

Sandwell Design Code

Planning Committee update – February 2026

To briefly recap a Design Code is a set of simple, concise, design requirements for new development in an area. The government's National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that all local planning authorities must prepare them. It will include a review and replacement of our existing [Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document](#).

The Design Code will establish a set of rules which all new development in the borough must adhere to through the planning process. It will help raise the quality of development across the borough as a whole and help ensure design proposals are directly informed by the character of distinct areas. Some examples of the aspects that design codes can cover include parameters for building height, parking provision and green or open space amenity.

Since our session in July 2025, the Design Code team has been busy undertaking extensive community engagement, identifying priorities and taking these forward into a vision and draft design guidance for the borough.

Stage 1: Understanding and analysis

Stage 1 of the work was completed in November 2025 and focused on gathering data, knowledge, information and views on the character of the borough. This analysis has generated three outputs which can be downloaded here:

- A [Baseline Report](#) - which focuses on character analysis, data and mapping, and review of the current context.
- An [Engagement Report](#) - which summarises the events and activities undertaken to draw in local knowledge and views to help inform the priority themes for the Design Code.
- A [Conclusions Summary](#) - which outlines the common threads between the baseline analysis and the engagement inputs

Between June and the end of September 2025, the Design Code team visited all parts of the borough and met with a range of community groups to gain insight and understanding. Five public pop-up events were held - each offering an informal opportunity for passers-by and visitors to get involved, ask questions and explore what is special about their neighbourhood and what should inform the design of new development. These events allowed for extensive discussions and for local people to understand the value that a Design Code could have in improving the quality of local areas. In addition, an online survey asked local people for views on their neighbourhood, recent developments and their priority issues for change.

Overall, the five most common topics raised across all the engagement activities were:

- **Green spaces** – existing parks are highly valued, and people want to see them protected, at the same time people want to see more green spaces (and trees) and to see this infrastructure well maintained.
- **Housing** – there is a desire for better quality housing and more affordable housing, but also that new homes need to better match needs including multi-generational living.
- **Safety** – there is a strong sense of community, but people want streets and spaces to feel safer and for there to be more provision for young people.
- **Community infrastructure** – there is concern about community facilities and spaces reducing, people want to see more community spaces (indoor and outdoor) delivered and supported.
- **Transport infrastructure** – local people want walking and cycling to be much more attractive and safe, and a stronger strategy on residential parking in new developments that avoids overspill onto neighbouring streets.

Other topics that came up frequently included: a desire for better quality design and materials, improved maintenance, improved pedestrian accessibility, better recognition of the importance of the canals as well as local character more generally, and stronger and greener boundary treatments.

It is worth noting that from the outcomes not all elements can be fully incorporated into the guide and therefore it will be critical to ensure there is clarity over the role of the design code and the methods used that some of the objectives can be achieved.

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

Stage 2: Vision

The team are now consolidating what we have learnt through Stage 1 into a design vision for Sandwell, alongside a set of borough-wide principles for new development. The team have been working closely with Council officers, the Community Design Panel and wider stakeholders to refine the vision.

Key tasks completed include:

- Vision workshop with the Officer Working Group (including key officers from Highways and development Management teams) – October 2026

- Public online survey to test the early vision ideas – open from December 2025-February 2026
- First Developer Forum session to understand their experiences of bringing forward development in the borough and their priorities for the Design Code - January 2026
- Officer Working Group session to test emerging ideas and design guidance content – January 2026
- Second Community Design Panel to test emerging ideas and design guidance content – February 2026

The team have been translating the priorities and key messages from all of these discussions and inputs into an outline structure for the Design Code. At the same time we are exploring the best way to ensure simplicity for the user.

The team are currently focused on working up themes and content for Part 1 of the outputs which will be borough-wide guidance. This will establish principles and clear guidance for every proposed development in the borough. This will pick up headline themes such as greening, parking and context/character-led design.

As part of this we have been working with the Council's planning, website and communications teams to agree the best platform to establish the Code and guidance in an interactive online format to make it as accessible and easy to use as possible.

Key themes

A strong theme which has emerged through the engagement has been that Sandwell is a borough that has always embraced evolution – it is constantly evolving. The second key theme has been the need to support an uplift in design quality. This will involve guidance and coding on enhanced greening, higher quality and robust materials as well as guidance on what locally-informed design is for each part of the borough.

As such we have developed these themes as part of the vision tested through the online survey:

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

AN UPLIFT IN DESIGN QUALITY: New development in the borough will be expected to achieve a higher bar of design quality to match the aspirations of local communities.

Both statements were supported by 76% of respondents to the online survey.

Next steps

The team will be drafting the borough-wide design guidance over the coming weeks, with a view to testing draft content with the Council teams before Easter.

We will be convening a third Community Design Panel session in May which will support the Part 2 work on outlining draft design codes.

We are keen to meet with the Planning Committee following purdah and the election to test the emerging work and get your inputs.

In the meantime, if you'd like any further information on the work so far please do look at the [Design Code website](#) or email Design_Code@sandwell.gov.uk.