

SANDWELL

Design Code

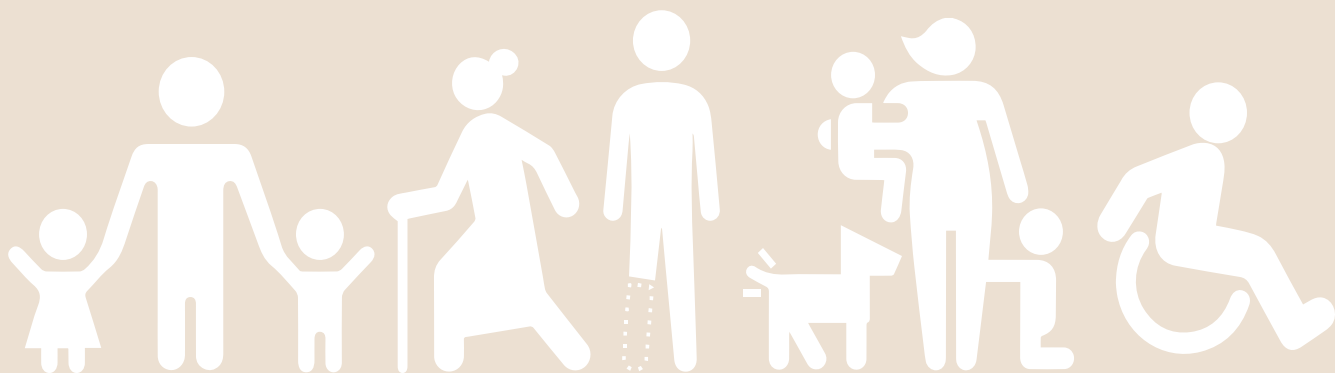
Stage 2: Vision and Engagement Summary



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The collage pictures used throughout this document have been prepared for the Design Code project using a mix of contemporary and historic images from the borough. This includes images from the Jubilee Arts Archive: www.jubileeartsarchive.com



¹ INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Sandwell Council has appointed a team led by Allies and Morrison to prepare a Design Code for the borough. The Sandwell Design Code will establish a set of rules which all new development in the borough must adhere to. It will help raise the quality of development across the borough as a whole and help ensure design proposals are directly informed by the character of distinct areas.

National Government encourages Local Planning Authorities to develop Design Codes that respond to their local context. Sandwell is looking to develop a best practice borough-wide example. A key part of the process is extensive community

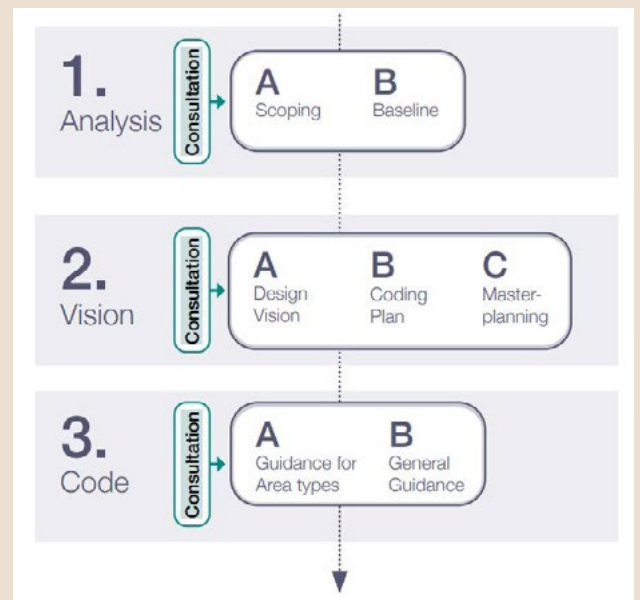
engagement to ensure the Design Code is informed by local knowledge and priorities. This engagement report documents the second stage of engagement undertaken as part of the Sandwell Design Code project.

The purpose of this document is to summarise the comments that were received during the second stage engagement events and provide an understanding of how these informed the vision for the project. This stage involved focused workshops with community representatives and key stakeholders as well as a public survey.



The Design Code will be co-produced through a collaborative approach, with community feedback playing a central role in shaping its outcome. The Community Design Panel plays a vital role in the feedback loop to each of the 6 towns and cultural and religious communities.

The National Model Design Code provides guidance on the stages of work and engagement for all Design Codes. There are three stages (outlined in the adjacent diagram) and this report covers the engagement undertaken as part of Stage 2.



2 PRIORITIES

2.1 BASIS FOR A VISION

A key part of Stage 2 of the Design Code project has been establishing a design vision for the borough. At the outset of Stage 2, the team drew out the headline priorities as an initial basis for a draft vision as outlined here. This built directly on the priorities identified through the community engagement in Stage 1.

During Stage 2 the team have worked with the Council Working Group and the Community Design Panel to iteratively refine the vision and an emerging structure for the Design Code. Alongside this, an interim draft was tested with the wider public via an online questionnaire. The final resulting vision is outlined at the end of this document.



The priorities identified as part of the Stage 1 work



Green spaces – existing parks are highly valued, and people want to see them protected, at the same time people want to see more green spaces (and trees) and to see this infrastructure well maintained.



Housing – there is a desire for better quality housing and more affordable housing, but also that new homes need to better match needs including multi-generational living.



Safety – there is a strong sense of community, but people want streets and spaces to feel safer and for there to be more provision for young people.



Community infrastructure – there is concern about community facilities and spaces reducing, people want to see more community spaces (indoor and outdoor) delivered and supported.



Transport infrastructure – local people want walking and cycling to be much more attractive and safe, and a stronger strategy on residential parking in new developments that avoids overspill onto neighbouring streets.

THE EARLY VISION STATED SANDWELL SHOULD BE A BOROUGH WHERE...

...THERE IS
A GREENING
UPLIFT

...THE
WATERWAYS ARE
CELEBRATED

...HOMES
SHOULD MEET
LOCAL NEEDS

...THERE IS
AN UPLIFT IN
THE DESIGN
QUALITY BAR



3 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

3.1 ENGAGEMENT AIMS

The engagement for the Sandwell Design Code seeks to meaningfully involve the community throughout the process, helping to shape a collaborative strategy that reflects local insight, history, and lived experience. The stories, knowledge, and everyday needs shared by residents and stakeholders reveal what people value most about Sandwell, while also highlighting the areas where change and improvement are needed. This depth of understanding is central to creating a Design Code that is rooted in the community and guided by the people who know it best.

The core aims of the engagement are to:

- Reach a broad and diverse range of people by combining in-person and digital engagement, offered in varied formats, locations, days, and times.
- Build on existing local knowledge and feedback, establishing a bottom-up, community-led approach.
- Listen with empathy and openness to understand the full range of perspectives.
- Start the conversation early, creating space for open dialogue and keeping stakeholders well-informed throughout.
- Be inclusive by offering multiple ways for people to take part, regardless of age, background, or ability.

The wide participatory approach in Stage 1 of the project has helped lay a positive, inclusive, and collaborative foundation for the project which has strongly informed the Stage 2 work and engagement.

3.2 TRANSPARENCY

The project team are committed to maintaining a transparent and inclusive engagement process by providing clear, accessible, and timely information about the Sandwell Design Code at every stage. This includes sharing project timelines and regular progress updates, such as engagement feedback reports, to keep the community informed.

Updates will be communicated through a variety of channels, including the dedicated project page on the Sandwell Council website and social media platforms.

By making all relevant materials easily accessible and maintaining regular, open communication, the project team aims to foster trust, encourage ongoing participation, and ensure that the community remains well-informed and confident in the process. This commitment to transparency helps build a shared sense of ownership in the future of Sandwell.

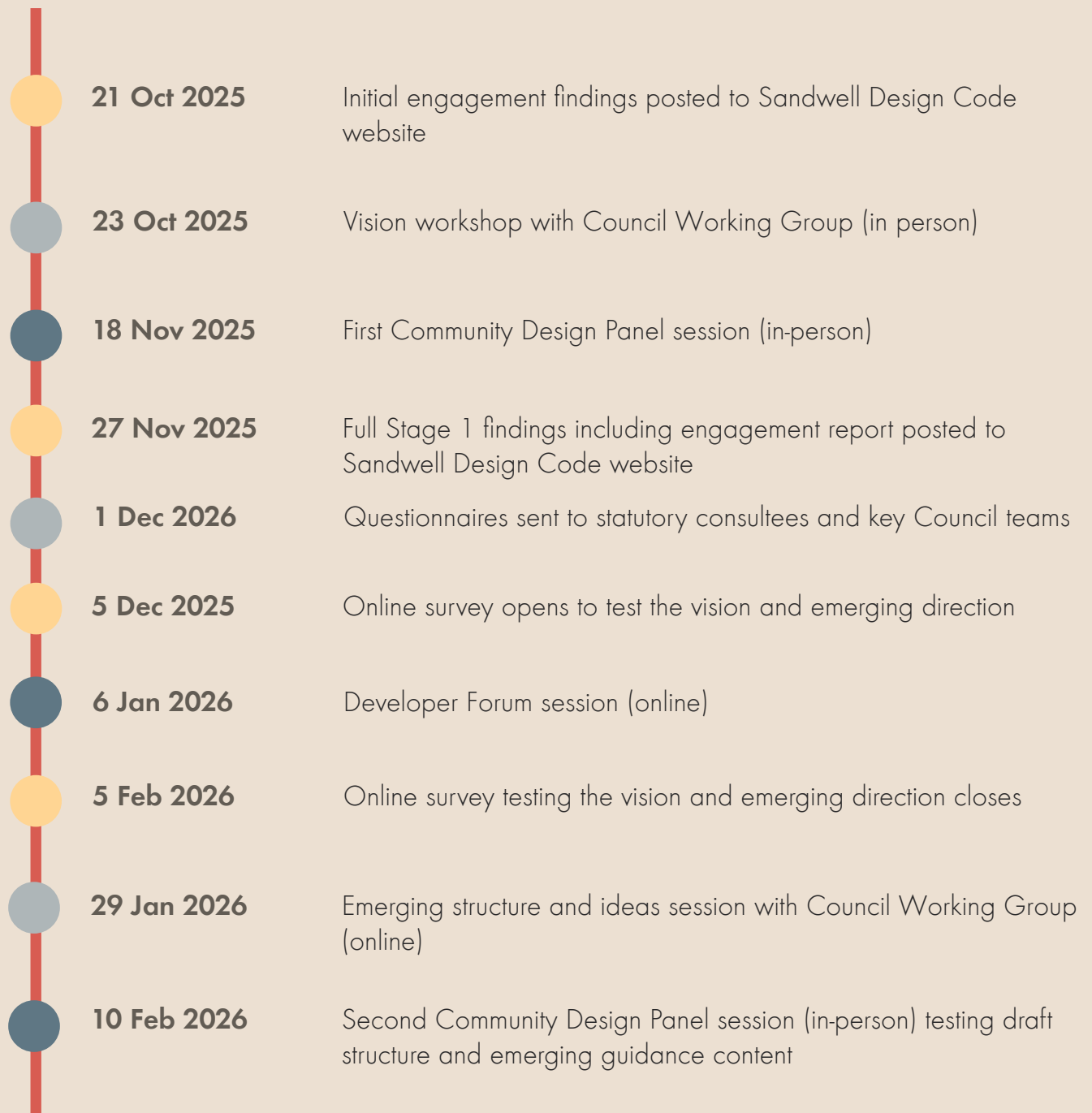
3.3 USING THE FEEDBACK

Community and stakeholder feedback is a vital part of shaping the Sandwell Design Code. The team has reviewed responses carefully, using to identify recurring issues, key priorities, and areas of consensus or concern. This analysis has directly informed the evolution of the design vision and the development of draft guidance content.

Throughout the process, the team will document how feedback has been taken into account to demonstrate its influence on decision-making. This approach not only builds transparency and trust, but also helps to ensure that the Sandwell Design Code reflects the aspirations of those who live, work, and visit Sandwell.



3.4 STAGE2ENGAGEMENTTIMELINE



3.5 STAGE 2 ENGAGEMENT METHODS

COUNCIL WORKING GROUP

A group of officers representative of relevant Council teams has formed a working group to help inform the Design Code project. The officers represent Development Management, Planning, Highways, Conservation, Parks, Health and Sustainability teams in the Council.

Workshop sessions have been held with the working group to explore themes to be included in the vision, as well as a session to test the emerging structure and suggested headings for the Design Code.

ONLINE PORTAL

The online portal has continued to be updated throughout Stage 2. The findings from Stage 1 have been posted and promoted through the Council's Residents Bulletin and social media channels. A public online questionnaire to test the emerging vision has also been posted and promoted in the same way.

COMMUNITY DESIGN PANEL

Members for the Community Design Panel were invited and contacted during Stage 1, and the first Panel session was held early on in Stage 2. Two workshops were held during Stage 2, the first as

a briefing to panel members on the baseline and engagement findings which informed initial discussions about what should be included in the vision. At the second session the panel reviewed and refined the emerging structure and tested the early typologies and precedents being considered for the code.

DEVELOPER FORUM

The first Developer Forum session was held as an online session in January to understand the experiences of a range of developers, design teams and planning agents in bringing forward development in the borough and their priorities for the Design Code.

QUESTIONNAIRES

A set of tailored questionnaires were developed and issued to statutory consultees as well as local stakeholder organisations with specific interests in design aspects. This included organisations such as Environment Agency, the Canal and River Trust and the Police, as well as targeted questions to some internal Council teams.

3.6 SUMMARY OF THE WORKING GROUP VISION SESSION

A visioning workshop was held with Council officers at the outset of Stage 2. Officers representing a wide range of departments from planning to public health attended to help shape an initial vision. The starting point was the priorities identified in Stage 1, and these were discussed in turn. To build up the draft vision, the group identified the sense of ambition relating to key priorities and reflected on the issues with applications experienced over recent years. The session explored what Council teams need the code to do to help enhance the design quality of schemes.

GREENING, LANDSCAPE AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Biodiversity and green networks emerged as a critical focus and an aspect to be strongly embedded in the vision. Discussions emphasised that the Design Code must match and enforce the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). To eliminate subjectivity, the inclusion of objective quantification methods was explored – such as a mandatory 3:1 tree replacement ratio. The need for developer schemes to connect logically into the wider green network was also flagged.

The role of urban planting and boundary treatments was a significant focus of discussion. Securing formal policy weight for planting on and around adopted highways was identified as essential to support green infrastructure objectives and protect against maintenance budget cuts. The discussion also flagged aligning street designs with national frameworks like the Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) guidance, exploring smaller species for tight spaces, and requiring mature planting from

the outset to drive immediate visual impact and community retention.

Finally, private amenity and water management were raised as cornerstones of healthy living. Officers suggested that mandating minimum space requirements for balconies and shared areas in apartment developments could be useful. Furthermore, the client noted that surface water management should favour above-ground SuDS contained within site boundaries, meaning these spatial requirements must be factored into density calculations early.

WHAT GREENING CAN WE/
CAN'T WE CONTROL THROUGH
THE PLANNING PROCESS?

MORE MATURE
PLANTING IS NEEDED
FROM THE OUTSET

SOFTER BOUNDARY
TREATMENTS ARE NEEDED

MATERIALS CAN ALSO HELP WITH
CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION/
MITIGATION, ESPECIALLY IN AREAS
PRONE TO HEAT ISLAND ISSUES.

ON PLOT PARKING ON TERRACED STREETS WOULD ENABLE NARROWER ROADS, WHICH CAN ENABLE SPACE FOR TREES AND REDUCING VEHICLE SPEEDS, THEREBY PROMOTING SAFER WALKING, WHEELING AND CYCLING

REALLY SUPPORT THE PROPOSALS TO GIVE WEIGHT TO URBAN PLANTING ON AND AROUND ADOPTED HIGHWAYS

MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Parking design and resident behaviour was a key topic of discussion. Recognising the actual demand for parking on plot within the code will help deliver quality placemaking. Officers suggested that designing longer driveways could prevent residents from later dismantling front landscaping to create extra parking spaces. The scope for the code to replace one-size-fits-all models with a flexible provisions matrix mapped against specific site types and densities was discussed. Furthermore, for highly sustainable locations prioritising car-free developments supplemented by car club spaces and EV charging was strongly advocated.

In discussing street design and active travel, the core challenge identified was striking a fine spatial balance between accommodating car parking, integrating street trees, and maintaining frontage landscaping. To address this, participants suggested utilising narrow roads, pinch points, and passing places to naturally lower vehicle speeds, thereby creating a safer environment for walking, wheeling, and cycling.

Finally, cycle and waste storage infrastructure was addressed. The discussion highlighted that providing viable, convenient rear access to dwellings is frequently the deciding factor in whether front-of-plot storage can be successfully integrated or avoided entirely.

THE DESIGN VISION NEEDS TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN CAR PARKING AND GREENERY

NEED TO PROTECT AGAINST ANTI-SOCIAL PARKING

PEOPLE WON'T PARK IN SPACES IF THEY ARE NOT ON PLOT

LONGER DRIVEWAYS ALLOW FOR MORE PARKING AND WOULD REDUCE DESIRE TO PAVE OVER FRONT GARDENS

HOUSING AND IDENTITY

The discussion highlighted the need for robust contextual appraisals, emphasising that the Design Code must mandate an uplift on existing surroundings rather than replicating poor-quality context. Masterplans and larger sites were identified as prime opportunities to deliver innovative layouts, while steering away from generic, off-the-shelf house types to establish a distinct local identity.

Officers expressed strong support for mixed-density options, with a clear preference for higher-density configurations near transport nodes. The reintroduction of underutilised traditional terraced housing was raised as a key method to optimise street design and efficiency, though it was noted this will require proactive engagement to secure developer buy-in.

Early material specification was raised as a priority to safeguard architectural integrity, preventing these decisions from being deferred to late planning stages or pre-commencement conditions. Additionally, to combat concerns regarding rapid material degradation, it was suggested that the code establish clear durability benchmarks informed by successful local precedents.

Aligning housing with long-term climate targets – specifically net-zero by 2041 – was discussed as a critical mechanism to reduce resident energy bills and mitigate local fuel poverty. To achieve this, stakeholders proposed that the Design Code explore a simplified benchmark, such as a 10% performance uplift above standard Building Regulations.

Buildings with heritage significance, including non-designated heritage assets, should not be routinely demolished and should instead be embraced to add physical character, social value, and community continuity to the new scheme. At a minimum, if a building cannot be saved, its key architectural features should be explicitly incorporated into the new design.

LARGE SITES OFFER
THE OPPORTUNITY FOR
INNOVATION

THERE'S BEEN TOO
MUCH USE OF STANDARD
HOUSE TYPES

WE SHOULD BE
ENCOURAGING THE USE
OF MATERIALS FROM THE
REGION

WE NEED TO SET A
BENCHMARK FOR THE
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF
HOMES

CODING MECHANISMS AND ENFORCEMENT

During the session, Development Management (DM) and scheme viability were raised key themes. The group noted that a prescriptive, rule-based approach provides developer certainty and prevents critical design elements from being diluted during post-application negotiations. They recommended utilising upcoming validation updates to set clear environmental and quality benchmarks right at submission.

Regarding Permitted Development (PD) rights and extensions, restricting rights on front gardens and boundaries was discussed as a vital tool to protect green spaces and existing parking allocations. However, it was recognised that this intervention would significantly increase formal planning application volumes and require robust enforcement.

Finally, householder management fees were highlighted as a critical consideration. The discussion emphasised that the code must evaluate the financial impact of estate management charges to ensure ongoing maintenance costs for infrastructure and green spaces remain sustainable and transparent.

DEVELOPER CERTAINTY
NEEDED ACROSS ALL AREAS

MANAGEMENT CHARGES
HAVE A BIG IMPACT FOR
HOUSEHOLDERS

3.7 COMMUNITY DESIGN PANEL - SESSION 1

At the end of Stage 1 a Community Design Panel was established. This Panel is central to testing and iteratively reviewing the Design Code as it is developed. The Panel has 10 members that together are as representative of the borough as possible. The Panel has a member from each of the six towns in the borough, representatives from the Youth Forum, Sandwell Visually Impaired (SVI) as well as representatives of different faith communities and lived experiences. The workshop session with the Community Design Panel was held on 18 November 2026 at West Bromwich Town Hall.

The first session was primarily about briefing the Community Design Panel members on all the work and findings from Stage 1 and their role in steering the Design Code project over the coming months. Following the briefing discussion a lively discussion covered lots of ground and highlighted some important points which should be captured in the vision for the borough and the content of the Design Code.



WE NEED TO RESPECT THE IDENTITY OF THE SIX TOWNS; MAINTAIN THEIR IDENTITY AND BUILD ON THIS AS A POSITIVE - IT'S WHAT MAKES THIS PLACE UNIQUE.

THE BOROUGH IS A PLACE OF EVOLUTION

WE SHOULD JUDGE THE CHANGE ON WHAT IT WILL DO FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

WE NEED TO BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT WE ACTUALLY WANT TO PRESERVE - IT'S NOT ABOUT PRESERVING THINGS IN AS-IF. SANDWELL MUST MOVE FORWARD.

WE SHOULDN'T ALLOW
THE PAST TO BE A BARRIER
FOR THE FUTURE

REGENERATION SHOULD CONTINUE
- WE SHOULD BE AHEAD OF THE GAME
AND HAVE AN EYE ON THE FUTURE,
LOOKING AT THE WORLD WE'RE
HEADING TO.

EVOLUTION VS PRESERVATION

The Panel members had an in-depth and meaningful discussion about the character of the borough and embracing change and growth. A key tension was discussed between on the one hand the need to preserve and conserve the heritage and character the borough has left, and on the other hand the need to allow evolution to address the needs and demands of existing and future generations.

This tension goes to the heart of what the Design Code vision must negotiate. It was agreed that the vision should reflect both objectives and give clarity around respecting heritage and character whilst ensuring flexibility to embrace innovation and change.

GREENSPACES, BROWN SPACES
AND INDUSTRIAL AREAS ALL NEED
THINKING ABOUT. CONTAMINATION
MUST BE UNDERSTOOD AND INFORM
THE APPROACH - IT'S A VERY REAL
LEGACY IN THE BOROUGH.

CAR RACING OCCURS IN
SMETHWICK AND IS AN ISSUE
FOR LOCAL PEOPLE.

BEWARE OF GENTRIFICATION -
CHANGES SHOULD BE FOR THE EXISTING
POPULATION AND THEIR CHILDREN.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

As part of the discussion about change, one aspect that was a focus was understanding what local people and communities need. In particular, understanding what young people really want was highlighted as key - it was suggested that the team could consider noting ages in consultation responses to be able to filter the messages by age group.

An overriding message under this theme was the large proportion of people needing affordable homes. The Panel all agreed that ensuring good quality future housing that's affordable is a priority. It was stressed that the Local Plan sets the policy for affordable housing, but that the Design Code could have an important role in raising the design quality of every housing scheme.

NEED TO BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT WE
ACTUALLY WANT TO PRESERVE - IN SMETHWICK
FOR EXAMPLE WE NEED TO KEEP THE SENSE OF
HISTORY AND LEGACY, RE-USING BUILDINGS
AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, AND THINKING ABOUT
THE URBAN GRAIN CHARACTER, BUT MOST
IMPORTANTLY IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE. SANDWELL
MUST MOVE FORWARD.

NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT NOT CAUSING MORE ISSUES OR JUST MOVING THE TRAFFIC ELSEWHERE.

CAN BOLLARDS BE USED TO HELP DELIVER EV CHARGING TO ON STREET SPACES, THEY COULD HAVE THE ADDED BENEFIT OF KEEPING PAVEMENTS FREE FOR PEDESTRIANS

CARS AND PARKING

A subject that was returned to on a number of occasions in the discussion was the dominance of cars (and the challenges of parking). The concerns voiced by the Stage 1 community engagement findings about car racing were echoed by the Panel members. Overall, there was a desire to see the issue of car dominance in the borough addressed and greater space and priority given to pedestrians in particular. Members stressed that good alternatives to driving are needed and that something actively needed doing to encourage the use of these alternatives. Street calming measures were also proposed for residential neighbourhoods to prioritise walking and cycling connections and de-link car connections.

Car parking was discussed in relation to a number of angles including managing provision on housing schemes, reducing water run-off from parking areas through the introduction of permeable materials, and the need to resolve EV charging where parking is on-street.

THE BEST AREAS ARE PEDESTRIANISED.

NEED TO HAVE GOOD ALTERNATIVES TO THE CAR AND ACTIVELY ENCOURAGE THESE

WATER AND ENERGY

During the discussion on water and flooding it was suggested that uncovering local history to better understand water courses and topography would be very useful. Members emphasised that it is important to express or emphasise topography through new development, rather than try and hide or suppress it, and that sustainable drainage could be informed by an understanding of historic water routes.

The Panel also discussed renewable energy, and how to make space for it. Positively planning for different technologies and allowing the space needed in developments was agreed as a good way forward.

FLOOD PLAINS SHOULD BE STUDIED AND USED.

RENEWABLE ENERGY - CAN WE MAKE SPACE FOR THIS?

LIGHTING AND SAFETY

The Panel were keen to explore how spaces can be protected and kept safe. The group discussed that the perception of crime may always be an issue in Sandwell, but that the Design Code should do what it can to help reduce the incidences of actual crime. Visual safety should be included in the Code, supporting principles like clear lines of vision.

All agreed that celebrating the canals would be great and that encouraging access to them is important. Members asked if there are safety aspects that need considering, and to encompass this in the Design Code.

VISUAL SAFETY
SHOULDBEINCLUDED
IN THE CODE

WE SHOULD LEARN
FROMEUROPEANCITIESIN
RELATIONTOMOVEMENT
AND STREETS



3.8 ONLINE PORTAL/PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS

As part of the findings and journey towards establishing the vision and borough-wide guidance, the team created an online survey for Sandwell residents to have their say on three areas of work. The survey included questions regarding these three areas of work:

- a vision for design in the borough;
- updating existing borough-wide design guidance;
- and mapping the existing character of the Borough to inform future design coding.

Over twenty residents provided full questionnaire responses and the answers provided helped inform the Stage 2 outputs. A summary of the findings from the survey is provided here.

VISION

To help establishing the design vision for future development, the survey asked how strongly residents would agree with a series of statements.

A place of evolution: Change should draw on the unique threads of character of each of the six towns whilst embracing innovation and invention.

76% of respondents agreed that Sandwell is a place of evolution and that the suggested vision for an evolving place based on the character of the six towns is correct, while 14% disagreed.

Those who disagreed with this part of the draft vision statement either wanted to see the economy supported but were concerned that this would not benefit local people, or wanted to see the character of Sandwell remain as Black Country and that culturally and socially people should adapt to this character rather than see too much change.

The comments from those who agreed to this part of the suggested vision added caveats to that support. In particular, that heritage must be respected. Conservation of existing historic building through retrofit and re-use was emphasised, and there was concern that this has not been happening and has led to neglect and the decline of local high streets and character. A further comment warned that embracing change for the sake of change is not a good thing, and therefore the implementation and approach needs careful thought.

HERITAGE IS WHAT
BUILDS A TOWN. IT
SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED
BUT RESPECTED.

WE MUST PROTECT
OUR PROUD HERITAGE AND
UNIQUE LOCAL LANDMARKS

An uplift in design quality: New development in the borough will be expected to achieve a higher bar of design quality to match the aspirations of local communities.

76% agreed with the need for an uplift in design quality, whilst 15% disagreed.

Those who disagreed commented that they were concerned about councillors making decisions on areas they know little about or have little experience or expertise in, or were concerned that the priorities should be shaped by talking to residents.

Those supportive of the vision suggested emphasised that design quality is important and that there has been a lack of quality to date. Other comments raised the need to prioritise the environment and climate adaptation and nature recovery. There was a background concern expressed that the council has not achieved high quality on new builds and that low quality new builds had been erected in preference to refurbishing characterful existing buildings.

PREVENTATIVE
MEASURE TO ENSURE
BUILD QUALITY LASTS
IS IMPORTANT

A borough that puts the emphasis for enhancement on its key assets: Where the features that make up the backbone of everyday life in the borough are the focus for enhanced change.

A. A Borough where town centres are thriving and resilient

71% agree

19%
strongly
disagree

B. A Borough where nature and waterways are celebrated.

76% agree

15%
disagree

C. A Borough where industry is a good neighbour.

56% agree

29%
cannot
decide

15%
disagree

D. A Borough where homes and streets are high quality.

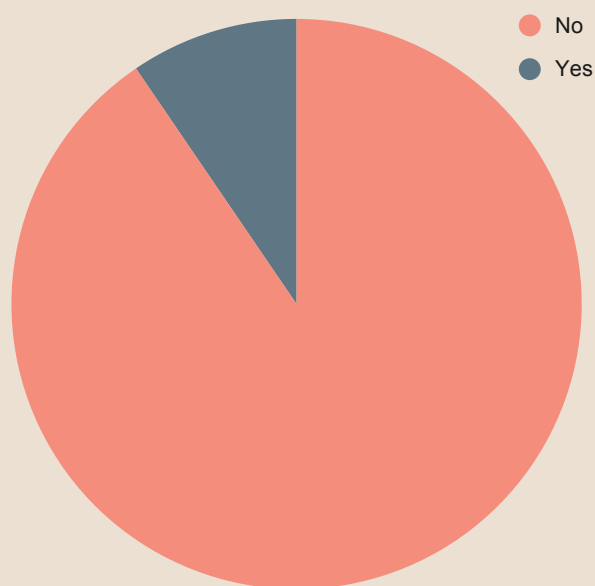
76% agree

19%
disagree

BOROUGH-WIDE DESIGN GUIDANCE

In addition to establishing the vision for design in the borough, the team are also refining the design guidance that should apply borough-wide. The following questions provided to help understand the use of existing guidance and what could be improved:

Have you used the existing Residential Design Guide?



In your opinion, what information would be most useful to include in a Borough-wide Design Guide?

The primary focus for residents, captured in roughly a quarter of comments, emphasises a critical need to weave nature directly into the built environment through trees, green

corridors, and 'living buildings.' Residents explicitly highlighted the importance of wildlife wellbeing, alongside the broader environmental benefits of green spaces for drainage, air quality, and public health.

A significant tier of responses covered local character, infrastructure and civic support. Regarding the local aesthetic, residents expressed a desire to honour heritage to inspire future growth, while strictly maintaining design quality and character so that new developments use high-quality materials and fit into the existing neighbourhood. Day-to-day upkeep was stressed with residents calling for better maintenance of housing and protective features like curbs for grass verges. Environmental standards were raised with respondents emphasising that adopting renewable technologies and maximising building efficiency should be central.

Transport, community and safety were also mentioned. These targeted comments advocated for the promotion of public transport and walkable 15-minute towns, the implementation of secure design features to reduce crime, and the active use of consultation surveys to drive meaningful community engagement.

PAVED OVER DRIVEWAYS
SHOULD NOT BE ENCOURAGED AND
INCLUDING GREENING MUST BE
INCLUDED IN ALL DESIGN

What are your views on the existing content of the Residential Design Guide: which sections are useful, which need revisiting and which could be lost?

A. Integrating into the Neighbourhood
- Connections/Facilities and Services/
Public Transport/Meeting Local Housing
Requirements

**48% believe it's
important but needs
revisiting or updated**

**24% are
unsure on the
value of the
section / don't
know**

B. Creating a Place - Character/Working
with the Site and its Context/Creating Well
Defined Streets and Spaces/Easy to Find
your Way Around

**48% believe it's
important but needs
revisiting or updated**

**24% are
unsure on the
value of the
section / don't
know**

C. Street and Homes - Streets for All/
Safety and Security/Car Parking/Public
and Private Spaces/External Storage and
Amenity Space

**57% believe it's important
but needs revisiting or
updated**

**24% are
unsure on
the value of
the section /
don't know**

D. Appendices - Homes in Multiple
Occupancy Standards/Identifying Local
Character Matrix/Developers Guide to the
Design of New Streets/Codes of Good
Practice for Tree Planting

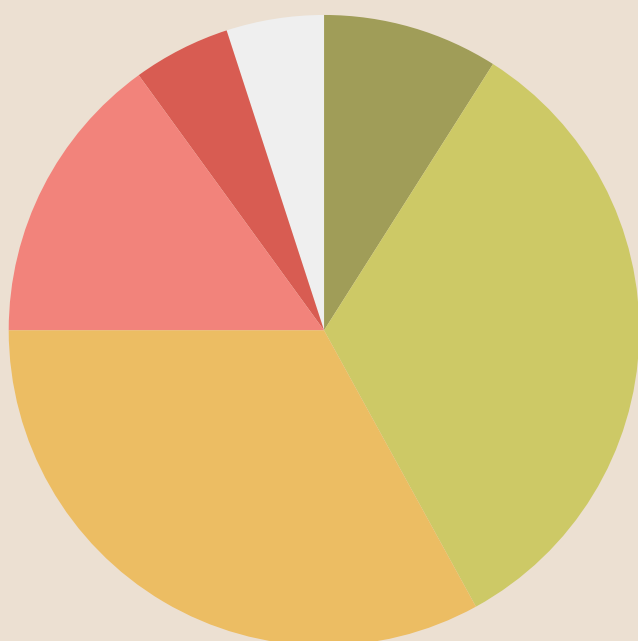
**57% believe it's important
but needs revisiting or
updated**

**19% are
unsure on
the value
of the
section /
don't know**

EXISTING CHARACTER

As part of understanding how Design Codes might apply in the borough, it is important to identify the different types of development and broad character that already exists. The team prepared a map of 'existing area types' which outlines which parts of the Borough are predominantly residential, industrial, mixed-use etc, and within these what the form or character of development is, for example, detached housing or urban terraces. These existing area types will form the basis for then defining the future character of areas moving forward. The survey requested comments on the map to understand if it truly reflects existing character:

Do you agree that the existing area types map accurately reflects the predominant character of built form across the Borough?



Are there any areas on the map that you think should be reflected differently e.g. where the residential character is more or less urban than suggested?

The largest share of feedback came from respondents who offered no specific comments or changes. The next most common stance came from around 24% of participants who expressed uncertainty due to their unfamiliarity with all the geographic areas.

The remaining feedback was split evenly between two distinct critiques. First, 14.3% of respondents shifted focus away from the actual urban character to highlight map clarity and usability issues. Stating difficulty in reading, interpreting, or understanding the map itself.

The remaining 14.3% of respondents provided specific, actionable suggestions centred on land designation and social infrastructure. This feedback included calls for a sharper distinction between open space and unbuilt areas to better identify principal brownfield and development sites, recommendations to explicitly feature areas of natural importance, and broader commentary on pressing community needs.

- strongly agree
- agree
- agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- not answered

When translating these existing area types into definitions for future character, should the team consider any additional categories to support the development you would like to see?

With many respondents unsure or responding that there are no areas that should be reflected differently, environmental and wildlife concerns represented the largest main change, making up around 20% of the responses. Key suggestions included safeguarding Green Belt areas from new housing developments, preserving existing trees during construction, and establishing wildlife habitat as an explicit category to protect non-human residents.

Respondents suggested introducing specialised housing zones, such as residential areas for older persons, and focusing regeneration efforts on large, empty buildings.

Finally, infrastructure and community facilities made up less than 10% of the answers. These suggestions focused heavily on the social infrastructure required to support residential areas like the need to incorporate more social spaces, such as community centres, into the neighbourhood fabric.

Should the team consider any additional categories of existing area types to support the changes in character or types of development you would like to see in the future?

The largest share of feedback came from over half of the respondents, with 57% providing neutral or non-specific answers. This majority indicated they were unsure, had no comment, or felt the question was simply not applicable to them.

Among those who offered specific suggestions, a significant portion - accounting for 14% of respondents - focused heavily on community and public assets. This group advocated for the improved utilisation and protection of council-owned buildings and spaces, specifically highlighting that these areas should be safeguarded for community and religious use.

Lastly, an emphasis on preservation was a primary theme for about 10% of the participants. These respondents underscored a clear need to protect wildlife habitats and wild spaces, explicitly suggesting that conserving these natural areas should be prioritised.

3.9 DEVELOPER FORUM

On 6 January 2026 a group of representatives from the development industry came together for an online session with the Sandwell Design Code team. Attendees had all been involved in developments within the borough and ranged from large scale developers through to architects submitting regular small scale development proposals and planning agents acting for a range of applicants. The session started with a presentation of the Stage 1 findings and a set of headings of likely themes to be covered by the Design Code, this was followed by discussion.

HOUSING VIABILITY

The larger developer representatives stressed that the viability of housing schemes is a primary concern. Generally anything under 100 units will be a wholly affordable scheme as it doesn't currently stack up in viability terms as a market housing scheme. One of the developers emphasised that they have been reducing the number of house types they offer to standardise and streamline projects to aid viability.

EXPECTATIONS

Concerns were raised that the private sector are currently delivering below the expected standard in the borough - both in terms of space and design / finish standards. For the Council's housing team this means they are reluctant to buy social housing through Section 106 agreements as they do not meet the standard needed. There was agreement across attendees for supporting design quality, with the caveat that this should not be overly onerous so as to further challenge viability.

CODE REQUIREMENTS

There was a consistent message that the Design Code will be helpful in clarifying the expectations and this clarity will be welcomed. However, any future code should not consist of a long list of requirements as developers 'will just walk away'. The context of ground conditions and contamination was flagged as already affecting viability and therefore an extensive list of additional asks on developers would not be welcomed. Attendees also stressed the need for flexibility, saying that too rigid minimum standards could be unproductive to cause issues. An issue highlighted by attendees was the space for parking and cycle/bin storage and that the code could provide clearer guidance. Concern about pushing for higher densities was also raised, with one team suggesting that this could result in worse design standards in the borough.

THERE IS A BIG GAP
BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND
OUTCOME - WE NEED TO CLOSE
THIS

VIABILITY IS THE
BIGGEST ISSUE

ANY CODE OR
GUIDANCE MUST BE
FLEXIBLE

DETAILED COMMENTS

- It would be good to establish a level playing field for design quality standards - the Council aspires to raise the standard through its own developments but it doesn't always result that way.
- The Council's housing team are delivering where the market isn't which affects the margins for developers.
- Big gap between expectation and outcome - need to close this.
- 1980s housing in the borough was built to better space standards and gardens. New properties don't have this.
- Street trees have nice curb appeal
- There shouldn't be a difference in the quality of facade design between different types of tenure in the same development
- All housing types should be tenure blind
- New flatted developments in Birmingham tend to be affordable housing, rather than market
- Design quality and materials do need to go into the Design Code
- Bin storage is becoming more of an issue, with the amount of bins required per house now sometimes up to 3.
- Cycle storage needs to be considered in code.
- Parking is a difficult one to get right with changing standards and people paving over gardens etc
- Sandwell has been good at removing Permitted Development rights which is good
- Aspirationally we would want to include more trees in schemes, but very hard to plant in schemes as require offset distances etc. Highways often don't want them, and the reality is its hard to incorporate trees. Sometimes total cost can be £1,000 per tree.
- Smaller developments have the same issues as larger ones in relation to viability and the cost of regenerating the land
- It is always a challenge to try and go above minimum standards.
- The Code / guidance must be flexible. 'Must achieve X' may be unproductive and cause more issues.
- What is important is the identity of Sandwell's towns and it should all be about enhancing standards, but we should avoid a check list.
- There is an increase in demand on space and Sandwell is not blessed with Green Belt land. There will be a squeeze on amenity if architects need to design in bin storage, EV parking, trees etc.
- Some clients don't want minimum standards - for example a specific client / certain market needs may indicate greater space provision, and inter-generational living will result in allowing for extra bedrooms to be added on ground floor etc.
- Better layouts are important to encourage.
- Road widths / any current minimum standard may not be useful looking forward.
- There is a concern of new demographics moving in - with the risk of gentrification with higher standards. Be wary of gentrification - change should be for the existing population and their children.
- Everyone wants private parking in new developments.
- Lower density design could be better, as denser development could lead to worse standards being delivered.
- Large proportion of people need affordable homes - need to ensure quality future housing that's affordable.

ASPIRATIONALLY YOU WOULD WANT TO INCLUDE MORE TREES BUT IT IS VERY HARD TO MAKE THEM WORK IN SCHEMES DUE TO OFFSET DISTANCES ETC

EVERYONE WANTS PRIVATE PARKING IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS

3.10 COMMUNITY DESIGN PANEL - SESSION 2

The second session of the Community Design Panel in February 2026 tested some emerging content for the Design Guide and put forward some draft housing typologies and precedents. The Panel members provided feedback in the session, as well as in follow-up input by email and online.

TREES AND GREENING

Panel members were supportive of the objective to increase street trees and want to ensure any guidance / code ensures this happens and in the right way. There was support for a 'right tree, right place' strategy and to ensure tree roots do not destroy surfacing. Ongoing maintenance was raised as a concern and that this needed to be resolved to ensure these trees stay for the long term. The heights of trees specified needs careful consideration to support inclusive environments - this includes a lower branch limit for shorter trees to make sure the visually impaired are not at risk of walking into branches, and careful height choices around car parking bays to avoid pedestrians feeling hidden and to support good sight lines for people opening cars so they feel safe doing so.

There was also strong support for green front gardens and for the Design Code to ensure these are kept green, with reference to preventing surface water run-off.

PARKING

The parking arrangements for the draft housing typologies were discussed and generally supportive. Electric vehicle charging was raised as a discussion point, and the need to make sure this can be facilitated by the preferred typologies. One member raised a concern about double linear parking on the semi-detached properties and whether this would cause

difficulties when residents needed to move the rear car first.

BINS AND BIKES

The practicality of storage for houses was discussed. Members commented that most garages cannot fit more than a car in and so cycle storage and bin storage was difficult. The poor provision for bins generally was raised, with a request that the guidance or code should help ensure bins are well accommodated and hidden from view.

HIGHER DENSITY FORMATS

One of the typologies presented was a 5-6 storey courtyard block of apartments. Some were concerned that the scale of block was too much for Sandwell, but recognised the need for higher densities. More detailed concerns focused on this format involving too much overlooking, particularly of private amenity space included for courtyard facing homes. Members stressed the need to be clear on the benefits of small private amenity spaces and larger communal amenity spaces. Some good dense examples were put forward including mansion blocks on Hadley Road, flats on Oxford Road and a courtyard block near Digbeth bus station. Overall the most liked typology was the semi-detached house.

THEROOTSOFSANDWELLARE
CAUSINGDAMAGE, HOWCAN
WEPREVENTTHEPASTBEINGA
BARRIER?

IT'SANOBRAINERFOR
PUBLIC TO AGREE WITH
THESE ASPIRATIONS

REALLYIMPORTANT
TOKEEPGREENFRONT
GARDENS

NEEDTOBECAREFULOF
HEIGHTSOFTREESAROUND
CAR PARKING BAYS - CAN
MAKEYOUFEELHIDDENASA
PEDESTRIAN

BINSAREABIGPROBLEM,
WOULDBENICETOHIDETHEM

THEENERGYEFFICIENCYOF
CURRENTNEWBUILDISPOOR

WORRIEDABOUTDEVELOPERS
JUSTHAVINGTHEIROWNTARGETS

COULDWEHAVESHARED CAR
PORTS/COMMUNITYCHARGING?

THE QUALITY OF HOUSE
RENOVATIONSIN THEBOROUGH
AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH

SHORTERTREESSHOULD
HAVE LOWER BRANCH
LIMIT-SAMEASHIGHWAYS
SIGNAGE HEIGHT

THEPROPORTIONAND
BALANCEOFWINDOWS
ISASIMPORTANTASTHE
REVEAL THEMSELVES

FLATTEDCOURTYARDBLOCK
SEEMS TO BE CITY SCALE,
RATHERTHANSANDWELLSCALE

MOST GARAGES CAN'T FIT
MORETHANACAR, ANNOYING!

IS PRIVATE AMENITY
SPACE IN COURTYARDS
LARGE ENOUGH FOR
DRYING WASHING ETC?

NEED TO ENSURE WE
EXPLAIN DEFINITIONS, I.E.
DUAL ASPECT, DENSITY

4 RESULTING VISION

4.1 REFINING THE VISION

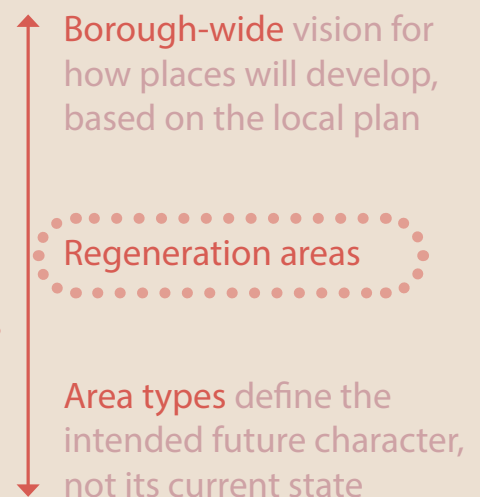
The project team meticulously analysed community and stakeholder feedback to identify recurring themes, key priorities, and areas of consensus. This process directly shaped the evolution of the Design Code project outputs, in particular ensuring that public insights meaningfully anchored the overarching borough-wide vision. The resulting vision wording is set out here:

A PLACE OF EVOLUTION: Change should draw on the unique threads of character of each of the six towns whilst embracing innovation and invention. Throughout history the borough's towns have continually and significantly changed. That change has not been sentimental, rather it has been practical – responding to economic and social needs. But at times of intense change some important threads of local identity and heritage have been lost. The vision for the borough is to ensure going forward that new development respects and celebrates heritage and historic fabric and is informed by locally valued character and needs, alongside embracing change and new opportunities.

AN UPLIFT IN DESIGN QUALITY: New development in the borough will be expected to achieve a high level of design quality to match the aspirations of local communities. Local people are concerned about the quality of past developments in the borough and want to see a real shift in the quality of scheme design across the board – this covers everything from the robust architectural quality and detail of buildings to the level of street greening and climate resilience.

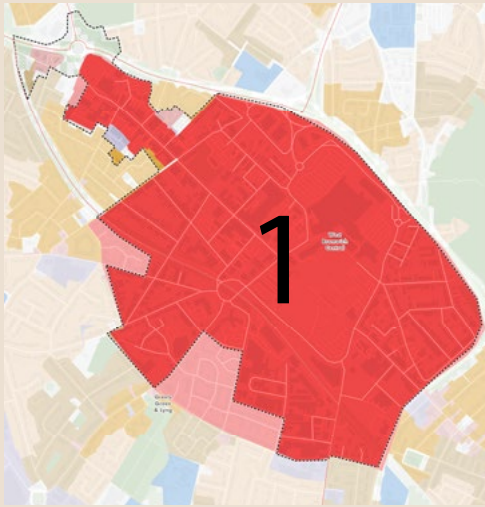
A critical step in establishing this borough-wide vision was determining how it translates into actionable Design Codes. Because regeneration areas offer the greatest potential for transformative change, the team aligned specific vision statements with each designated regeneration area in Sandwell. This targeted approach was directly informed by existing local conditions and the granular area-types map.

At what scale(s) should the vision and Design Codes address?



SANDWELL IS A BOROUGH WHERE....

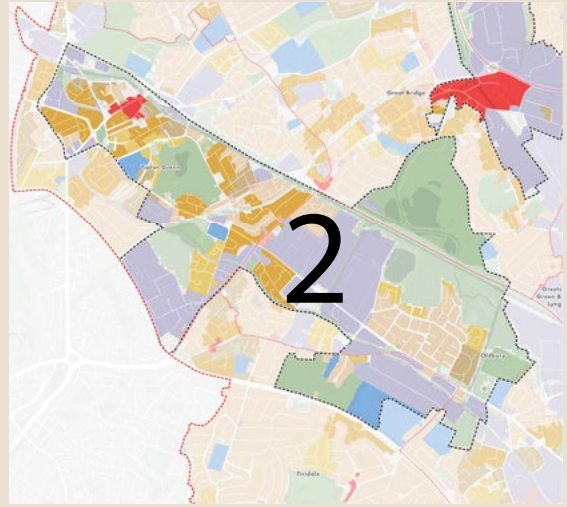
...TOWN CENTRES ARE
THRIVING AND GROWING



West Bromwich

- Housing
- Public spaces
- Community infrastructure
- Active travel

...WHERE NATURE AND
WATERWAYS ARE CELEBRATED



Tipton & Dudley Port

- Canal network
- Green infrastructure
- Biodiversity
- Safety / fear of crime
- Active travel

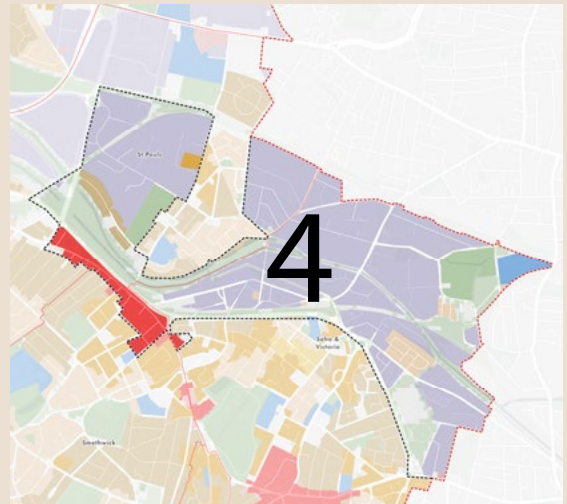
...INDUSTRY IS A
GOOD NEIGHBOUR



Wednesbury

- Large format industry
- Fine grain industry
- Co-location
- Adaptive reuse
- Urban greening

...HOMES AND STREETS
ARE QUALITY



Smethwick

- Housing mix
- Design quality
- Boundary treatments
- Vehicle infrastructure
- Spatial severance

4.2 INFORMING THE CONTENT OF THE DESIGN CODE

In addition to refining the vision statement, the engagement inputs have provided an important steer on the content of emerging borough-wide design guidance and the Design Code to be prepared as part of the next stage of work.

The headline findings from Stage 2 engagement that will carry through into the production of guidance and Design Code are summarised here.

BALANCING GREENING AND CAR PARKING

Across many of the engagement activities the tension between competing objectives was discussed. This was particularly evident in relation to front garden space and street greening. Local people want to see parking strategies that work in the long term and don't result in pavement parking or the paving over of front gardens. At the same time there is a very strong message that greening of streets is a priority, and that front gardens and boundary treatments are important to delivering this. The guidance and Design Code must therefore find a balance in how on-plot space is used in both house and flat schemes to deliver on-plot parking and a good proportion of soft landscaped front garden. This will need to be resolved alongside accommodating bins and cycle storage in accessible and well-designed locations which have also been emphasised in Stage 2.

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

Another common message from the engagement activities was the importance of building performance. Local people want to see lower carbon or net zero performance across new developments. There is a clear appetite to push for higher performance, however, there will be limitations in what the Design Code can require without causing conflict with nationally-set Building Regulations. The Design Code will need to clearly communicate the community's

desire for low energy design and sustainable buildings and illustrate the process and interventions preferred.

STREET TREES

Street trees have continued as a priority emphasised by stakeholders. Discussions with the Community Design Panel have stressed the importance of getting this right. The Design Code will need to provide guidance and examples on how to incorporate street trees best, this includes providing ample space for their growth but also choosing locations and species that support safety and inclusive design objectives.

VIABLE DELIVERY

The engagement discussions have stressed the need to pitch the right level and number of requirements in the Design Code. The local development industry is wary of too many asks being added to developments which in many cases are already struggling in terms of viability. Local people emphasised the need for good quality homes and for developments to positively contribute to local character and resilience. The Design Code will therefore need to focus on those requirements that will have the greatest positive impact without adding excessive cost to schemes.

RETROFIT

Alongside the messages for developments to respect and enhance local character, there were regular pleas for historic buildings to be reused rather than demolished. Across the Community Design Panel and public survey there were multiple comments about how much historic fabric had already been lost and the need to restore and find new viable uses for what remains. The guidance will need to give greater emphasis to retrofit and reuse as the first option to be explored on sites.

HOUSING TYPES

Stage 2 has involved exploring different housing types and densities. The engagement has shown local people strongly prioritise the delivery of new homes to meet community needs, particularly affordable homes. Through the discussions, there is recognition that higher density formats will be part of the solution. Whilst there is a preference for houses, the message for flatted schemes is that these should be designed with householders in mind - privacy and good amenity space are seen as critical. The scale of buildings is sensitive and generally lower or mid-rise precedents are preferred. The Design Code will need to put forward flatted typologies that meet the desire for really good quality and functional homes that support families as well as smaller households.

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Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners accepts no responsibility for comments made by members of the community which have been reflected in this report.