DESIGN COUNCIL RESPONSE TO BUILDING BETTER, BUILDING BEAUTIFUL COMMISSION CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Design Council response to Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission Call for Evidence

About Design Council

1.   Design Council is an independent charity and the Government's advisor on design. Our vision is a world where the role and value of design is recognised as a fundamental creator of value, enabling happier, healthier and safer lives for all. Through the power of design, we make better places, better products, better processes which then deliver better performance.

What do we mean by Design?

2.   *"Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones"*[1] So, in simple terms, designing is about solving problems through a variety of methods and using a range of skills and experience. Design is a mindset and a skill set, and anyone who has planned processes or policies, ways of doing something differently, a place or an object, has been a designer. Because innovation is about doing new things, or doing existing things better, that makes design an indispensable element of innovation.

Summary and Key Recommendations

3.   Design Council believes design needs to be recognised as the golden thread running throughout the development and planning process, with a greater focus on public engagement - with support for communities to develop the skills they will need to play an effective role. Alongside this it is crucial that additional resources are provided to rebuild design skills and capability in local planning authorities, with a greater focus on a whole-place approach to designing and planning the homes and communities we need and delivering healthy placemaking. This should be supported by a refreshed and more accessible online hub of CABE resources.

Our key recommendations (page 6) are as follows:

- Design needs to be recognised as the golden thread that runs throughout the development and planning process
- A culture change is needed to ensure genuine public engagement at all stages of the development and planning process, with support to allow communities to play an active role
- Investment in design skills and capacity in local planning authorities - including support and training for Councillors - is crucial
- Greater focus on a whole-place approach to new and existing development is needed, bringing holistic vision to our places through agile strategic and local plans which provide a framework for local design quality
- The way we design and plan our homes and communities must support healthy placemaking
- Government should draw on the independent expert advice and guidance Design Council can provide

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Design Council's Role in Creating Communities

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[1] Simon, H.A. (1996) The sciences of the artificial, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, USA. p. 111. ISBN 0-262-69191-4

4.   For over 20 years Design Council has worked with communities, local authorities, architects, developers, housing associations, the wider public sector, infrastructure providers and others, championing design quality in the built environment right across the country. We have a track record of developing and delivering a successful design toolkit of guidance, training, advice and support (and in disseminating this to the public and private sector). This includes an extensive catalogue of online best practice reports, guides, research, and case studies; study visits, networking and peer-to-peer learning; capacity building; design review; and enabling support. We helped develop Building for Life as a design tool and provided formal training to over 500 professionals in local authorities on how to use it.

5.   Today, as a trusted, expert partner, Design Council provides a range of tailored independent design services. These include design advice, review and training, drawing on an extensive and rich legacy. We are supported in this by our network of nearly 400 Built Environment Experts drawn from a wide range of skills and professions. We provide an extensive online hub[2] of best practice and advice on creating inclusive environments, which has recently been supplemented by the development of an Inclusive Environments CPD[3] (funded by MHCLG). We work with local authorities across the country, providing training and support to them in tackling some of the major challenges they face through our Design in the Public Sector Programme[4]. We provide world leading research, evidence and insight into the value of design and design skills, and our independence and impartiality allow us to bring the right people together from different sectors and disciplines to develop new approaches to societal problems. This includes our three-year pilot programme with partners and stakeholders in the South West using design approaches to understand and develop new approaches to transform people's experiences of ageing[5]. Lastly, Design Council's Framework for Innovation and Double Diamond design methodology provides a proven outcomes-based approach that can be used for engaging communities and stakeholders in shaping the future of the places where they live. The box on page 3 describes the Framework for Innovation.

6.   As Design Council approaches its 75th anniversary our mission remains to make life better by design. We continue to focus on national challenges and local issues, incorporating knowledge and experience from our work into developing our research base, and testing and developing new approaches. We use our insight to inform policy and provide practical advice, support and training that makes a difference to people's lives and the places where they live - delivering better homes and communities by design.

7.   This submission was informed by a roundtable discussion drawing on the expert insight and experience of a number of Design Council Built Environment Experts. Design Council is grateful to the following for their contribution: Sarah Allan (Social Space), Annie Coombs (landscape architect), Paul Karakusevic (Karakusevic Carson Architects), Julie Morgan (Place Elements), and Bridget Snaith (Shape Landscape Architecture). We are also grateful to The Parks Alliance for supporting material used in developing this response. Case studies have been highlighted in blue boxes for ease of reference.

[2]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/built-environment/inclusive-environments

[3]https://inclusive.designcouncil.org.uk

[4]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/design-training-and-education/design-public-sector

[5] Transform Ageing -https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/social-innovation/transform-ageing

Framework for Innovation

The Framework for Innovation is Design Council's internationally-recognised and proven, design-led methodology that promotes multi-disciplinary collaborative working and embeds these skills with stakeholders in a way that is both long-lasting and sustainable. It has been developed and refined from twenty years' experience of delivering national design programmes. Using Design Council's Double Diamond, the Framework for Innovation allows people to identify the root cause of challenges and use iterative cycles of 'think, test, learn' activities to develop new opportunities for innovation.
The four stages of the Double Diamond are:

Discover - the first half of the first diamond: collaborative exploration of a question or challenge, involving a broad range of perspectives, increasing the likelihood of uncovering hidden problems

Define - the second half of the first diamond: a filter stage enabling analysis and refinement of the Discover stage, and definition of early ideas and opportunities. The goal at this stage is to articulate the problem and the opportunity so they can be taken forward to development.

Develop - the first half of the second diamond: further development of ideas or concepts, often involving multi-disciplinary teams and stakeholders. The cycle of 'make, test, learn' helps improve the viability of the concepts and manage risk. The goal at this stage is to identify a solution that can be delivered at scale.

Deliver - the final stage of the second diamond: focussed on ensuring the resulting project is taken through final testing, approval and is ready to launch, with any issues undergoing further testing, and evaluation and feedback indicators put in place
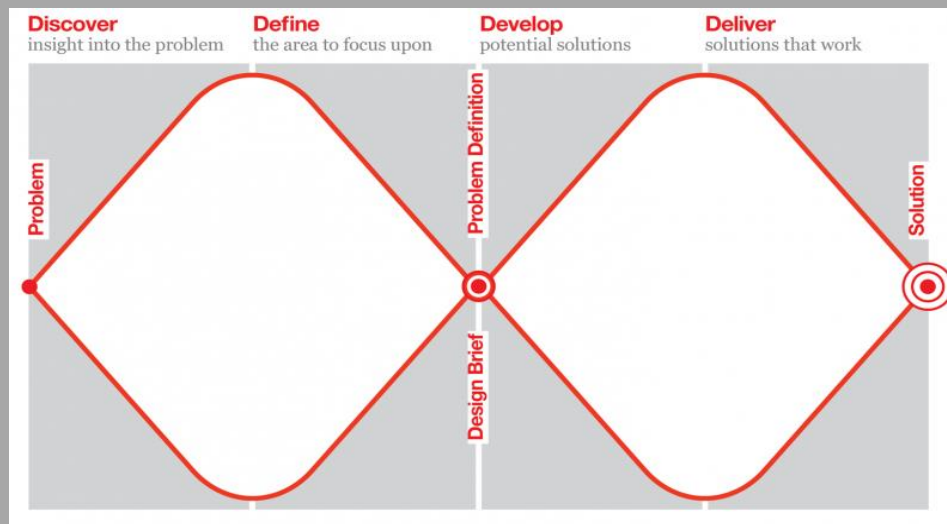
The Framework for Innovation is underpinned by four principles:

People-centred - inclusive and focusing on people's lives, needs and want

Communicate (visually) - conveying an idea or concept visually accelerates a shared understanding and consensus within diverse stakeholder groups

Collaborate and co-create - including diverse perspectives, expertise and lived experience can provide unique insights and inspire original ideas, as well as support inclusive solutions

Iterate, Iterate, iterate - testing insights and ideas throughout the design process is critical to mitigate risk, allowing for the identification of new opportunities and potential solutions.

Introduction

8.   The way we design and plan our homes and the communities we live in shapes every aspect of our lives, from the economic success and prosperity of an area; to crime levels and fear of crime; our health and wellbeing; and our connectivity and inclusion into wider society.

9.   Our homes do not sit in isolation, but within the landscape and the environment around them. They become a link to the character, culture and history of a place, to the future that they will be part of, and the legacy they will leave behind.   In designing and planning the homes we build we must therefore ensure they create a positive impact, both on their setting, and for new and existing residents. To do this the focus must be on place-making not simply housebuilding - taking a wider approach that looks at the needs of a whole area, connecting different issues that have an impact on a place, together with the needs of the people who live there. That means:

- creating inclusive environments which meet the diverse needs of everyone who uses them, irrespective of their age, ability, background or community;
- connected neighbourhoods designed around people, which encourage them to be active as part of their daily lives (i.e. children being able to cycle to school, adults walking or cycling to work, shops and services), reducing the dependency on the car, tackling poor air quality and improving health and wellbeing;
- places with a mix of type and tenure of homes that meet people's different needs, places of work, and thriving town centres with shops and facilities that are easy to access;
- designing places around public transport which ensures future growth and sustainability of services, and with the digital infrastructure that connects us to the wider world and which supports new ways of working, reducing the need for journeys;
- easy access to the health, education and other public services that people need and rely on;
- attractive parks and open and green spaces with access to nature near people's homes that provide for healthy activities, relaxation, enjoyment, and places to play, supporting improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, and which also help us adapt to and build resilience to the effects of climate change;
- places that welcome diversity and support social contact, community cohesion and social inclusion;
- future-proofing development and places so they are adaptable and responsive to our changing and future needs.

10.   However, Design Council's experience and research shows that the homes we build and places we create still do not fully live up to either our ambitions or national policy, particularly in relation to transport and sustainability, green infrastructure and healthy placemaking. For example, our report, *Healthy Placemaking*[6], which explored the attitudes and behaviours of built environment professionals, showed:

- while the vision for healthy placemaking was clear, this does not always translate into delivery;
- healthy placemaking interventions are often not implemented due to perceived costs – contrary to the economic benefits, market pressures mean healthy placemaking interventions are seen as a luxury rather than a necessity; and
- restrictions as a result of highways guidance or highways authorities' decisions which hinder the creation of healthy places - e.g. road layouts (such as roundabouts which encourage higher vehicle speeds) which are hard for pedestrians or cyclists to navigate, or connections to the existing network (such as new distributor roads with no frontages or access onto them) which continue to prioritise motor vehicles for most journeys.

11.   Similarly, recent research[7] has shown that over 2.5 million people live more than a 10-minute walk to green space, potentially denying them the health and wellbeing benefits that access brings.

Active by Design[8], is Design Council's 10 step guide to encouraging greater levels of physical activity in buildings and spaces, and increasing access to healthy and nutritious food, through good use of design.

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[6]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/healthy-placemaking-report

[7]http://www.fieldsintrust.org/revaluing

[8]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/active-design-designing-places-healthy-lives

Start with the Park[9], is our good practice guide for the creation and care of green spaces in areas of high levels of housing growth and regeneration.

Just as we must look beyond our homes when thinking about the quality of the communities we want to create, we must also look beyond the facades of our homes when thinking about how they contribute to the quality of our lives. That means thinking about the overall design of our homes, including the space inside to relate this to the way people live today and in the future.

12.   Our homes are first and foremost places of safety, shelter and privacy; places to relax, work and enjoy; places to live and have a family. That means thinking about and meeting the needs of those who live there - providing light and space to live (including enough space for our possessions), space to relax and enjoy (including inside and outside space for children to play), and space for privacy. Internal space and layouts must reflect the changing ways we use our homes today with higher levels of multi-generational family living, more people sharing for longer, and our homes increasingly acting as a place of work[10]. At the same time there has been a rise in the number of people living alone, with the impact this can have on isolation, loneliness and mental health and wellbeing. Our report, *Healthy Placemaking*, found that less emphasis was given to the impact of indoor than outdoor environments on our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

13.   We also have to think about how our homes are built in terms of safety, the sustainability of materials and construction, quality of workmanship, durability and ease of future repairs and maintenance. This is a particular concern for social housing, where our experience with tenants tells us that neglect and poor maintenance often contributes towards the conditions for decline, anti-social behaviour and social exclusion[11].

14.   With society facing the major challenges of a growing and ageing population, poor health outcomes and climate change, the homes and communities we build must be part of how we respond. We have to design and build in a way that allows people to live more healthy, active and independent lives in their own homes and communities for longer, while minimising our impact on the environment. This means providing a mix of energy-efficient homes that meet people's needs and which are adaptable to their changing circumstances[12]. It means reducing car dependency and making active travel (e.g. walking, cycling, running), together with good public transport, the easiest and simplest choice for daily journeys. It means making sure that community and green infrastructure is integral to the design and planning of local development. To do this we must connect stakeholders and agendas, use new ways of looking at problems, and use creativity to unlock innovation and find new solutions focused on people and place. That is design.

15.   There is a commitment from Government to tackle the country's housing crisis, including through increasing competition in the housebuilding industry; promoting the self-build, custom-build and community-led housing sectors; and supporting growth of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). This will help boost innovation in the sector, create diversity of products, increase personal choice and raise design quality. We must be careful that in attempting to raise design quality among the volume housebuilders we do not stifle creativity or make it harder for these sectors to grow.

16.   It is particularly important for the growing MMC sector, and the Government's ambition for it to be a larger player in the sector, that in looking to achieve the economies of scale that can create a viable market we do not compromise on design quality or choice. We look to Government, and Homes England through its work supporting MMC, to support design quality in the sector. Design Council has recently supported Homes England with a design approach to supporting its ambition on MMC and construction productivity. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution will change our economy and our society, including how we build the homes we live in. It is essential that design quality is central to our thinking about how we develop the opportunities that they provide.

[9]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/start-park

[10] https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/welfare/2019/05/alms-race-search-housing-fit-end-life

[11] https://www.citymetric.com/skylines/how-poor-maintenance-londons-social-housing-created-conditions-its-demolition-1644

[12] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/100-year-life-role-housing-planning-and-design

17.   There is also commitment from Government to design and quality in what we build, in particular through the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and embedding "better design and higher quality homes" into the strategic objectives of Homes England[13] (with whom Design Council has a close partnership and has provided design training) The establishment of this Commission and the focus that its work has given to the important issue of design quality is also welcome.

18.   There is however a fundamental tension - recognised in the establishment of the Commission - between delivering high levels of housing growth at pace to provide the homes that people need and delivering design quality which creates better places, helps tackle societal challenges and builds popular consent for development. Design quality requires a commitment to design at all stages of development - it is the golden thread that runs throughout the development process. Design quality cannot just be bolted on to improve the support for or success of a planning application. Design quality requires a genuine investment in public engagement, with the necessary resources required to deliver it. It also requires the design skills and capability - particularly among decision-makers. Design should not be seen as a burden or an added cost but as a means of creating the communities that people want to live in and contribute to.

19.   Design Council's recommendations to the Commission, which must be considered as interdependent, are as follows:

1. **Design needs to be recognised as the golden thread that runs throughout the development and planning process**

The NPPF focuses on design simply as an issue of visual quality. Instead it should also recognize the role of design at every stage of the planning process, from setting the vision and overarching plans for an area, through to individual site and development proposals, and on to delivering quality in construction and future management and maintenance. Design provides a way to integrate the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.

2. **A culture change is needed to ensure genuine public engagement at all stages of the development and planning process, with support to allow communities to play an active role**

The NPPF should give greater force to the need for genuine public and stakeholder engagement in shaping development proposals - not just consultation on fully worked up proposals where there is little opportunity to affect change. Engagement needs to take place throughout the development and planning process - continuing after schemes receive planning consent - and needs to provide confidence in the independence of the process. A range of tools and methods are needed to reach out to every section of the community and ensure that a diversity of voices are heard. The NPPF should attach greater weight to the outcomes of public engagement tools in considering planning decisions.

A funded programme of design support should be made available for communities, allowing them to access independent expert help, advice and training in shaping their local design ambitions, including through the use of design tools.

3. **Investment in design skills and capacity in local planning authorities - including support and training for Councillors - is crucial**

Any attempt to raise the quality of what we design and build (whether through policy or practical measures) will be futile if investment is not made to rebuild design skills and capacity in local planning authorities. As a minimum, each local planning authority should have its own dedicated and skilled Design Officer. Government should use the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review to provide additional resource for local authorities to fund design skills investment or to provide local authorities with the mechanisms to do this (i.e. through charging or use of s106/CIL), and to ensure they are resourced to embed design quality. Alongside this, government should fund a programme of independent expert design guidance, support and training for local authorities, including specific training and support for Councillors to embed design in decision-making.

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[13]https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homes-england-strategic-plan-201819-to-202223

4. Greater focus on a whole-place approach to new and existing development is needed, bringing holistic vision to our places through agile strategic and local plans which provide a framework for local design quality

International experience shows that local authority land ownership (or land assembly powers) provide greater ability to shape the overall quality of development of an area, and to consider issues such as how a place functions, reducing car dependence, increase resilience to climate change, and how places contribute to physical and mental health and wellbeing. Developing a strategic vision offers similar opportunities and helps provide the public with confidence in the quality of future development and the future of the place where they live. It also provides clarity for developers on local expectations. The NPPF should place greater emphasis on the need for local planning authorities to develop a strategic vision for key areas/development sites and ensure that planning decisions have sufficient regard to them. Currently, progress with developing and adopting local plans appears slow and piecemeal, with only just over half of all local plans compliant with NPPF 2012 and 23% of local authorities neither having published, submitted or adopted a local plan[14]. Effective local visions for places are about more than the process itself and instead should be agile and responsive to changing needs. This should be accompanied by funded independent expert advice for local authorities on developing and using an agile approach.

5. The way we design and plan our homes and communities must support healthy placemaking

Responding to the findings of Design Council's *Healthy Placemaking* research, a funded programme of independent expert support, advice, training and guidance should be developed - helping local authorities and developers translate the vision of healthy placemaking into reality on the ground. This should include the importance on inclusive environments and green infrastructure. Alongside this, work is needed to update highways guidance to reduce car dependency by promoting active and sustainable travel, and to develop new design guidance to encourage modal shift to walking and cycling.

6. Government should draw on the independent expert advice and guidance Design Council can provide

Design Council has a significant wealth of resource and expertise available to support communities, local authorities, developers and others to deliver design-quality. We have two world class assets, that are well respected and used in the sector and can be activated quickly. The first is our network of nearly 400 Built Environment Experts and design associates, drawn from a wide-range of skills and professions that are able to provide strategic advice and guidance. Our Design in the Public Sector programme has delivered training to 100 local authorities in the last three years, and with our Built Environment Experts we have managed over 4,000 design reviews and strategic design advice sessions, providing skills, insight and experience.

The second is the wealth of evidence, research and guidance that Design Council (and past CABE between 1999 and 2011) has produced. Unfortunately, much of our historic guidance, best practice, case studies and research are underused and not easily accessible on the National Archives website. This is despite much being still highly relevant and highly regarded by built environment professionals. Government should provide funding for Design Council to review and refresh the CABE online resource archive, transferring it to a new, easily accessible and searchable, online hub. This hub has the potential to be a 'what works centre' in that it can draw together in one place the best evidence from across the globe in a way that is easily accessible and easily used.

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[14] From analysis of Planning Inspectorate and Homes England data

Specific Responses to the Questions in the Call for Evidence

> **Q1.** Do you consider that securing 'beauty' should be a broad objective of the planning and development process - whether in the natural or built environment?

20. The challenge we face is raising the design quality of the homes we build and the places we create, so that they have a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. Beauty is a subjective term, which is difficult to define and risks overly focusing on one particular aspect of how we design and build our homes and communities, when we know there are many factors that impact on quality of life. Design Council believes that greater emphasis on design throughout the planning framework, with greater public engagement at all stages, and taking a whole-place approach to what we design and build, will better meet the Commission's aim of ensuring new development better meets the needs and expectations of communities.

21. Our homes, the places where we live, and the environment around us all have an enormous impact on our lives and help shape who we are and wider society. We all want to live somewhere that creates a positive impact on our lives, that delights us and adds to our happiness, enjoyment and overall wellbeing. The Commission's focus on design quality is therefore welcome.

22. Our report, *People and places: public attitudes to beauty*[15], found that individuals have a wide variety of associations of beauty, including nature, memories, happiness and appreciation: "people relate more to emotional experiences of beauty than visual experiences of beauty. Beauty is regarded as a positive experience strongly related to bringing about happiness and wellbeing in individuals' lives". The report also highlighted how feeling comfortable, safe and included in a place affects people's ability to appreciate beauty.

23. We should not therefore simply consider the physical appearance of what we build. There are many factors that impact on quality of life in an area, including the economy, education, health, crime and safety, and quality of the environment. We must also consider how our homes and neighbourhoods respond to - and add to - their context, their purpose, how they function, and how they can create a positive impact on our lives. Crucially, this means creating inclusive environments - places that work better for everyone - irrespective of their age, ability or background, and putting people at the heart of the planning and development process. That is design.

> **What we mean by place design**
> Design is not just about the visual quality and layout of new developments, but also the functionality and liveability of that development (including the physical, social and green infrastructure). Design puts the needs of people at the centre and balances the social, economic and environmental objectives. By connecting people with different agendas, respecting, listening to and involving those who traditionally have not had strong voices in the planning system, design has the potential to unlock solutions to complex problems. By connecting people with their place, design provides a different way of thinking about housing and new development, finding new ways of responding to challenges that make a difference to people, facilitating successful developments. Design is the golden thread that runs throughout the planning and development process.

24. Design quality – and the importance of functionality and attractiveness – Is already well recognised in policy terms. The NPPF already makes clear the need for development to:

- "function well and add to the overall quality of the area…over the lifetime of the development";
- be "visually attractive as result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping";
- be "sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting";
- "establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of street spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit";

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[15]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/people-and-places-public-attitudes-beauty

• "optimise the potential … to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other space) and support local facilities and transport networks";
• "create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity… and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience".

25. Recognising the scale of the challenge to deliver the level of housing needed, and the importance of genuine public engagement to securing successful plans and development, Design Council's response to the draft revised NPPF in 2018[16] called for planning policy to be bolstered with a new chapter on public engagement. This would give greater prominence to public engagement in the NPPF, driving a culture change away from the often-combative approach of only consulting once proposals are fully developed, to early engagement on, and co-design of, proposals for sites, developments and local plans, through design-led approaches. Such an approach will help planners and developers understand and respond early on to people's concerns, such as around the provision of physical, social and green infrastructure, or the proposed style, appearance and materials.

26. Design Council's submission on the draft NPPF highlighted the need for:

• recognition of design's contribution (the golden thread) at every stage of the planning framework, especially in integrating the economic, social and environmental objectives, and achieving sustainable development; and the effectiveness of independent design review - not just seeing design as an issue of visual quality, or an obstacle to be overcome.
• the development of a set of universal design principles to guide all new development, while still encouraging local distinctiveness. Design Council has worked with NHS England, Highways England and Network Rail to develop design principles to guide all new health, road and rail development.
• recognition of the proven benefits of design review in improving the quality of new developments.

It was with regret that we noted these recommendations were not taken up at that opportunity, but they remain central to the case for high-quality housing and places in general.

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[16]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/publication/design-councils-response-nppf

> Q2. Can you provide evidence of the best ways of creating homes and communities that have achieved a) sustainable and walkable densities b) high levels of public support c) high levels of well-being and d) environmental sustainability?

27. The challenge we face is a planning system and development industry geared towards individual developments/sites, with insufficient consideration of wider (and cumulative) impact of development on a place. Design Council believes there are many factors that contribute to creating homes and communities with sustainable and walkable densities, high levels of public support, high levels of wellbeing, and environmental sustainability. Key to this is a design approach to placemaking.

"In the built environment, design is the key decision-making process. At the strategic level, it creates the vision for places. At a more detailed level, it describes how we want them to work, look and feel. Good design is not inevitable. It needs to be championed, invested in and worked at."[17]

28. Design creates the right conditions to make places work. By focusing on quality, with the needs of people at the heart of the process, design makes a difference to our homes, the places where we live, and the quality of our lives. Design is the golden thread that runs throughout the development and planning process.

29. Fundamental to this is an understanding of a place, and having a clear vision for the future. This provides the context - its history; the characteristics of the area and the people who live there; how a place sits and functions in its wider landscape and geography; future opportunities and ambition - and the plans and policies that will shape and guide all future development. Our publication, *Planning for places - delivering good design through core strategies*[18], provides advice for local authorities on how to 'tell the story' of their area and set the future agenda. Key factors the report identifies are:

• local authority leadership for prioritising high-quality places;
• sending a positive message about change;
• explaining the benefits for existing and new communities;
• setting the goal and direction for the area;
• giving a clear message to developers about expectations for high-quality design;
• identifying what needs to be done.

30. Councillors have an important strategic role in setting the context, vision and ambition for their area, beyond decision-making on individual planning applications. They can also play a role as change-makers in their communities, representing and supporting the ambition of local areas. It is essential that Councillors have enough knowledge and understanding of the planning system and that there is effective advice, training and support available to support them in understanding how a design approach provides a positive opportunity for shaping the future of the places they represent and delivering better outcomes for their constituents.

31. There are a number of qualities that make up successful places - from the smallest streets and villages to the biggest towns and cities. Our publication, *The Councillor's Guide to Urban Design*[19], identifies these as:

1. **Character - sense of place and history** A place that responds to and reinforces locally distinctive patterns of development
2. **Continuity and enclosure - clarity of form** A place where public and private space are clearly distinguished

3. **Quality of the public realm - sense of wellbeing and amenity** A place with public spaces and routes that are lively and pleasant to use

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[17] Good Design: the fundamentals https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/good-design-fundamentals

[18] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/planning-places

[19] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/councillors-guide-urban-design

4. **Ease of movement - connectivity and permeability** A place that is easy to get to and move through
5. **Legibility - ease of understanding** A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand
6. **Adaptability - ease of change** A place that can change easily
7. **Diversity - ease of choice** A place with variety and mixed-use

32.   Alongside this must be considered issues such as urban structure (the relationship between new development, nature, land form and existing buildings), urban grain (pattern and scale of streets, blocks and plots), density and mix, height and massing, building type, facade and interface, details and materials, and streetscape and landscape. We live in a country incredibly rich in the diversity of architecture, culture and urban design, and where places do not stand still. There can be no one-size fits all approach, such issues can only properly be considered on a site by site, area by area basis. A design approach connects issues such as density, active and sustainable travel, health and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability to a place and supports the development of proposals which consider these design elements in their local context.

33.   The combined challenges of climate change, poor health and wellbeing, and a growing and ageing population mean we can no longer just consider the design of our homes and communities simply in terms of appearance. The homes and communities we live in must all play a part in helping us to lead healthier, more active and independent lives, reducing our impact on the planet. We must also take an inclusive approach to planning, design and management of the places we build to ensure we create inclusive environments that work better for everybody, reflecting the diversity of those who want to use them.

Inclusive environments[20] are:

- welcoming to everyone
- responsive to people's needs
- intuitive to use
- flexible
- offer choice when a single design solution cannot meet all user needs
- convenient so they can be used without undue effort or special separation and so that they maximise independence.

34.   There is already a significant body of evidence that demonstrates how green spaces can offer lasting economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. It links high-quality green spaces with increased house prices and demonstrates their role in tackling issues such as anti-social behaviour. Green infrastructure also has a key role to play in adapting to and mitigating against the impact of climate change and increasing sustainability. By planning networks of green spaces, and thinking about their design and care, we will not repeat the mistakes of the past. Natural England is currently preparing standards for green infrastructure in response to the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The standards will seek to ensure green infrastructure (including green space in the streets, public spaces, parks and natural areas) connect people with nature with an aim of making everyone happier and healthier. The standards aim to set out a number of principles including the requirement for local authorities, developers, communities and others to co-plan and deliver good multi-functional green infrastructure. This means essential infrastructure that is integrated with environment, social, health and environment policy as part of place-making.

Connswater Community Greenway[1] is a £40 million investment in new green infrastructure in East Belfast, creating a 9 km linear park connecting open and green spaces and a vibrant, attractive safe and accessible parkland for leisure, recreation and community events and activities. The project also delivers elements of the East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme, helping to reduce flooding.

35.   *Manual for Streets*[21], published in 2007, was a significant change in the approach to how we design our streets and the positive impact they can have on the places around them, helping to enhance areas and create better places. It was however only technical guidance and did not change policy or

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[20] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/built-environment/inclusive-environments
[21] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/manual-for-streets

regulation. It was also limited in its scope, only applying to lightly trafficked residential streets. It did not apply to other roads such as high streets, rural roads or the trunk road network (which has its own *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges*). Design Council's experience is that Manual for Streets has only had limited success and has been hindered by having separate highways guidance (with different status and coverage). The prescriptive examples set out in Design Manual for Roads and Bridges often becomes the default for highways engineers, which then restricts the opportunities for the wider highways and streets network that connects to them. This can prevent development proposals including street designs which support more active, healthier and sustainable modes of transport - as highlighted in our *Healthy Placemaking research*. Design Council believes that the separate reviews of *Manual for Streets* and *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges* should be brought together to ensure a consistent approach to promoting active and sustainable modes of travel as the norm on all our roads. To complement this there should also be national design guidance on walking and cycling, promoting modal shift.

36.   People must be at the heart of the planning and development process and this is crucial for building public support for development. In recent years the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning and the growth of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and co-housing projects has demonstrated people's willingness to make time to get involved in the decisions that affect their communities, taking a direct stake in - and responsibility for - shaping the places where they live.

37.   Design Council has significant experience of supporting communities developing their own local vision. Our publications, *Design in neighbourhood planning*[22] *and Design for Everyone*[23], provide advice and support for community groups. The £6 million funding recently announced to support training and advice specifically for community-led affordable housing schemes is to be welcomed. However, if we are to encourage and support more communities to play such a leadership role in shaping the future of the places where they live, it is crucial that they are provided with access to the skills and capacity that will help them play an active and positive role in the life cycle of development.

East Leake is a village of nearly 7,000 people near Nottingham, Leicester, Loughborough and Derby, and is well served by shops and services with good links to the M1 making it attractive to commuters. Villagers were concerned about the planned scale of development and its impact on village services and wanted to have their say. Design Council held workshops for residents which helped them understand the village's geography (and what this meant) and who lived there – i.e. the village was an important hub to smaller nearby villages which may create demand from older people moving into the village to be closer to key services. Design Council also helped residents carry out a townscape analysis looking at the architecture and use of buildings, local landmarks and views, highlighting the need for an overarching plan and long-term vision. A second workshop focused on housing design, looking at recent development, what was good and what could be improved, helping to create shared vision for a spatial plan for the village.

Balcombe is a small village of around 1,800 people in the High Weald, an area of outstanding natural beauty in the south east of England. The Parish Council wanted to develop a neighbourhood plan and design policy that would provide more affordable housing for local people, especially older people. Design Council supported the Parish Council on how to engage different groups within the community, and organised a workshop to help the neighbourhood plan working group understand the views of different stakeholder groups - residents, businesses, landowners. Turnout for public consultations increased with people recognising that new development did not have to be a bad thing for the village, especially if they had their say. The design policy meant residents could find a way to keep the characteristics of the village centre, take control of development, and address the need for new housing at the same time. Public support was therefore at the heart of the approach and the final plans

Q3.   Can you provide evidence of ways of creating homes and communities in other countries, which have been successful in achieving a) to d) in question 2?

[22]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/design-neighbourhood-planning

[23]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/built-environment/community-led-design-development

38. **Some international examples of new homes and communities are presented in the annex. Key themes we observe from them are:**

- the **scale** of development - and the opportunities this presents for overall placemaking;
- strong local government **leadership** role - often helped by public ownership of land/assets;
- **diversity** of development - as a result of a mix of architects, developers, type and tenure, including custom build and self-build
- strong emphasis on **landscape**, environment and sustainability - green infrastructure and open spaces an integral part of the overall design and plans
- Delivering significant **non-residential uses** within the scheme, particularly employment and wide range of retail and services, integrated with a variety of housing provision. This helps animate streets and public spaces, makes more efficient use of car parking and reduces the need for residents to exit the development for their daily needs (work, shopping, accessing services).

> Q4. Do you consider that the collaborative community and stakeholder engagement processes (such as planning for real, enquiry by design, charrettes) are effective in securing more publicly accepted development? If so, at what stage of the planning and development process are they most effectively used?

39. **The challenge is to ensure that public engagement is reflective of all sections of the community, and that the public and stakeholders feel their participation has been worthwhile - helping to build understanding of, and future engagement with, the development and planning process. Design Council believes such engagement tools and processes can be effective, but it is essential that communities are properly supported, to enable them to get the maximum from the opportunity. Otherwise we risk public engagement done badly, producing proposals which do not command local support, leading to hostility, disillusionment and resentment towards local development and the planning process.**

40. Design Council's experience is that new development will secure public support if people are actively engaged in the design process with the opportunity to shape proposals. This means greater public engagement at every stage of developing local plans, sites and development proposals, starting as early as possible, rather than just being consulted on a fully worked up scheme.

41. Local authorities and developers must have a grounded understanding of local areas and what matters to people, which better allows them (and the emerging plans and development proposals) to respond to local needs and concerns. Public engagement improves the quality of development and builds support for it, helping to ensure new development responds to local circumstances, and has ambition, legacy and a clear local context.

42. Such collaborative public engagement gives communities greater ownership, allowing them to set the parameters for development - the local vision, principles, site boundaries and community aspirations. It also helps communities to better understand the planning process and helps them see different viewpoints and form consensus. Early engagement with communities on issues such as style, density and materials can also provide clarity to developers in working up their proposals. However, just as important is an understanding by communities of what issues they will not be able to affect through the process. Having an independent, skilled, facilitator running the engagement process is therefore crucial to maintaining resident confidence in the process. They can also help residents understand and navigate their way through the complexities of the planning system.

43. Stakeholder engagement also ensures that the voices of a broad range of groups that will be affected by proposals - e.g. utility and infrastructure providers, schools, NHS - all have the opportunity to have their voice heard and concerns understood and addressed.

44. Some engagement tools and process require a significant time commitment by residents, which often mean it is hard for those who work, or parents or people with caring responsibilities, to take part. Any engagement therefore needs to ensure that it reaches a diversity of voices, especially the young and hard to reach groups (using a variety of different and new methods and approaches).

Charrette - Jersey
Design Council used the charrette approach in Jersey, where the focus of development proposals was on plans for the Esplanade Quarter and its relationship to the waterfront and historic capital, St Helier. A key conclusion from the charrette was the need to focus on a wider area, including the waterfront and harbour. In order to secure a wider vision, it was recommended that the existing masterplan should be de-adopted and that a community engagement strategy was urgently required. A process was agreed to develop a strategy for the wider area of South West St Helier. The vision is to seize the opportunity to create a new world class district. The government of Jersey agreed to de-adopt the outdated masterplan and initiate a new process, with a new vision and objectives shaped through the engagement process. The charrette process helped reset community engagement, allowed people to explore and better understand different viewpoints and build consensus around the challenges and opportunities faced.

45.   While there are strong benefits to such engagement tools and processes - in terms of public engagement and overall quality of development - the NPPF only requires local planning authorities to "look more favourably" on planning applications that can "demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community", with local planning authorities only required to "have regard" to the outcome of design tools and processes. We have already highlighted the need to give greater prominence to public engagement and design as a tool in the NPPF. In line with this, we believe the NPPF should also support greater use of such engagement tools and processes, attaching greater weight to their outcomes.

46.   *Design for Everyone[24]* is Design Council's briefing paper that helps tenants and residents play a central role in the decision making of new homes and neighbourhoods. There are a range of tools and methods for public engagement and it is important that communities are able to choose which best meets their own local needs.

Features of design-led engagement:
• adopting a user perspective - including imagining the resident experience in 10- or 20-years' time;
• visualising the future of a place or development;
• drawing upon the assets and expertise of local communities;
• active-hands on involvement of residents and stakeholders in developing a plan or design, not just offering views;
• bringing together inter-disciplinary and inter-organisational perspectives - residents, planners, developers, architects, engineers, infrastructure providers, local authorities;
• independent facilitation - bringing an independent perspective and challenge, keeping the process to time and task, bringing in lessons and insight from elsewhere.

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47.   From Design Council's work, including supporting neighbourhood planning groups and tenant groups, we know how important it is that communities are properly supported to enable them to play an active role in shaping local design ambitions. This will be particularly important with the expansion of the role of council housebuilding if we are to end the stigma of social housing and ensure the resident voice is heard in building high-quality, safe and decent homes which help improve people's health, wellbeing and overall quality of life, with greater prosperity and inclusion. As part of Design Council's response to the Social Housing Green Paper in 2018[25] we proposed a trailblazer initiative in two or three areas of the country to test and develop a comprehensive approach to resident leadership and engagement in the design, construction and management of social housing.

48.   Design Council's Community Led Design Programme[26], funded by the then Department of Communities and Local Government, explored how community organisations, residents' groups and the wider community can influence or take a lead in the way that housing is designed and delivered. The programme provided enabling support, practical learning and study visits for those involved – tenants, communities, landlords, professionals and local authorities – as well as case studies and guidance notes

49.   This research showed that where residents and landlords work together, new housing is more likely to meet the needs of the community and create places that residents feel proud of. Best practice also shows that it is important to adopt an active and comprehensive approach to community engagement, including action to hear marginalised voices as this leads to a greater range of ideas, richer information and more community buy-in during the design process and beyond. By engaging with people who represent a diversity of age, ability, gender and community we can ensure we design inclusive environments, that work better for everybody.

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[24] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/cld_briefing%20papers_DESIGN_FINAL.pdf
[25] https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/publication/design-council-s-response-social-housing-green-paper
[26]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/built-environment/community-led-design-development

50.   It is important that there is public engagement at every stage of the planning and development process. That means ensuring the resident voice is heard even once planning applications are approved to ensure that the design standards envisaged are adhered to. Too often, once a development proposal receives planning permission developers replace the design team responsible for developing the proposal (and engaging with the community) for a new design and build team who will have had no prior involvement with the scheme and whose focus will solely be on timely delivery and minimising costs. Changes are made to the design, layout or construction of the scheme with little or no engagement with the community, leaving people feeling disillusioned, betrayed and angry at the community engagement and planning process. Local planning authorities are often impotent to act as they do not have the skills or capacity to take enforcement action, or the financial risk of any appeals by the developer makes enforcement prohibitive. This risks disengagement with future planning issues or making people less likely to take part genuine attempts at community engagement.

51.   Design is the golden thread that runs throughout the development and planning process. Greater use of post-planning design reviews would provide an independent process for continued public engagement with development proposals through to completion, providing an opportunity for the public to be engaged and be assured about the quality of the outcome.

> Q5.   Can you provide evidence on the benefits and problems associated with introducing, and enforcing, design methods such as master-plans, design briefs and design codes, in the creation of homes and communities?

52.   The challenge is understanding local need and identifying the most appropriate design tool or method for the circumstances. Design Council believes local authorities must have the flexibility to adopt the right design tools or methods that best meets their own local circumstances. Independent design advice provides a source of expertise to local authorities to help them understand and decide which design tool or method best meets local needs and supports them in getting the best out of the process.

53.   There are a range of design methods and tools available, which help to provide greater certainty for local authorities, residents and developers and in driving up quality standards. They are particularly applicable to larger schemes, such as urban extensions, major redevelopment sites or new settlements. However, as highlighted in our recommendations, Design Council believes there are benefits from an agile strategic vision approach and believes the NPPF should place greater emphasis on the need for local planning authorities to develop such visions for key areas/sites.

54.   Such design tools work by introducing an increased level of design control to provide greater assurance of the quality of the final product. While there are certain principles of good design that can be covered in such documents, they cannot ever be comprehensive. They can only ever be a starting point. Places evolve and are shaped by the people who live there. Tools such as design codes can prove to be too rigid without the flexibility required to adapt to local circumstances or changing site briefs. They also risk stifling creativity and innovation.

55.   Masterplans, design briefs and design codes do not guarantee quality. There are bad masterplans, design briefs and design codes and they can only ever be as good as those who write them, and those who implement them. This is a particular concern given the worrying decline in design skills and capacity in local authorities.

56.   The 2017 report, *Design Skills in English Local Authorities*[27], by Urban Design Group and Place Alliance found that:

• almost half of local planning authorities have no dedicated in-house design capacity;
• of those that do, most only have a single officer covering design, but as part of a larger role;
• there is an increasingly heavy reliance on conservation staff to double-up as urban design officers, and significant reliance on external consultants;
• use of design guidance varies tremendously, with national Planning Practice Guidance poorly used;
• resources for the production of new proactive local design guidance for sites or areas has now largely disappeared.

57.   It is crucial therefore that independent expert advice is made available for local authorities on developing and creating a strategic vision, alongside additional resource to rebuild design skills and capacity in local government, supported by a programme of independent expert design guidance, support and training, including specific training and support for Councillors to embed design in decision-making.

Independent design advice - Oxford
Oxford is a world-famous city whose historic character attracts people to live, work, study, visit and invest, but the city's character - along with tight administrative boundaries, green belt and flood risk constraints - add to the challenge for new development, especially in the city centre.

Design Council provides a dedicated independent Design Advisory Panel to the city which has independently tested and challenged more than 150 schemes over recent years. The Design Advisory Panel has provided the council with support on pre-planning and planning application schemes, the council's vision for the city, masterplans and policy guidance, helping to protect the city's heritage assets and deliver high-quality development.

Q6.	How ideally, could the planning and development process in England foster higher standards in design, over the longer term?
Q7.	What first steps do you think the Government should take towards fostering higher standards in design through the planning and development process?

58. As set out in our recommendations and elsewhere in this response, Design Council believes design needs to be recognised as the golden thread running throughout the development and planning process, with a greater focus on public engagement - with support for communities to develop the skills they will need to play an effective role. Alongside this it is crucial that additional resources are provided to rebuild design skills and capability in local planning authorities, with a greater focus on a whole-place approach to designing and planning the homes and communities we need and delivering healthy placemaking. This should be supported by a refreshed and more accessible online hub of CABE resources.

59. Amending the NPPF and providing additional resource for local planning authorities will take time to implement or is subject to the outcome of the Spending Review. However, it is important that the government does not lose time in taking action to deliver design quality. This could include:

- early steps to improving access to an online hub of CABE resource and agreeing a review and refresh programme;
- looking at the role of Homes England and the role it can play in further raising design quality and building skills, through the schemes it is involved in, it's funding power, and the support it provides;
- looking at how other Government programme and policy levers - e.g. Affordable Housing Programme, One Public Estate, infrastructure programmes, response to Social Housing Green Paper, public sector procurement power etc.) - can increase design quality;
- looking at how any existing community capacity and skills programmes (e.g. Community led affordable housing, Neighbourhood Planning, etc.) can support building design skills capacity in communities;
- bringing together work to review *Manual for Streets* and *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges* and producing design guidance to promote modal shift to walking and cycling;
- prioritising any available funding/departmental underspends to provide design support, advice, and guidance for local authorities as a first-step in addressing the design skills and capability crisis - this could include, for example, training for Councillors, advice on creating strategic visions, support with public engagement or use of design tools.

Conclusion

60. Design Council welcomes this opportunity to discuss and debate the interlinked issues of design quality, public acceptability of development, the attractiveness of our places, and how we deliver the housing that the country needs. A range of solutions must be seriously considered, and the resources that are required to make them happen need to follow. We can create the attractive, desirable and welcoming communities that existing residents expect in their neighbourhoods if we approach these challenges as design issues from the outset and engage local people in the processes that go into building successful places. The tools are within our grasp and we look forward to the conclusions of the Commission.

ANNEX

Q3. International examples

Bottière Chênaie, Nantes, France[28]
Integration of SUDs with a very strong landscape led scheme which retains the market garden history of the site, mixed use and mixed income, including shops, businesses, older people's care, school, library and park.

Vallastaden, Linköping, Sweden[29]
Creativity and diversity at heart of development. Municipality commissioned range of architects to respond to masterplan. Future proofed infrastructure with service ducts under roads, allowing narrower roads and better densities.

Hammarby Sjöstad, Stockholm, Sweden[30]
A very strong public sector leadership behind the development (driven by public land ownership). A strong design ethos, with mixed-use and very landscape led.

Almere, Netherlands[31]
350 acres of custom and self-build delivering individually designed homes at mid-range prices. Strong local authority leadership, public ownership.

IJburg, Amsterdam, Netherlands[32]
Development on artificial islands, similar to Almere, but not so dominated by self-build. Includes experimental floating homes responding to potential flood risk. Strong masterplan and integration with tram system.

HafenCity, Hamburg, Germany[33]
Strong mixed use with major commercial uses, including major employment sites integrated into a functioning neighbourhood on a docklands site. Strong public sector leadership. Masterplan has evolved since 2000, now delivering more homes than originally intended and achieving high levels of sustainability.

Seestadt, Vienna, Austria[34]
Children and older people friendly design, strong masterplan. Significant public sector development of over 60% of homes. High levels of commercial/office development.

Reimagining the Civic Commons, USA[35]
A 3-year project in five US cities to revitalise and connect civic assets to support civic engagement, socio-economic mixing, environmental sustainability and value creation. Central to its approach is the belief that shared public places are a portfolio of assets that have the power to influence positive social outcomes.

Emscher Landschaftspark, Ruhr, Germany[36]
10-**year** regeneration programme to address the decline in this part of north west Germany's industrial heartlands. Area stretches across 20 local authorities and several major urban centres. Under an umbrella of a regional park, the programme developed proposals for the creative re-use of key industrial buildings, regenerating the river system, provision of new types of employment and housing.

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[28]http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2012/09/bottiere-chenaie-eco-district-by-atelier-des-paysages-bruel-delmar/

[29]http://www.nordregio.org/sustainable_cities/vallastaden/

[30]https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118150127/http://www.cabe.org.uk/case-studies/hammarby-sjostad

[31]https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2015/dec/15/almere-dutch-city-alternative-housing-custom-build

[32] https://www.urbangreenbluegrids.com/projects/ijburg-amsterdam-the-netherlands/

[33]https://www.hafencity.com/en/overview/the-hafencity-project.html

[34]https://www.aspern-seestadt.at/en

[35]https://medium.com/reimagining-the-civic-commons/setting-a-national-agenda-for-the-civic-commons-b290bb97043a

[36]https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/biggerpicture.pdf