

National Model Design Code

Part 1 - Testing Programme Summary

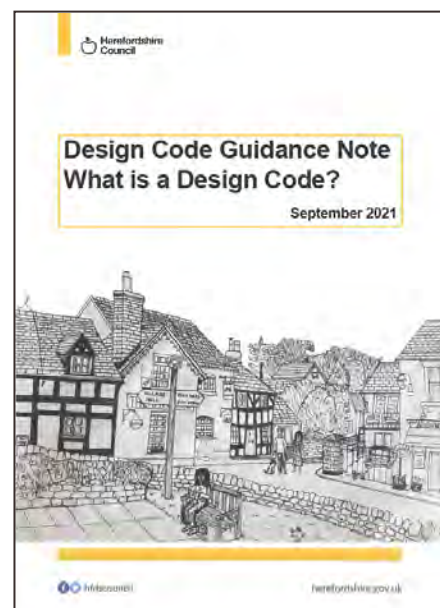
September 2021



Part 1 –Testing Programme Summary

Executive Summary

- 1.1 The test programme in Herefordshire has seen the Local Planning Authority's Neighbourhood Planning Team work directly with four case study parish councils to establish whether design coding could be undertaken at a local community level alongside the production of a neighbourhood plan.
- 1.2 This has involved creating a compendium of local distinctive templates, worksheets and guidance notes, based on the National Model Design Code, to assist parish councils gather the information required to produce their own Codes. The aim being to enable a standardised approach with the ability to be responsive to the rural environment of Herefordshire. This methodology has been successfully demonstrated in the high level of neighbourhood planning carried out within the county.
- 1.3 During the programme, templates and worksheets have been tested, firstly with representatives of the parish councils then members of their local communities, using a variety of engagement methods from traditional face to face to digital online platforms.
- 1.4 A proposed hierarchy of design codes has been established and consideration has been given to how these documents would be used at different grains in different places. An investment plan has been formulated to upskill both the Local Planning Authority, its residents and local developers and agents.
- 1.5 To pilot this work within only six months was ambitious and particular thanks should be given to the parish councils who assisted the testing within the timescales required. The constraints of time did mean that training and upskilling in a 'real world' coding work were reduced and did impact on some parts of the engagement processes.
- 1.6 It is acknowledged that a significant resource would be required to enable a full programme to be rolled out across the county. Local communities are currently sceptical of the ability of a design code to make a difference, particularly in the face of a lack of five year housing land supply and national house builders. Presently parishes are not confident in their abilities to produce a code without significant upskilling; however, this was a similar situation in 2012/13 when neighbourhood planning was piloted within the county.
- 1.7 Overall, the testing programme has shown that the National Model Design Code can be adapted to suit a local rural environment and it would be possible to integrate the creation of a code with the neighbourhood planning process.



Assessment of testing programme

- 2.1 Given the success of neighbourhood planning within Herefordshire, the overall aim of this testing programme was to ascertain whether design coding could be incorporated into the existing neighbourhood planning processes established within Herefordshire over the last eight years.
- 2.2 The original key objectives were as follows:
 - To establish how the current neighbourhood planning policies and background evidence can be used to inform a countywide Herefordshire Design Code
 - To establish how engagement techniques and communication networks used in neighbourhood planning can be expanded to incorporate design coding
 - To establish how parish councils can use the Code to review and develop their own local design codes within the countywide code.
- 2.3 The final outputs expected to be delivered by the end of the testing programme were:
 - To understand how the relationship between design codes and neighbourhood plans work in practice and how community engagement techniques can be used to facilitate a countywide and local design codes
 - To establish a future hierarchy of design codes across the county
 - To translate the National Model Design Code into locally rural based templates and guides to assist local communities to produce a design code for their area.
- 2.4 Overall, the objectives and outputs of the testing programme have been achieved. Part 2 of the submission contains the set of templates, guidance notes and worksheets produced so far. The proposed design coding hierarchy within the county and initial investigation of community engagement have been undertaken.
- 2.5 This initial information gathering and case study testing has shown that it is possible for design coding to be included within the neighbourhood planning process. Additional investigation is required to establish how the production timescales and adoption processes work alongside each other in practice.
- 2.6 The testing programme is not the end of the journey for design coding in Herefordshire, a future investment programme to deploy design coding has been devised and the ambition is to test the guidance notes, templates and worksheets with a local community to produce an actual Design Code at a local parish level.

Consultation and engagement process

- 3.1 The testing and engagement with the case study parish councils essentially contained two parts. Firstly, the creation and initial testing of the templates and guidance. Then wider community testing of potential engagement methods. This was to establish how a parish council could judge, and demonstrate that the background to the code would be based on sound opinions and be popular locally.
- 3.2 A Pilot Study Consultation and Engagement Statement has been prepared and contained the full details of the consultation undertaken. This is contained within Part 2 of the submission. However, in summary the following engagement was undertaken:

- Fortnightly feedback group sessions with the four case study parish councils
- Engagement with service providers and external interest groups – guidance formulation
- Wider community engagement testing within the case study areas mid-July to mid-August using a range of in person and online techniques
- Upskilling Planning Service workshop - Friday 18th June
- Engagement with Cabinet Member for Finance, Planning and Corporate Services

Time and Resources

- 4.1 Our testing programme was not only devised to understand how the National Model Design Code could be used locally but to also ascertain the input required by the Local Planning Authority if they were to invest in design coding across the county.
- 4.2 For this reason, all of the testing was undertaken by the in-house Neighbourhood Planning team without utilising any outside consultancy, to investigate the true LPA resourcing needs for the following:
- How deploy and implement a design code hierarchy across the county – resource/practicality
 - Understand the resource implications for both LPA and parish councils – time/cost/upskilling
 - The support offer from Planning Services to parish councils and local communities – templates/guidance/support/SLA
 - Level of internal upskilling required – existing and future staffing/commissioning
- 4.3 With regards to skills, the department already have well-established working relationships with parish councils and local communities, this can be utilised and continue to build on these trusted networks. There is an existing skill base with the proven deployment of neighbourhood plans across the county and a significant number of parish councils who have successfully produced adopted local planning policy documents with their local communities.
- 4.4 Being a unitary authority, the council already have internal specialist knowledge across many services such as transportation and the team itself has its own Consultation and Engagement Officer.
- 4.5 There was a requirement to update graphical and technical software to enable the production of more illustrative documentation and there is the intention to commission specific local based illustrations and diagrams.
- 4.6 External expertise has been commissioned to produce some of the wider support documentation, the Environmental Building Standards SPD will inform the Herefordshire wide Design Code and an external commissioned review of the existing Hereford Historic Core Design Guide had been approved for updating in light of the National Model Design Code. These commissions equate to £18,000.
- 4.7 Turning to resources, a significant resource during the pilot has been time to upskill parish councils and this will need to continue beyond the pilot period. It should not be underestimated the current level of existing knowledge, understanding or confidence.
- 4.8 Staffing time during the pilot has involved 472 hours in officer time so far; this is the equivalent of £9500 costs plus around 300 hours of parish council volunteer time.

However, it is acknowledged that the initial training and creation of guidance notes/templates will be resource intensive in the first twelve months of any project roll out. This mirrors our NDP programme creating a set of guidance notes and template early in 2012/13. Investment in templates, guidance and training within the first year would enable parishes and local communities to be upskilled to prepare codes as part of revision to NDPs (currently 82 plans)

- 4.9 The testing of an online consultation package for one parish council was £2500 which would equate to £300,000 if full countywide roll out was undertaken using this platform. An additional package was tested that although was at a cost to a local authority was free to parish councils.

Lessons learnt

- 5.1 The outcomes of the testing programme have demonstrated that it is possible to translate the National Model Guide Code to represent local rural environments and create a potential hierarchy of Design Codes covering different grains of the 10 characteristics of well-designed places.
- 5.2 Integrating design coding into the already established neighbourhood planning processes has potential, it would particularly assist parish councils if the funding and national support packages to produce a neighbourhood plan could be extended to include design coding.
- 5.3 As the LPA has worked with local communities and parish councils during the last eight years on neighbourhood planning, it was assumed that expanding to include design coding would be relatively simple. However, it is clear that we underestimated their true knowledge and understanding of wider ranging design issues and terminology. Design was often thought of as just the aesthetic of the building itself rather than the wider range of characteristics and element.
- 5.4 Initially parish councils were not confident enough to consider producing a design code or having the ability to fully represent the variety of potential opposing views within the local community. This was despite having successfully produced an adopted neighbourhood plan. The pilot demonstrated that more time would be required to inform, upskill and train parish councils on all aspects of the National Model Design Code. A supportive, proactive and well-resourced Local Planning Authority would be required to support parish councils if this model was to be adopted.
- 5.5 There is also a significant amount of work required to convince communities that design codes will make a difference particularly with national house builders and at appeals if the Local Planning Authority do not have a five-year land supply. This would need to be proactive at a national level and demonstrated within PINS.
- 5.6 It was ambitious when working collaboratively with parish councils to research, trial and produce all the required documentation within the 6 months testing timescale. However, this has given a firm basis to continue developing a potential methodology to enable design coding across the county.
- 5.7 Specific lessons learnt about the engagement methods used within the testing programme are include within the Consultation Statement submitted within Part 2.

Final Outputs

- 6.1 Final outputs for submission report are contained within Part 2 of the submission and are summarised below:
- 1) A hierarchy of design code documentation across the county
 - NMDC Characteristics Hierarchy table - grain
 - Extracts of companion documentation
 - 2) A compendium of templates, guidance notes and fact sheets (work in progress)
 - What is a design code? Guidance Note
 - Context – Cultural Heritage Guidance Note
 - Context – Mapping Guidance Note
 - Context – Landscape and settlement setting Guidance Note
 - Community Engagement techniques Guidance Note
 - Built Form and Identity Information Guide
 - Built Form and Identity Worksheet
 - Movement Information Guide
 - Movement worksheet
 - Nature and Open Space Information Guide
 - Nature and Open Space worksheet
 - 3) Pilot Case Study Consultation Statement
 - 4) Draft Service Level Agreement support and advice package from the team to town and parish councils
 - 5) Service level investment plan in skills and training across Planning Services
 - 6) Potential additional Guidance Notes and worksheets
- 6.2 None of the above is currently within the public domain as this is pending agreement to publish from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Planning and Corporate Services. It is anticipated that final documentation will be available on the Herefordshire Council website by the end of October 2021.
The list of templates, guidance notes and worksheets is also anticipated to expand and these will be added to the website when completed.

Planned use and/or adoption

- 7.1 It is intended that all guidance notes, templates and worksheets be placed on our website for use by parish councils. This will help to inform future codes including Hereford area/growth area Code, Market Town Design Codes and Parish Design Codes within/alongside Neighbourhood Plans
- 7.2 The Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-2041 containing strategic design policy is underway anticipated reaching Regulation 19 submission in April 2023
- 7.3 The Environmental Buildings Standards SPD (consultation Oct 2021) and Herefordshire Future Homes Guidance (consultation October 2021) will inform the Herefordshire countywide Design Code

Hereford Design Guide (Historic Core) is currently drafted and being reviewed in light of the NMDC (consultation early 2022)

Next steps

- 8.1 Work is still being undertaken with internal service providers and national/local interest groups to produce further guidance notes, templates and worksheets to cover all aspects of the 10 characteristic of well-designed places.
- 8.2 A hierarchy of design coding across the county has been established and the intentions to invest in upskilling the wider planning service can be seen in the submitted 'Investment Plan' within Part 2 of the submission.
- 8.3 The aim would be to further test the guidance notes and templates by working with a parish council to produce a design code.