 2019.

## 14

## Historic England's training programmes can 'level up' the heritage sector to support design codes

Design codes are an established but, to date, relatively infrequently applied tool for place-shaping in England. Few heritage professionals will therefore have basic knowledge of the key principles and best practices for producing effective frameworks.

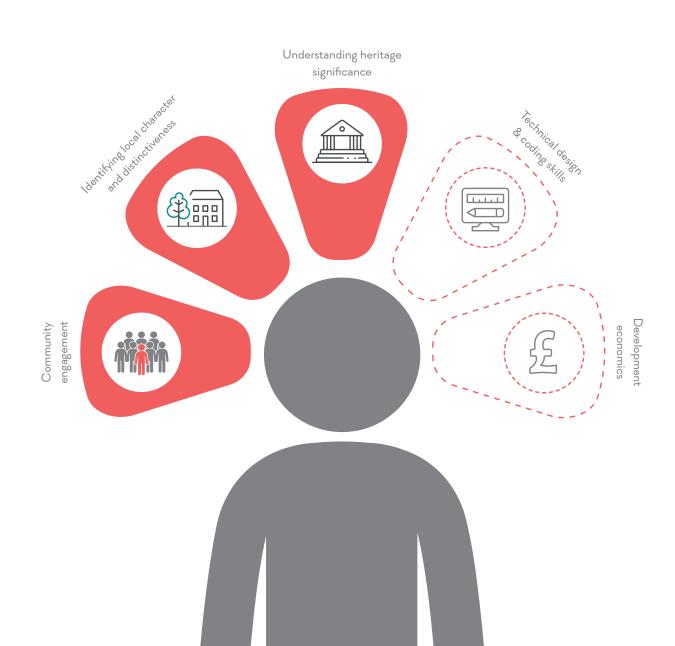
The heritage sector would benefit from development of key skills to support the design coding process to ensure the majority of its professionals can engage actively and constructively.

Practical urban design skills for large-scale residential development (e.g. issues of layout and density) - the focus of many design codes, are generally low amongst local planning authority heritage officers.

Improving knowledge of development economics will also be important to support heritage professionals in striking the careful balance of prescribing standards on development, and the impacts of those specifications on viability (see item 7).

## Historic England has long-established and highly successful programmes for professional development.

The programmes could be effectively used to deliver the required training in design coding, 'levelling up' the heritage sector to support, and perhaps even lead on, the creation of the new design frameworks.



## Lambeth Design Code

The Lambeth Design Code ('LDC') is an accomplished framework produced in-house by the local authority as a supplementary planning document.

The LDC is the product of significant investment by the local authority and its officers to identify, understand, and translate the key qualities of the borough into a functional design framework. Moreover, the council has committed to '...employing urban designers, conservations officers and other specialists to review schemes...', recognising the need for ongoing investment in skills and resources, to ensure the LDC's aspirations are matched in delivery.

Whilst the LDC is in many respects an exemplar, the case also shines light on the challenges that will be faced by authorities with fewer resources. Development of a new national design code template will need to be sensitive of the favourable conditions under which existing 'best practice' examples were created.

**Draft Lambeth DESIGN CODE SPD** 

Part 1: Introducing Lambeth

Heritage Assets
121 Lambeth has a particularly nich historic built environment which is multi-layered and
a forms a significant part of Lambeth's local distinctiveness. Collectively the Draft Revised
Local Plan policies seek to preserve the significance of these heritage assets and protect
their portions.

1.22 New overcopment in registered rains and carders and winth conservation areas should cause no harm. The original designation information and character appraisal (where available) for conservation areas should be consulted to inform the design approach. The demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to conservation areas is not

- Be respectful of prevailing heights and building lines,
   use materials which integrate the new development into its historic context, and
   irrespective of the chosen architectural style, have architectural rhythms and forms which reinforce the established positive character / local





1.24 In some cases the only way to preserve OLIV may be to restrict building height to ensure that the new development is not visible. Where visible development is acceptable particular care should be taken with the detailed design and appearance to ensure it is subdued and does not visually compete with the World Heritage Site.

1.25 New development in the setting of heritage assets should cause no harm. In order to respect settings designers should:

- 1. Avoid heights or masses which draw the eye from or dominate
- Select material palettes which are locally distinct and blend the development into

favor of London's 'London's World Heritage Sites - Guidance on settings SPG March 2012:





terms of the style of development. Irrespective of style all development should respond tively to established or emerging local character. The established character of the ough is set out in Part 1 of this document and in the Lambeth Local Distinctiveness

- 2. Generally avoid fully glazed facades
- 3. Ensure the elevations have unity and are well-proportioned
- Generally take a cautious approach to colours that are not of Lambeth's built environment.

3. O Occasionary are durinness reproduction to insolute durinness a system large representatives possible. For example the inentialational of a missing facale within a historic letrace. Designers taking such an approach should do so on the understanding the County will expect committing designs executed in authentic materials to traditional construction. Local historic examples should inform historic detailing.















#### Shop Fronts and Other Premises frontages

2.72 The Council accepts that many of Lambeth's shop fronts and signs are of poor quality and detract from the character of the Borough. It is committed to raising the standard going forward.

Existing Shop Fronts
2.73 Surviving traditional shop fronts should be preserved and original features relatined, restored adultor exhalled wherever possible. The majority of old shop fronts in the borough are briber framed atthrough some 20th Centary examples have skinder metal frames. Old shop fronts are three view yell Chull and orderly detailed. The Micholagy features are common stop fronts are other view yell Chull and orderly detailed. The Micholagy features are common stop fronts are other view yell Chull and orderly detailed. The Micholagy features are common stop fronts are other view yell Chull and orderly detailed. The Micholagy features are common stop fronts are consistent with the control of the control

- 2. Beauty through the use of good proportions and ornar
- Good quality materials and construction detailing which is pleasing to look at, neatly detailed and weatherpoof.

evalion and their loss or unsympathetic change will be resisted. Designers should

- 1. Integrate new shop fronts into the design of their host building by respecting th scale, style and general building forms. Where the shop front is within a group the design should replicate common features of that group.
- 2. Retain surviving historic detailing and carefully integrate with new work
- Maintain the appearance of party wall divisions where shop units spread habeauer huildings
- 4. Endeavour to provide inclusive entrances







For more information see: www.lambeth.gov.uk

## 15

## Renewing key guidance could demonstrate the potential value of the historic environment to the modern place-shaping agenda

Historic England's vision for high quality design has been steadily emerging in recent years. A vision is outlined in documents including 'Heritage: The Foundation for Success' and its 'Places Strategy', good practice is promoted through a suite of guidance and advice resources and active investment is undertaken through ambitious place-shaping schemes at both national and local levels (e.g. Heritage Action Zones).

It is, however, approaching 20 years since the publication of the flagship design framework 'Building in Context' by English Heritage and CABE. Renewal of this guidance, and the inclusion of new practical toolkits for design codes, could be of great benefit, particularly if this is to be achieved through collaboration with the newly (re)established national design body, and other partnered organisations (e.g. Design Council, RTPI, Landscape Institute, RIBA).

Renewal could also offer opportunities to align advice with recent and forthcoming design frameworks. For instance, illustrating how heritage can help achieve the 'ten characteristics of well-designed places' outlined in the National Design Guide (MHCLG, 2019), build on the lessons emerging from the 'Living with beauty' report of the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' commission (MHCLG, 2020).

New technical guidance on design coding for the historic environment will be invaluable to practitioners, such as through a new Historic England Advice Note, or through newly devised design frameworks for heritage. New guidance will need to integrate directly with the frameworks established within the forthcoming National Model Design Code.

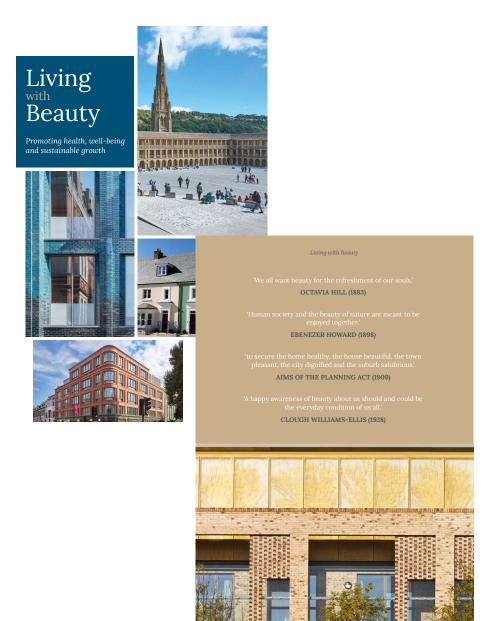




Above: The National Design Guide's '10 characteristics of well-designed places' offers a potential framework around which to rewrite key, but outdated, guidance on new design and the historic environment.

Right: Excerpts from 'Living with beauty' report of the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' commission (MHCLG, 2020)

Left: Key Historic England strategy documents engaging with good design for heritage assets and the historic environment within place-shaping.





3

# Recommendations for Historic England

- 1 Introduction and methodology
- 2 Key lessons
- 3 Recommendations for Historic England



# 3. Recommendations for Historic England

#### Recommendation 1:

Historic England **should** present a position of cautious optimism for design codes. Whilst there have undoubtedly been some shortcomings, design codes have to date been a principally positive factor for design of development with potential to affect the historic environment.

## Recommendation 2:

Historic England **must** ensure the benefits of integrating existing heritage assets into new places has been properly accounted for within the forthcoming National Model Design Code. Accounting for the substantive legislative and policy requirements for the preservation and enhancement of the significance of existing heritage assets, the consideration of such issues within design codes to date

has been strikingly infrequent and generally of a poor standard.

### Recommendation 3:

Historic England **should** actively support the emerging national design body, embracing opportunities to support its strategic objectives and to broaden the sector's voice on design matters by embedding heritage specialists in its national, regional and local frameworks.

## Recommendation 4:

Historic England **should** continue their long-standing advocacy for evidence-led design when engaging with design codes. To date, codes that are anchored on an upfront and robust understanding of local significance and character have proven most successful. A "one size fits all"

approach to character will dilute, not reinforce, the rich and varied nature of many areas' local distinctiveness.

## Recommendation 5:

Historic England **should** examine the potential to deploy existing skills and resources held by the heritage sector to support design coding. To achieve this Historic England **could**:

- Review and repurpose established techniques, including historic area assessment, townscape characterisation, and conservation area appraisal.
- Explore how to recycle and revitalise existing evidence-bases on the character and qualities of existing places. The results of decades of high-quality research initiatives lie dormant, lacking weight in the

- modern planning system. Such resources could find renewed life supporting design codes which promote locally contextual design.
- Share lessons learned from the sector's recent engagement with Neighbourhood Planning to support delivery of "provably popular" design codes.

## Recommendation 6:

Historic England **could** revise its existing design advice documents and place-shaping strategies. Review may offer opportunities to align with emerging national frameworks, including the National Model Design Code and National Design Guide, and build on the lessons of the 'Living with beauty' report of the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' commission (MHCLG, 2020).

#### Recommendation 7:

Historic England **should** be a vocal leader of the heritage sector's efforts to support and deliver new design coding frameworks.

To achieve this, Historic England could make good use of existing advice and capacity-building frameworks, including:

- Production of a dedicated 'Good Practice Advice Note', to integrate with and build upon the National Design Code Template and National Design Guide.
- Embedding of design code skills
  within regional teams through
  targeted capacity building of existing
  personnel (e.g. Historic Places
  Advisors) and/or creation of new,
  dedicated roles.

Historic England **should** pursue such outcomes proactively, ready for rapid deployment should the proposed reforms be enacted. The radical nature of the reforms, and the timeframes for local planning authorities to deliver them, may limit the capacity for local experimentation, and the ability to learn lessons from frontrunner authorities.

Clear and central positions on good practice, established at an early stage, will provide the necessary direction and instil confidence within the sector.

## **Recommendation 8:**

Historic England **should** promote urgent investment in local planning authorities' skills and resources. At present, it appears unlikely that many local authorities could deliver on the ambitions for design coding outlined within 'Planning for the Future'. Good practice approaches for historic environment may not be met equally across the country, with local authority capacities for heritage differing starkly between wealthy and poorer areas.

To achieve this Historic England could:

 Produce an up-to-date, and detailed appraisal of local planning authority capacities in respect of the core historic environment professions.

- Undertake a detailed skills audit of existing heritage professionals, including both the public and private sector, and within Historic England itself, to enable key areas of deficit to be addressed.
- Develop new training initiatives to address skills gaps for both heritage and non-heritage professionals.
   The long-established and widely respected 'HELM' programme provides a ready-made framework.

## Suggested further reading:

MHCLG MHCLG MHCLG	2021 2020 2019	National Model Design Code (forthcoming at time of publication) White Paper: Planning for the Future National Design Guide: Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places
BBBBC Commission	2020	Living with Beauty: Promoting health, well-being and sustainable growth
CABE	2003	The Use of Urban Design Codes: Building sustainable communities
CABE	2005	Design Coding: Testing its use in England
DCLG	2006	Design Coding in Practice: An evaluation
DCLG & CABE	2006	Preparing Design Codes: A practice manual
UDG and UCL	2012	Design Coding: Diffusion of Practice in England
English Heritage & CABE	Multiple	Building in Context
Historic England	2019	Heritage: The foundation for success
Historic England	2018	Places Strategy
Historic England	Multiple	'Heritage Counts' series

## Images:

Page	Reference	Originator
Front	Terraced housing	Historic England; Wikimedia; Urban Splash
12	Gasholder Park	Historic England
15*	Alconbury Weald	Urban&Civic
16	Accordia	Historic England
17*	Bath Quays North Design Code	Allies & Morrison + Bath & Northeast Somerset LPA
19*	Nansledan	Duchy of Cornwall & ADAM Architecture
20	Terraced housing drawings	Historic England
21	Terraced housing	Historic England; Wikimedia; Urban Splash
25	Community	Coventry City Council
26	Post-it consultation	Node
27*	St Albans Design Code	Look! St Albans
28	Historic Area Assessment	Historic England
31*	Lambeth Design Code	London Borough of Lambeth Council
32	Heritage guidance	Historic England
33*	10 characteristics	MHCLG
33	Living with Beauty	CreateStreets

<sup>\*</sup> Reproduced from planning application materials within the public domain or documents published by government bodies.





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