

West of England Placemaking Charter

Final Report

January 2021

Design West for the West of England Combined Authority

Note on publication, July 2022

This report was produced by Design West in January 2021 on completion of a commission to support stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the Placemaking Charter for the West of England. The content of this report reflects the national and regional planning policy context at the time of writing. However, the report provides a useful record of work undertaken to develop the Placemaking Charter and should be treated as a standalone document.

It is being published in July 2022 as a background document on publication of the Placemaking Charter.

For an up-to-date position on strategic planning in the West of England please visit <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-housing/>



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1. Introduction/Executive Summary

The West of England Combined Authority (the CA) and the four West of England Unitary Authorities have worked together through 2020 to develop a Placemaking Charter in dialogue with stakeholders. The Charter will set out a shared ambition for the quality of development in the West of England and communicate the authorities' priorities and expectations to support clean, inclusive growth, responding to the climate emergency.

Following two stages of engagement, this Final Report is provided to support the authorities in developing the implementation of the Placemaking Charter. It brings together a summary of current national design guidance, the WoE strategic context, the use of design charters currently and the learning from these – with the outcomes and learning from the engagement process. This has itself been a process of research bringing in considered contributions from over 250 placemaking stakeholders through ten interactive workshops and two online questionnaires. This report sets out the thematic structure for the Charter proposing a tiered set of themes, principles and guidance. It identifies recommendations for the role of the Charter and for its practical development and application.

Design West have led this research and engagement programme working with the CA and the authorities to capture key challenges and priorities to feed into the Charter. Design West provide design review, policy support, consultation and training for the West of England working collaboratively with the development sector and decision-makers to shape better places. Design West's Design Review service runs in the four WoE authorities bringing together the best expertise from across the built and natural environment sectors.

The research and engagement programme began in January 2020 and was adapted to continue during the Covid 19 crisis in March 2020 just as face to face workshops were due to begin. The Phase One Engagement invited participation from officers and members of WECA and the UAs through responses to a questionnaire, and further discussion at online workshops. This process led to a Draft Charter Framework. Phase Two Engagement offered this Framework for contributions to wider stakeholders in series of workshops from October to December 2020. Stakeholders included those from the built and natural environment sector, public and private sector developers, culture and health experts, local interest groups, communities and young people.

The aim is that the outcomes from the engagement on the Placemaking Charter will also feed in to the West of England Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) and Local Plans, ensuring alignment and clarity in the articulation of the region's ambition for quality places, and enabling the vision and principles from the Charter to support the development of the region's planning policy framework. The CA and the Unitary Authorities (UAs) will also use the evidence and learning from wider plan making activity to refine and update the Charter to ensure alignment with regional priorities and any subsequent national policy changes.



2. National Design Policy

The Planning White Paper and current policy drivers

The proposals set out in **Planning for the Future** the planning white paper in August 2020 envisage a radically changed planning system in England, with the role of local plans changing significantly. The white paper has a continued focus on design quality and beauty and sets out the expectation for local authorities to develop local design guides and codes and appoint chief Placemaking Officers. Proposals for reform reduce the scrutiny of development at application stage, frontloading the planning system in favour of the stage of plan adoption. A robust approach to tools such as masterplans, design codes and design guides will be essential to gain the best outcomes for areas designated for 'growth' and 'renewal'. The impact of this on development management and control is something the development of the Charter will need to respond to as more details emerge. The Charter could provide a regional framework to support bringing forward these new documents, supporting training and skills development to enable planning teams embed good practice.

The Housing Design Audit for England, Place Alliance (2020) is a recent update to the CABE Housing Audit in 2004. It found that basic levels of good practice not being achieved across the country. The report suggested that one in five housing developments should have been refused planning permissions on design grounds. The South West in particular is not faring well. Issues identified included: sense of place, street design, walkability (car dependence) and not generally deploying the benefits of higher density. The researchers found poor schemes were ten times more likely to be in less affluent areas. Schemes were less good in rural contexts and better design was found in higher density (averaging 56 dwellings per hectare (dph) – UK average 31 dph). Also, urban schemes with pre-existing context were better designed than those in greenfield sites. In looking at governance impacts they found design outcomes were most improved by place specific design codes and by design review. The active use of the national standards Building for Life and Manual for Streets also had an impact. Schemes were much more likely to be good if they had been subject to greater design scrutiny.

The **National Design Guide** and the regional guidance reviewed below integrate considerations about supporting health and well-being in design approaches. **Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review Ten Years On (2020)** highlighted the shocking decline of longevity occurring in parts of the UK. In its review of place related actions, it noted the continuing impact of air quality on health especially on deprived communities, the role of unhealthy high streets and poor access to affordable mobility and housing. It also identified how the Government had not met its targets since 2016 for increasing walking to school and doubling cycling rates. All the while prioritising road travel to new development as documented in Garden Villages and Garden Towns – Vision and Reality, Transport for New Homes, (2020).

Related to this is the wellbeing of children and their health and wellbeing in particular that has also been the subject of recent policy research. **Child Friendly Planning in the UK (2019)** a report published by the RTPI, reviewed how children's rights could be better accounted for planning policy in the UK. It recommends that children should be considered as a distinct group, that planning be focused towards child friendly (and social) outcomes and that planning, early years and childcare, education housing and transport should be linked - with professional in different spheres having the opportunity to learn from one another. Other research has demonstrated how places that are good for children also benefit adults. Recent transport policy advice in Manchester recommends that accessibility to 12 year olds should be a test of proposals; Made to Move, 15 steps to transform Greater Manchester by changing the way we get around (2017).

‘Not only must we create a joined-up network that spans the city region, it must be something a 12-year-old would choose to use. That ‘12-year old’ represents a pensioner, a mother, someone with mobility issues, all the people we want to travel by bike instead of car but currently don’t. A 12-year-old will be our yardstick’

Health, play and active travel for all were a strong feature of all the engagement conducted. Advice from the Department for Transport published in 2020 add further weight to these considerations:

- [LTN1/20](#) that supports segregated cycle ways for busier streets, and
- [Gear Change](#) that gives walking and cycle priority for all ages.

Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergencies in Design Guidance

‘Urban planning and urban design have a critical role to play in the global response to climate change. Actions that simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate risks should be prioritized at all urban scales—metropolitan region, city, district/neighbourhood, block, and building. This needs to be done in ways that are responsive to and appropriate for local conditions.’ Raven, J., [The Assessment Report for Climate Change in Cities \(ARC3-2\) Urban Planning and Design](#), (2016).

Adapting to climate change can bring quality of life benefits to communities. Internationally cities and city regions have been leading on articulating the value of and enabling change. In their re-election campaign (Jan/Feb 2019) the Paris Mayor, Ana Maria Hidalgo Aleu, focused on the ‘15-minute city’. This principle advocates a return to thinking of cities in neighbourhoods with ‘*grocery shops, parks, cafes, sports facilities, health centres, schools and even workplaces just a walk or bike ride away*’. This aims to reduce pollution and stress by making urban areas more sociable and reducing the need to commute. This approach has also been followed in [Melbourne](#) where a 20 minute neighbourhood plan is being rolled out and in examples like Norhavn, Copenhagen and a proposed car free neighbourhood (Merwede in Utrecht).

“The construction, operation and maintenance of the built environment account for 45% of total carbon emissions in the UK. Around 80% of those emissions are from buildings in use. Given this context, if we are to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050 as legislated by the Climate Change Act, a paradigm shift in building standards is necessary in order to design and deliver buildings that are far more energy-efficient. To meet this challenge, all new buildings must operate at Net Zero by 2030 - meaning that by 2025 all new buildings must be designed to Net Zero levels of energy efficiency.”
PN14 Making Net Zero Happen: How can Authorities target the highest standards in energy performance for new council- led homes, Public Practice 2020.

A number of initiatives are leading to collectives of designers and Universities open sourcing advice on responding to the Climate Emergency. ‘Architects and Contractors Declare’ and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) highlight the next decade as critical in achieving a step change. The [LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide](#) – is technical guidance developed collaboratively by a professional network supported by the Greater London Authority (GLA). ‘LETI is a network of over 1,000 built environment professionals who are working together to put London on the path to a zero carbon future. The voluntary group is made up of dedicated and passionate developers, engineers, housing association professionals, architects, planners, academics, sustainability professionals, contractors, and facilities managers, with support and input provided by London Energy Transformation Initiative the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London boroughs.’

The Environment Bill and Building with Nature – The Environment Bill England will require new development to demonstrate a 10% increase in biodiversity on or near sites. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will be a significant driver for change, requiring that “new houses [built]... protect and enhance nature, helping to deliver thriving natural spaces for local communities”. The need to support the transition to how new development should be designed to integrate nature has also been strongly emphasised in the phase one engagement workshops on the Placemaking Charter.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a useful global reference point and help to recognise the linkages between social, environmental and economic issues which the development of places has a role in addressing to deliver sustainable development, particularly in light of climate change and the region’s aspirations to achieve clean, inclusive growth.

THE NPPF and National Design Guide

Design and placemaking has received increased attention in national policy in recent years. The current edition of the **National Planning Policy Framework (2019)** gives considerable weight to design. In so doing it aims to raise the quality of places and homes, giving more direct say to communities over the quality of development. It empowers Local Authorities and communities to set and enforce higher design expectations to capture the economic, environmental health and social benefits that well designed places can deliver (see Chapter 12). Achieving well-designed places is focused on design

- “Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals” Para 128
- LPA’s to use tools – “community workshops, design advice, design review and Building for Life” (Para 129)
- “Permission should be refused for development of poor design....that fails to improve...” Para 130
- “...great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs...” Para 131

The final report from the Governments **Building Better, Building Beautifully Commission; Living with Beauty – Promoting Health, well-being and sustainable growth** (2020) made a series of recommendations to government about how to deliver better places. It highlighted how early engagement with communities and co design processes should become more the norm along with the potential role of Local Design Codes to require a ‘duty of visual enhancement’. The recommendations are:

- Planning: create a predictable level playing field
- Communities: bring the democracy forward
- Stewardship: incentivise responsibility to the future
- Regeneration: end the scandal of ‘left-behind’ places
- Neighbourhoods: create places not just houses
- Nature: re-green our towns and cities
- Education and skills: promote a wider understanding of placemaking
- Management: value planning, count happiness, procure properly

The report also emphasised the importance of strategic role of plan making ‘A more strategic approach to the allocation of sites and a more predictable design policy and standards are therefore necessary’.

The National Design Guide (2019) - is the first major revision of National Design Guidance since By Design and The Urban Design Compendium (2000) were published. It follows on from the more

recent *The Design Companion and Councillor's Companion* (2017/18). Rather than being focused on physical elements of form it describes a range of qualities of place to include experiences, systems of movement and resource use. The guide is structured around three key principles; Character, Connectivity and Climate and ten characteristics: Context, Identity, Built-form, Movement, Nature, Public spaces, Uses, Homes & buildings, Resources and Lifespan. The guide is well illustrated with good quality photographs of recent award winning projects from around the country and hand drawings of the characteristics.

National Model Design Code - A National Model Design Code is currently being developed by MHCLG which, once finalised, will form part three of the National Design Guide. It will be subject to a formal consultation in 2021. All planning authorities will be expected to produce local design codes based on the national template, and where they are not in place the national code will be used as default. Codes will be encouraged at appropriate area scales and will enhance the ten characteristics of the national design guide, to provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The National Model Design Code will be supported by a revised *Manual for Streets* (due for publication in 2022).

Building for a Healthy Life and Manual for Streets

Building for a Healthy Life (2020) is the national housing design standard it is a recent revision of *Building for Life 12 (BfL12)*. The new guidance is mapped against the NPPF and the National Design Guide. Written in partnership with Homes England and the NHS it draws on [Putting Health into Place \(2019\)](#) – NHS research into the ‘how to’ of healthy placemaking. This identified the negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing of poorly designed places and the need for places to support healthy play, leisure and active travel. As the national design standard, BfL12 is already widely used and cited in Local Plans and this revision can easily be substituted. *Building for a Healthy Life* can be used as a discussion tool. Its twelve points can be used for communities, authorities and developers to engage with a proposal and identify what works well and what still needs thought. This new edition places more emphasis on place to place connectivity and on active travel so that places are designed to enable everyday activity. The principle of Healthy Streets emphasises sharing available space fairly – to create wider pavements and more protected cycleways. Car parking becomes cycle and car parking. The consideration of public space gives greater importance to the integration of nature and the quality of interfaces between private homes and streets is given new focus. Throughout the new guide clear examples of good practice are given. Design issues that have intensified in importance during the Covid 19 emergency such as access to private or shared gardens and room for more generous public routes and paths are flagged.

Manual for Streets (2007 & 2010) are the national standards for street design. These are to be used for all streets inside settlements and provide guidance about how to balance movement and place function in street design. Highways Authorities have been slow to embrace this approach and in 2018 the Urban Design Group (UDG) found only 20% had fully updated their standards to reflect MfS. The *Manual for Streets* is due to be revised in line with the National Model Design Code in 2022.

3. The West of England Strategic Context

Relationship of the Charter to the SDS

The West of England Combined Authority is developing a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the area covering Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire, in collaboration with the local councils. This will be a high-level strategic plan and each council will also develop Local Plans that will need to be consistent with the SDS. The development of the Charter will support the development of the SDS by providing evidence to inform Placemaking policy in the SDS and setting the context for more detailed and local interpretation in Local Plans (including the new North Somerset Local Plan). This will lead to a planning policy framework and Charter that work to achieve consistent objectives for high quality places in the West of England.

The Charter can also support and link to strategies for transport and green infrastructure, culture and economic development and climate emergency responses. While it is not currently the intention to make it a policy document, the Charter should be in alignment and reinforce the intention of planning policy. This gives the Charter space to go further than planning policy in setting out an aspirational vision for future of places in the West of England, and to be used to inform plans, proposals and strategies outside of the planning system.

Climate Emergency Planning WECA

The carbon reduction target for the West of England is to achieve Carbon neutrality by 2030 and work is underway to prepare a [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#). The [South West Energy Hub](#) supports and *hosts energy projects in the region. The partner authorities are also developing their evidence bases and action plans having all declared a Climate Emergency in 2018 and 2019.* There is an urgent need to both reduce emissions at a more rapid rate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Excluding motorways, rail, and large industry, 33% of the region's emissions came from business, 35% from households and 32% from transport. Most emissions from both businesses and households are generated by heating. Priority for reduction are transport, heating and the generation of energy. More energy efficient homes are also a priority both net zero carbon homes and retrofitting older homes. Extreme weather events; storms, flooding and high temperatures also impact on how we consider urban systems and form. Issues that have an impact on placemaking approaches are:

- Decarbonising transport and encouraging modal shift to walking and cycling.
- Promoting new zero carbon homes and the retrofit of existing buildings.
- Increasing levels of sustainable energy generation.
- Improving how we integrate green and blue infrastructure in development.
- Improving how we manage and use our natural habitats.
- Designing for resource efficiency.
- Designing for resilience to extreme weather.

An example of design for resource efficiency would be using solar orientation wisely – and an example of designing for resilience would be considering shade available to vulnerable people in extreme heat.

West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020-30

“The Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (JGIS) through providing a multi beneficial approach to strategy, policy and delivery will contribute to addressing:

- *inequalities in provision of GI and health*

- *achieve well designed, attractive and healthy places that deliver economic benefits and community resilience.*
- *respond positively to the climate and ecological emergency.*

The four West of England UAs and WECA, recognising the critical role that GI plays in supporting sustainable growth and communities, agreed a West of England GI programme of work in 2017.”

The strategy aims to secure investment in GI alongside other infrastructure investment. It identifies a set of principles that the partner authorities should apply: Educate, Embed, Collaborate, Communicate, Evidence and Invest. *“Well planned GI conserves and creates natural networks of wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, field boundaries and parklands.”* Networks should be considered at a range of scales. The guidance also links to Building with Nature and its site based themes of Wildlife, Water and Wellbeing. Regional guidance on Biodiversity Net Gain to meet obligation of the Environment Bill is being developed and will also have a bearing on design principles, and should be reflected in the Charter.

Joint Local Transport Plan 4

The Draft Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (JLTP4), sets out the West of England’s vision for travel to 2036. The plan supports the delivery of walking, cycling and public transport, parking and the main road network as set out in local strategies. The plan relates to proposed growth in employment and homes to 2036. Challenges identified are the high number of commutes by car, the frequent use of cars for short journeys, the health and environmental impacts of NO2 and CO2 emissions, the projected growth of trips and the shortfall in transport funding. The vision is ‘Connecting people and places for a vibrant and inclusive West of England’ the five objectives of JLTP4 are to:

- Support sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Enable equality and improve accessibility
- Address poor air quality and take action against climate change
- Contribute to better health, wellbeing, safety and security
- Create better places

To support the creation of better places, principles for an integrated and connected transport network include:

- improved journey experiences
- minimised impacts on the built, natural and historic environment
- enhanced streetscape and public spaces
- renewed and regenerated neighbourhoods in deprived areas.

The West of England Cultural Strategy

WECA are currently developing a Cultural strategy this will ensure that the importance of creativity and public art in place making is recognised in the West of England. The Charter gives specific reference to culture and creativity. The West Midlands Design Charter places an emphasis on harnessing local creativity to inspire placemaking and this is considered to be important in the WofE.

The West Midlands Design Charter *‘will also serve as a springboard to grow a range of key design sectors such as digital media, graphic design and creative industries including advertising and screen (film, TV and games). In supporting the region’s wider design sector, it is also intended to drive investment and inclusive economic growth.’* Feedback from cultural sector leads in the WofE highlighted similar aspirations for the CA cultural strategy and the importance of bringing the notion of creativity into the Placemaking Charter.

4. Learning from Charters in Use

Summary of Charters Reviewed

To consider the scope, content, weight and delivery mechanisms for the West of England Placemaking Charter, a number of other similar design and placemaking charters were reviewed. These include places of a similar scale and governance, places with the need to address urban, suburban and rural contexts, guidance for infrastructure and for organisations acting as planning authorities and as clients.

These included:

- Cambridge and The West Midlands.
- Liverpool and Manchester
- Essex and Suffolk
- London and Nottingham
- Planning Policy Wales
- The National Infrastructure Commission and Network Rail
- Freiburg

The Placemaking Charter should be a framework for a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of places. It should support people working to create enduring places in the West of England who are concerned with land-use, architecture, landscape and movement. We outline here the key questions that have emerged in the phase one engagement and options for the weight and use of the Charter identified through the review of Charters and National Design Policy. Responses to these questions are developed in relation to feedback from the questionnaire and workshops.

How do the Charters reflect what is particular to the people, places and landscapes of this region?

The Charters are strongly related to one another and to national design guidance. The National Design Guide and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Charter draws on the structure of the Cambridge Charter on the approach to sustainable development taken in Freiburg. The National Infrastructure Design Principles and Welsh Planning Principles also use elements of the same language. This engagement process is important for identifying what emphasis is particular to the West of England.

What current momentum is given by the learning from the Covid 19 crisis and the Climate and Ecological Emergencies?

The Climate and Ecological Emergencies are addressed in the Charters in various ways. Cambridge has used Climate as a headline to ensure thinking is integrated in design review for example. This heading is also deployed by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) Charter whilst WMCA use the themes of Future Readiness to capture principles to do with resilience (to Climate change impacts) and mitigation (zero carbon or carbon reduction). The ecological emergency is less well reflected.

What should the balance be between process guidance and place/space focused principles?

The approach to quality charters varies from place to place but these fall into three main approaches. The charters foreground thematic design principles with their application less structured (Cambridge), the charters are process frameworks with sets of thematic principles or design guidance following from them as needed (London, Nottingham) or they offer thematic design principles and process guidance (National Infrastructure, WMCA and Wales).

What is the status of the Charter and what is the relationship to local and national guidance?

The Charters have differing planning status. Some frameworks or charters are adopted as SPDs (Nottingham, WMCA, Cambridge). At WMCA this is a reflection of the partner authorities consistent commitment to quality. They are widely used to invite national agencies and developers to sign up to the charter. In articulating high level placemaking aspirations for the West of England, the Charter can be aligned to the Government's National Design Guide and other national design guidance and standards without necessarily needing to directly assimilate or shadow this guidance. Nottingham endorses a suite of design practice guidance whereas Essex and Suffolk's guidance are largely local interpretations of Building for Life and are more detailed than the other Charters reviewed.

How can charters communicate well, engage widely and have impact?

Easy to communicate themes can be used to structure more detailed principles (Cambridge, WMCA, NIC). It is an opportunity to articulate the value of good design. The guidance can be expanded on with: Why it matters? What items to evidence? and How will the development benefit our community? (National Rail). Being transparent about the issues that are being addressed and the purpose of the principles helps communicate the intentions (Suffolk, NIC).

How does a high level charter address different scales of placemaking?

The regional and local scales can be reflected (WMCA, National Rail). The sub regional scale is an opportunity to take a multi scalar approach – this is valuable in addressing climate change and how this can be addressed in the metropolitan region, city, district/neighbourhood, block, and building. Health, inclusion and public engagement have more integration and emphasis in recent charters (Essex, Suffolk, Nottingham, WMCA).

Can a charter be a framework for a range of actions that make a difference?

Charters can be a framework for subsequent more detailed design policies or advice notes (Nottingham and London). Some areas have associated housing design guides or make their charter focused around housing drawing on Building for Life (Essex and Suffolk). Charters are used in design review to focus its impact and develop its application over time it can also structure design review and enhance its authority and accountability (Cambridge, London, Essex).

An additional emphasis in delivery and associated design management also extends impact (Suffolk, Network Rail, WMCA). Charters can be related to initiatives to encourage talented and skilled local design practices to engage (Liverpool and London). It can be a catalyst for better interdisciplinary working (NIC). Charters have been shown to improve planning performance (quicker and more positive outcomes) and increase the uptake of design review.

Providing a framework for skills development for Officers and Members?

By supporting the development of a 'shared language' that can help authorities articulate their ambitions and expectations, charters are used widely to structure training and continuous processes of learning (London, Suffolk, Nottingham).

Learning from the phase one engagement and research in to Placemaking Charters is also recorded in detail in the Interim Project Report (August 2020).

5. Co-creating the Charter Content

Phase One Engagement and Draft Framework

Interviews with Lead Officers and Policy Mapping - The structure of phase one engagement was developed from interviews were held in January and February 2020 with lead officers in each authority and the CA to:

- expand on the definition of place in the sub region
- identify the current state of play in terms of placemaking policy and project exemplars
- explore the placemaking challenges and opportunities, short and long term
- begin to set out possible themes for the charter
- consider the scope of the charter, who it should influence and how

The officers all highlighted the important role of landscape in defining place. As the setting for cities, towns and villages (that can be seen and accessed from urban areas) and as landscape integrated within settlement boundaries. They noted the sense of independence and spirited quality of places and the value to communities of their quality of life – made up of cultural and economic opportunity, transport accessibility, environmental diversity, and richness of heritage. In more rural and suburban areas they noted that people’s sense of belonging was being threatened by generic development.

A key driver for the Charter was that more consistency of approach would help to negotiating quality objectives. The Charter also offered an opportunity to consider how policies could operate at and link different scales from the region to the neighbourhood and embed good practice on addressing climate change and becoming more inclusive. The lack of design awareness, skills, appreciation of placemaking qualities – amongst officers, members, developers and landowners are seen as a barrier to creating enduring good quality places. Some authorities noted that they received a wildly inconsistent standard of applications often lacked a coherent design concept and clear guiding principles/objectives.

Future challenges and opportunities identified were:

- Seizing major opportunities to enable extraordinary places to be created.
- Influencing the valuation of land to reflect what’s viable at the right level of quality.
- Building shared interests/relationships and influencing the development of a sub-regional vision and design culture.
- Driving the appointment of skilled design teams and investment in design.
- Encouraging the use of Design Review.

A review of current design policies in each area also highlighted how design policy is generally more focused on the major urban areas of Bristol, Bath and Weston Super Mare and is less clearly defined in suburban and rural areas. It also highlighted inconsistencies between areas and between areas and the ten key themes in the National Design Guide.

Workshops with Officers and Members - In July and August 2020 four online workshops were held for each of the four West of England authorities. The sessions were hosted by the lead officer for the authority and Design West. Officers from the CA attended and assisted with facilitation – about 72 officers and members attended. At the workshops, Design West shared research about the use of charters in areas including Cambridgeshire, the West Midlands and Freiburg and their application to support and advocate for high quality in new buildings and places. Lessons from elsewhere helped to frame the discussions on the scope, audience and use of the Charter. Three breakout sessions were

held to explore the thematic content of the charter, its potential use in practice and the focus of future engagement. Thematic headings for the Charter of Mobility, Character, Community and Economy were used to structure the workshops. These were informed by research and the review of Placemaking Charters nationally. The aims of the phase one engagement workshops were to:

- share placemaking knowledge amongst key officers and members,
- identify the key challenges to achieving high quality development that the Charter should address,
- identify the scope/potential of the Charter and where it can have most impact.

Online Questionnaire - An online questionnaire was set up to run alongside the four area workshops. It had twelve questions that identified:

- What area participants were from and their role,
- The range of knowledge about current design policies,
- The place values of local communities,
- learning from the Covid 19 emergency,
- The potential role of the charter,
- The thematic focus of the charter,
- The issues participants would like to expand on with a wider audience.

The questionnaire had 49 respondents comprising 28 officers, 18 members and 3 Design West review panel managers. Approximately 12 people responded from each UA. Just over half of the respondents were familiar with design review, but less than half the respondents were familiar with local and national design policies. In expressing valued qualities of the districts, landscape features and access to nature made up more than half the points made with the quality of the built environment, heritage and cultural experiences being important alongside access to public transport.

The Covid 19 Emergency led to the wish to capture quality of life and environmental improvements enabled by reductions in vehicle movements. It had also stressed the need for local shops and parks in safe walking distance and the need for quality environments nearby. It had placed a focus on walking and cycling for all, including children, families and older people. It also highlighted the importance of building resilient communities and creating sociable places that bring people together, integrating communities. It had shown up how some homes had a lack of access to outdoor spaces. It had made people aware of the importance of sustaining good background health.

What could a Placemaking Charter have the most significant impact on?

Low impact 0 – high impact 10

- | | |
|---|-----|
| - Defining ambitions for better quality developments | 8.2 |
| - Improving recognition of the value of our built and natural environments | 7.8 |
| - Shaping planning policy - SDS, Local Plans, design codes and development briefs | 7.8 |
| - Improving standards of design/innovation in planning and delivery processes | 7.7 |
| - Fostering a regional design culture or conversation | 7.1 |

The priorities at the sub regional scale of the Charter were identified as: Becoming zero carbon, Public transport accessibility, Walking and cycling amenity, Green and blue infrastructure, architecture and urban design and engaging communities.

The outcome of the Phase One Engagement was captured in an A4 Draft Placemaking Charter. This was then tested in the Phase Two Engagement. More detailed reflections from the phase one engagement is also recorded in Chapters 5 to 7 of this report and documented in more detail in the project Interim Report (August 2020).

West of England Placemaking Charter Framework

Draft for consultation, October 2020

WECA and the four West of England Unitary Authorities are working together to develop a Placemaking Charter, to be launched in 2021. The Charter will set out a shared ambition for the quality of development in the West of England and communicate the authorities' priorities and expectations to support clean, inclusive growth and respond to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. These workshops are inviting a range of people with different expertise and interests to participate and help us develop the Charter themes and working principles:

CONNECTIVITY - Strategic design principles

- Think ahead – plan and design for integrated public transport
- Locate development in well served and well connected places
- Design infrastructure sensitively
- Promote walking and cycling for all
- Contribute to 15 minute neighbourhoods
- Promote adaptable, sociable mixed use development
- Provide good connections to broadband and support digital know how

CHARACTER - Building and planting beautifully

- Value what's there
- Reflect and acknowledge local distinctiveness in the West of England
- Respond wisely to the form of rural, suburban or urban locations
- Work with architecture, landscape and topography
- Assemble character from a rich combination of elements
- Design and create good quality buildings and public spaces people can be proud of
- Pay attention to detail and the quality of buildings and planting

INCLUSION - Equity, health and recovery

- Listen to understand what's important to people
- Be respectful of the legacy of existing cultures, communities and identities
- Use accessible language and media to engage and describe change
- Make room for communities and local enterprises to grow
- Design housing to be adaptable and affordable
- Support good health and wellbeing
- Build for a Healthy Life

CLIMATE - Our route to Zero Carbon

- Collaborate, share and innovate
- Bring people and nature together
- Deliver Biodiversity Net Gain
- Localise clean energy generation
- Identify Zero Carbon (energy and construction) strategies early on
- Re-use existing structures and construct efficiently
- Lead by example

Phase Two Engagement and Draft Placemaking Charter

“We agreed it would be useful in that it would provide a framework for discussion and create consistent solutions”

This second round of engagement was an opportunity to have input from those directing, designing, leading and participating in developments in the sub region. Five interactive workshops were held with 116 built and natural environment stakeholders. These invited comment on the overall emerging themes and principles for the Placemaking Charter and each session focused on a part of the proposed framework in more detail:

- One - Our route to Zero Carbon
- Two - Equity, health and recovery in placemaking
- Three - Building and planting beautifully
- Four - Developer Summit – strategic design principles
- Five - Homes West Conference – homes and places

The aim of the workshops was also to explore how the Charter could have impact in practice. Some informal presentations were held as part of existing events and responses were sought from working groups convened at the regional level including the Green Infrastructure Working Group, the Tourism and Cultural Sector Groups of The Recovery Taskforce, Cultural Services Team and the West of England Public Health Partnership Built and Natural Environment Group. An online survey was also carried out with young people in the Architecture Centre’s ‘Shape My City’ Programme.

Generally, participants agreed the Charter should be an aspirational document that defines and encourages good practice across the region. It was felt that a change in culture is needed and that the Charter should be clear about the scale of the uplift in expectations. For example, to address climate change a significant shift in behavioral change is required that approaches to placemaking can support and encourage. Some felt the clarity of purpose needed to be refined further and WECA and the partner authorities should be pioneering and ambitious in how they promote good design.

The Charter was seen as a positive tool to promote collaboration between Local Planning Authority (LPA), developers and communities. It could be used to encourage a shift in focus from development to place making and encourage both developers and LPAs to be more creative and engaging. The Charter should bring people together linking ‘bottom up’ grassroots initiatives and ‘top down’ professional guidance. It could encourage ‘two-way planning’ with communities to generate a more holistic view of future places.

Contributors to the Developer Summit largely supported the use of the Charter but requested more specificity and clearer more tangible outcomes. Continuity across the region would be welcomed as moving between LPA’s would have more certainty. There was interest amongst developers in how the Charter could speed up decision making some participants were weary of the length of time and lack of decisiveness in planning processes. They asked if it could improve cohesion between design and planning policies and aid decision making around conflicts between priorities.

Registered Providers felt they were already invested in placemaking as they have a long-term interest in the wellbeing of their residents and want to create great places for residents. They welcomed the emerging Charter and the scope for greater consistency. They thought it was really positive as a one stop shop and a potential catalyst for benchmarking and the sharing of good practice.

“What should the launch press release say – what is the headline we want?”

The Charter should use the right language, describing the purpose of the document and who its intended audience is. The Charter is an ideal opportunity to say something sensible about the character of the West of England which can support LPA in delivering locally distinct places. Participants thought it was important that the Charter was locally specific and tailored to regional challenges, identity and context. In setting the ambition it was suggested that the Charter could reinforce humanistic and environmental outcomes as a clear theme throughout.

Some recommendations were made about the overall structure of the Charter. It needs to have an overarching vision that outlines the context of the Placemaking Charter, and emphasises the interdependencies of the themes. The content is really good but it is important to link themes to present a coherent message. Generally placemaking should be better defined in the text. The structure should be two tier, the themes should be slightly expanded upon, with the specific aims beneath overarching objectives/themes.

Climate should be earlier or at the top of the framework. Climate first, connectivity second, inclusion and character. The language could be a lot more ambitious and assertive especially in its zero-carbon section. A 5th theme centred around biodiversity and nature was recommended reflecting the alignment with climate change objectives and people’s health and well-being. The Charter is an opportunity to encourage long-term thinking that goes beyond the immediate to ensure genuine investment in biodiversity, green infrastructure, equity, diversity and inclusion.

The importance of promoting behaviour change and place adaptation and building retrofit alongside growth was highlighted in several workshops. *“Placemaking is more than buildings, there needs to be a greater focus on cultural and behavioural change and how this is promoted through placemaking.”* The Charter was seen as an opportunity to prioritise children’s inclusion of places. It was thought to be too focused on residential development and should reflect other types of growth including employment, particularly as economic recovery from the pandemic is a significant challenge.

“Ensure the charter is used – we all need to be ambassadors!”

Overall the engagement process was very positive with participants enthused and pleased to be able to contribute knowledge and expertise. The process has begun to build a network of charter ambassadors.

Design Review Testing

The draft Charter structured around five themes was tested with the Design West design review panel. The panel included four experts in architecture, urban design, landscape and movement. The panel commented on the implementation and use of the charter and the detail of its language. Their comments are reflected in the final draft.

The unique selling point of the Charter should be clear from the outset. The Charter is an important tool for ensuring there is consistency across the region with regards to high quality design and the narrative of placemaking. It too can act as a bridge between policy and national and local design tools and guidance. It can also play an important role in informing dialogue between communities and developers, giving communities the language and key questions during negotiation. The role of the CA as a design champion is an opportunity for sharing best practise moving forward.

The Charter’s implementation plan is as important as the Charter. The suggested use of indicators and the dual tier structure of the Charter was welcomed. The panel thought the themes are currently

listed in a way that was too hierarchical putting zero carbon first - whilst in reality all the themes are important and interlinked. Orientating the document in landscape with the themes in columns could be an option or a circular visual representation could illustrate the relationship between themes.

It was identified that currently larger infrastructure projects miss a design edge and the charter could better promote the importance of design and the form of these projects across the region, usefully linking to NIC advice. As noted in stakeholder workshops, further consideration should be given to the language around the fostering of local economic/enterprise outputs. For example, it should be easier to be able to make a living in your neighbourhood. It is important to highlight sustainable economic principles as these are a key driver for new development.

The panel felt design review processes, sharing of good practice through case studies and associated training for stakeholders and officers and members are all important to the delivery of the Charter – comments on these areas are included later in the report under these headings.

Community Summit

“Needs to be integral and ongoing - so that communities continue to decide what happens with the open spaces, community buildings etc i.e. democracy not management companies”

“The impact and relationship to existing communities, both in terms of how we adapt the existing to include the new, and how we use the new to gap fill the needs of the whole community rather than just the needs of the new”

A Community Summit held on the 14th December 2020 was attended by 25 people from 18 Parish and Town Council’s and from local networks and action groups. The session introduced the Charter and research so far and invited responses to the Charter in its draft form and feedback on its practical use for communities. As in the second stage of workshops, participants were concerned about how the Charter would have teeth and be enforceable. Many of the themes in the Charter such as the focus on neighbourhood amenity and the emphasis on community engagement were well responded to. When talking about neighbourhoods, it was important to still keep in mind work that can’t be done from home and the way employment sites are designed and connected. It was thought that the Charter could have more of a role in highlighting the need to adapt places and retrofit of buildings to mitigate climate change. Could it give more emphasis to the quality of housing? It was felt the Charter could go further still on encouraging co-design and early enough engagement along with long-term community ownership of or stake in places. The Charter should reflect better minority needs as sometimes these are dispersed and therefore not considered enough though when the needs of Muslim and South Asian communities are considered across the region these are significant.

To be truly useful to communities its high-level language needs to be clearer, more accessible and use plain English. Overall, it should be made clearer whether it is a design guide or framework. Extended guidance was thought to be important as otherwise it might be considered to be too open and too vague. One group wondered if the Charter could be made into a questionnaire to help communities review and respond to local proposals. It would be useful to have a one page document that is available online and links different drivers and plans together such as the SDS, site evaluation, Climate Emergency Actions, Neighbourhood and Local Plans, providing a directory of agreed guidance and standards used across the WofE. The provision of a visual explanation was thought to be really important. Diagrams and photographs are needed illustrating what good looks like. There could be short 30 second videos to accompany the Charter that illustrate what well designed places mean to the people who use them.

West of England Placemaking Charter

Draft following stakeholder engagement, December 2020

The West of England Placemaking Charter has been developed collaboratively by WECA and the four local authorities and a wide range of stakeholders in the region. It sets out a shared ambition for the quality of placemaking in the West of England to deliver locally distinctive, clean, inclusive growth – that responds to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. It provides a framework for communities, developers and authorities to set, evaluate and share design approaches to placemaking that are future ready, connected and biodiverse. It encourages the creation of characterful and inclusive design to shape vibrant places that reflect the ingenuity, creativity and diversity of the West of England.

FUTURE READY – Zero carbon strategies are developed early on seizing opportunities to generate clean energy, reuse structures, support behaviour change and reduce whole life carbon.

- Lead by example and work collaboratively
- Make resilient places that support positive behaviour change
- Localise clean energy generation
- Identify whole life Zero Carbon (energy and construction) strategies early on
- Improve and re-use existing structures and construct efficiently

CONNECTED – Places grow and develop efficiently, bringing land use and movement together - making connected sociable places with good active travel and public transport accessibility.

- Think ahead – plan, design and connect to integrated public transport
- Locate mixed use development in accessible, well served and well connected places
- Promote and enable walking and cycling for all
- Adapt, create and contribute to liveable neighbourhoods with opportunities for work, rest and play
- Provide excellent digital services and support remote working

HEALTHY & BIODIVERSE – All scales of development contribute positively to nature recovery, bringing people into contact with trees and greenspaces and supporting health and well-being.

- Design infrastructure creatively and sensitively
- Contribute positively to the sub region's river catchments and coastal landscapes
- Design with nature contributing to nature recovery in the W o E
- Improve people's access to greenspaces and connection with nature at a variety of scales
- Support good health and wellbeing – understand our vulnerabilities (*the challenges*)

CHARACTERFUL – The character of different places in the West of England is understood and reflected. Distinctive high quality places contribute culturally, socially and physically.

- Value what's there – understand existing cultural, social and physical attributes
- Respond wisely to the different qualities of sites and their place in village, town and city locations
- Work imaginatively with architecture, art, landscape, local and heritage context and topography
- Design attractive streets, buildings, public and green spaces - people can use readily and be proud of
- Pay attention to detail and the quality of buildings and planting and their stewardship

INCLUSIVE – Communities are involved creatively in the development of proposals and their needs considered. Places – make space for enterprises and communities to thrive.

- Listen, engage and work with communities early on to respond to what's important
- Use accessible language and media to engage, build trust over time and describe change
- Engage creatively with existing cultures, communities and identities
- Design housing to be robust, adaptable and affordable
- Make room for enterprises and communities to meet and thrive

6. Advice on the Charter's Key Themes

FUTURE READY

"Give a confidence the many aspects of the climate crisis but also the future we face is actually considered in this charter."

Zero carbon strategies are developed early on seizing opportunities to generate clean energy, reuse structures, support behaviour change and reduce whole life carbon.	
Lead by example and work collaboratively	<p>Districts and WECA to lead by example as clients to demonstrate innovation (in school building for example).</p> <p>Collaborate – support new more integrated ways of working and investing.</p> <p>Multidisciplinary design – refer to the charter when working with other professionals. Encourage engagement across specialisms – e.g. engineers to understand green and blue infrastructure.</p>
Make resilient places that support positive behaviour change	<p>What is the vision of low carbon communities and lifestyles in the future? Whole life carbon, not just operational, include location of development and lifestyles.</p> <p>Bold and rapid behaviour change and adaptation is needed – <i>can the charter set out what this will look like?</i></p> <p>Plan for low traffic neighbourhoods/streets without cars – has worked well in areas of London. Parking strategies are key in existing and new developments.</p> <p>Design new houses to encourage (or even require) active transport choices. Bike storage, restrict new homes to one parking space, provide accessible public transport and safe pathways for all ages to walk and cycle.</p>
Localise retrofit and clean energy generation	<p>Localise energy generation - mitigation should sit alongside adaptation as new development can enable enhanced environmental and energy performance for existing communities.</p> <p>Cover redevelopment, regeneration and retrofit of existing communities - span different scale solutions - housing/building, street-level, neighbourhood/community. E.g. we will need to insulate all our buildings and changing the way we heat them (move to electric heating).</p> <p>What is role in setting a level playing field on energy?</p>
Identify whole life Zero Carbon (energy and construction) strategies early on	<p>Consider Zero Carbon development early on taking concepts through to delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support energy reduction through lifestyle changes, - Deliver higher quality, more equitable zero carbon residential schemes. - Consider embodied energy, - Food production and transport. <p>New developments should be built to zero carbon standards – to avoid the need to retrofit (at increased cost) in future. Need to link to existing guidance – RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge, targets etc.</p>
Improve and re-use existing structures and construct efficiently	<p>Re-use existing structures creatively – use resources efficiently in Modern Methods of Construction.</p> <p>Reuse/ restore heritage - Heritage and reusing buildings and the embodied energy in existing buildings – linking heritage to carbon reduction.</p>

Commentary

“There is an opportunity for the Charter to set an ambitious route to net zero carbon – and if not a danger that a weak approach could be a drag on that ambition.”

Workshop participants thought that the CA and the authorities should be bold about the scale of change needed. They thought focusing the Charter around the requirements of the green renewal could help shape resilient communities for the 21st century. There needs to be clarity about the scale of uplift in expectations and the seismic shift in behavioural change needed. The second set of workshops also highlighted the need for greater clarity on what the zero carbon principles are aiming to achieve. Being bold also means being clear and creating a level playing field for developers, setting standards and evaluating progress is an important part of this.

The CA is currently developing its Climate Emergency Action Plan and the authorities have strategies at different stages of implementation. For example, the [North Somerset Climate Emergency Strategic Action Plan \(2020\)](#) is promoting zero carbon homes and commercial spaces and is aiming to raise energy performance of new buildings above Building Regulations.

Good practice is emerging about approaches to take to acting on zero carbon ambitions. Public Practice, ‘Pathways to Climate Action: How can officers respond to the climate crisis within an Authority?’ highlights the importance of setting specific targets against a time frame and setting in place an action plan that could include actions to facilitate interdisciplinary working. The C40 Cities’ ‘Climate Action Planning Framework’ sets out the fourfold function of action plans:

1. To develop an emissions pathway set against a carbon budget.
2. To demonstrate how the city will adapt to climate hazards and improve resilience.
3. To engage with the community and establish equitable distribution of benefits.
4. To detail the governance powers, capacity, and partners for delivery.

Other aspects of zero carbon to do with transport and active travel are expanded upon in principles on Connectivity and Biodiversity.

CONNECTED

“Connectivity is crucial to the success of place = access to opportunities, to nature and open spaces (including employment and schools).”

Places grow and develop efficiently, bringing land use and movement together - making connected sociable places with good active travel and public transport accessibility.	
Think ahead – plan, design and connect to integrated public transport	<p>Link to Draft Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (JLTP4),</p> <p>Think ahead – plan and design for integrated public transport – (to address inequalities and opportunities, access to employment choices is essential and so choice of high quality transport modes is critical (clean, frequent, fairly priced)).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate park and ride/share systems put dedicated public transport lanes in place (enable smooth running of Metrobus etc). - Make good links to a choice of public transport stops as many people rely on this mode for their mobility. - Invest in good public transport. - Encourage car clubs and car sharing. <p>In response to comments about who should ‘Think Ahead’ – this point adapted to include ‘connect’ to public transport to encourage smaller sites to always consider multiple modes of movement.</p>
Locate mixed use development in accessible, well served and well connected places	<p>Locate homes in well served and well connected places – <i>reconnect isolated places</i> - put sustainable modes of transport first and reduce the need to travel.</p> <p>What does ‘well served and well connected’ imply when not all sites are well served by good public transport. Equally concerns expressed about unsustainable development without good public or active transport options. Charter needs to result in design of places for people to work and live within (not commute out of).</p> <p>Promote areas of flexible or adaptable, mixed used development as part of housing. For workspace too - mixed use & high quality amenity, not isolated business parks.</p> <p>Design resilient places – more future proofed (learning from Covid-19).</p>
Promote and enable better streets for walking and cycling for all	<p>Link to Gear Change – A bold vision for cycling and walking, DfT 2020 and LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design, DfT 2020</p> <p>A greater emphasis on the street network and its design should be considered - should encompass multifunctional active travel routes that promotes place making.</p> <p>Link to Manual for Streets</p> <p>Promote active travel – evidence/create multifunctional multi-generational movement strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable for a range of needs (work/personal/health etc.) – i.e. walking and cycling for amenity and travelling to work. - Design better more multi-functional PROWs
Adapt, create and contribute to liveable neighbourhoods with opportunities for work, rest and play	<p>Link to Design for Homes ,2020 - Building for a Healthy Life for new neighbourhoods also the Homes England and national design standard. Includes recommendations of street design.</p> <p>Place a focus on neighbourhood and place making at all spatial scales. Consider how principles apply to areas of employment such as mainly factories, warehouse or retail – how do these work as neighbourhoods?</p> <p>Encourage (15 minute) Hyper locality – so communities can access services (shops/ recreation/workspaces/schools) locally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve walking and cycling links to green infrastructure

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve the design of and efficient use/ accessibility to community facilities as ‘places’ for a wide range of uses/users. - as accessible ‘working spaces’ - create flexible working spaces alongside local infrastructure – libraries, community halls. Spaces for ‘start-ups’. - create cultural spaces - as critical to community self-worth, value, cultural identity and empowerment. - consider how this translates to the less urban areas, ensure locations are not left behind. <p>Prioritise the needs of children and young people - put play and having accessible safe places for young people as central themes. The provision of space for a “free range childhood” and an encouragement for young people to be outside and feel welcome in their environment. Establish good practice on the integration of independent play.</p>
<p>Provide excellent digital services and support remote working</p>	<p>Integrate excellent digital accessibility – provide good connection to the physical network (broadband) and support knowledge of use of digital tools.</p> <p>Recognise the increasing demand of home working and the impact this has on space standards, amenity requirements. Engage employers with respect to home working.</p>

Commentary:

It will be a challenge to meet zero carbon commitments with the number of new homes needed. The design and retrofit of suburban and rural places to be more self-sufficient is also a challenge and opportunity. There are opportunities to improve inner urban areas by retrofitting/adapting and reconnecting edge of town (big shed) locations these have some of the biggest carbon footprints, and need better walking and cycling infrastructure.

The Charter should discourage car use through design creating real alternative choices at scale. The location of new homes should be close to transport links, reducing commuting times. The use of walking and cycling and public transport should be prioritised – this is supported by the Governments Gear Change (noted above) plan which calls for a step change in cycling and walking accessibility (Newman and Kenworthy’s research in the 1980s established relationship between more compact denser cities to lower levels of energy consumption). The role of transport interchanges (from car to bus etc.) is important across the sub region – as these facilitate sustainable movement into and out of the cities and reduce congestion.

There is an opportunity to put active travel, public transport connectivity and infrastructure first. Improvement to the quality and standard of walking and cycling provision should be made. The Charter has an important role in adding momentum to changes in design and development practice as this approach is often resisted. Attitudes and behaviours towards private car use for short trips can be ‘worked on’ as 40% of car trips are short less than 2km. We can understand better people’s motivation for travel – as we tend to overestimate journeys to work (20% of travel is work related). Leisure, retail, etc. journeys form a bigger proportion of travel - better mixed land use planning can reduce need to travel. In all the workshops people liked the example of the ‘15-minute’ city from Paris and felt the Charter could build on this.

Workshop participants agreed that a strategic shift in thinking is needed. There are big challenges to reducing car journeys by half in next 10 years with remaining transport being taken up by electric vehicles. They agreed that places will need more accessible electric charging, bike storage and better opportunities to choose between walking, cycling, public transport and electric car use. It was suggested that strategic investment will be needed/top-down to support car-free developments, a strategic approach to the use of car clubs and electric vehicle charging capacity – could be a catalyst for change.

Providing links to local and free recreation activities is important for all ages as has been highlighted during the pandemic. Workshop participants thought the Charter was an opportunity to improve how children are served in planning processes. A test for the design of street networks could be adopted as in Manchester where the requirement is to make places easy for a 12 year old to move around independently. Across the sub-region, good quality and improved access to Public Rights of Way (PROW) is becoming more important. There has been an increase in demand through the pandemic, both in terms of number of users and types of users. More multi-user PROW will be required in the future.

Developers highlighted how well considered at scale development can enhance existing places/communities - improving the viability or frequency of public transport services, facilitating high speed broadband connections, providing usable open space and public realm, or improving pedestrian and cycle connections to social infrastructure and the natural environment.

HEALTHY AND BIODIVERSE

“Climate/biodiversity/sustainability are used interchangeably but actually mean different things. Tying together Green Infrastructure delivery and regional ecological networks is really important.”

All scales of development contribute positively to nature recovery, bringing people into contact with trees and greenspaces and supporting health and well-being.	
Design infrastructure creatively and sensitively	<p>Climate People Places, Design Principles for National Infrastructure</p> <p>Infrastructure design – ‘creatively and sensitively’ - West of England past transport developments are examples of how not to do it – this is a chance to do something better.</p> <p>More attention to the design of infrastructure was identified as important. Infrastructure should be multifunctional access – integrating green spaces and capturing the benefits of greater social interactions.</p> <p>Design infrastructure to work with green infrastructure and respond to different places – to support the natural and built environment and enhance identity.</p>
Contribute positively to the sub region’s river catchments and coastal landscapes	<p>Also link to good practice guidance of SUDS design in urban and rural areas. CIRA</p> <p>Flooding and water quality are a significant issue and is likely to steer development now and, in the future - linked to insurance too. E.g. Somerset Levels - Nitrates and Phosphates leeching into watercourses and impacting on water systems and SSSI https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-54509331</p> <p>Natural Flood Management - Point was made about Charter helping understand the scale of change that natural flood management might create.</p>
Design with nature contributing to nature recovery in the W o E	<p>Reinforce the WoE Joint GI Strategy 2020 - 2030 (see the design chart p. 15). Its headline themes are: Educate, Embed, Collaborate, Communicate, Evidence, Invest.</p> <p>Link to Building with Nature - advocates the importance of connecting people and Nature. Its key themes are ‘Wildlife, Water and Wellbeing’– see desktop add to references with BFHL.</p> <p>“Building with Nature sets a new standard for green infrastructure. It brings together existing guidance and good practice to recognise high quality green infrastructure at all</p>

	<p>stages of the development process including policy, planning, design, delivery, and long-term management and maintenance.”</p> <p>Assist developers to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain as a new area of design - multiple benefits for; carbon capture, recreation, local food production and active travel.</p>
<p>Improve people’s access to greenspaces and connection with nature at a variety of scales</p>	<p>Improve strategic and doorstep access - In a post pandemic world, mental health and well-being would be a key design objective. A well designed masterplan should ensure easy access to green infrastructure such as parks on a strategic scale or door-step greens at a more local scale along with provision of good walking and cycling routes. Biodiversity and access to green space are also central and many communities especially in urban areas are poorly related to green space.</p> <p>Prioritise accessibility and play for children - 5 minute zones for access to play and open space, Covid has highlighted this. Play, and communities that work for all ages/groups.</p>
<p>Support good health and wellbeing – understand our vulnerabilities (the challenges)</p>	<p>Health and wellbeing – baseline - require developers to assess the particular communities health concerns (vulnerabilities) through more localised in-depth research – the charter might look to ensure this type of in-depth research takes place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporate design principles / elements of design that improve public health. - Improve community cohesion, public health & equality, - Strengthening the design quality of setting of and connections between assets that support health and well-being and increase social value, - Accessibility - design for life, principle to make housing for life. <p>Multiple benefits - Improved biodiversity brings non-carbon benefits on top of long term carbon sequestration benefit (e.g. wellbeing, sustainable land use, encouraging and facilitating active transport choices)</p>

Cambridge have a 'doubling nature' vision - are we considering it enough? Should there be more emphasis on nature, e.g. supporting health & recovery, addressing nature equally. The ecological emergency strategy for Bristol – has a requirement for 30% for nature in developments.

A separate theme for health and biodiversity was introduced to reflect the importance of natural environment to the identity of the West of England. Also highlighting our own role as part of nature and the dual benefits to our health and the health of ecosystems of better landscape integration in places. The Charter can add weight/recognition to the need to integrate Green infrastructure. It can help meet new challenges such as achieving Net Gains in Biodiversity. It can help signpost developers to guidance/advice creating a scenario where developers are really keen to use the Charter. This will require true innovation and integration, as opposed to various specialists chipping in their requirements. It could explain and signpost to the natural capital approach/net gains. Green infrastructure is an important part of placemaking and often gets left out by developers - a concern was also highlighted about how GI might translate to higher service charges. Needs good practice examples.

To improve health outcomes, we need to understand and mitigate the spatial drivers of health inequalities and minimise noise and air quality impacts. It is also important to capture the social benefit of creating better places. In North Somerset Public Health are now commenting on any significant pre-apps or applications. Adding to the current evaluation of POS, walking and cycling opportunities, they will review noise, air quality, and impacts on particular health issues, health inequalities and areas of deprivation and poor health or prevalent diseases. This will also be developed as a theme in the Local Plan. The Charter can link in with the Building for a Healthy Life neighbourhood indicators, using this tool for facilitating conversations between developers, local authorities and delivery agencies to deliver better places.

CHARACTERFUL

“People look at the detail of developments at parish meetings or at committee, and that ‘looking out’ to how a development sits in context needs to be better understood.”

<p>The character of different places in the West of England is understood and reflected. Distinctive high quality places contribute culturally, socially and physically.</p>	
<p>Value what’s there – understand existing cultural, social and physical attributes</p>	<p>Reflect and acknowledge varied local distinctiveness across the region</p> <p>Use ‘know your place’ and other tools to develop a deep understanding local history and culture</p> <p>Engage local communities to research and understand character</p> <p>Recognise that character can be an intangible thing you feel in a place, not necessarily about uniformity/matching?</p> <p>Engage with independent character of the West of England - entice the radical and unexpected.</p>
<p>Respond wisely to the different qualities of sites and their place in the region and in village, town and city locations</p>	<p>Develop character to be appropriate to different locations with the West of England.</p> <p>Rural, suburban or urban – brownfield or greenfield sites – should be equally understood/valued?</p> <p>Protect character of high streets – concern about Permitted Development.</p> <p>Bristol’s Urban Living SPD initial zoning is a good start for thinking about character, identifying regeneration areas for example.</p>
<p>Work imaginatively with architecture, art, landscape, local and heritage context and topography</p>	<p>Character assembled from a rich combination of elements - from layers of uses (mixed - horizontal and vertically) and from buildings and spaces between the buildings.</p> <p>Townscape and context: work with architecture, landscape and topography – ‘townscape’ and ‘context’ is missing?</p> <p>Consider how development ‘sits’ - work with landscape as a key aspect of character.</p> <p>Make good quality tree planting an important element of character - include significant tree planting or enable reforestation?</p> <p>Landscape integration and value – multiple value for solutions - meet needs of people and nature.</p> <p>Emphasise heritage more - perhaps could be emphasised more – recognise as key aspect of Bath’s identity.</p> <p>Response to character can be contemporary and innovative</p>
<p>Design attractive streets, buildings, public and green spaces - people can use readily and be proud of</p>	<p>Make places people can be proud of - quality of place is essential to long-term success and resilience.</p> <p>Emphasise spaces between buildings - are becoming more important than the buildings themselves Covid has increased the value of the shared external environment.</p> <p>Public space – cultural/events spaces. Public realm is fundamental, working with the place and character of the place.</p>

	<p>Flexibility of public realm / space an aspect of character. Activity that is not always there brings public realm to life, the opportunity for activity, events and interaction is key link to culture</p> <p>Standards for outdoor spaces for housing - as Bristol Urban Living SPD?</p> <p>Design to develop social cohesion and connectivity - E.g. with block of flats – where can you have passing points to see neighbours?</p>
<p>Pay attention to detail and the quality of buildings and planting and their use and stewardship</p>	<p>Design policy and plans can be really sound but if not delivered in detail – e.g. poor quality of build has an impact on perceptions thereafter.</p> <p>Consider maintenance and stewardship especially streets and open spaces. It's a significant consideration that probably crosses many of the themes, but is crucial for the long term success of any place.</p> <p>What's important to people? How can places stimulate community activity? The importance of establishing long-term 'stewardship'.</p>

Commentary

There was a consensus that character is an outcome resulting from a design approach in which new demands such as zero carbon demands need to be integrated. Whilst it has physical elements, the social and cultural dimensions of character were also highly valued. Places develop over time, as does character and inclusiveness – engaging communities and ensuring they have a long term sense of ownership is important to the stewardship of places.

The recent government focus on beauty has been helpful for widening dialogue around what is attractive. This draws attention to how we need to do better and does not only relate to the appearance of buildings. Some of the best places are not necessarily beautiful in terms of architecture but work well as communities. Local distinctiveness is a key aspect of the whole of the West of England, not just the World Heritage Site and AONBs. It is important for designers and developers to understand specific historic context for all sites – e.g. plot dimensions (found in miners cottages in B&NES), detail of homes and streets in the Garden Suburbs (Bristol's interwar suburbs), the materials used in different villages or clusters of villages, the historic links between villages and neighbourhoods.

Bristol has its Urban Living Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) but across the region more design guidance is needed to assist the delivery of new communities. Good practice from the suburbs, towns and villages etc. needs to be expanded upon. When the focus is purely on numbers, out of character development has been accepted, for example large scale development around villages. Important to engage with people about what they value about their settlements – use this to seek more identity from developers – could a model suburban and rural design code be developed in this way? Need to overcome cultural issues around density.

To understand the role of the WofE landscape character, a selection of settlements could be assessed from across the region – to understand further similarities and differences. Landscape strategies should ensure existing vegetation and new can grow and thrive. E.g. street trees should be big enough and allowed to form canopy cover. Wilding - Biodiversity net gain/ improvements are not necessarily 'beautiful' but more untidy - e.g. scrubs/woodland. Cultural awareness needs to change over time. Also 'wilding' does not fit in with urban management plans, yet produces more biodiversity. Distinctive planting - Native vs introduced planting, can be difference of opinion -

planting schemes are often samey and repeated by companies – more locally specific interpretation needed. Planting expertise not widespread.

INCLUSIVE

Communities are involved creatively in the development of proposals and their needs considered. Places – make space for enterprises and communities to thrive.	
Listen, engage and co-design with communities early on to define to what's important	<p>Could there be a still stronger focus on community engagement within the charter to help foster this long term stewardship.</p> <p>Involve and build communities - early engagement and investment in people is important.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage 'tactical placemaking'/temporary experiments to test ideas. - Can aid inclusion and generate social value to connect communities which are forming over a period of time i.e. those developments which might be built and sold in phases etc. - Generating joint ownership for a 'meaningful' place. - Creates stewardship, think about food, and edible landscapes. - By building communities RPs build value for PLCs. <p>Encourage more energetic and innovative community engagement.</p> <p>Engage at policy stage and development management stage - to deliver better places, link and build communities and secure long-term stewardship.</p>
Use accessible language and media to engage, build trust over time and describe change	<p>Offer a common language so everyone can engage in the process, and have the confidence to participate.</p> <p>Communicate processes of change. Could a Charter reflect how development takes place over long time frames and support communities in experiencing change?</p>
Engage creatively with existing cultures, communities and identities	<p>Facilitate integration, be respectful of the legacy of existing cultures, communities and identities before rushing to change. '<i>Cohesion first</i>' rather than '<i>fabric first</i>'.</p> <p>Integrate Public Art in development processes to expand on the creative opportunities.</p> <p>Rationale for inclusion - set out clearly why important the rationale and evidence supporting the charter. Inclusivity is more than just reaching out to youth (though younger generation is very important). Also, about BAME and wealth inequality and reflecting views of everyone living in a community.</p> <p>Creative engagement processes can inform the development of distinctive character.</p>
Design housing to be robust, adaptable and affordable	<p>Space, light and ventilation - Consideration of good design needs to go beyond layout, form and style to the needs of the end-user e.g. well-designed new homes regardless of style should have internal spaces with good floor to ceiling height, plenty of natural light and ventilation. Is more detail around the dwellings themselves - Space standards and internal layouts - missing - needed re healthy homes?</p>
Make room for enterprises and communities to meet and thrive	<p>Lots of businesses involved in shaping WoE, question how to better engage?</p>

Commentary

The Charter can set out that good engagement needs to be part of place making at different scales. The Charter should enable local voices to be heard. Engagement is a way of developing community and the means of securing long term stewardship and management of community facilities.

Participants felt there should be more emphasis on co- design and working with communities early on to define needs and to explore the role of communities for the longer term. There was a concern in some areas that gentrification could displace the most vulnerable members of communities. The inclusion of all members of communities was felt to be important, as was generating opportunities for communities and enterprises to grow with places.

7. Shaping the role of the Charter

The Purpose of the Charter

“It should support use of high quality design standards across the whole of the West of England, ensure continuity of approach and learning between Authorities.”

“It should help us work collaboratively to overcome the challenges we all face going forward, be it climate change adaptation, delivering high housing targets, or investing in cross-boundary transport networks or green/ blue infrastructure.”

The purpose of the Charter and use in practice including its scope, weight and qualities, were explored in the workshops and in an online questionnaire. We asked: How do you see a Placemaking Charter supporting you in your work in future? Contributors were supportive of the sub-regional approach – they saw the Charter as an opportunity to challenge thinking by which we make decisions in the built and natural environment sectors. Addressing inconsistencies in the standard of placemaking and design skill regionally was also a theme. There was consensus about the strategic value and significance of the Charter and how this could articulate a common cause. It could be a statement of intent that set out a common language, standards, process and above all a common stance.

Workshop participants would like to see developers use the Charter as a tool to negotiate planning permission, early on in the process - acting as a framework for constructive dialogue. There needs to be a balance to how detailed or specific the Charter is if it is too ‘high level’ it could be too open to interpretation to be practical. On balance it was felt better to articulate a vision, to gain traction and commitment, rather than to set out processes that might be better placed in policy. There would need to be confidence that the Charter would be upheld and enforced by all authorities involved to have weight and strength. It would also help to inform the quality of design policy development and consistency of application between and within the UAs.

The role of the Charter was identified as:

- **A high level document, very clearly needs to be aspirational** – a quality charter that is a genuine statement of intent - focused on quality design and relationship to quality of life.
- **An ambitious framework to work within, providing a strong message to developers** that the LA is serious about enhancing the quality of new developments.
- **Better articulating when design and quality conversations can happen** - bridge the gap between planning and the development sector.
- **Providing a shared evolving vision for what good looks like** - an integrative learning point signposting good practice and establishing how to learn lessons from design outcomes, an iterative framework that evidences and assert that design adds value.
- **Providing a consistent approach to quality in placemaking** – across the UAs linking to shared tools and guidance.
- **Reflecting the diverse kinds of places in the region** – e.g. securing quality in delivery of new communities in suburban and rural areas.
- **‘Coat hanger’ analogy – providing the frame for design guidance to hang from** – (for example local interpretation of same overarching principles).
- **Incentivise the development industry to want to do better** - Make things easier, add value, enable, and have tangible benefit. Inform policies so if you follow the Charter that you are likely to satisfy general direction of policies making it easier to get approval.

- **Defining standards for the public sector to lead by example** – projects supported by LAs should go beyond existing policy. This can raise aspirations and expectations with potential purchasers and therefore get developers to raise their game.
- **Develop understanding of placemaking across authority led** projects to integrate delivery of good design and place outcomes.
- **Highlight the quality of life benefit of development** - rather than just housing numbers and building quality.
- **Recognising the role of LA teams and communities** - as often it is the determined in focus of planning teams and the local community that produces something of quality.
- **A framework for regional awards** - for example in quality of delivery including community building.

Relationship to the SDS and Local Plans

“The Charter can give authority to placemaking adding weight to placemaking principles set out in local guidance. It can help develop a unified vision making aspirations concrete by setting out common goals.”

“The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth has been adopted by all Cambridgeshire local planning authorities. Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council adopted it from the beginning and other districts have adopted as a policy statement in their local plans.” Judit Carballo, Principal Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council

It was widely agreed that the Charter can usefully set an overarching expectation to guide and judge planning outcomes making these consistent – putting placemaking high on the agenda across the region. It should distil priorities and reflect West of England’s shared aims, feeding into and be referred to in the SDS and strategic policy. There were differences in opinion about the weight the Charter should be given in planning policy. For some it was felt the Charter would be more appropriate as a promotional tool, and could provide the golden thread through which SDS and Local Plan policy flowed. Some felt that if it is not a statutory plan it needs a distinct role, especially as it is important that the Charter should have teeth and impact in the advent of further planning de-regulation. There was some concern about how the Charter will be implemented if it is outside the statutory planning framework. If it is not adopted as planning policy by the local authorities it will have little weight in the process of decision making. There was a concern that documents that are simply guidance and are not mandatory are unlikely to have influence.

It was thought that clarity around the weight of the Charter would provide certainty for developers. Securable policy objectives are needed so that the Development Management process can deliver better places. Many contributors thought that the Charter (and Design Review) should be mentioned in all four local plans and the WECA area SDS; aligning the four authorities. The Charter Framework should be able to also be reflected in strategic and DM policies - influencing Local Plans and Design Codes, supplementary planning guidance, neighbourhood plans. Instead of being an optional design guide or could the Charter be adopted as an SPD to be a material planning consideration? In its relationship to National Policy the Charter should have a clear identity – it should reflect the National Design Guide but be distinct. As we will see big changes in the planning system the Charter can act as a bridge whilst area based design codes are developed. As a coat hanger for further policy there is potential to test and pilot new 'policy' or guidance to facilitate some of the ambitions and outcomes in the Charter. Such as policy guidance on neighbourhood design, public space and play, co-design and engagement or design coding.

Being specific to the West of England

“A balance of strategic and detailed/local advice needed – if too high a level it might have limited utility or merit, too much detail, would be difficult to manage across the West of England area. The Charter should enable local level design codes to replicate its structure, with local adaptations – again, this will enable more efficient understanding of codes as these develop, and common approaches to respond to proposals, particularly at design panel stage where this can better frame discussions.”

The Charter needs to be able to reflect the distinctive character of the whole of the West of England not just its cities and major settlements but also its rural villages and smaller towns. The region is diverse but four specific characteristics have been amplified as the Charter has developed; the attention to landscape character and the value of natural capital to communities, the distinct topography and the coastal edge of the region, the diverse built and social heritage and an emphasis on creativity and ingenuity. The latter is highlighted in the [West of England Recovery Plan 2020](#) but has also been articulated and expanded upon by stakeholders.

The Charter doesn't not focus on specific types of place such as High Streets but sets out principles that can apply for a range of different sites. For example, it highlights the importance of considering movement and place together to create accessible, well served and well connected places. It also highlights the importance of valuing what's there and understanding heritage contexts. Similarly, the aim of creating liveable neighbourhoods should apply to urban and rural contexts. 15 minute neighbourhood principles can be met differently in different places but the principle is that of making connected sociable places with the resources that are being deployed. Stakeholders highlighted how the Charter should be a useful communication tool introducing developers and designers to what is important - both those in the region and from outside region who are working on local projects.

Whilst the Charter needs to highlight the importance of character, identity and distinctiveness in placemaking it should leave room for local communities in each LA to implement/deliver more details at local level to reflect their sense of place etc. For example, in future, advice could be developed about how the Charter applies in zones for growth, renewal and protection (as outlined in the PWP) but this is more likely to be done through Local Plans. Rather than attempting to describe the region in all its variety the Charter asks that the difference between places in urban, suburban, rural and greenfield sites is understood and responded to in proposals.

Accessibility and Language

“Needs a vision and accessible language for all – keep it ‘non-urban design’ speak!”

“It should be for everyone, proving an accessible (jargon-free) framework and signposting good practice and beacon developments.”

The Charter was thought to have an important role in facilitating more productive dialogue between developers, communities, local authorities and statutory agencies. It could also be a useful reference point for planning committee members when speaking to communities. It can give confidence to communities that there is aspiration to deliver good quality development that delivers social inclusion, and healthy places to live.

The language used should be clear, simple and succinct – it should be accessible and understandable to all – not a technical document or perhaps have two versions. This view was reflected in the responses in the Community Summit. As pictures speak a thousand words it should use imagery to

‘demonstrate’ what ‘good’ looks like and signpost to other examples of best practice. Note the Placemaking Wales Charter was launched with an A4 Charter summary, a film and a list of who has signed up on a dedicated website.

The Charter’s aspirations should be practical, tangible and deliverable. A three tier structure was suggested – a clear tangible overarching vision, with more specific principles, linking to clear explanation – e.g. what does clean growth mean, how does this benefit people and communities? The accessibility of the finished product was thought to be key to ensuring effective inclusion i.e. something delivered online, a website, rather than a PDF which is hard to search for.

8. Practical Application

Who is ‘signing up’ to it?

“The placemaking Charter needs to be constructive and acknowledge what the development industry contributes, should also be seen as an influencing tool for local authorities”

“We need to try and work with the development industry instead of battling it.”

“It should be emphasised that good design is achievable in areas of low value or with more restricted budgets, here quality design should not be impossible but schemes need to be worked harder to achieve quality.”

It was felt widely that developer commitment is needed to ensure high quality design and that the Charter should persuade the development community of the wider value of good placemaking. It should: *“Act as a guide to large and small scale developers - a bold go to document preventing ‘more of the same’ soulless estates?”*

To achieve this, it could:

- Offer incentives such as an associated kite mark that partners/developers sign up to.
- Or offer accreditation against the Charter- ask developers to ‘sign up’ in return for ‘fast tracking’ through planning
- Show why it is a good investment, generating increased value/returns.
- Show how better placemaking can still deliver a developers bottom line.
- Support dialogue on greenfield sites where character is more difficult to define.
- Support collective ownership between - community and developers/ registered providers.

It is important to create an environment where the right skills are deployed at the right time and design innovation is encouraged. For example, in North Somerset (where values are lower) to get higher quality housing there is a need to attract quality architects that operate in Bristol / Bath to invest in quality. There is a need to encourage more multi-disciplinary working with good architect and landscape architects leading teams with strong zero carbon engineering input.

The Charter needs to have wide support from political leaders and communities and to be advocated by professional groups and statutory consultees. Having community and cross-party political support would enable it to have weight amongst landowners, developers and businesses. In addition, the following records the kinds of organisations and businesses that stakeholders felt were key to the Charter’s success;

- **The Districts and WECA themselves** should lead by example in public procurement paying attention to the principles within the charter. E.g. This could include a focus on new schools and requiring excellent environmental performance and design.
- **Politicians and councillors** – encourage to reference this in discussions. Land deals and viability – political risk. Having the Charter will help politicians – a training programme for Members (is part of the process) – Longer term vision – beyond political cycles.
- **Design West Design Review Panel** - Charter must be ‘actively’ owned by design panel and applied by them.
- **Landowner** aspirations should be recognised as important aspiration in terms of driving quality, influencing when best practice occurs. Include the promotion of new partnerships with landowners from trusts e.g. National Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry of England.
- **Housebuilders, Developers, RPs and SME’s, estate/land agents, consultants** – it is very important to encourage developers to get onboard or sign up – with developers themselves highlighting how a joined up understanding of how to achieve quality in placemaking would help speed delivery. Also noting that they didn’t want the Charter to feel like a stick to beat developers with but instead to be a tool enabling better engagement.
- **Homes England and Housing Associations.**
- **Investors** - very important for investor confidence demonstrates co-ordinated leadership in wider region.
- **Key Stakeholders (University sector, key businesses).** Could it be something that clients/businesses also sign up to, a commitment to quality placemaking?
- **Local Highways Authorities** - need to show to developers that others in the process are being challenged. Recognise the role of highways design and highway authorities role in delivering the charters strategic objectives, often the single largest block to design quality. The total lack of flexibility and engagement with highways on design is problematic - unless everyone (highways) has buy in, the charter will only be aspirational.
- **Statutory Agencies** - WECA have an opportunity with the Charter to lead by example in engaging with statutory agencies and aligning with those.
- **Professional Organisations** - professional organisations e.g. Landscape Institute should be invited to adopt this document – for it to be seen as best practice in the region.
- **Architects and design professionals** - good architects and design teams can help push boundaries.
- **Champions and Ambassadors – To change attitudes, culture and behaviour** authorities should identify Champions who can be advocates for the Charter and promote its use across the sector.
- **Local community champions;** Important that the document wasn’t just for built environment professionals but had **community support and buy-in – could** seek quotes from community champions - what does a right place look and feel like? Personal thoughts and ideas resonate for politicians and communities rather than from professionals etc. drive from the community i.e. Neighbourhood plans

Use in Policy and Project Development

“‘Living document’ critical with examples of good practice taken from the sub region, so it becomes a locally ‘ownable’ document, capable of being updated/refreshed constantly by the design panel.”

The Placemaking Charter can be used to set consistent and higher standards at the earliest stages of the placemaking process. It can inform policy development, local guidance for sites and design briefs for sites and buildings. It can be used as an overarching guide in the pre application process and in

Design Review. It can be used to structure engagement with or by communities. It can signpost to other recognised tools and standards and expectations for their use in the region. It should promote the best development in the sub-region so pulling the rest up. Participants in workshops hoped it would improve the standards of planning applications brought to committee as in some LA's the quality at the moment is very poor. It can generate a support network for a focus on design quality in planning decisions across the region - fostering competition between authorities. It needs to be embedded in policies which are then consistently implemented by officer, followed through and enforced if necessary. Authorities can consider together 'refusing' from time to time the worst applications on design grounds so developers see that other developers are not 'getting away with it'.

Recommendations:

- **Link funding opportunities with compliance** - particularly if partners and developers were signed up – good evidence of partnership working and clear aims. Clear principles for developers on expectations – minimum standard that could be expected. Embed as part of WECA business case process – will not tolerate poor design.
- **Site Appraisal** - Encourage RP clients to work smart - *investing enough time at the right time*. Sound approach to site appraisal and concept design early on saves money in the long run.
- **Brief Development** – A useful communication tool – steering discussion with clients, helping to broaden their briefs Helpful in reinforcing messages about quality - useful for client relationships. RPs to adopt principles within their ERs

An Engagement and Communication Tool

“Promote the Charter across the region so that local communities know it is out there and understand how they can use it to engage with development. Use as a tool to win hearts and minds and communicate with developers the region’s aspirations and explain local planning context”

“Enabling the communities lead in building the vision of what they hope their new/neighbouring community to be like is key to true inclusion.”

“Need for much greater inclusivity in engagement and consultation to ensure placemaking is for all”.

The Workshops surfaced the appetite for better engagement with communities to support more 'two way' relationships, enable co-design and bring more creativity and skill into placemaking with communities. It was felt that the Charter could signpost more detailed guidance on good practice engagement explain when and how this should take place as in Nottingham. In response this commentary was reflected in changes to language of the Charter and a dedicated workshop for community leaders was held to test and input to the charter. Community Leaders felt that the Charter needed to go further in using plain English and also reinforced the view that the Charter should be illustrated with film, photography and diagrams.

Stakeholders felt that the charter should reflect a 'bottom up' approach to encourage genuine engagement with people to help them influence change. To build communities there should be grassroots buy in, participation and co-design of the process and the outcomes. By being 'two way' – the charter would articulate the benefits of development to communities and to encourage developers to listen and understand what's important to people, making mutually beneficial projects. The Charter could also improve the interface between different uses and users of an area or bringing together those who already live in a place and those who will populate/use an area in the future.

“It should be the responsibility of the designer/ developer to engage in a meaningful and easily understandable way, rather than expecting the ultimate users to become designers/ developers. Development can be seen as an exclusive club that can only be joined if you know the password. Lay people often don’t know the language, and therefore don’t have the confidence, to participate and have a say in the process. This can both disempower people and at the same time provide an excuse not to engage.”

To reflect the WoE cultural strategy – it was highlighted how placemaking is a creative process. Further guidance on approaches to engagement could also evidence how to embed cultural projects early into the design process giving examples of the cultural ‘opportunity’ of shaping places creatively with people through public art practice. Design West should also consider potential to offer Community Design Workshops. The Community Summit with Parish Council and Community representatives also highlighted the need for plain English and every day communication of the principles in the Charter

Recommendations:

- **Develop good practice guidance** on engagement alongside and linked to the Charter.
- **Include case studies** that evidence creative co-design processes.
- **Include case studies** that include public art and/or artist led engagement.
- **Include personal testimony** (film, photographic and written) of the benefits of making high quality places.
- **Test the charter** with residents for both LA’s and RP’s to understand how the charter could work for communities
- **Develop a more community focused version of the Charter**, or a version that can be more clearly used by neighbourhood forums / parish councils.
- Consider developing a Design West - **Community Design Workshop**

Structuring Pre - Application Discussion and Design Review

The Charters core role is in framing discussions in the Pre- application process before a formal planning application is made and when the placemaking role of a project is negotiated. For significant projects design review is a key part of this as its focus is on the quality of design, the public interfaces of a proposal and the integration of the different design disciplines such as architecture, urban design, landscape and movement design.

In the second round of workshops there was focus on how the Charter could have objectives that are measurable. They felt there was a need to work out how to quantify and qualify its impacts. They suggested that the Charter could have an evaluation framework that could be used at different stages in the process. This would help to measure the progress of the developments and showcase exemplar places / developments that have used the Charter.

The design review panel welcomed the suggested use of indicators and the dual tier structure of the Charter. They thought that a summary page for each theme with indicators could be one possibility with a series of key questions for each indicator. The scalability of the charter across different spatial scales should be tested. This will require some thought while considering how indicators and schemes were assessed against these. Not all indicators may be relevant for every development . In relation to indicators and measurability the urban living SPD is a possible framework to look at. Some further suggestions about evaluation are:

- A badge orientated system to promote and show adoption of charter.

- A framework akin to Building for Life would give a readily recognisable approach and enable DRPs, developers and LPAs to respond uniformly to clear parameters;
- Set out clear methods / scales for measuring how well schemes relate to the principles. Could be based on a traffic light system to embed flexibility while maintaining some certainty for developers.
- Consider fewer tangible outcomes that have a large number of determinants such as health. Perhaps here a two tier checklist can be employed which has a set of core mandatory objectives and then a second tier level.
- Compliance will vary from large garden settlements, new neighbourhoods or village extensions. This needs to be considered whilst setting out the checklist.
- Link the Charter to CIL obligations - use in section 106 negotiations - in order to ensure greater buy-in from developers.

Design West's design review panels cover the four local authorities these were established at the end of 2019. Generally, feedback in workshop's was that the development sector's experience of design review is very positive as it provided an open process leveraging in others view. Design review can be used as a method to speed the pre-app process giving confidence to planning officers and developers and is an important part of embedding the Charter early in the design process. Stakeholders expressed the view that the Charter should be put at heart of design review and be equally embraced by the LPA's across the WECA. This is the case for the GLA's Good Growth by Design Charter and is a strong feature of the application of the Cambridge Charter. The design review panel contributed to the development of the Charter.

The design review panel suggested that the charter subtext or supplementary guidance could propose a prompt too developers to take schemes to design review – this could be an indicator of success for projects of a certain size or significance. This advice should have an emphasis on timeliness, recommending design review early in the process, allowing time to respond to design review comments through design iterations. This is important so design review it's not seen as a tick box exercise. It would also be helpful to provide guidance on the level of detail developers should bring forward to the design review panel, often it can be difficult to provide detailed feedback when schemes are brought to design review with scant information or when design has been developed in detail (see Consulting the Commission through the Design Review Service, DCW, 2017)

It is proposed that a beta version of the Charter should be tested at design review with feedback provided to the Placemaking Charter team. There are resources in place to test the Charter in 2021 in design review in each local authority. The chairs should work together to agree how to adapt design review to use the Charter themes to structure feedback. The panels could consider whether a five star review could be awarded when all areas of the Charter have been met.

Recommendations:

- **Develop key indicators** of success for each theme.
- **Adapt Design Review to use the Charter themes to structure feedback**, test and evaluate its application.
- **Put Design Review at the heart of the Charter** - embrace this equally across the WECA area.
- **Provide guidance** linked to the Charter about when and how to approach Design Review

Developing Skills

“A lack of design knowledge amongst elected members and the industry more generally was highlighted as a current challenge.”

Early in the process of engagement the need to develop placemaking skills in the Local Authorities was highlighted. A lack of design skill in officers and members was identified and therefore a limited confidence in and ability to influence planning process and achieve climate emergency ambitions. In the workshops the importance of including statutory agencies in training programmes especially highways was emphasised. In general, the importance and value of better interdisciplinary working was recognised, especially when delivering on new policy challenges such as net gains in biodiversity or integrating Zero Carbon approaches. The Charter is therefore an important framework for developing skills and closing skills gaps, encouraging cross-pollination between sectors.

- Challenge and influencing tool – not just private sector but for the network of planning professionals working across region and influencing developers – challenge them to be firmer.
- Use diverse thematic areas to encourage interdisciplinary/collaborative working bringing together officers from wider disciplines. Make sure planning, highways, sustainable transport teams adequately resourced and joined up.
- Need for training for interest groups on how to use and engage with the charter – planning officers, communities, charities etc.
- Local Authorities could educate officers and Members encouraging them to challenge some of the norms and change practices to allow more successful outcomes.
- Encourage authorities to act as ‘One Council’ – need to be better at resolving tensions across the departments. As part of the launch a session could be held with members to raise awareness.
- It can provide a platform for linking into the work Universities and Professional Institutes do.
- Also, take into schools – e.g. to inspire around climate change action.

Reference was made to the role of Urban Design London in developing a learning platform for Local Authorities in London around the Mayor’s Good Growth by Design agendas. Design West have delivered Community Design training for Bristol City Council and in partnership with WECA could deliver training to officers and members and statutory agencies as part of the roll out of the Charter.

Recommendations:

- **Use the Charter as a framework for training** for example in new areas of challenge such as delivering Net Gains in Biodiversity.
- Use the Charter as a framework for **shared skill development** for officers and members.
- Use the Charter to continue to **engage and collaborate with design professionals** and built environment stakeholders.

Shaping Case Studies

“Do we need both excellent local exemplars and a good basic standard of quality? There are lots of pressures funding is getting tighter. Would ‘pretty good’ be an acceptable minimum standard? Is this about an idea about being good enough?”

The illustration of the Charter with best practice examples that evidence what ‘good looks like’ was thought to be critical. Case Studies can be used to reinforce the objectives and indicators of the charter, providing an accessible way to highlight best practice. Participants thought linking to tangible examples would make it a powerful tool. The Charter should establish a practice of generating comparable case studies of successful projects - jointly demonstrating best practice and cycling learning into new applications. Evidence of what is good should reflect the views of community champions and leaders not just professionals – giving personal resonance to the Charter. Commentary from citizens/residents is important as the lived in experiences of those living in new developments has a role to play in communicating the Charter’s objectives.

As the Charter is applied it can also gather examples of how its use has made a difference at different stages of the process. For example, evidencing the lessons learnt from the pre application process and the difference made by design review. Care is needed in gathering good quality images and drawings and quotes from users. Case studies should acknowledge clients, developers, designers and credit photographers. The Charter can be a framework for commissioning research. For example, there is a need to build a convincing value argument and evidence how good design requires an up-front investment but needn’t lead to increased costs overall. Especially as developers need to balance priorities such as the climate emergency and affordable housing.

The Charter should be mindful of not being purely housing led it's encompasses development across several sectors. Case studies could explore good practice in delivering:

- **Housing**
 - o Collaborative working between RPs with Homes West
- **15 minute neighbourhoods**
 - o Mixed use development in different locations
 - o What works at different scales
- **Transport/infrastructure**
- **Education & Healthcare**
- **Good urban design/landscape practice in suburban and rural contexts.**
- **Blue and green infrastructure.**
- **Responses to landscape setting and variations of over the region.**
- **Public and Open Space**
- **Value of placemaking/good design**
 - o Economic rationale for quality workplaces (Atkins)
 - o Economic benefits of the high street by better walking and cycling connections
- **Good Practice in Engagement and Co Design**
 - o Building new communities
 - o Engaging communities in creating new community amenities
 - o Community adoption of public spaces (Kim Taylor of Plymouth Homes)
 - o Role of new development in stitching together new and existing communities
- **Delivering Zero Carbon District Heat Network (Curo)**
- **Neighbourhood Plans comparative high quality examples.**

Recent and notable projects include:

- Keynsham North
- Chipping Sodbury High Street
- Barn Hill, Chipping Sodbury
- Lyde Green Community Centre, South Glos
- Hannham Hall, South Glos

- Filton Airfield and Strategic Heat Network
- Locking Parklands, WSM
- Port Marine, Portishead
- Uplands, Nailsea
- Western Villages SPD
- Mulberry Park, Bath Riverside, Warminster Road, Somerdale (B&NES).
- The Spa, Bath
- Holbourne Museum, Bath
- Elderberry Walk, AHMM – Building with Nature Pilot
- Ensleigh (Bloor Homes)
- Wapping Wharf, Finzel’s Reach – Bristol
- Smaller BCC housing schemes Lawrence Hill
- Wessex Water
- Hortham Hospital

Recommendation;

- Establish processes of generating and sharing case studies that respond to the themes of the Charter.

9. Options for Implementation

“How will the charter evolve? Needs to live! Trends and practice evolve over time - cannot be a one hit wonder as it will soon date and become irrelevant. Has to move standards forward year on year.”

“The Council’s also need to recognise the necessity of resources dedicated to delivering quality as at present there is a struggle just to keep up and any additional weight a charter like this can bring is welcome.”

POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION	SITE DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS, DESIGN BRIEFS, PROCUREMENT	PRE_APPLICATION PROCESS & DESIGN REVIEW	COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN AND ENGAGEMENT	CASE STUDIES & ACCESSIBILITY	REVIEW, TRAINING & AMBASSADORS
The Charter is reflected in the SDS, WECA develops research and policy expanding on key themes, Local Plans endorse and reflect the Charter, Authorities are resourced to Champion placemaking.	The range of Placemaking aims highlighted in the Charter are reflected in site and project briefs, LA’s deliver Charter exemplars in their own procurement of projects.	The Charter is used to structure pre application discussions, Design Review is recommended and follows the Charter themes in its advice. Guidance is provided on how to approach Design Review.	The Charter links to guidance on good co-design and engagement practice, the Charter content is developed for use by communities in Community Design Review and Community Visioning processes.	An illustrated Charter is widely accessible on line. Case studies are developed of Charter project and process exemplars.	An annual programme of training is available to Charter Ambassadors and key placemaking actors in the region. The Charter is tested, reviewed and updated from time to time.

The UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence recent report on Delivering Design Value includes a useful process map that highlights the Critical Points of Intervention when design value can be maximised. Primarily it is in the early stages of policy and project development but skills development and effective ‘feedback’ or processes of learning from outcomes are also important. Design

Commission Wales in 'Consulting the Commission through the Design Review Service' explains how design review should take place before or at the start of the pre application process (p08).

The implementation of the Charter will be reviewed by WECA in response to this report on the engagement process. An initial summary of recommendations is recorded here:

Charter Summary and On line Presence - Prior to the launch of the Charter in 2021 an illustrated version of the Charter as a digital pdf should be developed that would be accessible from a Placemaking Charter web page. This summary should be well designed and illustrated and should also set out the ways in which the Charter will be used. The role of the Charter in relation to the WoE policy context will need to be explained and the role of the Charter at different stages of the placemaking process set out as indicated above. As well as its use for communities, developers and local authorities.

Placemaking Summit and Signing Up - Before the Charter is launched some key signatories should be put in place and a process for gathering more signatories identified (Design Wales have done this in an effective way for the [Placemaking Charter Wales](#)). Signatories could also be invited to join a mailing list for updates on training and future related policy initiatives. The Charter could be launched at Placemaking Summit in Mid-Summer. This could invite speakers to address the five themes of the Charter and celebrate 2 yrs of Design West and the best of Design Review over this time. Stakeholders could be invited to attend and at the same time sign up to the Charter.

Expanded Guidance and Case Studies - Over the course of 2021/22 accompanying guidance (as will be eventually offered in by the [WMCA Design Charter](#)) could be developed. The commentary from the workshops given in Chapter 6 of this report is offered as a starting point for this guidance. There is also recommendation to establish a means of developing and sharing Case Study Advice and to develop related advice on Engagement Practice.

Keeping pace with National Policy - When and how the Charter will be introduced was thought to be important by developers as retrospective application of the charter could be frustrating. They asked that there is time to respond to new requirements arising from the Charter, enabling land values to adjust on an even basis. However, its noted that national legislation will be driving change at the same time for example in the delivery of Biodiversity Net gain and the role of the Charter could be to make this process more seamless by fast tracking emerging good practice.

Design review Testing and Linking to the SDS - The application of the Charter can be tested through Design Review and community engagement in 2021 (and other contexts considered to be critical). Its weight can be strengthened at the same time as the SDS is adopted also relating it to the National Model Design Code to be launched in 2021.

Resources and training - Workshop participants highlighted how the Charter needs dedicated resources giving the view that the Charter will not be effective without appropriately resourced LA teams. They thought the Councils and WECA could (as part of the charter) sign up to a commitment to maintain a minimum level of in-house Placemaking and Urban Design expertise and commit to participation in an annual cycle of training that should be open to wider stakeholders.

Building on Momentum - The engagement workshops gathered momentum as they progressed. Overall, the response to the Charter was extremely positive and participants were enthusiastic and energised about its potential. They felt it would be valuable to them in their work and some asked to be ambassadors for it. The engagement process was the first step in developing shared language

around what makes an enduring place in the West of England. It is important now to move forward with the Charter implementation in phased way so that this momentum can be built on.

Champions and Review - The Charter should have an identified champion and custodian in WECA and the four authorities and be tested and reviewed periodically.

10. References

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11. Appendices

Organisations Engaged

<p>Abri Housing Aecom Alec French Architects The Architecture Centre Arup Aster Housing Atkins Global Autograph Homes BDP B in Bath Bath and Northeast Somerset Council Bath University Bill Gething Boyer Planning Bristol City Council Bristol Green Capital Bristol Civic Society Bristol City Council Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network Bristol University Bristol Walking Alliance Bromford Housing Association Building with Nature Burro Happold Centre for Sustainable Energy Compton Dando Parish Council Cotham Ward, Bristol Churchman Thornhill Finch Clarion Housing Context 4D CPRE Curo Group CVS - South Gloucestershire DLP Consultants Dodington Parish Council Frampton Cotterell Parish Council Frus Studio Grant Associates Guinness Housing Association Hallam Land Historic England Homes England House Builders Federation HTA Design Iron Acton Parish Council</p>	<p>Keynsham Town Council Knowle West Media Centre Landsmith Associates Lawrence Hill, Bristol Lovell Levitate Livewest LT Studio MPC Agency Nicholas Pearson Associates North Somerset Council Oldland Parish Council Olveston Parish Council Persimmon Homes Pilning & Severn Beach, South Glos Point Consultancy PJA Pucklechurch Parish Council Redrow REM Events Ridge and Partners LLP Salvation Army Sovereign Housing Solon Housing Stride Treglown St Mowden Sodbury Town Council South Gloucestershire Council Taylor Wimpey Thornbury Neighbourhood TRAPP'D - Thornbury Residents Against Poorly Planned Development Turley University of the West of England Up Our Street Wain Homes West of England Civil Society Wilmore Iles Architects Wrighton Parish Council Yate Town Council</p>
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