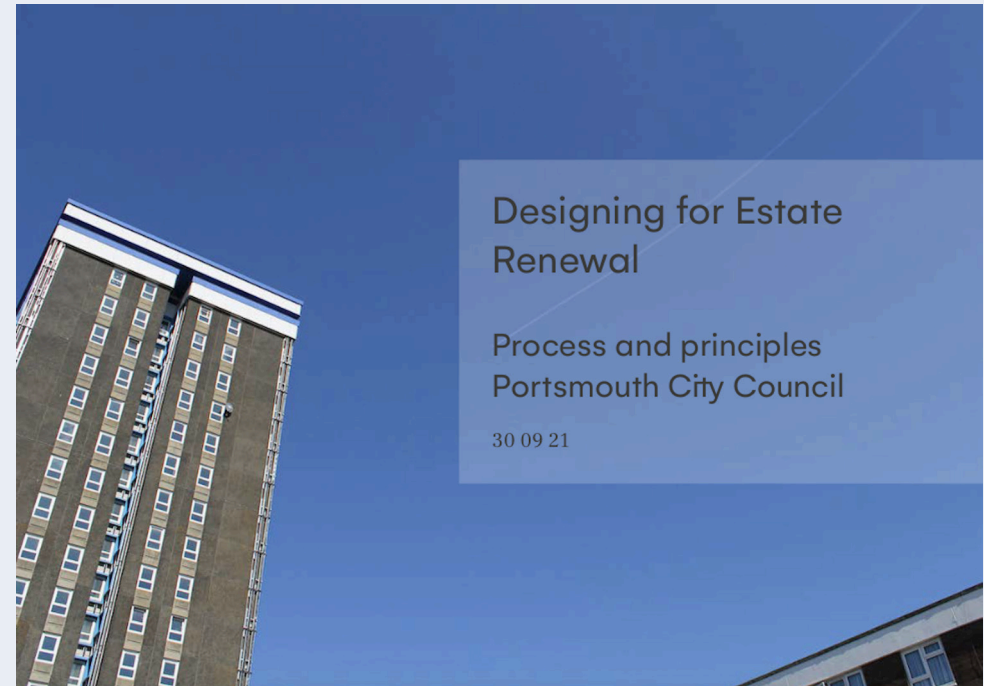


Portsmouth City Council: Exploring coding for estate renewal

This case study was prepared as part of the six month testing programme for the draft National Model Design Code (NMDC), run by DLUHC (then, MHCLG) from April to September 2021. Not all participants prepared design codes and all the pilot projects were at different stages when the pilot started. This case study is not a recommendation of best practice but seeks to highlight the work the local authority did as part of the pilot programme and the local authority's reflections on the programme and the design coding process.

Portsmouth City Council: Exploring coding for estate renewal

Scale:	Site-specific
Context:	Urban
Focus:	Producing a 'How to' guide for estate renewal
Project team:	Portsmouth City Council; Design South East.
Region:	South East



Introduction

This pilot case study sought to explore the process and outcomes of developing design codes for estate renewal, with the objective of producing a 'How to' guide for future estate renewal design codes. An existing estate renewal project (Horatia House and Leamington House) was used as a means of testing project management processes, methods of analysis, and community engagement. Key themes included appointing an internal 'champion'; collaborative, cross-council working through the establishment of an Estate Renewal Working Group; and gaining an understanding of what is 'provably popular' through analysis of community engagement outcomes.

Local Authority background information

The city of Portsmouth has very defined boundaries, due to its geographical location, bordered by the sea and Portsdown Hill, which significantly influences its growth and character. As the city cannot expand, development has to be very carefully considered. Portsmouth City Council (PCC) owns and manages approximately 15,000 homes in Portsmouth and Havant, much of which was constructed between the 1940s and the 1970s, as part of a process of gradual clearing and reconstruction following significant bomb damage from the Second World War. Therefore, it will be important for PCC to understand how they invest, renew and redevelop this housing stock in the future.

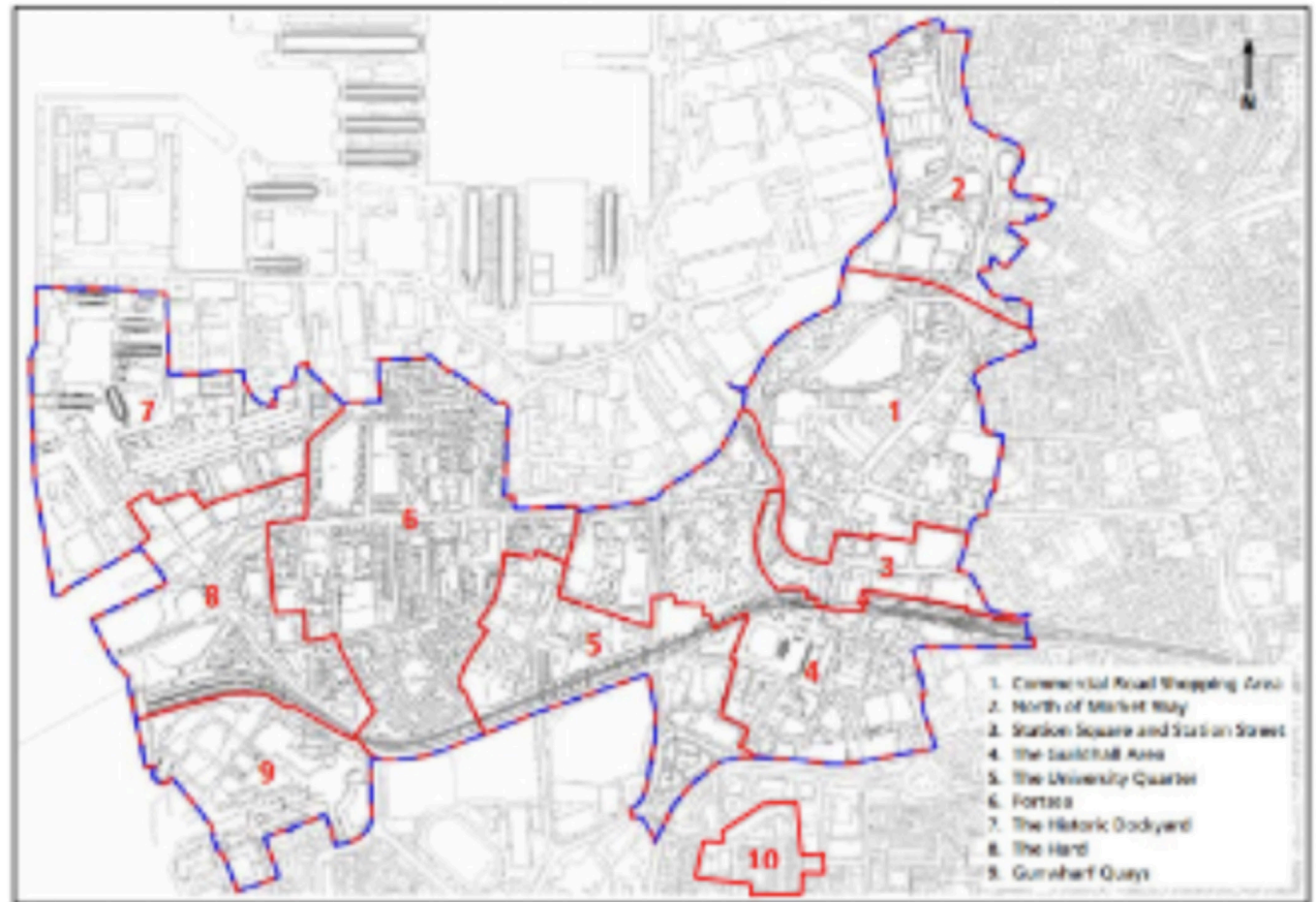
“ A working group for estate renewal was set up, including policy, strategic development, highways, public health, and the design team (in the housing directorate). A brief was produced, about who to contact and who should be the directorate lead to appoint the right people to the project team. This working group format needs to be a long-term part of how the council approaches development projects. ”

The context for coding

Located to the south west of the city, Horatia House and Leamington House are two council-owned tower blocks in a large estate renewal area owned by PCC in Somerstown, near Portsmouth city centre. They have been identified for demolition and redevelopment to provide new affordable and social homes, led by the Council's Strategic Development team as client.

“ There are challenges of trying to get everyone together and the earlier the better improves the outcome. Getting everyone into the same room for the design coding process is going to be beneficial to such joined up thinking and working, particularly with Development Management. ”

At the time of the pilot process there was already a design team in place who had done significant work on the scheme. Headed by Karakusevic Carson Architects (KCA), this multi-disciplinary team had started work in May 2021 to lead the redevelopment with the community. The project provided the ideal opportunity for Design South East to review the design work (not seek to replace or redo it) as a testbed for design coding an estate regeneration project.



Horatia and Leamington site; red boundary

Why code?

Focusing on the Horatia House and Leamington House redevelopment as a pilot project in consultation with officers, members and the Somerstown Community Panel, the council's Planning Policy team looked at how the National Model Design Code (NMDC) principles could apply to development in practice in Portsmouth. The objective was to produce a guide that could inform the development of future estate renewal design codes, with cross-council input, that would underpin any future discussions or joint guidance with other local planning authorities (LPAs) where PCC owns land outside the council boundary.

“ Absolutely critical to have a person in the local authority who can lead it, weave it together, upskill and bring everything together. ”

What was the coding process?

KCA and Design South East played important roles in the design code pilot project. KCA worked closely with the Strategic Development team, using existing public engagement as the pilot's baseline (to avoid consultation fatigue in the resident population) and focusing the pilot's engagement with officers and members instead. To this end, an Estate Renewal Working Group was set up including representatives of the relevant council departments. Design South East worked with the council's lead project manager to plan how they would work together, which included:

- Developing an inception training day
- Developing tool kits and pro formas to capture information
- Reviewing engagement work that has been undertaken
- Workshops
- Review of community engagement
- Working out how the code will or will not align with the existing planning policy
- Designing a place audit to explore the locally popular design ideas
- Working with GIS to see how they could support the process.

A working group training day (facilitated by Design South East) was held, to bring everyone together and build stronger 'buy-in' to design across departments.

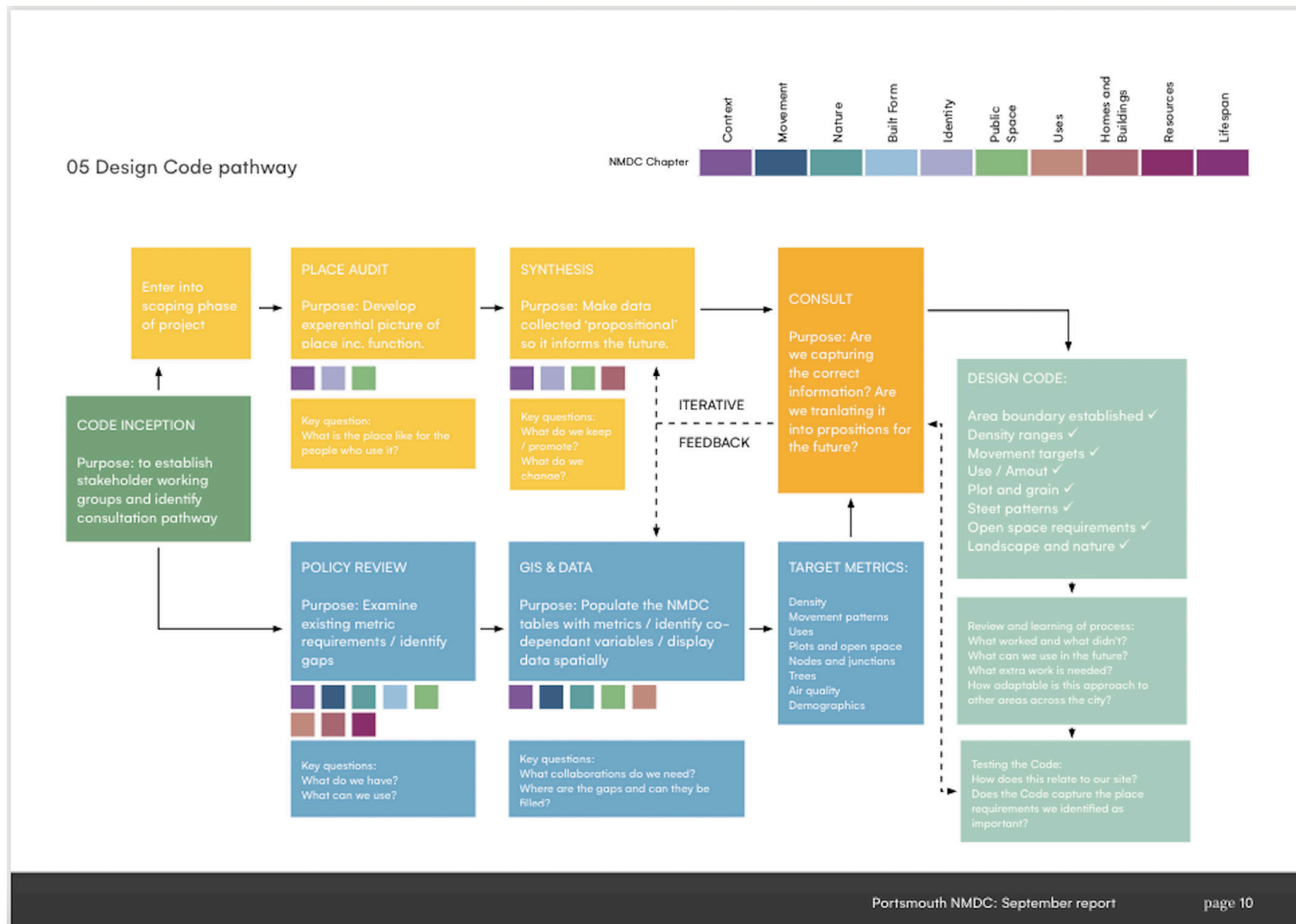


Aerial view of Horatia House and Leamington House

Subsequently, a series of 'walk and talk' walkabouts were held with officers and members; these were structured to bring officers from different departments together to understand their shared agendas and objectives when looking at an estate. It was anticipated that this feedback would help to determine the scope and nature of an estate renewal design code for Portsmouth, alongside supporting the visioning process through capturing the values and objectives for change of the different departments.

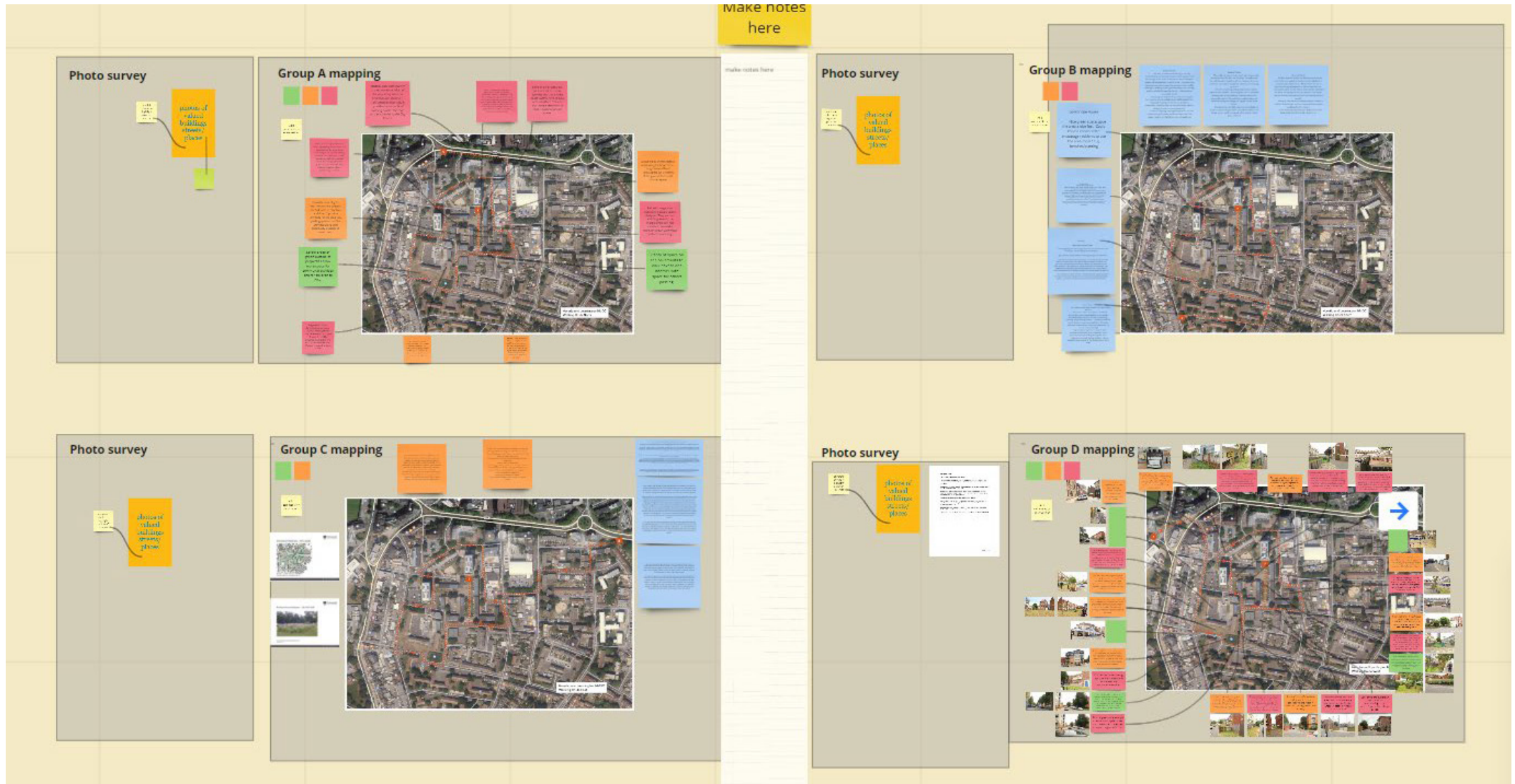
What form will the code take?

The output is a working document, essentially a 'How to' guide for estate renewal projects. The broad form focuses firstly on consultation and engagement with the planning system and outlines a repeatable process highlighting elements of exemplary community engagement and how it could evidence 'provably popular' design outcomes. This is followed by an outline of the NMDC structure including the 10 characteristics of a well-designed places in addition to specific direction on what aspects to code for in an estate regeneration scheme. These reference typical problems seen on estates and are informed by the pilot consultation and walkabouts.



“ The difficulty is really understanding how community engagement – and capturing what is locally popular – will happen when you haven't got a development proposal, or if you have a greenfield site. Communities only know what they know; there's a whole education process needed to help dealing with concepts and conceptual ideas. That is the greatest challenge in this process. ”

Design code pathway, adapted from the process undertaken for the Horatia and Leamington site



Miro board outputs from the walkabouts with officers and members



Design Goals:

How estates relate to their site boundaries is a critical issue and one that must be addressed sensitively by designers. The exact design solution will vary from site to site.

To understand which design solution is appropriate, the design team should undertake consultation with the stakeholders identified in Part X, and through an analysis of the edges of the site.

NMDC Heading	Estate-specific issues	Resources	Responsibilities
C.1.i Character Types	Block typologies (macro)	GIS map with block dimensions / groups of block types coloured up	LPA lead
C.1.ii Site Context	Neighbouring development patterns Neighbouring land uses and destinations	GIS map of land uses and key open spaces / transport hubs	LPA partial lead, but some sections are to be completed during more detailed design phases.
C.1.iii Site Assessment	Site edges Transitions Long views Connections Landscape	Map showing extent of the site in question	LPA lead, with refinement during the design stage.
C.2.i Historic Assessment	Conservation areas	Conservation area maps Conservation area appraisals	LPA Lead
C.2.ii Heritage Assets	Listed buildings	Listed Buildings maps Listed Buildings reports	LPA Lead

Context





Design Goals:

Estate renewal brings with it opportunities to create new urban blocks that manage the interaction between public and private spaces. Taller buildings can be used strategically and have good relationships with their setting. Done well, increases in density can bring with it benefits for communities and the local economy. A block and massing strategy is mandatory for all sites.

NMDC Heading	Estate-specific issues	Resources	Responsibilities
B.1 Compact Development	Development densities and typologies Mixed Tenure Communities	Density matrix Tenure mix policies	LPA lead
B.2 Built Form	Communal Spaces Entrances & Circulation Arrival at the Front Door Communal Entrance Lobbies Lifts Circulation Communal Staircases Communal Facilities Fire Safety	Block size guidance Building and heights and setback ratios Acceptable block typologies Links to regs and statutory requirements	LPA lead



Lessons learned

Share knowledge, information and workloads across council departments – Local authorities have a huge intrinsic advantage as most officers have a vast amount of local knowledge that can positively influence a design code – this is something the private sector may not always have access to. However, to utilise this 'knowledge resource', LPAs need different departments to be involved and for those departments to see how contributing could help them achieve or contribute to their own department's objectives. To operationalise this, departments need to share knowledge and information (including GIS data) and have an expectation that design code involvement will be part of their workload. A cross-departmental working group can be a successful way of achieving this.

Strategic resourcing and funding of the coding process – Strategically, resourcing and funding issues will need to be resolved by the council if further coding work is to be undertaken. The merits of a dedicated coding team could be explored, as it may be easier to deliver a project without having to pay for resources through the current charging mechanisms between departments.

Appoint an 'internal champion' – This pilot has also shown that a design code needs an internal champion who would be the 'face' of the design code process, build rapport with colleagues, members and the community and ultimately remain positive and organised to keep the project moving forward.

In their words

As part of the NMDC pilot project research, interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders involved in each of the pilots. This section summarises some of those reflections.

Collaboration between council departments – Estate Renewal Working Group

The leading project manager for the pilot within the council was trailblazing and making the connections and giving the direction. As part of this, an Estate Renewal Working Group was established, and a training day organised to bring everyone together to understand how they might work together. This was a Day 1 start to embed design across teams, and it helped to get that cross department buy-in.

Place audit – and evaluating what is 'provably popular'

We started with the worksheets at the back of the NMDC guidance notes. There are things that are very measurable that you can get from plans or GIS eg building line, density. You don't need to ask people about that. What is much harder to get is the experiential parts – is it safe? Is it inviting? Is it a place to walk and cycle through? We went through the chapters and subheadings of the NMDC to establish which parts are about how a place works - and is used - to inform the place audit tool that was developed. In order to show how locally popular things are, you need to quantify along a scale and also build in a narrative of the individual's response, eg how do they feel, do they feel happy here? We are looking at how we could make the filling in of this digitally enabled, eg to add photos to answers and also to help make qualitative judgements – eg are the trees attractive and in the right place rather than 'are there trees?'

Community engagement

We have had the benefit, and the complications, arising from a live development process in train for the Horatia and Leamington site. Pre-existing exemplary community engagement was available to weave into the document, particularly in how it evidences the 'provably popular' thinking. This has informed the process significantly as it really engaged a diverse group with the design process. This learning will be included in the 'How to' guide as well as informing Portsmouth's design commissioning processes to ensure that there is an expectation of a high standard of community consultation in briefs and competitive tendering processes.

Boundaries and identity

Boundaries can be quite critical as to how the place works, eg how the community use/don't use the space. This is a critical part to think through, but the design solution might not be universal. When you start splitting things up into categories there are overlaps and some things that cover a number of issues. Some residents are very clear that they like living in a place with a distinct identity with a boundary – they are 'living on the xy estate'. They have said they are keen for an estate not to lose its identity, even if the built form changes.

Scope and nature of the 'How to' guide

The 'How to' guide is an internal document for officers for a very specific and complex form of development. We have tried in the process to identify what bits should be coded – things that must be coded or guided to ensure a successful estate renewal scheme, which has included the tiering of must, should and could elements. There is a level of detail the text will provide because it focuses on key processes and activities, eg how to do things like walkabouts, analysis, and explain the key stages. Diagrams and checklists will be helpful, to avoid officers having to read so much text, and the document will present the approach that the council and its external partners will be expected to follow.

Must / should / could

It is much easier to do the 'musts' aspects of a design code. There are things that are very easy to code for, that are specific problems eg building entrances or parts of public realm. It is much more difficult to code for the bigger scale issues such as movement networks. The 'How to' guide has to cover all eventualities. It will depend on the estate to which it will apply. There will be generic 'should and could' issues, but the 'musts' might be specific to a place, for example to deal with known issues or elements. Walkabouts were very useful to decide what to include – the feedback was filtered by the pilot team to decide which 'box' each piece of feedback fits in: must, should or could. All of the pilot walkabouts, audits and other engagement with the officer groups has been amassed and will be filtered to seek to express what is locally popular.

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The full National Model Design Code (NMDC) Pilot Programme Monitoring and Evaluation can be downloaded here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1083852/NMDC_M_E_final_report_v5.pdf

