



WMCA Housing & Land Delivery Board

Date	30 September 2019
Report title	Regional Design Charter
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Accountable Employee	Gareth Bradford, Director of Housing and Regeneration, WMCA Louise Wyman, Design & Inclusive Growth Lead, WMCA Patricia Willoughby, Senior Reporting Officer, WMCA Rachel-Ann Atterbury, Report Author, WMCA
Report has been considered by	Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group (11.09.2019)

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Housing and Land Board is recommended to:

- a) Agree the principles and format of a regional design charter document (Annex A)
- b) Agree the production of a web-based tool, featuring the design charter and additional supporting information and case studies.
- c) Agree the production of a further PDF document, for ease of access to both principles and supporting information, to be made available on the website
- d) Agree delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing & Regeneration to make minor and technical amendments to the regional design charter

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the work undertaken by WMCA and the Regional Design Charter Working Group and to seek views of the Housing & Land Delivery Board on the proposed Regional Design Charter's principles and format.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The West Midlands is a region in renaissance – unprecedented levels of investment and development over the next decade will shape the way our residents live and work for years to come. Like other regions, the West Midlands is also facing a climate emergency and a digital revolution; shifts that create both risks and opportunities. The economy is growing, but too many people are excluded from that growth. Health



inequalities are widening, with more people inactive than ever before. The opportunity is one to seize; setting a new benchmark for what ‘great places’ mean now will enable our residents to prosper, our communities to thrive and our businesses to grow.

- 2.3 At its meeting in February 2019, the Housing & Land Delivery Board agreed to the preparation of a Regional Design Charter which would align Local Authority and WMCA aspirations to deliver at pace and scale whilst defining new quality benchmarks. The Design Charter would provide a framework to ensure new development adds social, economic and environmental value and support WMCA to prioritise quality, innovation and inclusive growth whilst delivering homes and investment at pace.
- 2.4 Members agreed that the charter would be non-statutory, concise and would seek to supplement and compliment, not supersede, the existing documents of Local Planning Authorities. The charter’s purpose would not be to set local design policies but it would seek to provide a clear and consistent understanding of the West Midlands’ place-making expectations and create a level playing field for developers across the region. It would increase the baseline of design quality across the region.
- 2.5 Additionally, the charter would enable WMCA to define ‘good quality design’ when this is included as a funding condition in its investment decisions and in its commercial negotiations. Its purpose, therefore, would not be to prevent development but to drive quality. As a non-statutory document, developers would not be required to comply with WMCA’s preferred standards if they chose to seek funding elsewhere. Furthermore, developers would not be able to use the charter to undermine local planning policies, though Local Planning Authorities could choose to use the charter to support their design ambitions and achieve their quality aspirations if they so wish.
- 2.6 Whilst the specific principles and format of the charter have not previously been discussed by the Board, it was agreed by the Board in February that the charter should focus on a limited number of key principles, circa 10-15, that could best articulate a shared ambition to improve the quality of new development. The principles would be designed to support the wider objectives of the West Midlands, focusing on general principles relating to place-making and quality of life, including WMCA’s inclusive growth, health and wellbeing and climate change aspirations.

3.0 Developing a Design Charter

- 3.1 Following February’s meeting, WMCA undertook work to focus on the scope and priorities of existing design documents and compiled a literature review of key documents in the West Midlands. Using this literature review as a starting point, WMCA formed a working group including Local Authority and LEP representatives to identify a number of ‘core principles’ that represent essential placemaking qualities and address some of the most pertinent design challenges that all of the West Midlands authorities face.
- 3.2 Through a series of workshops, the Design Charter working group has considered the scope, principles and format of the draft charter. These principles represent design issues that the group consider to be key priorities to both WMCA and its partners and have been identified by the group as areas where a regional design charter could add



value to the current landscape of design documents at a local level. The working group's regional design charter report was agreed by Housing and Land Delivery Steering Group, subject to minor changes to wording, at their September meeting.

- 3.3 Additionally, the working group considered how the charter could be made accessible to those not from a planning, design and development background. It was suggested that the inclusion of contextual information and case studies could help to define what the principles might look like in practice, inform discussions around how developers might meet each principle and ensure that all partners are communicating the same message. This information was considered to be useful and could be captured as supporting material through, for example, a website and supplementary PDF. These would have the added benefit of giving users access to both the charter and supporting information in an easily accessible place.
- 3.3 It is suggested, therefore, that the Charter should be made available in three formats:
- a) a two page charter, comprising the core principles that WMCA will promote through new development, to be launched in mid-October.
 - b) a web-based tool with supporting information and demonstrative case studies.
 - c) a PDF document, downloadable from the website, including the core principles and relevant supporting information.

4.0 Next Steps and Implementation

- 4.1 Prior to launching the Regional Design Charter, WMCA is seeking final review from the Housing & Land Delivery Board.
- 4.2 To ensure the Charter can be appropriately implemented and launched, and that stakeholder feedback can be incorporated, WMCA is seeking delegated authority to amend, with the agreement of the Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Regeneration between the Board meeting and the launch date (mid-October). The Design Charter Working Group will be party to any final changes, which would be minor in nature or changes of wording that would not affect the sense of the principles or supporting information.
- 4.3 Ahead of and following its launch, WMCA will approach private sector forums to seek endorsement of the charter's principles. WMCA has begun conversations with a number of design bodies to seek support of the approach to raising the quality of design.
- 4.4 Similar to the affordable housing definition and Inclusive Growth Toolkit, WMCA will seek to use the revised Design Charter to shape project proposals coming forward and inform decisions on investment under the Single Commissioning Framework. As with the SCF itself, WMCA will commit to carrying out monitoring and evaluation of the Autumn 2019 Charter to test its impact in practice on specific development schemes.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of the recommendation to develop a Regional Design Charter.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Section 113A(1)(a) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 gives the CA a power of competence appropriate for the purposes of carrying-out any of its functions. Part 4 of The West Midlands Combined Authority Order 2016 (2016 No 653) confers that the functions relating to any Economic development and regeneration in the constituent councils are exercisable by the CA. Part 3 of The West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2017 confers functions corresponding to the functions of the Homes and Communities Agency has in relation to the combined area. Paragraph 10 (2) (a) of the 2017 Order confers the function of improving the supply and quality of housing to the Combined Authority with 10 (2)(d) conferring the function of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and good design.
- 6.2 The principles for the Design Charter will be incorporated into the relevant grant funding agreements and Legal will advise further when instructed to advise on any grant agreements where the principles apply.

7.0 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The Design Charter takes into account key accessibility design principles to ensure inclusivity is achieved for a wide range of groups.

8.0 Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The proposed Design Charter is focused on improving quality of life for all residents of the West Midlands through better place-making and design. The value of the Charter will be determined by its backing and adoption on as much new development as possible, including those sites where the cost of delivering better development would normally be considered prohibitive.

9.0 Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1 The proposed Regional Design Charter would be used to guide WMCA investment decisions across the whole geography of the WMCA area, including the 3 LEPs and non-constituent Member authorities.
- 9.2 The Charter would be available to all Local Authorities within this area to use in addition to their existing and future design documents.

10.0 Other Implications

- 10.1 There are no other implications.



11.0 Schedule of Background Papers

11.1 There are no background papers.



Appendix 1

West Midlands Combined Authority – Regional Design Charter

Introduction

This Charter has been produced in collaboration with the local authorities and LEPs that make up WMCA and has been tested with developers, designers and investors from the private sector. The Charter represents a regional commitment to good place-making and will be used to support applications for WMCA funding for new development (including residential, commercial and mixed use). Applicants should inform the relevant local authority(s) of their intention to seek WMCA funding and their ability to meet the Charter standard. WMCA will expect applicants to evidence this.

1. Character/Context

Principle 1 – Regional Ambition

Development promoters will be expected to produce unique and innovative schemes that are grounded in a sound understanding of the local context and acknowledge the diversity of place across the West Midlands.

Principle 2 – Local Distinctiveness

New development should acknowledge and respond to the qualities that define the locality's 'spirit of place' for its users, including residents, users and workers. Schemes should contribute to crafting the physical and cultural identity of the local environment.

2. Connectivity and Mobility

Principle 3 - Regional network

New development must contribute to enhancing regional connectivity and integrate effectively to existing and planned transport networks, thinking beyond both site and administrative boundaries.

Principle 4 – Modal Shift

Proposals should demonstrate an understanding of the changing face of transport in the local area and seek to promote walking, cycling and public transport use accordingly.

3. Future-readiness

Principle 5 – Climate Resilience

Developments should incorporate climate adaptation measures that respond to the short and long term impacts of climate change and address the environmental impact of the proposal across its lifecycle.



Principle 6 – Delivering Low Carbon Development

Development proposals should seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by making clear, specific commitments to carbon reduction and the potential for new schemes to meet zero carbon standards should be considered from the outset.

Principle 7 – Technological Resilience

New development should harness technological innovation from the outset, to deliver adaptable buildings that respond to the rapidly changing digital, communication and infrastructure requirements of our businesses and citizens.

4. Health and wellbeing

Principle 8 – Building Active Communities

Development proposals should support healthy living environments and address health inequalities by providing access to a range of physical activity.

Principle 9 – Promoting Wellbeing

New development should promote wellbeing and good mental health by fostering community, identifying opportunities to reduce social isolation and limiting loneliness.

5. Engagement and Stewardship

Principle 10 - Engagement

Consultation should reflect local social and geographical diversity and enable key stakeholders to shape design solutions from an early stage.

Principle 11 - Stewardship

Public spaces and facilities should be designed to encourage long term civic pride. Developers must give early consideration to their ongoing management and will be responsible or delivering long term maintenance solutions.

6. Delivery

Principle 12 – Securing Social Value

In addition to the principles in this charter, WMCA will expect developers to promote social value throughout the development process and seek to align all housing and regeneration investment decisions with its inclusive growth objectives (through its Single Commissioning Framework).