



Developing a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

The Witton Lodge Community Association Demonstrator

May 2025



Centre for the New Midlands



Contents

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May 2025

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their thanks to Witton Lodge Community Association for commissioning this first demonstrator project of what we hope will be an extensive, collaborative research programme to develop a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, underpinned by both universal themes and local priorities to create place-based equity and accountability, and addressing inequalities while empowering and supporting communities to thrive.

Thank you to Afzal Hussain, Chief Officer and Waheed Saleem, Head of Programmes and Partnership for facilitating discussions and providing comments on the draft.

Thank you to the Witton Lodge Community Association Senior leadership, Board Members, staff, volunteers, residents and community members who attended our meetings and participated in our workshops.

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Foreword

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) was established by local residents to create a decent neighbourhood following the demolition of substandard housing in Perry Common, Birmingham.

Over the past three decades, WLCA has invested in the community by building and refurbishing high-quality homes and improving the social, economic, and environmental fabric of the area.

In partnership with the Centre for the New Midlands and Social Life, we commissioned this research to develop a Decent Neighbourhood Standards Framework. This framework combines evidence-based research with our 'practice into policy' approach to guide our work, future initiatives and to disseminate good practice. Our aim is to demonstrate the impact of community-led approaches in creating neighbourhoods where everyone can flourish.

We look forward in working with our partners, Centre for the New Midlands and Social Life, to develop, co-design and implement the framework as a meaningful tool to understand, evaluate and improve neighbourhood quality.

Afzal Hussain
Chief Officer, Witton Lodge Community Association



WLCA team photo

Executive summary

Aims

Neighbourhoods are units of place which connect housing and communities spatially, socially and structurally. They have a profound impact on our lived reality and day to day experience. A good neighbourhood is not just aspirational, it is essential to enable communities to thrive. Yet, there is no recognised standard for what makes a “decent neighbourhood”. This absence of a baseline quality standard or framework makes it difficult to assess, improve, and advocate for the places where we live.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard conceptualised in this research project applies the underlying principles and core themes of the Decent Homes Standard to a neighbourhood scale, expanding its scope from the closed system of individual homes to the broader open system of neighbourhoods.

Our ambition is to create a universal but adaptable standard that can be applied to new and existing neighbourhoods and communities, helping to identify local priorities, guide policy and strategic investment, and support community empowerment. This demonstrator project marks the first step in developing a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, a practical framework for evaluating and enhancing the quality of neighbourhoods.

This work is led by the Centre for the New Midlands (CNM) in collaboration with Social Life and delivered in partnership with Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA). The project is underpinned by the belief that neighbourhoods are essential for community wellbeing, resilience, and opportunity. While we have a nationally recognised standard for decent homes, there is no comparable benchmark for the quality of the places around them. This project seeks to address that gap, to address place-based social inequalities and build on the assets of our neighbourhoods and communities.

Methodology

The research was carried out between January and March 2025, combining desk-based research with organisational engagement and community collaboration. The methodology included:

- Comparative framework analysis of five seminal urban design and neighbourhood quality standards, and a systematic thematic analysis of constituent themes when compared against the core principles of Decent Neighbourhoods.
- Documentary analysis of WLCA strategy, operations and data dashboards and the North Birmingham context.
- Meeting observations and workshops with WLCA frontline staff, volunteers, residents, senior leaders and board members.
- A collaborative workshop with WLCA’s local community to explore perceptions of neighbourhood quality and priorities through mapping and ‘neighbourhood diagnostics’, and a practical interaction with the five urban design frameworks to understand their resonance for the local community.

Outcomes

The report sets out an initial ‘model’ of four universal dimensions of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard:

- Neighbourhood Quality Standards
- Accountability, Influence and Stewardship
- Reducing Inequalities and Enabling Aspirations
- Securing a Sustainable Future.

This draws on the Decent Homes Standard core themes and principles, cross referenced with the five seminal urban design frameworks.

Crucial to the Decent Neighbourhood Standard is the reflection of local priorities and a sense of neighbourhood quality through community collaboration and neighbourhood diagnostics. We start from an assets based approach, rather than a deficit model, recognising and mobilising existing assets rather than focusing on needs or deficits in communities. This first pilot has tailored the universal dimensions to create a Witton Lodge Community Association Decent Neighbourhood Standard that reflects both the organisation’s strategic priorities and critical issues for the local community.

The WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard is the first step in a multi-year collaboration around monitoring and evaluation. The Standard highlights WLCA’s role as a community anchor organisation. It will be embedded within WLCA’s organisational planning and community development work. In the future it can be used as an impact evaluation tool: to guide strategic planning; as a framework for evaluation work; to underpin partnership development and to support local community stewardship and neighbourhood accountability.



Figure 1: The Decent Neighbourhood Standard

Recommendations

1 Witton Lodge Community Association

WLCA can start to embed the Decent Neighbourhood Standard within its strategic and business planning, to enhance neighbourhood impact assessments and to guide future strategic planning. The detailed neighbourhood quality metrics and data mapping processes will be developed collaboratively with the project research team. A key part of that development will be co-design and co-creation with the local community through existing engagement forums, working with new community researchers.

2 Community actors and policymakers

There is a need for better neighbourhood-level data and metrics and the Decent Neighbourhood Standard can be deployed as tool to collect those. It can support and enhance policy making and implementation, investment choices, and regeneration plans.

There is an opportunity for community anchor organisations and actors, neighbourhood forums and boards to adopt the Decent Neighbourhood Standard to evaluate their impact on neighbourhoods. The Decent Neighbourhood Standard can support work with local communities to identify neighbourhood priorities, and act as the basis for neighbourhood accountability structures. It will help agencies advocate for the communities they work in.

Collaborative research

The ongoing research project with WLCA will allow for an iterative refining of the framework through longitudinal data collection, collaborative evaluation, and place-based neighbourhood diagnostics that reflect community voices.

Developing the Decent Neighbourhood Standard through a programme of further case studies will support its ongoing testing and development and the practical application of the framework as a tool to support thriving, equitable, and resilient neighbourhoods.

Piloting and adopting the Decent Neighbourhood Standard in a range of neighbourhood types and locations will help to build a body of evidence to share learning and inform a national neighbourhood quality agenda.

Finally, working collaboratively with other institutions, agencies and researchers will strengthen our shared vision around the importance of neighbourhoods as the most appropriate frame and context for meaningful policy and design intervention to improve the quality of place, shaped by and for communities.



Witton Lodge Community Association staff and volunteers' workshop in February 2025

1 Introduction

Where we live is fundamental to our daily lives. Whether it is the streets we walk down, the local park where we connect with nature, the friends we meet or a library that facilitates lifelong learning, neighbourhoods define our experience of the world. A good neighbourhood should not be only aspirational and experienced by some; it is essential for all thriving communities and individuals. Yet, there is no universally recognised standard for what makes a “decent neighbourhood”.

The absence of a framework makes it difficult to assess, improve, and advocate for the places where we live. We define neighbourhood as a spatial and perceptual unit which connects housing and communities spatially and structurally, and we’re interested in understanding the quality of a neighbourhood and its impacts on communities and place-making.¹

The Centre for the New Midlands (CNM), Social Life and Witton Lodge Community Association have entered a partnership to develop a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, a practical framework for evaluating and enhancing neighbourhoods. While the work developing the framework is starting with the WLCA demonstrator, it is designed to be replicable, informing policy and practice across diverse places.



Duckling Watch at the Eco Hub and Witton Lakes Credit: WLCA

¹ Place-making is a collaborative, participatory process that empowers communities to shape their public spaces in ways that reflect local identity, promote wellbeing, and foster social, cultural, and economic vitality. Place-making can be regarded as both a theoretical and a practical approach to planning and design that focuses on strengthening the connection between people and the places they share.

Project for Public Spaces. (n.d.). What is Placemaking? <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

UN-Habitat. (2015). Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice. Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme



Collaborative workshop with local residents in February 2025 at Perry Common Community Hall

1.1 About the project

CNM and Social Life carried out this research between January and March 2025. The aim of the project is to create a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, acting as an initial place-based evaluation framework for WLCA to test, refine and pilot. This will measure the impact of the Association’s work at neighbourhood level, inform the development of a strategic framework and become the starting point for a three-year plan for monitoring and development.

This project is part of CNM’s ‘Towards a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard’ research programme and builds on Social Life’s work over a decade developing and testing social sustainability frameworks with communities in different contexts, and the ‘practice into policy’ approach developed by WLCA over the last three decades.

Through this work we’re engaging with the West Midlands region across the public, private and charity sectors, with academia, and most

importantly with communities to create bottom-up case studies of what a Decent Neighbourhood Standard should look like in different places.

The WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard is a demonstrator project by which we can test and refine this approach in a real-world context, ensuring the Standard meets its intended aims of using data and evidence to enhance neighbourhood quality.

The demonstrator is the start of a long-term collaboration. Our collective goal is to develop a standard that is evidence-based, community-driven, and capable of inspiring lasting change in neighbourhoods in Birmingham, the West Midlands, and across the country.

1.2 About the project partners

Witton Lodge Community Association



Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) is a Community Association and Community Landlord. The organisation was established in 1994 by residents of Perry Common, and over the decades WLCA has evolved into an active resident-led organisation dedicated to improving housing, health, employment, and community life in North Birmingham. WLCA delivers practical services to the local community while aiming to create a sense of belonging and place-identity for residents. Their work is shaped by the lived experiences of residents, staff, and volunteers, alongside best practice and academic insights.

WLCA is aiming to develop its bespoke Decent Neighbourhood Standard with its community, as a tool for neighbourhood impact assessment and strategic planning.

<https://www.wittonlodge.org.uk/>

The Centre for the New Midlands (CNM)



Centre for the New Midlands

CNM is the only independent, not-for-profit think tank for the West Midlands. The Centre creates a space to debate and shape a better region, fostering collaboration across society, industry, and academia. With a strong track record in research spanning digital innovation, infrastructure, people and skills, and housing and communities, CNM is well positioned to drive forward the development of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard. Its ability to connect stakeholders and influence policy positions the insights from this work to contribute to shaping both local and national agenda.

<https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/>

Social Life



Social Life is a social enterprise founded by the Young Foundation in 2012 to specialise in the social dynamics of places. Focused on the intersection between people and their built environment, Social Life brings deep expertise in community-led research and taking action to boost the social dimension of urban change. Social Life works across the UK and internationally. Social Life is collaborating with CNM to ensure that the Decent Neighbourhood Standard is informed by robust social insights and grounded in the lived experiences of communities. Social Life's expertise in designing qualitative and people-centred frameworks, engagement and community-focus bring an essential know-how to the programme of research.

<https://www.social-life.co/>

2 Conceptualising a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

2.1 The aim of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard is an evaluative framework at the neighbourhood level which aims to support communities to thrive. It translates the core principles and spirit of the Decent Homes Standard² to the neighbourhood and community, adapted to reflect the broader determinants of quality of neighbourhood.

By establishing minimum quality standards across entire neighbourhoods, the Decent Neighbourhood Standard is designed to be universal yet adaptable, applicable to new developments and existing neighbourhoods and communities. Deploying a multi-layered methodology, it draws on established place-based principles and seminal urban design theories, but critically drawing on community insights, neighbourhood diagnostics and community collaboration to tailor the Standard to local needs and priorities.

By setting a baseline for what constitutes a decent neighbourhood and refining this in collaboration with communities, the Decent Neighbourhood Standard crucially seeks to address the accountability gap for neighbourhood quality, underpinned by the principles of social justice, using an asset based approach and seeking to address place-based social inequality.

The universal and local approach of the Standard will ensure all neighbourhoods can be brought into focus, not only the most deprived or in need of intervention, but also the 'lost middle' - neighbourhoods which hinder communities to thrive, with conditions that challenge rather than support aspirations.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard aims to set clear, evidence-based expectations for the places in which we live to create healthier, safer, and more inclusive communities that promote wellbeing, social mobility and quality of life.



Yoga at Witton Lakes Eco Hub. Credit: WLCA

² The Decent Homes Standard was introduced in 2000 by the UK government to improve social housing conditions. The standard was applied primarily to social housing, leading to significant improvements in living conditions. The Decent Homes Standard sets the minimum quality requirements for social housing in England, ensuring homes are safe, warm, and in good repair.

2.2 Neighbourhoods as the unit of change

A neighbourhood is a geographically bound and socially constructed space where people interact and engage with their surroundings. It is shaped by physical infrastructure, social and economic conditions, and culture. Neighbourhoods serve as a foundation for daily life, impacting on residents' wellbeing. Neighbourhood boundaries can be formal or informal, evolving in response to demographic changes, policy, and socio-economic forces as well as local geography. Their significance extends beyond physical location, encompassing architecture, collective memory, and local governance and culture.

The role and importance of neighbourhoods as a unit for change and policy intervention is continually evolving. Technological advancements,

particularly the emergence of smart cities, are beginning to enable highly detailed, data-driven insights at a local level.

Climate change has positioned neighbourhoods as key arenas for sustainable initiatives, from green infrastructure to community-led solutions. The forces of hyper-globalisation have fuelled a renewed desire for human-scale environments, emphasising hyper-localism and walkability.

At an individual level, the Covid-19 pandemic forced intimate reassessment of the places we inhabit, exposing weaknesses in infrastructure and highlighting the importance of local social connections and resilient neighbourhoods. The convergence of these factors presents a critical opportunity to rethink neighbourhoods as spaces that promote inclusivity, sustainability, and community wellbeing.



Community activities at Perry Common. Credit: WLCA



Exploring neighbourhood frameworks at a collaborative workshop, February 2025

In the current political landscape, neighbourhoods have re-emerged as critical units of change in planning and design. We have seen a flurry of research and policy launches in early 2025. The Labour government's "Plan for Neighbourhoods" (2025)³ underscores a shift towards localised decision-making, allocating £1.5 billion to 75 areas across the UK to empower communities in shaping their development.

The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods' (ICON) interim report (2025)⁴ identifies over 600 "mission-critical" neighbourhoods requiring targeted investment to address social inequalities, stressing the necessity of a localised approach to regeneration and national mission-led programmes. Both reports quote the learnings from previous large-scale neighbourhood interventions such as the "New Deal for Communities" (2010) which demonstrates the tangible impact of local community empowerment, with significant improvements in deprived areas through engagement and long-term planning.

The "Building New Towns for the Future" interim report (2025) produced by the MHCLG New Towns Task Force⁵ draws on lessons from previous new town programmes and asserts the importance of high-quality design, affordable housing, integrated infrastructure, and strong local governance. The proposed twelve new towns will have to consider innovative ways to develop socially sustainable neighbourhoods.

The Task Force also emphasises community engagement to create socially and environmentally resilient places, proposing mechanisms such as land value capture, harnessing the increased value of land caused by public investments, to reinvest in local amenities. The Design Council Homes Task Force launched their own Design for Neighbourhoods report⁶ in early 2025 which focuses on the need for holistic visions for neighbourhoods, driven by a whole stock approach, better design and supporting social cohesion.

³ MHCLG (2025) Plan for Neighbourhoods Prospectus: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus>

⁴ Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (2025) Think Neighbourhoods, Interim Report <https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/interim-report-think-neighbourhoods/>

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) Building New Towns for the Future: Interim Report. [online] London: MHCLG New Towns Task Force. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-new-towns-for-the-future>

⁶ Design Council (2025) Design for Neighbourhoods. [online] Available at: https://issuu.com/designcouncil/docs/design_for_neighbourhoods



Outreach with schools at Witton Lakes Eco Hub. Credit: WLCA

Neighbourhoods are also a central unit to addressing climate adaptation and wellbeing challenges. The “3°C Neighbourhood” report (2024) by CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs⁷, focusing on Ladywood in Birmingham, examines the risks UK urban neighbourhoods face due to climate change, and advocates community-led adaptation strategies. Dark Matter Labs’ “Towards Multi-Capital Models” series (2025)⁸ further explores integrating diverse forms of capital - social, environmental, and economic into financial and decision-making processes focusing on the role of neighbourhoods in systemic change. The climate and systems driven approaches are key baselines for any neighbourhood intervention.

Wider studies on housing and neighbourhood quality reveal their direct impact on wellbeing, with access to green spaces, public services, and social cohesion contributing to higher life satisfaction. The Carnegie UK “Life in the UK 2024: England”⁹ report underscores persistent inequalities in economic and social wellbeing, suggesting that neighbourhood-focused interventions could mitigate these disparities. The 2025 paper by DEMOS “Social Capital 2025: The Hidden Wealth of Nations”¹⁰ examines the role of social networks and trust in fostering economic growth and societal wellbeing.

⁷ CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs (2024) 3°C Neighbourhood. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/neighbourhood-public-square/3%C2%BAc-neighbourhood-582903b050b2>

⁸ Dark Matter Labs (2025) Towards Multi-Capital Models. [online] Provocations. Available at: <https://provocations.darkmatterlabs.org/towards-multi-capital-models-a01539e3ce1d>

⁹ Carnegie UK (2024) Life in the UK 2024: England. [online] Carnegie UK. Available at: <https://carnegieuk.org/publication/life-in-the-uk-2024/>

¹⁰ Haldane, A. and Halpern, D., 2025. Social Capital 2025: The hidden wealth of nations. Local Trust. Available at: <https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/Demos+2>

Research conducted at Aston University in 2021¹¹ investigated the impact of housing quality and neighbourhood conditions on tenant wellbeing. The study found that neighbourhood conditions had distinct wellbeing impacts. Better access to schools, public amenities, essential shops and GP surgeries were associated with higher subjective wellbeing and were positively related to happiness and lower levels of anxiety. Community features such as safety, trust, social cohesion and a sense of belonging were all associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

Conversely, concerns over the neighbourhood were associated with lower levels of wellbeing as well as higher anxiety. Locational aspects of the neighbourhood affected wellbeing too; living in mixed tenure communities was seen as positive, while access to green outdoor spaces (from small gardens to large nature reserves) emerged as critical to wellbeing. Negative wellbeing impacts were related to traffic and pollution, lack of access to public transport, shops, schools or GP surgeries.

Although neighbourhood planning was introduced more than a decade ago through the Localism Act 2011 to empower communities in shaping their local areas, it has yet to realise its full potential in enabling broader community stewardship and planning, largely due to its highly contextual application. However, emerging findings from Reading University’s *Just Neighbourhood Project* (2024)¹² highlight recurring community concerns—such as social justice, safety, and wellbeing—across diverse planning processes, suggesting the universality of these fundamental priorities.

¹¹ Sacranie, H., Tian, L. and Lymer, A., 2022. VIVID Wellbeing Study: The Impact of Housing Quality and Neighbourhoods on Customer Wellbeing. Aston University. Available at: https://www.aston.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/cpfw1_vivid_wellbeing_final_report.pdfHomepage+3

¹² <https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp/just-neighbourhoods/>

¹³ “Nimbyism assumes that the vested interests of the ‘housing haves’ triumph over the ‘housing have nots’ and this is typically often seen in community campaigning across local authorities to turn down planning support for new affordable homes developments. However this tendency and attitude is more nuanced than ‘I’ve got a house and I’m alright’. Communities know affordable housing is needed but oppose it for a range of reasons including the quality of development being poor, the houses being unattractive or the lack of the additional infrastructure and amenities to serve a growing community. It also comes down to the real affordability of those new affordable homes in a particular location or place.”

Centre for the New Midlands (2023) Affordable Housing Roundtable Report: April 2023. Birmingham: Centre for the New Midlands. Available at: <https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CNM-Affordable-Housing-Roundtable-Report-April-2023.pdf>



Picnic at Witton Lakes Eco Hub. Credit: WLCA

2.3 Why a Decent Neighbourhood Standard: quality accountability and addressing social inequalities

While we can generally assign the responsibility for the quality of homes to owners, builders, developers and landlords, when looking beyond buildings and homes, a Decent Neighbourhood Standard raises the question of who is ultimately accountable for the quality of our neighbourhoods. A Decent Neighbourhood Standard should provide the framework to benchmark quality of place, provide insights to organisations on their performance and impact on wider communities, and allow us to make targeted policy decisions to support communities to thrive.

It will also incorporate environmental, ecological and biodiversity factors that contribute towards a socially-just net-zero transition. Developers, investors, the private sector, the charity sector, and civic and community groups all have a role to play, alongside local authorities, in being collectively responsible for the quality of our neighbourhoods.

Councils' financial pressures and resource constraints highlight the importance of neighbourhood level standards for which the public sector, public-private partnerships, the private sector and community organisations can share accountability.

The final report of the APPG for the “Left Behind” Neighbourhoods’ Inquiry into Levelling Up published in October 2023 sets out a definition for the neighbourhoods identified as “left behind” who are facing multiple challenges and disadvantages.¹⁴ The report describes “a basic lack of sufficiently detailed data to guide policy decisions and ensure levelling up reaches the ‘left behind’ communities it is supposed to prioritise.”

There is now both a strong political direction and the evidence base to deliver change at neighbourhood level. Social Life’s work in

communities across the UK¹⁵ has demonstrated that to achieve decent neighbourhoods, we have to safeguard the social and environmental assets of local areas, meet the needs of residents in different circumstances including people with the least power and security, and raise our collective game to make better decisions about the balance between social, environmental and economic trade-offs. A Decent Neighbourhood Standard can be the mechanism for providing that baseline data, at a neighbourhood level, and thus to help inform funding and policy decisions.



Collaborative workshop adapting the Decent Neighbourhood Standard model with Witton Lodge Community Association

¹⁴ “The APPG uses ‘left behind’ to describe a particular set of local authority wards: those facing the dual disadvantage of high levels of deprivation and community need, and low levels of investment and resources. These are neighbourhoods ranked in the ten per cent most deprived on both the Community Needs Index and the Index of Multiple Deprivation. ‘Left behind’ communities face multiple challenges that limit their opportunities compared to other places. They have worse socioeconomic outcomes than the English average - as well as other, equally deprived areas”

All-Party Parliamentary Group for ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods, 2023. A Neighbourhood Strategy for National Renewal. Available at: <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/A-Neighbourhood-Strategy-for-National-Renewal.pdf>

¹⁵ Social Life (2025) Learning from Regeneration: https://www.social-life.co/blog/post/learning_from_regeneration/

2.4 Developing a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

2.4.1 From Decent Homes to Decent Neighbourhoods

There is a crucial distinction between a home and a neighbourhood. A home functions as a closed system, where resources such as energy, water, and household finances are managed within a defined environment. In contrast, a neighbourhood operates as an open system of systems, interconnected with broader economic, social, and environmental networks.

For example, unlike a household budget, which is relatively fixed and self-contained, a neighbourhood's economy is dynamic, influenced by external factors such as employment opportunities, infrastructure investment, and community engagement. This highlights the complexity of neighbourhood development. In the home, individual family units (of various types and forms) live their lives privately and autonomously. Neighbourhoods are collective in nature, encouraging communal ties and interaction.

Any attempts to improve the quality of neighbourhoods requires a systems-based approach that considers the flow of resources, people, relationships and opportunities beyond individual homes. The standard also considers the agents of change such as local communities, grassroots organisations and civic groups, anchor organisations and institutions and public local authorities who will be responsible for upholding it.

The Decent Homes Standard was introduced in 2000 by the UK government to improve social housing conditions. The standard was applied primarily to social housing, leading to significant improvements in living conditions. It sets the minimum quality requirements for social housing in England, and ensures homes are safe, warm, and in good repair.

The standard encompasses the following criteria:

- **Fitness for Habitation:** Homes must be free from serious health and safety hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- **Reasonable State of Repair:** Key building components (e.g. roofs, walls, windows) and services (e.g. plumbing, heating) must not be old and in poor condition.
- **Modern Facilities and Services:** Homes should have adequate kitchens (under 20 years old) and bathrooms (under 30 years old), suitable layouts, and sound insulation.
- **Thermal Comfort:** Properties must have efficient heating and effective insulation to ensure warmth and energy efficiency.

The Decent Homes Standard is being extended to cover the private rented sector through upcoming legislation¹⁶, aiming to ensure that all rented homes meet basic living conditions. This expansion is set to create greater accountability of landlords and provide stronger protections for tenants.

The Decent Homes Standard guidelines set out how the delivery of Decent Homes originally sat within part of wider policies and strategies for neighbourhoods, regeneration and mixed communities. While the policy detail has evolved, those connections remain relevant to current thinking about housing and neighbourhoods.

“Delivering decent homes is a commitment in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and has a key role to play in narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. Delivery needs to be part of a holistic approach to regeneration which is about more than just ‘bricks and mortar’ and which makes the right linkages to wider regeneration objectives such as improving health and education outcomes, renewing failing housing markets, tackling poverty and delivering mixed sustainable communities” (Decent Homes Standard, 2006, pg. 8).¹⁷

Some of the defining characteristics of communities set out by the Decent Homes Standard guide included having “good quality housing in attractive environments with access to good local schools and retail or leisure facilities and other services such as health; a mix of housing size, type and tenure; strong local economies which contribute to strong regional economies; good connections to employment opportunities through neighbourhood design, transport and job access services; providing access to other economic and social opportunities for all residents, enhancing their life chances; high quality housing and neighbourhood management; low levels of crime and providing support services for vulnerable people and families at risk.” (Decent Homes Standard, 2006, pg.9).

Looking to the future, and addressing the need to adapt to climate change, another home quality standard iteration ‘The Future Homes Standard (FHS)’ is expected to be implemented in 2025.

The FHS will also play a crucial role in shaping housing quality by setting ambitious energy efficiency and carbon reduction targets for new homes. The aim of this new standard will be to ensure that new-build properties are net-zero ready, incorporating low-carbon heating and high-performance insulation, aligning with broader government objectives for sustainability and climate resilience.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard takes as its starting point both the spirit of accountability, and some of the same core categories as the Decent Homes Standard, and aspirations of the Future Homes Standard, evolved to capture neighbourhood-level social, environmental, economic and spatial challenges. Table 1 sets out an initial comparative mapping of some of the key principles and themes of the Decent Homes Standard. This was then used to inform a systematic thematic analysis of seminal neighbourhood frameworks, summarised in Section 2.4.2 below.

DHS Starting Elements	Mapped Decent Homes Standard	Mapped Selected Frameworks	Emerging Decent Neighbourhood Standard
Focus	Focus on household	Focus on Community	Focus on Community
Accountability	Clear and tenure specific	Aspirational and evaluative	Ambiguous - accountability vacuum at neighbourhood level
Component Parts	Specified and quantifiable	Diverse and non-comparable	Non-specified and diverse Neighbourhoods layered over time Diverse aspects need to be up-to-date and fit for purpose
Safety	Removal of hazards to occupants	Perceptions of safety and minimum provision	Safety is key - reducing crime, removing physical hazards, identifying social risk and addressing community needs
Health and Wellbeing	Tangible metrics - e.g. fire risk, intangible - tenant wellbeing	Nuances and complex understanding of wellbeing core to each framework	Tangible and intangible metrics Multitude of drivers from air quality and clear water to community wellbeing and social cohesion
Net Zero	Future Homes Standards and housing quality standards	Mix of representations, focus on climate, resilience and nature	Net Zero Neighbourhoods Need to integrate different standards more broadly

Table 1: Decent Homes, Selected frameworks and Decent Neighbourhood: Mapping

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill>

¹⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2006) A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation - June 2006 update. London: DCLG. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79ce6ded915d0e3c5bf98f/A_Decent_Home_-_Definition_and_guidance.pdf

2.4.2 Analysis of key frameworks

In developing further the Decent Neighbourhood Standard model we looked at five frameworks employed at neighbourhood level from tools for evolution and monitoring to delivery, namely:

- Design for Social Sustainability, Social Life¹⁸
- 15/ 20 Minute City, developed by Carlos Moreno¹⁹
- Place Standard, Our Place and Scottish Government²⁰
- Inclusive Growth Framework, West Midlands Combined Authority²¹
- Quality of Life Framework, QoLF²²

The frameworks were selected based on analysis of best practice, picking a mix of frameworks which were relevant to the demonstrator project at Witton Lodge Community Association. Each of the frameworks had a specific focus from the perceptual views of residents; availability and proximity of key infrastructure; standard of place; economic resilience and quality of life. (For more detail on the 5 framework analysis please see Appendix C).

The spatial dimension of neighbourhoods emerged strongly from the 15-minute city framework and the Place Standard Tool, informing the neighbourhood quality and accountability priorities of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard. The frameworks emphasised the need to monitor community assets, social and physical infrastructure, building upon the starting question of reasonable state of repair the Decent Homes Standard tackled with, but expanding the logic to derive at a reasonable state of infrastructure provision and suitability.

Similarly, alongside the WMCA Inclusive Growth and Design for Social Sustainability, the frameworks brought out the spirit of the Decent Homes Standard as a mandated standard, by highlighting the importance of governance and institutional lenses. At neighbourhood level, enforceability shifts and issues of influence, accountability and partnerships become more pronounced, leading to the development of this priority within the Decent Neighbourhood Standard.

Finally, the social dimension of neighbourhoods, perceptual views and needs, were essential to each of the examined frameworks, emphasising the definition of neighbourhoods around communities as much as spatial characteristics. The importance of understanding feelings of belonging, safety, community cohesion and future aspirations were all essential elements. This led the Decent Neighbourhood Standard to expand beyond the more narrow and quantifiable bounds of a technical standard, to consider this an essential priority at neighbourhood level.

2.5 The four dimensions of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

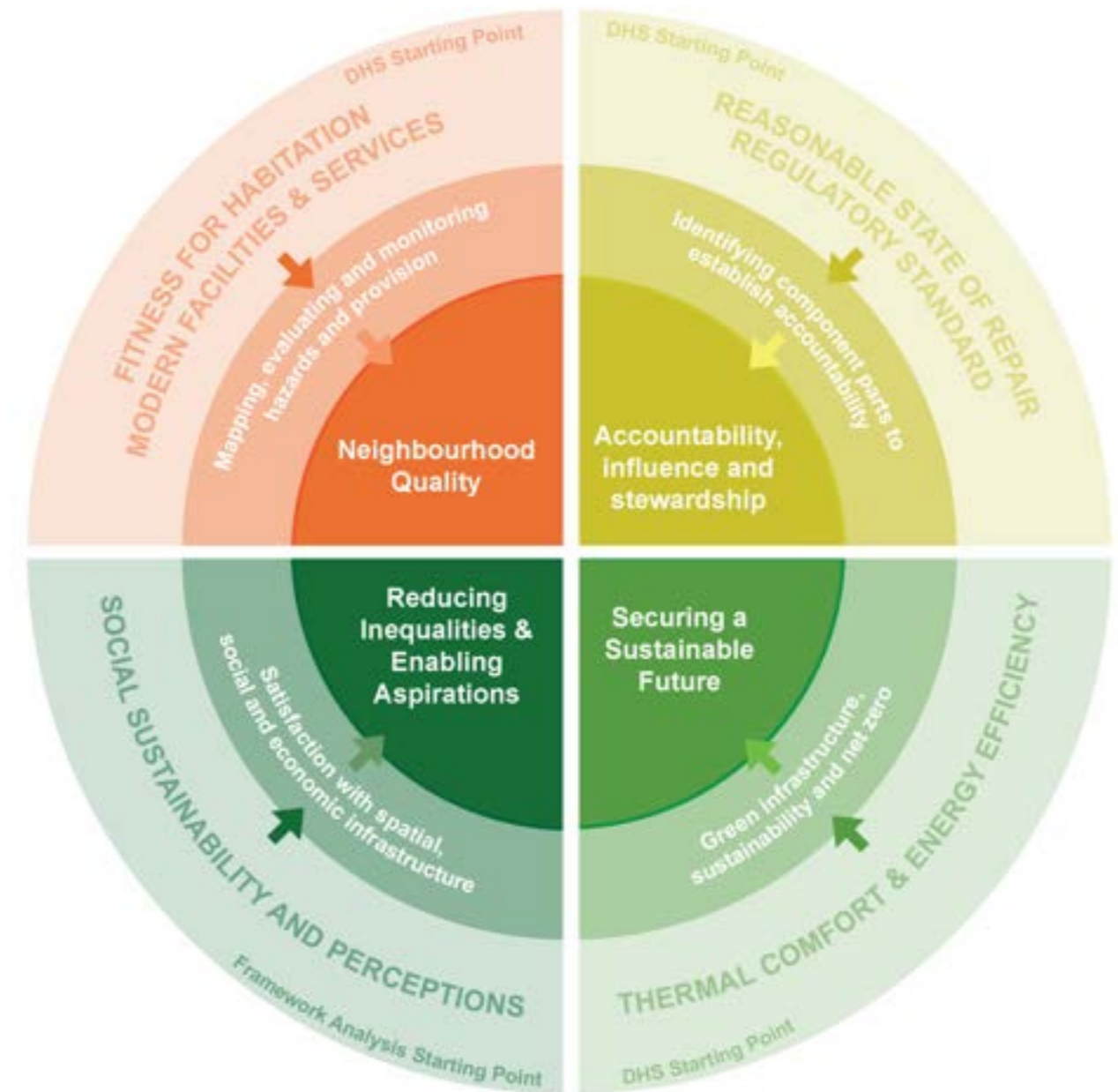


Figure 2: The Decent Neighbourhood Standard Universal Dimensions, translation from Decent Homes Standard and framework analysis to emergent model

¹⁸ Social Life (2011) Design for Social Sustainability: A framework for creating thriving new communities. London: Social Life. Available at: https://www.social-life.co/publication/design_for_social_sustainability/

¹⁹ Moreno, C. (2020) The 15-Minute City: A new urban model. Paris: Mairie de Paris. Available at: <https://www.paris.fr/pages/le-paris-des-quarts-d-heure-15820>

²⁰ Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and Architecture & Design Scotland (2015) Place Standard Tool: How good is our place? Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.placestandard.scot/>

²¹ West Midlands Combined Authority (2020) Inclusive Growth Framework: Making inclusive growth real in the West Midlands. Birmingham: WMCA. Available at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4052/inclusive-growth-framework.pdf>

²² Quality of Life Foundation (2021) The Quality of Life Framework. London: Quality of Life Foundation. Available at: <https://www.qolf.org>

Neighbourhood Quality Standards

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard extends the Decent Homes Standard principle of neighbourhoods free from hazards and enabling modern facilities and services to the neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood quality standards are the baseline of understanding the living conditions in a neighbourhood. This includes measures to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and to improve public safety; reduce environmental risks like flooding and pollution; and create healthy living environments with access to green spaces, and robust social infrastructure.

Reducing Inequalities and Enabling Aspirations

A decent neighbourhood must provide essential amenities and infrastructure that enable economic and social mobility, and support social capital, feelings of belonging, wellbeing and resilience, underpinned by perceptual data and the needs of residents. The Decent Neighbourhood Standard ensures monitoring of access to education, employment, digital connectivity, and transport links—key factors in addressing systemic inequalities and supporting inclusive local economies. It also captures local social relationships and the quality of relationships between groups, which are key elements of wellbeing and resilience.

Accountability, Influence and Stewardship

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard translates the regulatory spirit of the Decent Homes Standard and its principle of good repair into ensuring that neighbourhood infrastructure such as roads, public spaces, and local amenities and social infrastructure are well-maintained and fit for purpose. This requires clear governance structures that promote community stewardship and accountability. There is a critical role for community anchor organisations, neighbourhood forums and/or boards to support communities to take ownership of their neighbourhood.

Securing a Sustainable Future

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard takes a wider environmental approach, embedding green infrastructure, sustainable transport and net-zero policies to create climate-resilient communities. The forward-looking dimension ensures sustainability at a neighbourhood scale.

Each of these categories require the adoption of data measurement metrics, drawing on both existing and new qualitative and quantitative data, to ensure that this evidence align with the lived experiences of residents. This approach ensures that both tangible infrastructure and intangible aspects of community life are accounted for in the standard.

3 The Witton Lodge Community Association Decent Neighbourhood Demonstrator

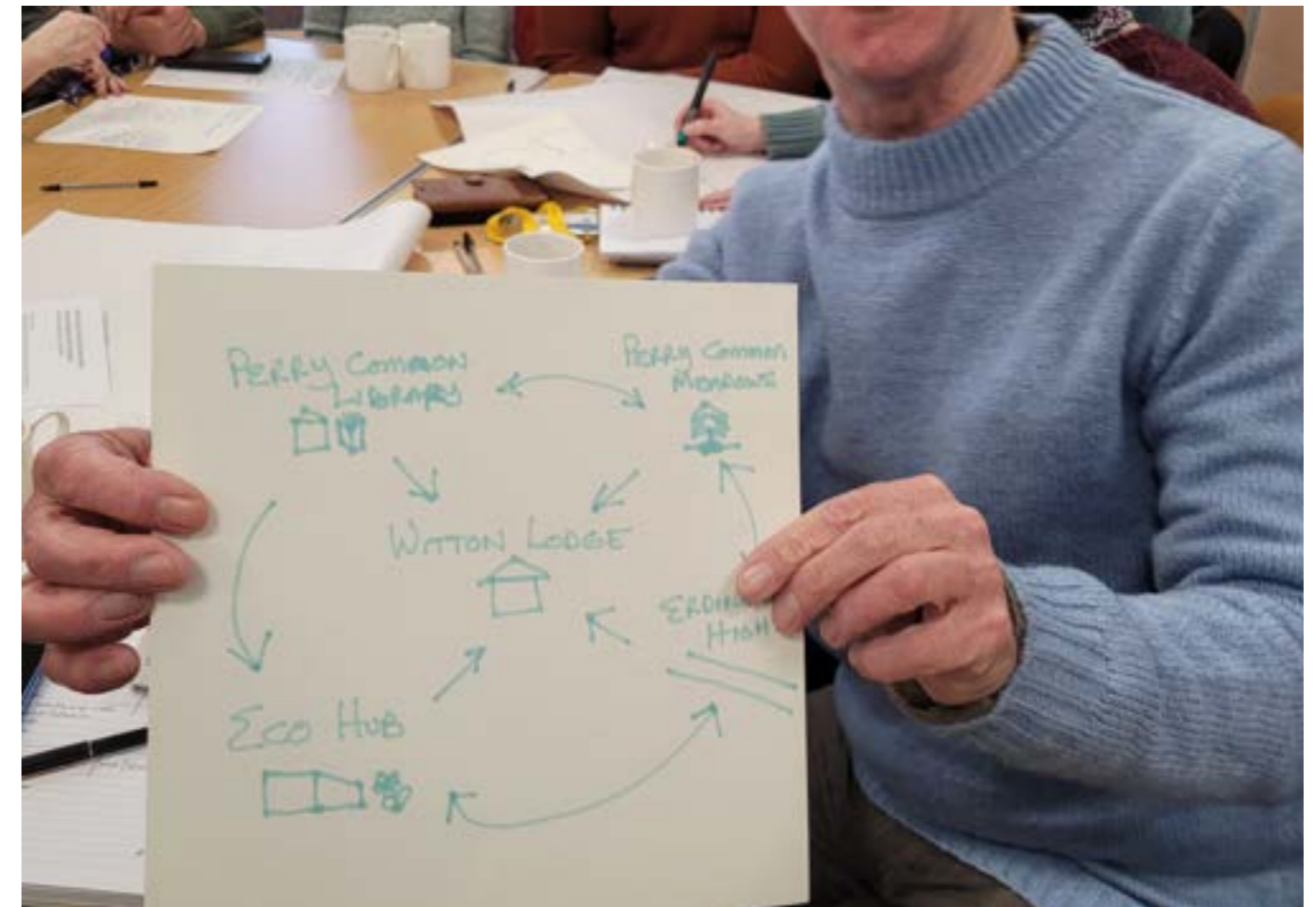
3.1 About Witton Lodge Community Association

WLCA was formed in 1994 by a group of residents. From its inception, WLCA has evolved from a community-led housing organisation managing and building housing, to their role as a community anchor organisation aiming to create vibrant and thriving places for people.

In the first year of operation, WLCA invested £333,000 in community-led initiatives, with a focus on environmental sustainability, health and

wellbeing, and employment; areas of focus that residents identified as their priorities.

For nearly two decades (1994-2012), WLCA operated without permanent staff, relying on volunteers and external commissions to deliver services. Today, WLCA employs over 40 people, reflecting the increasing demand for services and the organisation's evolving role in the community.



Witton Lodge Community Association through the eyes of staff and volunteers, workshop in February 2025

3.2 Why a Witton Lodge Community Association Decent Neighbourhood Standard

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) is an ideal first demonstrator for the Decent Neighbourhood Standard because of its community-based structure and ethos. As an organisation it tries to bridge the gap between local needs and policy, offering practical services while fostering community ownership and social cohesion.

Its resident-led model is rooted in strong participatory governance and place-based leadership, with initiatives spanning housing, health, employment, and community wellbeing. WLCA works in both Perry Common and Erdington, a range of semi-urban and urban contexts, with diverse geographical and demographic profiles.

WLCA's commitment to innovation and continuous learning makes it a compelling demonstrator of a decent neighbourhood. The Decent Neighbourhoods Standard will systematically measure impact at the neighbourhood level, set clear goals, and enable organisations to reflect on past and future actions. WLCA are interested in adopting a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, capturing and demonstrating impact to shape their future strategic priorities and reinforce a community-led approach.

Research Context

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard Demonstrator at Witton Lodge Community builds on past research by the University of Birmingham²³ highlighting the significant impact of WLCA's community-led approach which provided a valuable starting point.

Key recommendations from the past study suggest that strengthening partnerships with local organisations, such as the Lakeside Family Centre, and fostering collaboration between residents, service providers, and the Police could

help address pressing concerns like anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood safety and traffic calming. Enhancing community communication through a mix of digital platforms, notice boards, and printed materials would increase awareness of local events.

The research recommends consulting residents on the introduction of meeting points and shared spaces to support relationships. There is a limited scope to the research, however, as it is only presenting a perspective of community life and neighbourhood conditions in North Birmingham, without establishing a framework or an ongoing monitoring and evaluating process.

The research context and insights have informed our approach and guided our focus. We have started further engagement with WLCA staff, volunteers and residents to inform WLCA's development and delivery of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard.

We want to take this further in phase two in which we will develop the evaluation and monitoring processes underpinning the standard. We want to ensure a Decent Neighbourhood Standard is grounded in local experiences, responsive to community needs, and scalable across similar neighbourhoods.



Residential properties managed by Witton Lodge Community Association Credit: WLCA

²³ Internal report to WLCA by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, the research was conducted in 2017 with community researchers in the local area.

4 Our approach

This research project took a four-stage approach.

Stage 1: Neighbourhood framework mapping

A desk-based rapid assessment reviewed five seminal place-shaping frameworks (as described in Section 2.4.2. above) selected because of their global and regional impact and relevance to the project. The selected frameworks were cross referenced with the Decent Homes and then Decent Neighbourhoods themes and categories, and staff and community insights from the meetings and collaborative workshops with WMCA.

Stage 2: Organisational document analysis

Desk-based analysis of strategy, policy and monitoring documents to provide a deeper insight into the organisation. These documents were coded and mapped against the Decent Homes Standard framework, as well as the 5 key neighbourhood frameworks.



Witton Lodge Community Association staff and volunteers map organisational values, February 2025

Stage 3: Leadership, staff and community engagement

Findings from Stage 1 informed the initial structure of a WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard. Organisational insights were gathered through meetings with WLCA leadership, frontline management, and community representatives, providing an overview of key interventions, impacts, and strategic priorities. Community and stakeholder workshops explored emerging themes and started to refine the universal dimensions for a more targeted analysis.

Stage 3 of the research deployed ‘Neighbourhood Diagnostics’ questions as a core element of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard methodology. These questions focused on community and organisational co-design, allowing residents to identify priorities, define minimum quality standards for their neighbourhood, and highlight existing or potential hazards. These questions included:

- How would you define your neighbourhood?
- What makes you want to move to a neighbourhood?
- What makes you want to stay in a neighbourhood?
- What makes you want to leave a neighbourhood?

Appendix B provides a detailed analytical overview of each of the diagnostic questions based on our engagement with WLCA.

Date	Activity	Summary
03.02.2025	Witton Lodge Staff and Stakeholder Workshop	Using interactive activities to map key neighbourhood features, identify community engagement, and discuss WLCA's values and measures of success.
05.02.2025	Workshop with senior leadership trustees	Roundtable with WLCA senior leadership and trustees explored the organisation's operations, strategic direction, partnerships, and approaches to measuring community impact.
14.02.2025	North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board	Observed North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board, in which WLCA plays a key part. The standing meeting focused on strategies to address ongoing economic challenges in the region, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.
27.02.2025	Community Engagement Workshop	Interactive community workshop and an online survey to capture residents' perspectives on their neighbourhoods. The workshop explored community members' views on the key frameworks explored, as well as the key minimum qualities of a decent neighbourhood.

Stage 4: Evaluation and reporting

This report presents this synthesis of the work undertaken between January and March 2025. This will be followed by a longer-term research strategy for monitoring, co-designing metrics, testing and refining the demonstrator WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard, while conducting other Decent Neighbourhood Standards case study and demonstrator projects.

5 The Witton Lodge Community Association Decent Neighbourhood Standard

5.1 Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood Demonstrator overview

The Demonstrator adapts the universal dimensions of our emerging Decent Neighbourhood Standard model to the local community needs and priorities of Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA). The WLCA Demonstrator is made up of four quadrants, each addressing the key dimensions of a decent neighbourhood - quality, community, accountability and future resilience. These can serve as both an evaluative and monitoring tool, as well as a strategic planning tool.

Each of the dimensions informs the others and collectively they set the standard for a decent neighbourhood. Each (or any) of the dimensions can serve as the starting point of an iterative and collaborative process to explore and inform neighbourhood quality.

This standard will support WLCA to evaluate the quality of, and impacts on, different neighbourhoods in which they operate, allowing better planning to meet specific needs in each area. Accordingly, the dimensions align with WLCA governance and operations, which means they can be incorporated into existing work streams.



Figure 3: WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard Demonstrator

Dimension 1

Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality

This dimension looks to evaluate the qualities of the neighbourhoods in which WLCA operate, from Perry Common to Erdington High Street. It relies on existing data and links to the emerging data and monitoring stream of work WLCA are developing. The dimension is concerned with collecting data on health, homes, crime and transport at hyper-local level and comparing across neighbourhoods, wider Birmingham and city region to identify gaps, good practices and key needs.

An entry point for this dimension will be a data audit of available hyper-local data, mapping of geographies of local neighbourhoods and establishing specific needs which are informed by the data. Data collection practices within WLCA will be aligned with the wider set available data, locally, regionally and nationally, as well as establishing context specific questions. It will include a baseline assessment of the quality of the neighbourhood against key metrics (see Appendix B and C for what has emerged already in our conversations with residents) specific to WLCA.

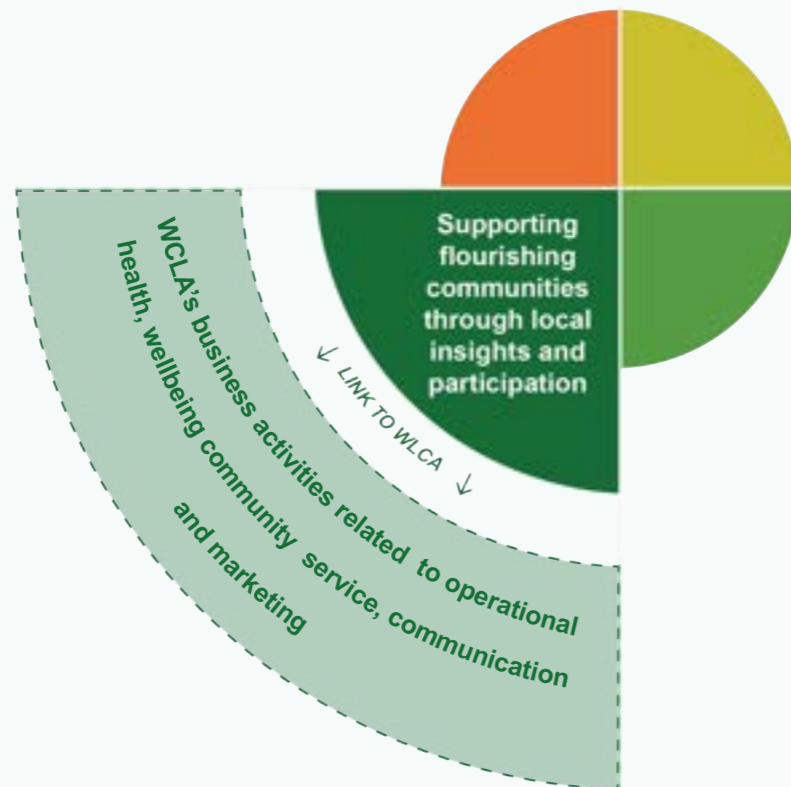


Dimension 2

Supporting flourishing communities through local insights and participation

This dimension introduces the human, social and perceptual elements of the work WLCA conducts. It is focused on establishing an understanding of residents' and community needs, aspirations and perceptions. The dimension links to the wider idea of a decent neighbourhood where inequalities should be reduced, opportunities created, aspirations encouraged, and social capital and resilience supported. Dimension 2 will be concerned with the social networks, assets and infrastructure across the neighbourhood areas.

An entry point for this dimension will be a social impact assessment, developing qualitative data collection capturing the experiences of WLCA residents and the communities it supports. Community Dynamics predictive data (a methodology developed by Social Life) can illuminate the perceptual context in which WLCA operates and allow for comparison with local data. It could involve long-term engagement with community researchers, enabling WLCA to demonstrate impact, collect community insights and deliver qualitative foresight while supporting residents voice and opportunities. The methodology developed for this project around 'Neighbourhood Diagnostics' will be further developed as a formal community insights research tool to complement Community Dynamics and focus these on perceptions of neighbourhood specifically.



Dimension 3

Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham

This dimension looks at the system of neighbourhoods in North Birmingham in which WLCA operates. It is concerned with the role of WLCA as an anchor institution in the community and the relationships between key organisations in North Birmingham. It will provide a way of monitoring duplication or gaps in delivery at neighbourhood level.

An entry point for this dimension will be a strategic mapping of key zones of influence within which WLCA has direct and indirect impact, auditing accountability structures, stewardship arrangements and opportunities for residents to have agency in both highlighting critical issues for local communities, and in the improvements in the quality of their neighbourhoods.



Dimension 4

Achieving sustainable and inclusive development

This dimension looks to the future. For WLCA it is centred on aligning their strategic planning and actions to deliver sustainable development, climate and nature-friendly neighbourhoods and inclusive growth. It looks at the standards around organisation strategy and delivery within the organisation and matches the strategic direction of the organisation to the needs of the neighbourhood.

A starting point for this dimension will be a best practice audit, evaluating effectiveness of programmes and activities against the other dimensions, and inclusive and sustainable growth objectives.



5.2 Developing the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard Demonstrator

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard WLCA Demonstrator’s dimensions are underpinned by our understanding of the operational activities and strategic direction of the Association, our interviews, conversations and data collection, as well as review of best practice frameworks and documentation. We have presented those in detail in the Appendices.

Here we have drawn out the key findings and how they inform the next steps in developing the standard.

5.2.1 Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality

Central to the Decent Neighbourhood Standard demonstrator for WLCA is establishing a robust baseline that integrates existing internal and external data sources, local quality standards, and new primary data collection. This baseline will help WLCA to identify community needs, assess their areas of influence, and evaluate neighbourhood conditions against established benchmarks of quality.

What we found out about neighbourhood quality and data practices

WLCA has started to consolidate its data collection practices. A strong example of an existing data source is demographic data. This provides a deeper understanding of the make-up of the community and what types of services WLCA should develop. Currently, data from those that directly engage with WLCA is being collected and analysed through PowerBI. This quantitative data can be used to triangulate findings from the staff and volunteer workshop underlining that those that work with WLCA have a deep understanding of the make-up of their local community.

“Our health work has been very innovative, it is keeping up with what’s happening now and where the trends are going relying on the data we collect. We understand the issues and then aim to be creative” - WLCA stakeholder

In our workshops participants identified a diverse population served by WLCA, with a significant presence of older adults. While the majority of residents are white British, WLCA also engages with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups, as well as other key demographics such as unemployed individuals, single parents, disabled residents, and vulnerable households.

Moreover, demographic data capture can also highlight who is not served by WLCA’s current programmes and services. Our sessions with staff, stakeholders and community revealed limited engagement with specific demographic groups, including pre-school children, young adults aged 18-25, and some faith communities.



Collecting data at community events Credit: WLCA

How we see the standard developing

The focus of this dimension on hard data collection to measure indicators of neighbourhood quality and enable medium to long-term monitoring. It poses key questions about geographical boundaries and aims to establish minimum service and facility standards required for a decent living environment.

This dimension builds most closely on the learnings from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Inclusive Growth Framework and the Place Standard Tool (see Appendix C). The WMCA's framework metrics can be adapted to hyper-local level to develop minimum standards. Similarly, the Place Standard tool framework provides a methodology for qualifying diverse urban design elements in a systematic way. The reviewed 15 and 20-minute neighbourhood frameworks demonstrate that clear metrics on proximity and need can also be established.

Existing data collected by WLCA can be complemented by regional and national datasets, providing a more comprehensive understanding of neighbourhood conditions. From experience, we know that national and regional data sets often are hard to translate at hyper-local and neighbourhood level. Combining these sources with WLCA's internal data will enhance their capacity to monitor impact, identify gaps, and inform future strategic decisions. At this stage, we have identified the following research and data mapping priorities for WLCA to consider:

- Mapping and understanding geographical neighbourhoods for impact assessment, allowing for comparability and strategic prioritisation.
- Understanding crime and safety across the areas in which WLCA operates.
- Detailed mapping of demographics of service users and understanding gaps.
- Hyper local mapping of proximities and availability of social infrastructure, physical assets, green and blue spaces, quality of urban realm and accessibility.

- Understanding existing data assets which WLCA already has.

Data sources will include, amongst others:

- National and Regional Data Sets - Office for National Statistics (ONS), West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), local authority databases.
- Health and Crime Data - Public Health England, NHS data, police reports, crime statistics.
- Education and Employment Metrics - School attainment records, employment rates, access to training.
- Infrastructure and Accessibility - Walking distances to key services (e.g., GP, schools, retail, transport), broadband connectivity, green space access.

Recommendations:

- 1 Conduct a baseline assessment of neighbourhood quality to understand current neighbourhood conditions, identify areas of influence, and measure needs against established quality standards.
- 2 Integrating internal organisational data with relevant regional and national datasets to create a more robust evidence base for monitoring and evaluation of neighbourhood impacts as well as decision-making.
- 3 Develop a monitoring framework based on the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, supporting strategic planning and improving accountability across all service areas,
- 4 Ongoing monitoring and data collection as part of long-term Decent Neighbourhood Standard evaluation will need to include both quantitative and qualitative insights to track both long-term neighbourhood impacts and emerging community needs.

5.2.2 Supporting flourishing communities through local insights and participation

This dimension focuses on understanding residents, their needs, wants, and perceptions in to co-create a flourishing neighbourhood. The dimension informs the strategic direction of WLCA and ensures that community voice remains central to shaping organisational strategy.

What we found out about WLCA's communities

CNM and Social Life undertook stakeholder workshops and a community consultation to shape our understanding of community priorities. Workshops used interactive group activities and facilitated discussions to explore WLCA's work and its impact on the local neighbourhood. Participants were asked to draw or map key features of their neighbourhood, identify who engages with WLCA, and highlight community landmarks. A new research protocol was developed for this project which was a 'neighbourhood diagnostics' approach, centred around understanding what the key components of a decent neighbourhood for people are.

Findings from this research revealed two contrasting themes:

- A positive perception across the system of neighbourhood, in which WLCA operates, rooted in community connections and local amenities.
- And a negative one focused on safety concerns and environmental maintenance.

While many respondents expressed pride in their local spaces and the sense of community fostered through events and shared facilities, others highlighted issues related to crime, neglect, and a lack of investment.

Social connections

Social relationships emerged as the most significant factor influencing residents' attachment to their neighbourhood. WLCA's community spaces and events play a vital role in fostering these connections. Staff mentioned the multicultural nature of their team and strong volunteer engagement as a strength, allowing them to better connect with the communities they support.

"I very much appreciate Witton Lodge volunteers at Perry Common Library" - Community Member

The staff and volunteer workshop underlined WLCA's role in supporting residents, facilitating new social connections and acting as a trusted community engager. "We change people's lives" was a repeated impact statement reported by staff and volunteers, indicating high pride in the work that they do. Participants in the workshop reported the value of their services can be demonstrated by observing positive change in service users, monitoring that change through individual assessments and a data-driven approach.

Crucially, residents and stakeholders underlined the trusted reputation of the WLCA citing word-of-mouth recommendations and positive public feedback can be viewed as evidence of WLCA's influence. Participants suggested that repeat service use and ongoing engagement with WLCA's programmes reflect community trust and the long-term effectiveness of the organisation's work. This positions the WLCA as a key facilitator of neighbourhood improvements that have community support and can create lasting benefits for people.

Community safety

Whilst the 2017 University of Birmingham internal WLCA study found that 80% of residents surveyed reported feeling safe in their community, concerns around parking, dog fouling, anti-social behaviour, and vandalism remain prevalent. One resident voiced a clear plea to “sort out crime, fly tipping (shops) and make space safe”. Workshop participants noted that some safety concerns were shaped as much by negative perceptions as by direct experience, sharing “I hear many comments that people no longer want to go to Erdington. Hopefully perceptions will soon change”. Although initiatives such as Operation Fearless²⁴ in Erdington are working to reshape both crime levels and perceptions of safety, these issues continue to be a concern within the community.

Local amenities

Access to shops, schools, healthcare, and communal spaces emerged as a priority for residents and significantly impacts perceptions of neighbourhood quality. The participants identified several key physical assets from which WLCA already operates. The core assets were seen as the Perry Common Hall and Erdington High Street Hub (reported at the workshops to be attracting all ages), Eco Hub (perceptually engaging an older demographic) and the soon to open Erdington Baths Enterprise Hub. Other key assets identified over which Witton Lodge doesn't have direct control, but where volunteers and staff engage regularly, were Witton Lakes and Perry Common Meadows (catering for all ages) and Perry Common Library (reported at the workshops to cater for older demographics). Overall, these local amenities were reported to improve neighbourhood quality.

Economic factors

The availability of affordable housing and local employment opportunities is critical to supporting residents' long-term wellbeing and reducing inequalities. Many residents described their

decision to live in a neighbourhood as being driven by “mostly necessity”, reflecting the reality that economic and social factors often force people to accept neighbourhood conditions out of practical need. However, participants also highlighted how economic and social factors frequently lead residents to engage with services and amenities beyond their immediate area.

How we see the standard developing

The dimension **Supporting flourishing communities through local insights and participation** captures resident experiences and community dynamics to provide a deeper understanding of neighbourhood quality and community wellbeing beyond traditional hard data. While statistics on crime, infrastructure, and economic performance offer valuable insights, they do not fully reflect how people feel about where they live, their trust in local institutions, or their sense of belonging.

This dimension aligns most closely with the Social Life's Design for Social Sustainability and the Quality of Life Foundation frameworks and builds on the methodologies employed for understanding perceptual dimensions and needs in a community. (See Appendix C)

We need to understand how residents perceive and experience their environment. This goes beyond physical infrastructure to include social interactions, cultural identity, and emotional connections to place. Deploying the Decent Neighbourhoods Standard 'Neighbourhood Diagnostics' research tool will help identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities within neighbourhoods, to inform the development of locally relevant policies and interventions.

At this stage we believe priorities for WLCA are:

- Further understand communities' perceptions, specifically on issues around safety and security, social cohesion, wellbeing and resilience and economic opportunity.

interpretation of data and strategic decision making. This can be achieved by employing methodologies such as Community Dynamics.

Community Dynamics

Community Dynamics²⁵ is a methodology developed by Social Life that maps data that predicts how people are likely to feel about where they live. It complements the data commonly used by local agencies - information about deprivation, crime, public health - with data that tells us how people experience everyday life in local neighbourhoods. By incorporating Community Dynamics Data, resident surveys, and long-term, co-designed qualitative research, this dimension embeds people-centred perspective on neighbourhood quality.

A key component of this process is benchmarking findings against national perceptual surveys, such as those measuring community cohesion, safety, and participation levels. This allows for a comparative analysis between different neighbourhoods and ensures that local insights align with broader regional and national trends. By establishing longitudinal benchmarks, this framework enables continuous monitoring of satisfaction, trust, and civic engagement, ensuring that interventions are both effective and responsive to evolving community needs.

- Consider an asset-based approach or frame, understanding the social and community assets (tangible and intangible) across different demographics to better leverage influence and impact.
- Understand what the gaps are in mutual support systems in their neighbourhoods.
- Develop internal practices to capture experiences through qualitative data.
- Capitalise on the strength of resident-led leadership, strong volunteer networks and engaged customers to develop a long-term approach to community data gathering.

Recommendations:

- 5 Baseline social impact assessment: Develop and carry out a large-scale survey to gather insights on how residents experience and think about their neighbourhood.
- 6 Social Infrastructure: Map social infrastructure, local assets and support systems through community-led exercises to strengthen evidence base (drawing on survey data from social impact assessment).
- 7 Develop long-term community-led data collection processes: Establish ongoing methods to gather perceptual and qualitative data to capture residents' experiences and insights to feed into the Standard. Train residents to work as researchers and to feed into the design and analysis of research.
- 8 Engage a core group of trustees, volunteers and residents to steer, support and interpret the perceptual data emerging.
- 9 Align processes in this dimension with the data collection processes in Dimension 1: Neighbourhood Quality to enable

²⁴ <https://www.westmidlands.police.uk/police-forces/west-midlands-police/areas/campaigns/campaigns/operation-fearless/>

²⁵ Social Life (2019) Understanding Local Areas: https://www.social-life.co/publication/understanding_local_areas/

5.2.3 Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham

This dimension evaluates the accountability and stewardship structures that are essential to ensure a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, looking at the wider system and networks while adopting an actor-network theory approach.

What we found out

WLCA holds a key position in the area as a community-led anchor organisation with the capacity to influence policy and decision-making. It is well placed to take forward this aspect of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard. Its involvement in initiatives like the North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board demonstrates its ability to coalesce stakeholders and bridge local community needs with broader policy agendas, fostering accountability across stakeholders.

“We have some wonderful partnerships, built on relationships. There is value there. Witton Lodge is different in these relationships – when we’ve asked people to describe WLCA it is the warmth of people, opposite to a faceless organisation.” - WLCA Stakeholder

WLCA plays an important role in facilitating collaboration between residents, local authorities, and service providers, which can contribute to increased trust, transparency, and accountability. This approach has the potential to support more inclusive and sustainable neighbourhood development. The organisation’s resident-led model of leadership forms the basis for its strong local connections. We observed that some staff and senior leaders who had previously been residents or service users had later transitioned into roles as employees or trustees.

WLCA’s strategic documents indicate a clear engagement and ambition to influence the broader context within which they operate. In Figure 4 we have depicted how we see this evolve. From their original base in Perry Common, WLCA has now expanded its work with another natural cluster forming around Erdington High Street. In the workshops and engagement with staff we heard a distinct differentiation between the specific drivers of change and neighbourhood quality characteristics in the two areas. WLCA delivers different services, at various levels of delivery, some of which capture the whole of North Birmingham. This potentially might mask some more hyper-local needs.

Perry Common and Erdington are the first neighbourhoods that the Demonstrator will focus on. However, they should be seen within the wider constellation of neighbourhoods within which WLCA operates (Figure 4). Implementing the standard will allow WLCA to understand its localities better and compare their influence on an operational level. This will help it to better understand its influence within the wider geographies.

How we see the standard developing

Effective governance, an intrinsic feature of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, requires clear structures of accountability, ensuring that those responsible for maintaining neighbourhood standards can be held to account by the communities they serve. This dimension also assesses how community anchor organisations, such as WLCA, can strengthen their role as active stewards of their neighbourhoods.

This dimension builds on the learnings from Social Life’s Design for Social Sustainability voice and influence dimension, including elements such as trust and responsiveness of agencies as well as the Quality of Life framework’s connected communities.

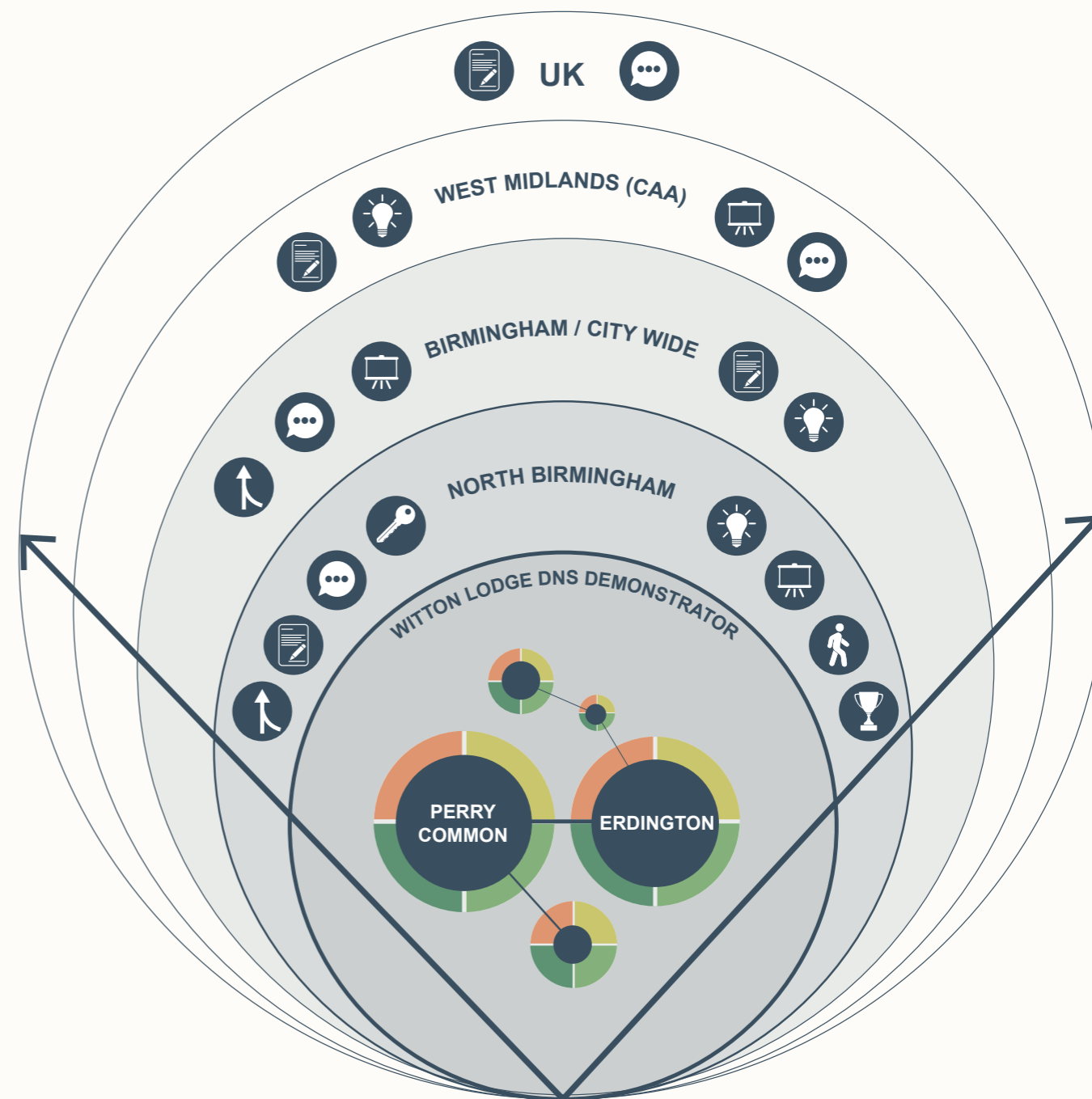


Figure 4: WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Demonstrator mapped against the WLCA Strategic Plan zones of influence.

Recommendations:

- 10 Mapping WLCA's role as a community anchor, its spheres of community influence, ability to impact and stewardship.
- 11 Understanding how best WLCA can use its position as a community anchor to identify specific, local challenges, issues or gaps in neighbourhood services.
- 12 In trying to address the issues and gaps, evaluating what are the existing structures of accountability at the neighbourhood level. (This may include the development of metric tools to assess how different actors impact neighbourhood quality over time.)
- 13 Driving forward local advocacy that WLCA already provides, to drive improvements to neighbourhood services, infrastructure, and housing quality.
- 14 Promoting models of community-led change and governance, such as WLCA's role as a community anchor organisation within a neighbourhood or neighbourhoods.

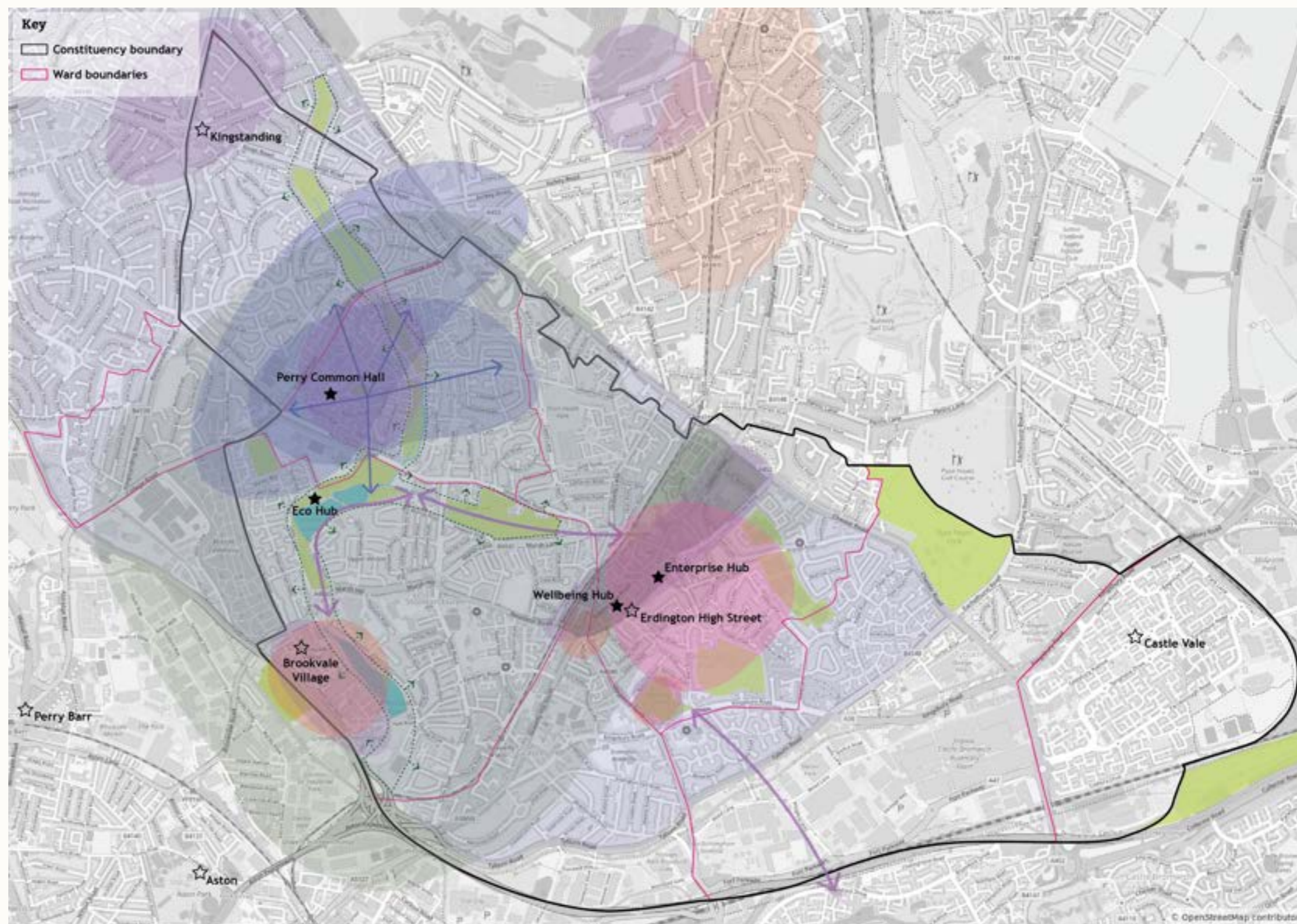


Figure 5. Composite mapping of participants' perceived boundaries of neighbourhoods in North Birmingham. The Erdington constituency and local ward boundaries are overlaid, demonstrating the need to further define neighbourhood boundaries. Areas which WLCA serves such as Wyley Birch and Kingstanding might be outside of formal governance boundaries yet have strong social connections with the core areas of delivery.

5.2.4 Achieving sustainable and inclusive development

This dimension focuses on how WLCA would deploy the Decent Neighbourhood Standard for its future sustainability, strategic planning and development, including around an asset management and inclusive growth strategy.

What we found out

WLCA's core areas of control and responsibility revolve around assets and their management, as well as strategic planning for future growth. The Association is focused on aligning its priorities with the needs of the local community, ensuring that key areas such as housing, employment, health, environment, and community life drive decision-making. WLCA is committed to addressing several key priorities as embedded in its Strategic Plan, including inclusive growth, neighbourhood regeneration, and sustainability. As part of this vision, strategic planning is essential for fostering growth that is inclusive and forward-facing, particularly regarding young people, digital access, and environmental sustainability.

There is already a strong neighbourhoods focus embedded in WLCA's Strategic plan²⁶:

“Stabilise and transform neighbourhoods; by creating high quality homes, community facilities and local parks, with neighbourhood services that local people need and are proud of.”

“Build local networks, infrastructure, and relationships; that promote good health, improved well-being, and enhanced community resilience.”

“Support action on fuel poverty and climate change by implementing a programme of investment and retrofitting our homes and facilities.”

Staff across the organisation valued WLCA's willingness to take risks, pilot new initiatives and invest in long-term community benefits. A key strength was seen in the organisational structure, resident-led governance and non-siloed working. They also appreciated that WLCA's strategy is rooted in consultation and a deep understanding of local issues and felt that WLCA should continue to emphasise and focus on lived experience and holistic community development. However, some areas which require strengthening are aligning long-term strategic direction to short-term engagement and delivery of services and contracts.

Engagement with staff and volunteers through this project revealed that there is appetite to take responsibility for improving local areas by addressing issues like empty properties and fuel poverty. Housing is still a priority, but focus has shifted from community-led building to managing and taking over existing empty homes. Asset management is a key element over which WLCA exercises control allowing it to lead by example.

How we see the dimension developing

This dimension assesses how WLCA's Decent Neighbourhood Standard aligns with Net Zero commitments, good governance practices, and long-term business and strategic planning. It ensures that neighbourhood development is not only socially and economically sustainable but also contributes to climate resilience and environmental sustainability. By embedding Net Zero and inclusive growth principles, the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard can support neighbourhoods towards low-carbon, energy-efficient, and environmentally responsible futures.

The dimension builds on all the examined frameworks (see Appendix C) but aligns most closely with the metrics of 'environmental resilience' in the WMCA Inclusive Growth framework, connections to the 'nature' dimension in the Quality of Life framework, as well as the 'adaptability and resilience' dimension of the Design for Social Sustainability.

Strategic planning for sustainable neighbourhood impact

To ensure long-term success, WLCA can choose to move from a focus on programmes based on available funding opportunities to being more strategic in its activities, aligning its business plans to neighbourhood needs while maximising impact. This requires a theory of change approach, linking interventions to measurable outcomes in social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

WLCA's business planning should integrate climate and nature resilience, ensuring that all activities contribute to sustainable regeneration. In this way Net Zero and sustainability goals are embedded into governance structures, operational models, and funding strategies.

By integrating Net Zero principles, governance best practices, and strategic planning, the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard ensures that neighbourhoods are resilient, sustainable, and adaptable to future challenges.

Operational and strategic approaches to change

To drive real change, organisations need to work both on the ground and at strategic level, testing out new approaches and building on what works, and can be scaled. This includes thinking carefully about how they're governed, how they attract investment, and how they measure their impact.

WLCA is in a strong position as a community-led organisation to test and refine community-based approaches such as through community-led housing, volunteer-driven regeneration projects, and local asset management strategies.

Recommendations:

- 15 Deploying the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard provides a framework to align with Net Zero goals embedding sustainability and resilience into neighbourhood quality improvement and development.
- 16 WLCA can clearly embed sustainability into both strategic governance and strategic planning. For example, through an asset-based development strategy which would leverage WLCA's community-led housing model to create sustainable neighbourhoods where local people have a stake in decision-making and place-shaping. Neighbourhood retrofit initiatives are an example of future activities WLCA could undertake.

²⁶ WLCA Strategic Plan available: <https://wittonlodge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/WLCA-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

6 Conclusion

6.1 A new Decent Neighbourhood Standard to support communities to thrive

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard translates the principles of the Decent Homes Standard beyond individual dwellings to the wider neighbourhood context. Existing frameworks for neighbourhood design tend to be aspirational rather than implementable, often lacking mechanisms for governance and accountability.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard aims to fill this gap by defining a clear baseline, ensuring that every community meets minimum conditions that support sustainable, thriving neighbourhoods. It takes a pragmatic approach, combining:

- A deductive or top-down thematic mapping of core neighbourhood quality themes and metrics and identifying systemic gaps.
- An inductive or bottom-up community co-design which integrates lived experiences, neighbourhood diagnostics and local community insights and priorities.
- Universal place-based accountability based on the principles of equity and addressing social inequalities which is focused on ensuring that a decent quality of neighbourhood supports a decent quality of life for everyone.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard is strategically segmented into four priority dimensions:

Dimension 1. Neighbourhood Quality Standards:

The neighbourhood meets minimum quality standards regarding improving public safety, limiting environmental risks and creating healthy living environments.

Dimension 2. Reducing Inequalities and Enabling Aspirations:

The neighbourhood provides essential amenities and infrastructure that enable economic and social mobility, and support social cohesion, social capital, wellbeing and resilience, underpinned by residents' perceptual data.

Dimension 3. Accountability, Influence and Stewardship:

The neighbourhood infrastructure is well maintained and fit for purpose, supported by robust governance arrangements.

Dimension 4. Securing a Sustainable Future:

The neighbourhood has embedded green infrastructure, sustainable transport and net-zero policies to create climate-resilient communities driven by future-facing organisations.

Each priority incorporates mechanisms for evaluation, adaptable to the evolving needs of neighbourhoods, ensuring that the Decent Neighbourhood Standard is both practical and implementable.

6.2 The next phase for the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard demonstrator

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard offers a focused framework to help WLCA better understand the specific needs of the diverse neighbourhoods it serves, prioritise interventions based on need, strengthen links to regional policy and resource allocation, and align with national policy imperatives.

This report marks the first, critical step in applying the Decent Neighbourhood Standard to WLCA's operations and testing the adaptability of the framework.

Priority 1

Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality

By establishing a baseline of the neighbourhoods in which WLCA operates, the organisation can make more informed strategic decisions and drive long-term improvements.

- **Findings:** WLCA has begun consolidating its data collection practices.
- **Next Steps:** WLCA would benefit from conducting a more systematic baseline assessment of neighbourhood quality, integrating internal data with relevant regional and national datasets, developing a monitoring framework aligned to the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, and embedding ongoing monitoring and data collection as part of long-term evaluation efforts.

Priority 2

Supporting flourishing communities through local insights and participation

Understanding residents' needs, aspirations, and perceptions is key to building thriving communities.

- **Findings:** Communities have a positive perception of their neighbourhoods rooted in community connections and local amenities, but have concerns around safety and environmental maintenance.
- **Next Steps:** WLCA should consider conducting a baseline social impact assessment and social infrastructure mapping, establishing long-term community-led data collection processes, forming a community-led steering group to interpret perceptual data, and aligning these efforts with the data frameworks outlined in Priority 1. There is an opportunity here to work with community members as researchers, with appropriate training and support.

Priority 3

Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham

Strategic mapping of WLCA's zones of influence will strengthen its leadership role across North Birmingham.

- **Findings:** WLCA holds a unique position as a community-led anchor organisation with capacity to influence local policy and decision-making.
- **Next Steps:** WLCA should map its role as a community anchor, explore how to leverage this position for greater impact, evaluate existing structures of neighbourhood accountability, drive forward local advocacy, and promote its model of community-led change and governance regionally and nationally.

Priority 4

Achieving sustainable and inclusive development

Embedding sustainability and inclusive growth in strategic planning is crucial for WLCA's future impact.

- **Findings:** WLCA's Strategic Plan reflects strong commitments to inclusive growth, neighbourhood regeneration, and sustainability.
- **Next Steps:** WLCA should align its strategies with Net Zero goals, and embed sustainability principles into both strategic governance and strategic planning.

Deploying the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, WLCA can steer local priorities, strengthen community cohesion, and influence the development of centres and hubs as key zones of influence. This would provide a clear avenue to capture qualitative and experiential data from residents and customers, enabling WLCA to evidence and build upon their connections with local people.

The Standard provides a framework for measuring and capturing neighbourhood impacts, helping WLCA advocate for investment in areas such as modern facilities, economic infrastructure, and sustainability initiatives.

CNM and Social Life are working with WLCA on the next phase of the Decent Neighbourhoods Standard Demonstrator. We look forward to deepening our collaborative approach, embedding co-design and local insights and working closely with WLCA, its partners and its community.



Perry Chocobow Swanet at Perry Common Community Hall

6.3 Towards a Decent Neighbourhood Standard

Neighbourhoods are complex inter-related social, economic and cultural systems, often spatially overlapping with one another. When they are the focus of interventions, those are often politically or contextually driven, initiatives are seldom developed or replicated in an organic manner.

The current government and industry focus on housing delivery, New Towns, Planning Reform and Devolution at national and regional level risks forgetting that ultimately it is at neighbourhood level that impacts on communities are most keenly felt.

There are clear priorities that communities want from their neighbourhoods. People want their neighbourhood to be well-maintained, be in good proximity to key social and economic infrastructure and to feel safe and at home. They want to be able to co-create the future of their neighbourhood, feel pride in place and develop long-lasting relationships with people and the area. Most importantly, neighbourhoods need to underpin good health and quality of life for their residents, tackling health and social inequalities.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard can be the tool to enable comprehensive diagnostics of neighbourhoods, establish accountability gaps and provide a way forward for complicated policy decisions. Establishing clear and comparable baselines can avoid short-term, politically driven targets and develop a long-term focus on improving hyper-local areas.

6.4 Future directions

This report reflects our thinking around the development of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, setting out an emerging logic model, with high level themes and dimensions which will be further developed into more detailed evaluative tools, mapping data metrics and research methodologies within each of the dimensions. We hope to do this collaboratively and iteratively, building an evidence base of tested demonstrator cases studies of different types of neighbourhoods with different types of organisations.

Future questions to be explored include:

- Who owns a Decent Neighbourhood Standard and what are the accountability processes embedded in the standard?
- What are the evidenced and standardised minimum requirements for quality-of-life underpinning each of the dimensions of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard?
- How can the Decent Neighbourhood Standard enable the interplay between porous and overlapping neighbourhood boundaries, while maintaining robust accountability structures?

As we move into the next phase of this research, we will be contemplating these questions as we deepen and expand the evidence base, testing the practical application of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, and continuing to co-develop the Standard as a collaborative, and policy-relevant tool for driving more equitable, inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) is a Community Association and Community Landlord. The organisation was established in 1994 by residents of Perry Common, and over the decades WLCA has evolved into an active resident-led organisation dedicated to improving housing, health, employment, and community life in North Birmingham. WLCA delivers practical services to the local community while aiming to create a sense of belonging and place-identity for residents.

www.wittonlodge.org.uk

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Developing a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard

**The Witton Lodge Community
Association Demonstrator**

**Appendix A: Engaging with Witton
Lodge Community Association**



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May 2025

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Appendix A: Engaging with Witton Lodge Community Association

A1: Workshop with Witton Lodge community staff and volunteers



A1: Workshop with WLCA staff and volunteers

A workshop with WLCA staff and volunteers was conducted by CNM and Social Life. We met at the Perry Common Hall on the 03.02.2025. The workshop was attended by the majority of the front-line staff and a group of dedicated volunteers working across WLCA's projects and programmes, while senior leaders were absent to encourage open discussion.

The workshop used interactive group activities and facilitated discussions to explore WLCA's work and its impact on the local neighbourhood. Participants were asked to map key features of the neighbourhood, identify who engages with WLCA, and highlight community landmarks. Further discussions focused on WLCA's values, best practices, and how the organisation measures success. Below are some of the key findings.

Demographics

Participants identified a diverse population served by WLCA, with a significant presence of older adults, women, and families. While many residents are White British, WLCA also engages with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups, as well as other key demographics such as unemployed individuals, single parents, disabled residents, and vulnerable households. The age profile of service users is predominantly 40 years and older. It was noted by one staff member that to a degree this reflects the people who live in the local area.

Core values

The staff and volunteer value WLCA's commitments to supporting residents, facilitating new social connections and acting as a trusted community engager. Other key values identified included promoting wellbeing, providing decent housing, supporting mental health, maintaining clean spaces, and working closely with volunteers. Overall, they described how the mission of the organisation is to support initiatives that improve the lives of the wider communities in North Birmingham.



Figure A2: Outcome of staff workshops mapping values with WLCA reach

Key assets

The participants identified several key physical assets from which WLCA operates. The core assets were seen as the Perry Common Hall and Erdington High Street Hub (catering to all ages), Eco Hub (perceptually engaging an older demographic at the moment) and the soon to open Erdington Baths Enterprise Hub. Other key assets identified over which Witton Lodge doesn't have direct control, but volunteers and staff engage with regularly were Witton Lakes and Perry Common Meadows (catering for all ages) and Perry Common Library.

Key activities

The workshop highlighted the wide range of activities delivered by WLCA, focusing on housing, employment, and community wellbeing. These include school holiday programmes, seasonal celebrations like Christmas events, and employment initiatives such as job fairs. Wellbeing is promoted through activities like gardening, fitness sessions, and community engagement events. The Wyrley Festival of Fun stands out as a flagship event, exemplifying WLCA's commitment to fostering social connection and community spirit. Additionally, WLCA provides tailored support through Sycamore Court, which offers a programme of activities for older residents in supported living.



Figure A3: Illustration of key assets, workshop 03.02.2025



Figure A4: Staff and volunteers meeting

Best practices

Key best practices mentioned were face-to-face engagement with residents, good team communication, structured programmes such as the job club and strong faith groups. WLCA's have an open-door approach that welcomes all residents and a focus on maintaining high housing standards and supporting older people.

WLCA's presence across four sites (Perry Common, Eco Hub, Erdington High Street and Erdington Baths) in the locality enhances their reach and ensures they can provide services where they are most needed. Staff mentioned the multicultural nature of their team and strong volunteer engagement as a strength. Test piloting and stress testing organisational practices as well as their linkages to local governance and policy influence were seen as unique to WLCA.

There was a strong sense that the Association encourages staff to work across different work streams and encourages ongoing upskilling. Other best practices mentioned were accessibility, adaptability of evaluating services, and good facilitation of diverse events. WLCA's close presence to the housing properties they manage was also seen as a key strength.

Key impact

“We change people’s lives” was a repeated impact statement reported by staff and volunteers, indicating a high level of pride in the work that they do. Participants in the workshop reported observing positive change in people using their services, monitoring that through individual assessments and data-driven approach.

Indicators of success

Participants reported several ways WLCA’s impact is measured. Improved wellbeing, reduced isolation and increased community participation were seen as primary indicators of success. These outcomes are captured through individual assessments, satisfaction surveys and feedback forms.

Reputation and community perception were also highlighted as important measures, with word-of-mouth recommendations and positive public feedback viewed as evidence of WLCA’s influence. Participants suggested that repeat service use and ongoing engagement with WLCA’s programmes reflect community trust and the long-term effectiveness of the organisation’s work.

A softer measure of local influence was reported as the willingness of other groups and organisation to work with WLCA, demonstrating their success as a local anchor institution.



Figure A5: Staff and volunteers meeting

What is missing

The workshop identified areas where WLCA could improve outreach and engagement. Participants highlighted limited engagement with specific demographic groups, including pre-school children, younger people, men, and some faith communities. Language barriers also present challenges in connecting with residents. Suggestions for improvement included expanding cultural programming to reflect the area’s diversity:

“We could build more cultural events such as activities around Caribbean communities, Divali, other festivals.” - Staff participant

Young people’s services were a repeated refrain we heard from staff, volunteers and community members. Even though there has been some progress in that direction, the perception was that the need was greater than was being serviced and there was room for improvement. There was also a call for more services targeting young adults aged 18-25, as well as teenagers, children and families. adults aged 18-25 but also with teenagers, children and families.

A2: Workshop with senior executive team and trustees

As part of the development of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard, a semi-formal roundtable discussion was held with Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) senior leadership and trustees on the 05.02.2025. The session aimed to gather insights on WLCA’s operations, strategic direction, and perceived community impact. The meeting began with an overview of the project and invited to ask questions to clarify the project scope and approach. The meeting focused on WLCA’s activities and partnerships, strategic direction and values, and how the organisation measures its impact.

What is a neighbourhood?

“You can build housing, but they become homes if you do the flourishing communities” - WLCA Trustee

Defining the perceptual boundaries of neighbourhoods within which WLCA operates emerged as a key question. In our workshops, staff, volunteers and community members drew diverse and often overlapping boundaries between different perceived neighbourhoods. The green linkages - parks and valleys such as Witton Lakes and Bleak Hill Park emerged as important destinations as the defined residential areas.

Findings from the Senior Leadership and Trustee workshop further highlighted that defining a neighbourhood is complex and multifaceted. While physical assets—such as housing and community hubs—serve as clear markers, participants emphasised that neighbourhoods are also defined by social connections, safety, and a sense of belonging. The Eco Hub was identified as a key example of WLCA’s commitment to community-led spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and security for local residents.

Participants noted that neighbourhood boundaries are not always fixed. Insights from the 2017 University of Birmingham study were referenced, suggesting that 20-minute walking distances represent a natural neighbourhood boundary. However, economic and social factors often lead residents to engage with services beyond these immediate areas. The workshop also highlighted concerns that community identity has weakened due to factors such as the rise of HMOs and short-term tenancies.

Who's responsible for the quality of a neighbourhood?

Workshop participants felt that responsibility for neighbourhood quality is shared among local organisations, authorities, and residents. The old Homes England pilot was discussed as an example of both success and challenge. While WLCA effectively improved local services (e.g., bin collections and community engagement) on a specific estate, scaling these improvements more broadly was difficult due to external partner involvement. As a result, participants agreed that WLCA focuses on areas where they have direct accountability, using their resident-led model to influence wider neighbourhood standards.

Participants also highlighted WLCA's role in key partnerships, such as the North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board, which enables the organisation to advocate for change while continuing to deliver practical improvements within their areas of control.

Strategic Direction

Values

Senior Leadership and Trustee (SET) echoed the values identified in the staff and volunteer workshop, promoting openness, inclusivity, and being resident-led. This community-first approach is embedded across all services, with staff working from GP practices, libraries, and community hubs to ensure accessibility.

A key insight was the importance of lived experience—many board members and staff live locally, fostering a genuine commitment to improving the area. Participants highlighted that WLCA is not just about housing but about holistic community development, addressing health, education, and economic needs.

Strategic growth and adaptability

WLCA's strategy is rooted in consultation and a deep understanding of local issues. This approach has led to innovative projects, including the Eco Hub, health initiatives on Erdington High Street, and the business hub at Erdington Baths.

A major strategic challenge is financial sustainability, as much of WLCA's work relies on grant funding, which can be unpredictable. Despite this, participants highlighted WLCA's financial strength and willingness to take risks and invest in long-term community benefits.

Responsibility and the future

Workshop participants agreed that WLCA takes responsibility for improving local areas by addressing issues like empty properties and fuel poverty. As the organisation grows, there is a commitment to preserving grassroots values, ensuring performance reviews and strategic decisions remain community-focused while adapting to future needs.

Impact

WLCA measures impact at multiple levels. At a personal level, every interaction matters; people leave knowing someone cares. The Perry Common Community Hall acts as a safe space, providing referrals to essential services, particularly for those facing housing insecurity. On a broader scale, WLCA is shifting narratives about areas like Erdington, challenging negative perceptions and building community pride. Participants noted that external policies, like austerity measures, significantly impact residents but remain outside their control.

When considering new opportunities, the organisation ensures alignment with core service areas: **housing, employment, health, environment, and community life**. This strategic focus ensures that funding decisions reflect local priorities rather than external Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

A key theme was trust. WLCA is seen as a reliable, community-first organisation. During the pandemic, the community knew "Witton Lodge will be there," reinforcing their reputation. Many residents return for additional support or refer family and friends, reflecting deep-rooted trust and ongoing relationships.

Participants emphasised the intangible impacts **such as changing perceptions and building relationships** which are harder to measure but crucial for community well-being. WLCA uses case studies to bring these stories to life, though there is an identified need to improve how they capture softer outcomes like personal transformation and community trust.

A3: Attending the North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board

We attended as observers the North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board, in which Witton Lodge plays a key part. The standing meeting focused on strategies to address ongoing economic challenges in the region, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Discussions highlighted the need for targeted business and employment support, with plans to provide funding and resources for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) while also investing in skills training and job opportunities for young people and disadvantaged groups.

Infrastructure development was a key priority, with updates on major projects aimed at driving economic growth and attracting sustainable investment.

Collaboration emerged as a crucial theme, especially the role of partnerships between local authorities, businesses, and community organisations in fostering long-term resilience. Witton Lodge Community Association appears to play a pivotal role in supporting local regeneration, housing initiatives, and community-led employment programmes.

The meeting also underscored the influence that Witton Lodge Community Association holds with local MPs and Councillors, partner organisations, developers, educator providers and local and regional government agencies who were all present.

The North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board website can be seen here: <https://www.northbirminghameconomicrecovery.co.uk/>

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Developing a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard

**The Witton Lodge Community
Association Demonstrator**

**Appendix B: Community Collaborative
Workshop Insights on WLCA Decent
Neighbourhood Standard**



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May 2025

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Appendix B: Community Collaborative Workshop Insights on WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard

B1: Community collaboration workshop

To test and refine the desk-based analysis of five seminal frameworks and Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) organisational documents, CNM and Social Life conducted an interactive community workshop and launched an online and physical ‘Neighbourhood Diagnostics’ survey to capture residents’ perspectives on their neighbourhoods. The workshop took place on the 26.02.2025 and was widely advertised across social media and local connections that WLCA had. Overall, we collected feedback from 25+ people on the neighbourhoods diagnostic questions at the event and in further engagement at Perry Common Library. This collaborative workshop was intended to test the method with a view that this will be the first of series of workshops in the next phase of the future development of the standard.

Demographics

We collected demographic data of people attending where people consented to. Overall, 6 forms were completed at the event and a further 9 forms at the library consultations. The data presented below indicated the broader demographic of respondents who consented to provide demographic information.

On *gender*, we collected data from 9 females and 6 males. On *employment* 8 of the respondents were in full-time or part-time employment, 3 were looking for work, 1 person indicated they are self-employed, 1 indicated they are on zero-hour contract, 1 indicated they are retired and 1 was unable to work. *Household composition* was as following - 4 people indicated having 2 children in their household, 3 indicated having three children or more, 3 lived with their partner or spouse, 2 lived alone, 2 lived with other family and 1 preferred not to say.



Figure B1: Poster and promotional materials for workshop

Out of everyone who completed the forms 12 people indicated no *disability*, 1 indicated disability and 2 preferred not to say.

On *ethnic groups*, 7 people indicated they are White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, 2 indicated they are Indian, and 1 each in Irish, Caribbean, Other Black, Pakistani, Afghanistan and Mixed (English-Portuguese).

The demographics of respondents resonate with some of the information presented in Appendix A on the type of people that Witton Lodge engages with. It should be noted that there was no sampling strategy, however, in any future development of the standard we will aim to collect responses closely matching the wider neighbourhood demographics.

Have you engaged with Witton Lodge Community Association?

We asked each participant if they have engaged with WLCA in the past. Out of all completed form, disregarding the ones where no answer to this question was provided 13 participants said yes and 4 said no.

From the reason why they have engaged included: engagement with various activities in Erdington; a rich history of staff and venues was indicated; through the scout group; occasional participant in community activities; through the Perry Common library; through community voice forum WLCA runs.

Some attendees lived in Sycamore court and others currently work for WLCA but also have known the organisation beforehand, were a service user or live locally, demonstrating the link between the WLCA and local communities.

Reasons why they haven't engaged with WLCA included: not being aware of the organisation; no idea about this community or that they have just moved into the area.



Figure B2: Image from the workshop

Neighbourhood diagnostics

This phase of the research used ‘neighbourhood diagnostics’ questions as a core element of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard methodology. These questions focused on community and organisational co-design, allowing residents to identify priorities, define minimum quality standards for their neighbourhood, and highlight existing or potential hazards. This section provides an analytical overview of each of the diagnostic questions based on our consultation.

How would you define your neighbourhood?

The responses to this question revealed two distinct and contrasting themes: a positive perception rooted in community and local amenities, and a negative one focused on safety concerns and environmental maintenance. While many respondents expressed pride in their local spaces and the sense of community fostered through events and shared facilities, others highlighted issues related to crime, neglect, and a lack of investment.

Positively, residents valued green spaces, local services, and community connections. Parks, nurseries, and local amenities were frequently mentioned as points of pride, with several respondents describing the neighbourhood as “quiet,” “clean,” and home to “like-minded people who help each other.” Events and community activities were seen as key to fostering a sense of belonging and improving the social fabric.

One respondent described their neighbourhood as having “infinite possibilities,” suggesting optimism about its potential for growth and change.

However, safety and cleanliness emerged as consistent concerns across responses. Some participants described the area as “crime-ridden” and “unmanaged”, with visible signs of neglect such as abandoned buildings. One respondent specifically cited the decaying Old Plaza cinema in Stockland Green as a symbol of disrepair. Drug-related activity and antisocial behaviour were

also mentioned, particularly in more deprived areas. Several respondents called for increased investment and better management to address these ongoing challenges.

What makes you want to move to a neighbourhood?

Responses revealed a balance between necessity and preference in decisions to move. Many participants cited economic factors—such as housing affordability, job opportunities, and family connections—as primary motivation for moving to a neighbourhood, often leaving them with limited choice. For these respondents, moving was described as a matter of “mostly necessity”, reflecting the reality that many accept neighbourhood conditions out of practical need.

When describing desirable neighbourhoods, respondents prioritised safety, clean streets, and the ability to walk without fear, especially at night. Access to local amenities—including shops, schools, healthcare, and community spaces—was also highly valued. Social factors, such as inclusive, caring communities, further shaped perceptions of an ideal place to live.

This tension between economic necessity and quality-of-life preferences highlights the need for a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, ensuring all neighbourhoods provide safety, essential services, and community resources, regardless of residents’ reasons for moving.

What makes you want to stay in a neighbourhood?

Social connections emerged as the strongest factor influencing residents’ desire to stay in a neighbourhood. Respondents consistently highlighted the importance of friendly, inclusive neighbours, strong community bonds, and positive relationships as key reasons for remaining in a place. This reflects a broader understanding that social inclusion and connectedness build a sense of belonging and place attachment.

Beyond social ties, safety was a major priority. Participants emphasised the need for low crime rates, clean streets, and secure environments suitable for people of all ages. Access to essential services including local shops, public transportation, green spaces, and community facilities was also a recurring theme.

What makes you want to leave a neighbourhood?

Crime and safety concerns emerged as the most significant factors prompting residents to consider leaving a neighbourhood. Respondents highlighted issues such as drug-related activity, violence, anti-social behaviour, and a general lack of security.

Maintenance and cleanliness were also key concerns. Participants mentioned littering, fly-tipping, and run-down environments as contributing to potential dissatisfaction. Neglect of local amenities, including the decline of high streets and the misuse of green spaces, would contribute to an individual’s decision to leave a neighbourhood.

Other motivators included lack of facilities for children and teenagers, specifically the absence of youth centres or play areas. Racism and other forms of discrimination were also cited as reasons to consider leaving, particularly when combined with feelings of social isolation and poor community cohesion.



Figure B3: Image from the workshop

When asked about key places, spaces and activities, participants highlighted the importance of green spaces, public areas, and community facilities in enhancing local well-being and social cohesion. Parks such as Witton Lakes, Brookvale Park, and Sutton Park are highly valued, alongside well-maintained streets and public spaces. Key public services, including GPs, NHS facilities, schools, libraries, and leisure centres, play a crucial role, with community hubs like Witton Lodge Eco Hub, YOLTA, and Sycamore Court recognised for their support and engagement.

The high street, local shops, supermarkets, cafes, and essential services such as dentists and vets were mentioned. Mobility is a priority with specific mention of the number 7 bus route as an important transport link.

However, concerns were raised regarding crime, fly-tipping, and safety, with issues around alleyways and declining perceptions of Erdington. Some residents expressed hope for change, while others stressed their appreciation for the community volunteers and local engagement initiatives, particularly at Perry Common Library.

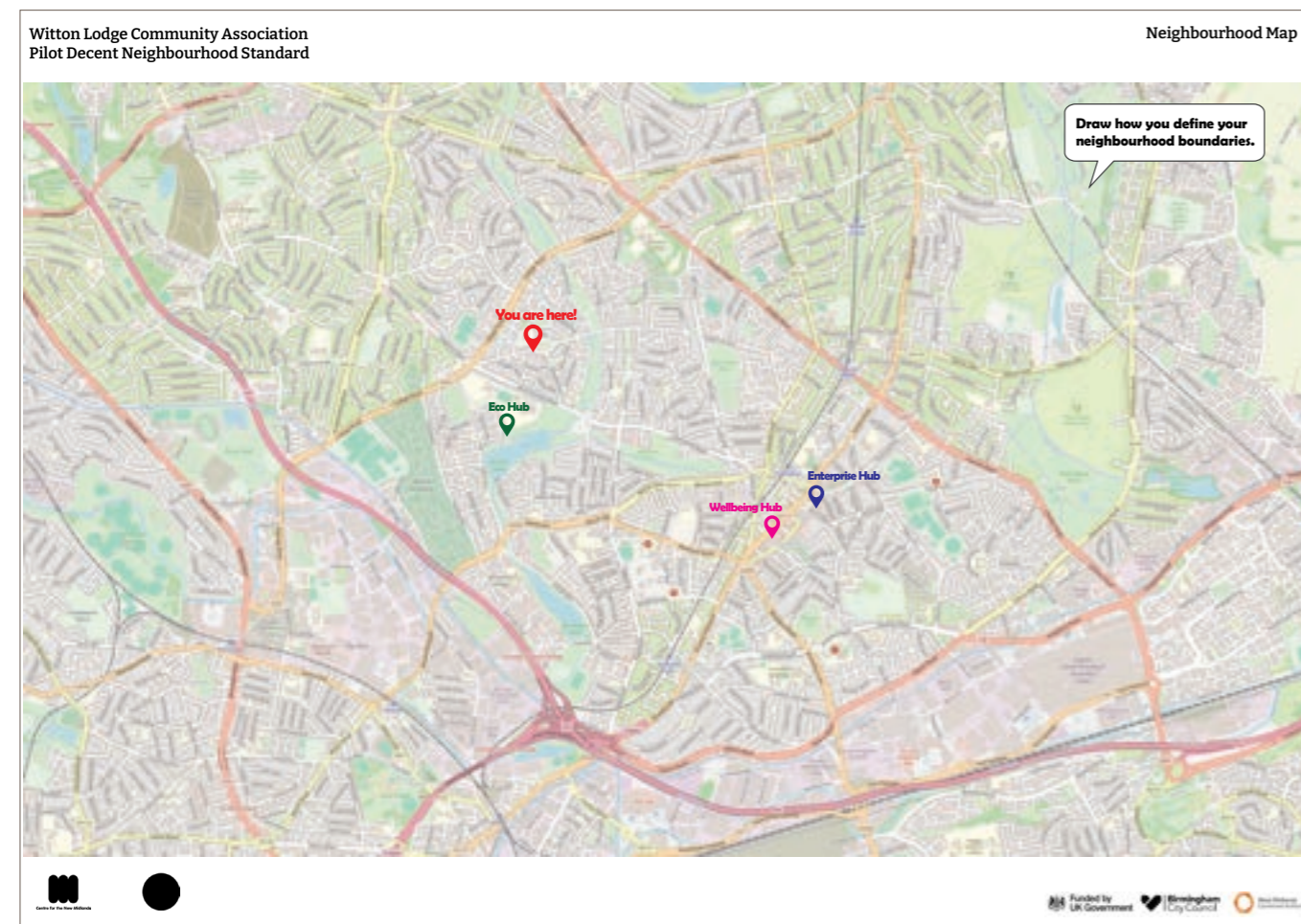


Figure B4: Workshop map with assets

What is your neighbourhood?

In the areas where WLCA has influence over, green and blue spaces emerged as key, with participants valuing them as much as defined residential areas. The natural corridors serve as connectors between communities, particularly the route from Brookvale Park to Witton Lakes, extending north to Witton Meadows and Kingstanding, as well as Bleak Hill Park linking to Erdington.

Other significant spaces include Rookery Park, which supports Erdington High Street, and Pype Hayes Park, serving both Erdington and Wylde Green. Perry Common was closely associated with the WLCA hub, while Erdington High Street and Brookvale Village were also mentioned. Additional locations noted included Perry Barr, Sutton Coldfield, Castle Vale, Aston, and Kingstanding. The WLCA influence primarily covers the Erdington Constituency, though it does not extend into Castle Vale, with its boundary defined as reaching only up to Tyburn Road by a few participants.

Reflections on diagnostic questions

The responses to the neighbourhood diagnostic questions reveal a complex interplay of factors that shape residents' experiences and decisions to stay, leave, or move to a neighbourhood. Social connections, safety, and access to amenities consistently emerge as critical factors of neighbourhood satisfaction.

While many residents value community cohesion, green spaces, and local services, concerns about crime, poor maintenance, and lack of facilities create dissatisfaction. Economic necessity often limits individual choice, reinforcing the need for a Decent Neighbourhood Standard to ensure every neighbourhood meets basic expectations for safety, cleanliness, and social connection. These insights highlight the importance of creating environments where people feel secure and supported and have access to the essential resources and relationships that enhance their quality of life.

WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard

In addition to the diagnostic questions we also asked attendees to review and comment on the key 5 frameworks that we had selected for our thematic analysis. The relevant comments against each of the respective frameworks are depicted in Appendix C.

Below is a summary of what participants felt would need to be included in a WLCA Decent Neighbourhood standard.

Social

The social dimension emerged as the highest priority. Safety and community cohesion were seen as the top priorities. People wanted not only crime to be tackled but also the perceptions of crime. Creating safe places for all ages was seen as a top priority. Community connections and cohesion were equally important. People wanted to belong and feel at home in their neighbourhood.

Power and participation emerged closed second. Inclusivity was key, with one participant suggesting that the high street should be reflective of local demographics. Arts, culture and youth inclusion also emerged as key asks:

“I have two teenagers and find younger children are more catered for, where are the youth clubs. Not everyone can afford membership.” - Workshop participant



Figure B5: Image from the workshop

Economic

People wanted to be able to make the most of present opportunities and to change things in their lives. Local jobs being open to everyone including by ethnicity, gender and sex was also a key demand linked to inclusive economies.

Environmental and Spatial

Participants requested a focus on disabilities, including hidden disabilities. Issues around better public transport, diversity of local shops and retail provision, good quality schools, health facilities and adaptable community spaces were all raised as crucial to a successful WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard.

Additional comments

Finally, some of the respondents added additional comments. One respondent indicated that there were too many alleyways in the neighbourhood they live in, pointing to the morphology of built form as an important element underpinning a decent neighbourhood. Another participant added that they hear a lot of comments that people no longer want to go to Erdington expressing hopes that perceptions will soon change.



Figure B6: Perry Chocobow Swanet and the Community Hall

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www.wittonlodge.org.uk

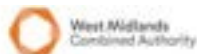
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www.social-life.co

Part funded by:



Developing a Decent Neighbourhoods Standard

The Witton Lodge Community
Association Demonstrator

Appendix C: Analysis of key frameworks
concerned with neighbourhood quality



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May 2025

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Appendix C: Analysis of key frameworks concerned with neighbourhood quality

C1: Key frameworks

To inform the development of the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood demonstrator we examined five key frameworks which are often applied at neighbourhood level as either strategic, monitoring or evaluation tools. The frameworks vary in their focus, organisation and application but all have in common an aspirational model - from developing a set of criteria to evaluate the social sustainability of a place to focusing on mobility or inclusive growth.

We have presented a short summary of the framework and a synthesis of the analysis of how the different elements have informed our own thinking about a WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard.

1. Design for Social Sustainability¹

Summary: A framework focusing on creating socially sustainable communities by integrating primarily social alongside economic and environmental factors. It aims to link the social dimensions of a place with its built environment. It emphasises long-term community well-being, resilience, and inclusivity. It addresses the social sustainability requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Focus: Prioritises social cohesion and community resilience in urban development, and has four main dimensions: Voice and Influence, Amenities and Infrastructure, Social and Cultural Life and Adaptability and Resilience.



Figure C1: Design for Social Sustainability

¹ Social Life (2011) Design for Social Sustainability: A framework for creating thriving new communities. London: Social Life. Available at: https://www.social-life.co/publication/design_for_social_sustainability/

Established: Developed in 2011 by Social Life for the Young Foundation and Homes England, the original study was based on learning from 20th century New Towns and large-scale regenerations. (Refreshed 2024)

Used: Applied in the UK and internationally for urban planning, new towns, regeneration and evaluation.

Scope: Supports community-led and policy-driven urban planning, social impact assessments and strategies such as theories of change.

Users: Housing associations, local authorities, developers, planners, policymakers, and community organisations.

Case Study: In Grahame Park², Social Life was commissioned by the housing association Notting Hill Genesis to carry out an assessment of the social impacts of regeneration, and to understand how local priorities and needs can inform future phases of planning, design and management. The Design for Social Sustainability framework underpinned the data collection and informed the refresh of the Grahame Park Theory of Change.

The framework's relevance to the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood:

- **Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality:** The Design for Social Sustainability framework refers to and uses many external measures which provide background data such as IMD, ONS demographic statistic, definition of natural neighbourhoods and asset audit. For WLCA this can provide a clear methodology and sample data sources.
- **Supporting flourishing communities, local insights and participation:** The design for Social Sustainability frameworks uses Social Life's Community Dynamics methodology to collect, benchmark and monitor perceptual data. For the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood demonstrator, this means that the key dimensions of the framework and data collection methods are transferable and local baseline minimum requirements can be set-up in a co-design manner. There will need to be an exercise in defining minimum need by involving residents and establishing what key elements are the baseline for the neighbourhoods in question. Dimensions relevant here will be voice and influence, social and cultural life and amenities and social infrastructure.
- **Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham:** Understanding neighbourhoods beyond the immediate boundary. The Design for Social Sustainability framework looks to evaluating an area beyond its defined boundaries on elements such as participation, built environment quality, governance and adaptability. The framework is underpinned by adapted methods such as the Homes England, Building for a Healthy Life framework, which can provide an exemplar.
- **Achieving sustainable and inclusive development:** The Design for Social Sustainability framework presents a methodology for evaluating the adaptability and resilience of a local area. For the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard this can be adapted to focus on the key requirements such as capacity to react to crisis and identifying plan to discharge future needs and aspirations.

² More information available at: https://www.social-life.co/publication/living_in_grahame_park/

- **Community reflections on Design for Social Sustainability Framework:** The Design for Social Sustainability is a non-prescriptive framework, and as such provides an example of what outcomes should be encouraged in an area - the so-called 'building blocks'. The community mapping of the Design for Social Sustainability building blocks indicated what WLCA representatives considered a wide-range of activities that already happen within the work of the Association.

Missing from the blocks were, however:

- In the dimension of voice and Influence: online spaces and forms for exchange; devolved or delegated neighbourhood budgets.

- In Adaptability and Resilience: Meanwhile spaces and temporary use of green space; non-prescriptive master planning.
- In Amenities and social infrastructure: Early provision of school, nursery and childcare; Good accessible public transport and low carbon infrastructure; mutual support initiatives.
- In Social and Cultural life: projects that promote mutual exchange; well managed public spaces and inclusive third places that meet everyone's needs.

A common thread emerged from these discussions which was around devolving power to the individual or establishing mutual support initiatives.

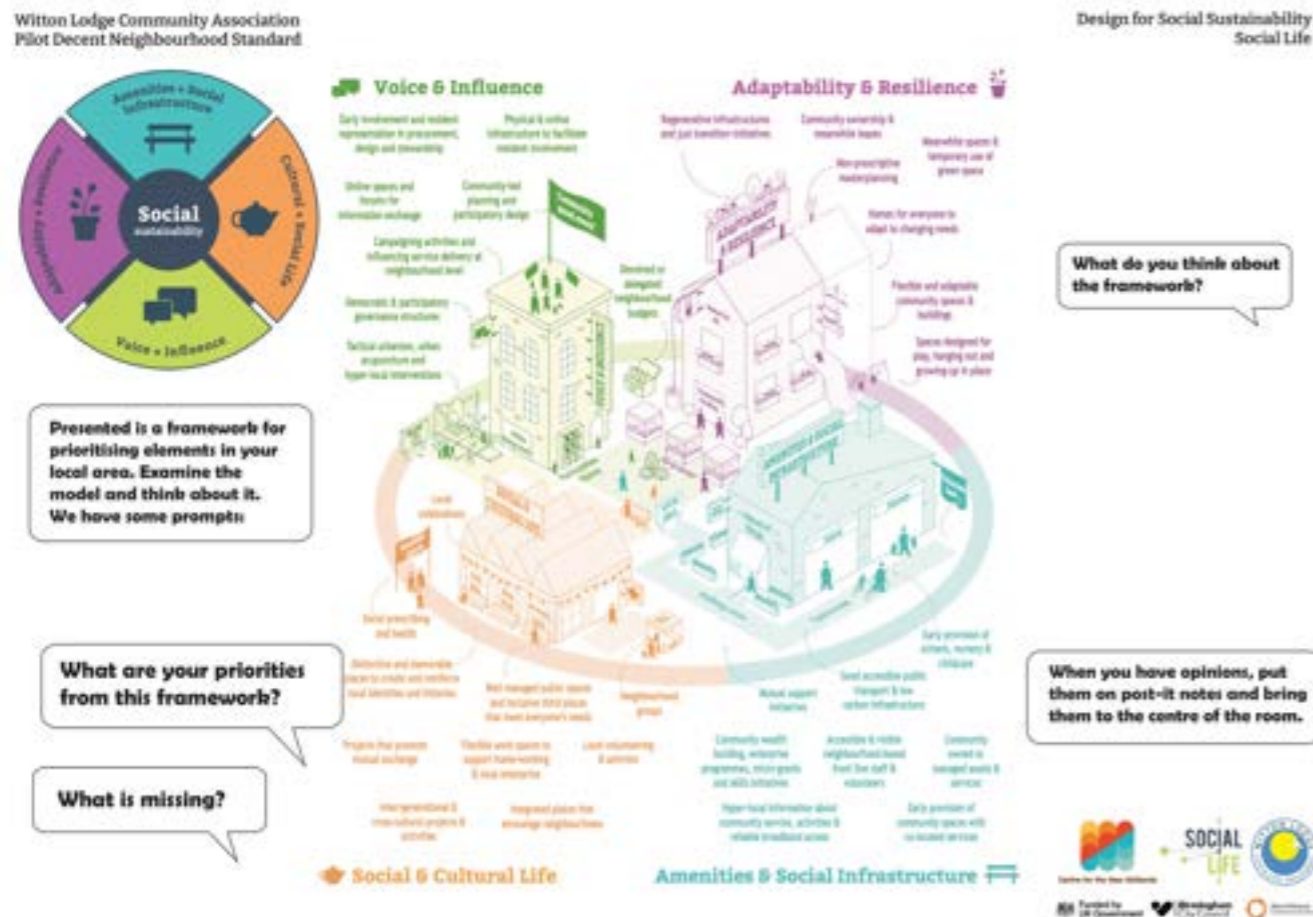


Figure C2: Design for Social Sustainability worksheet

2. WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) Inclusive Growth Framework³

Summary: A framework developed to enhance well-being and prosperity across the West Midlands region, integrating economic growth with social and environmental priorities. The framework is based on Doughnut Economics theory developed by Kate Raworth re-thinking economies to fit within ecological ceilings while supporting social foundations. The aim of the framework is to promote inclusive growth in the West Midlands region by focusing on providing social foundations and not overshooting on emissions, biodiversity, energy use and waste.

Focus: A regional approach to inclusive growth and well-being focusing on 8 fundamentals - equality, inclusive economy, power and participation, affordable and safe places, connected communities, education and learning, health and wellbeing and climate.

Established: 2018

Used: Primarily in the West Midlands, UK.

Scope: Regional economic and social development.

Users: Local government, businesses, and community groups.

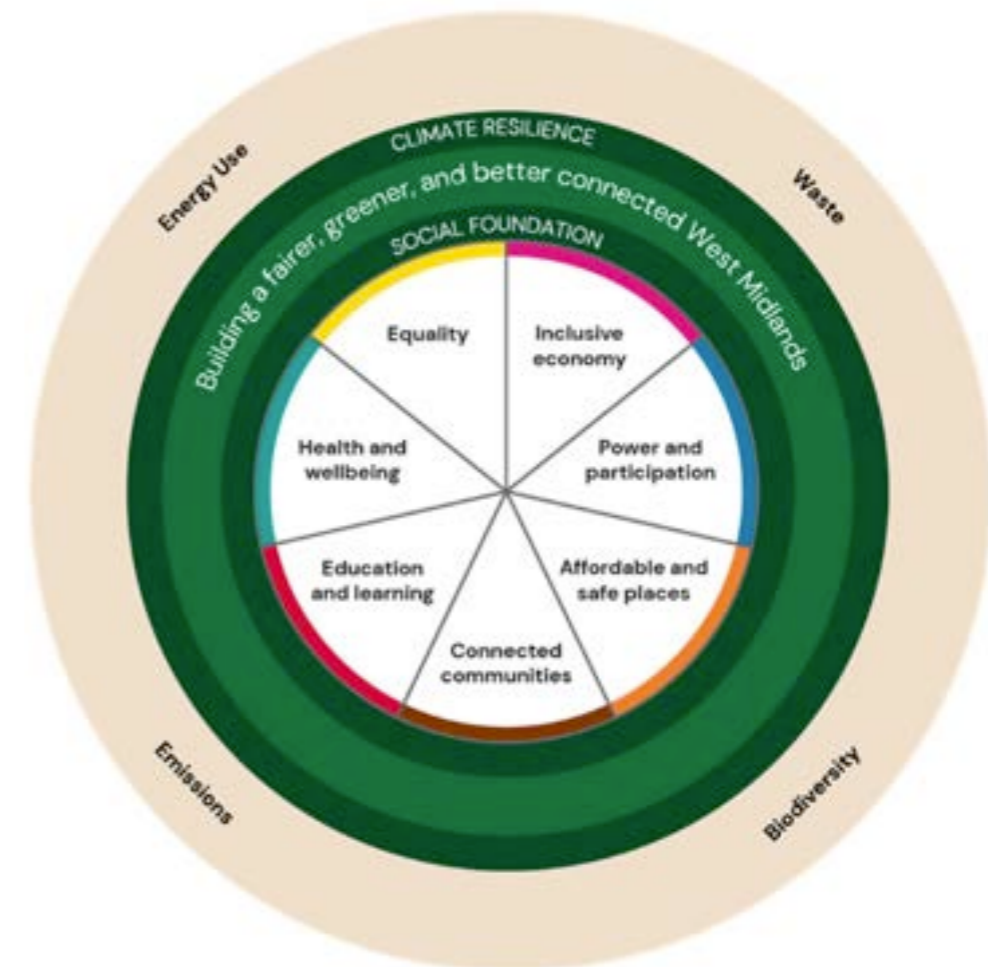


Figure C3: WMCA Inclusive Growth Framework

³ West Midlands Combined Authority (2020) Inclusive Growth Framework: Making inclusive growth real in the West Midlands. Birmingham: WMCA. Available at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4052/inclusive-growth-framework.pdf>

Metrics: The framework doesn't provide many case studies, although it underpins the strategic and policy work of the West Midlands Combined Authority. A detailed overview of the different metrics under each of the key 8 fundamentals can be found on their website⁴ - the measures are reliant usually on data sources collecting as part of the operation of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The framework's relevance to the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood:

- **Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality:** Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood demonstrator can align to WMCA framework by collecting hyper-local data on neighbourhood data on connected communities, affordable and safe places, inclusive economy and employment informed by the WMCA Inclusive Growth framework.
- **Supporting flourishing communities, local insights and participation:** The WMCA Inclusive Growth Framework can inform the collection of community insights around equality and participation, health and wellbeing, and connected communities.
- **Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham:** The WLCA Decent Neighbourhood can align with collecting data such as civic participation and trust in local authorities under the Power and Participation. Neighbourhood wide systems around energy use, waste, biodiversity and emissions can be drawn on.
- **Achieving sustainable and inclusive development:** The framework defines climate resilience metrics which can be defined and evaluated at neighbourhood level.
- **Collaborative workshop comments on the WMCA Inclusive Growth:** Participants specifically supported or advocated for people with disabilities - hidden and visible, highlighting the need to focus on that sense of "connectedness" and to engage with further demographics. It was suggested that WLCA should enable people 'to be able to make a difference' while recruiting activities to opportunities, volunteering and staff should aim to include the community fully.

3. Place Standard⁵

Summary: A tool that assesses the quality of places by evaluating physical and social factors that influence well-being. It helps communities and planners improve environments. The tool has suggested metrics from the standard which are scored from 1 to 7, based on key evaluation questions. This allows a spider diagram representation to be developed and for different gaps in provision and quality to be identified.

The tool is evaluative and doesn't include strategic issues such as governance and participation in the process or monitoring but has extensive case studies and further guidance for effective engagement. The full list of evaluation questions can be found online.⁶

Focus: Encourages participatory place-making with a holistic approach to urban design organised around 14 themes to assess place. Aims to improve quality of places, tackle inequalities, identify strengths and needed improvements, create sustainable environments, and inform resource allocation.

Established: 2015 by the Scottish Government, NHS Scotland, and A&DS.

Used: Widely used in Scotland and adopted internationally.

Scope: Community and urban planning - used at the neighbourhood, city, and regional levels.

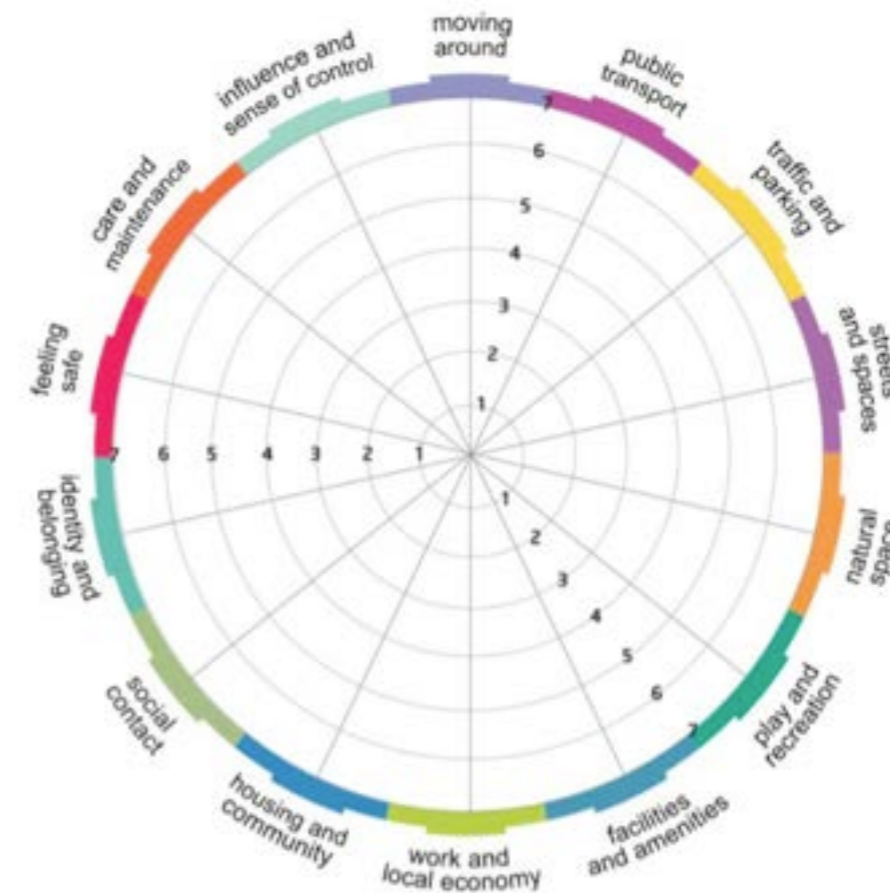


Figure C4: Place Standard

⁴ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/inclusive-growth/framework/metrics/>

⁵ <https://www.ourplace.scot/tool>

⁶ <https://www.ourplace.scot/sites/default/files/2022-11/Our%20Place%20Place%20Standard%20Tool%20final%20version%20-%20Print%2C%20Interactive%20and%20booklet%20details%20-%20Oct%202022.pdf>

Users: Governments, planners, and communities.

Case Study: Calton Barras Action Plan⁷

The framework's relevance to the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood:

- **Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality:** For the WLCA Decent Neighbourhood Standard the place tool can inform the evaluation of mobility (streets, traffic and parking) as well as work and local economy metrics.
- **Supporting flourishing communities, local insights and participation:** Perceptual metrics around social contact, identity and belonging, feeling safe, play and recreation, housing and community are relevant to WLCA. This tool can enable sample questionnaires to be quickly compiled when diagnostics are to be deployed.
- **Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham:** This standard most closely aligns with the care, maintenance, influence and sense of control metrics.
- **Achieving sustainable and inclusive development:** The Place Standard provides relevant questions under the dimensions of facilities and amenities and natural space.

4. Quality of Life Framework (QoLF)⁷

Summary: A framework measuring various aspects of well-being, including economic stability, health, education, environment, and social connections.

Focus: Focuses on subjective well-being and broader life satisfaction.

Established: 2021, refreshed in 2024.

Used: Applied in the UK across research and development projects, as well as internationally.

Scope: Social policy and urban wellbeing. Used at city, regional, and national levels.

Users: Governments, NGOs, and research institutions.

Case Study: The Quality of Life Foundation has extensive case studies available on their website.⁸

The framework's relevance to the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood

This framework can inform the questionnaires around establishing an understanding of quality of life. It defines broadly that quality of life may be understood in terms of:

- health and its social determinants
- an individual's physical, social and psychological wellbeing
- social impact, which refers to the effect that an individual, organisation or project has on the long-term health and wellbeing outcomes of individuals and communities.

Getting around and Health Equity from the Quality of Life Framework can provide quality questions.

Healthy food choices, air quality and housing standards are key elements.

- **Supporting flourishing communities, local insights and participation:** 'Connected communities', 'Sense of wonder', 'A sense of control' and 'A sense of wonder are key community insight and perception themes which might reflect the work and aspirations of WLCA.
- **Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham:** The framework can help developers, housing associations, local authorities and the community to work in partnership to create stewardship plans and measures for determining success.

– **Achieving sustainable and inclusive development:** Green and blue spaces from the framework, biodiversity and climate resilience and adaptation under connection with nature were all important topics for WLCA residents.

– **Collaborative workshop comments on Quality of Life:** When reflecting on the Quality of Life framework the following issues were raised by participants: no control, no access to health care, parts of the neighbourhood unsafe due to drugs, the importance of neighbourhood conditions for physical and mental health, 'my home is good but the area is not' and 'my personal transport is essential' (car or bicycle).



C5: Quality of Life Framework

⁷ <https://www.ourplace.scot/case-study/calton-barras-action-plan>

⁸ https://www.qolf.org/wp-content/uploads/Quality-of-Life-Framework_compressed.pdf

⁹ <https://www.qolf.org/wp-content/uploads/Quality-of-Life-Foundation-Framework-Case-Studies.pdf>

5. 15 or 20-Minute City¹⁰

Summary: A planning concept that ensures all essential services (work, education, healthcare, leisure) are accessible within a 15-minute walk or cycle from homes.

Focus: Enhances local living by reducing reliance on cars and improving accessibility.

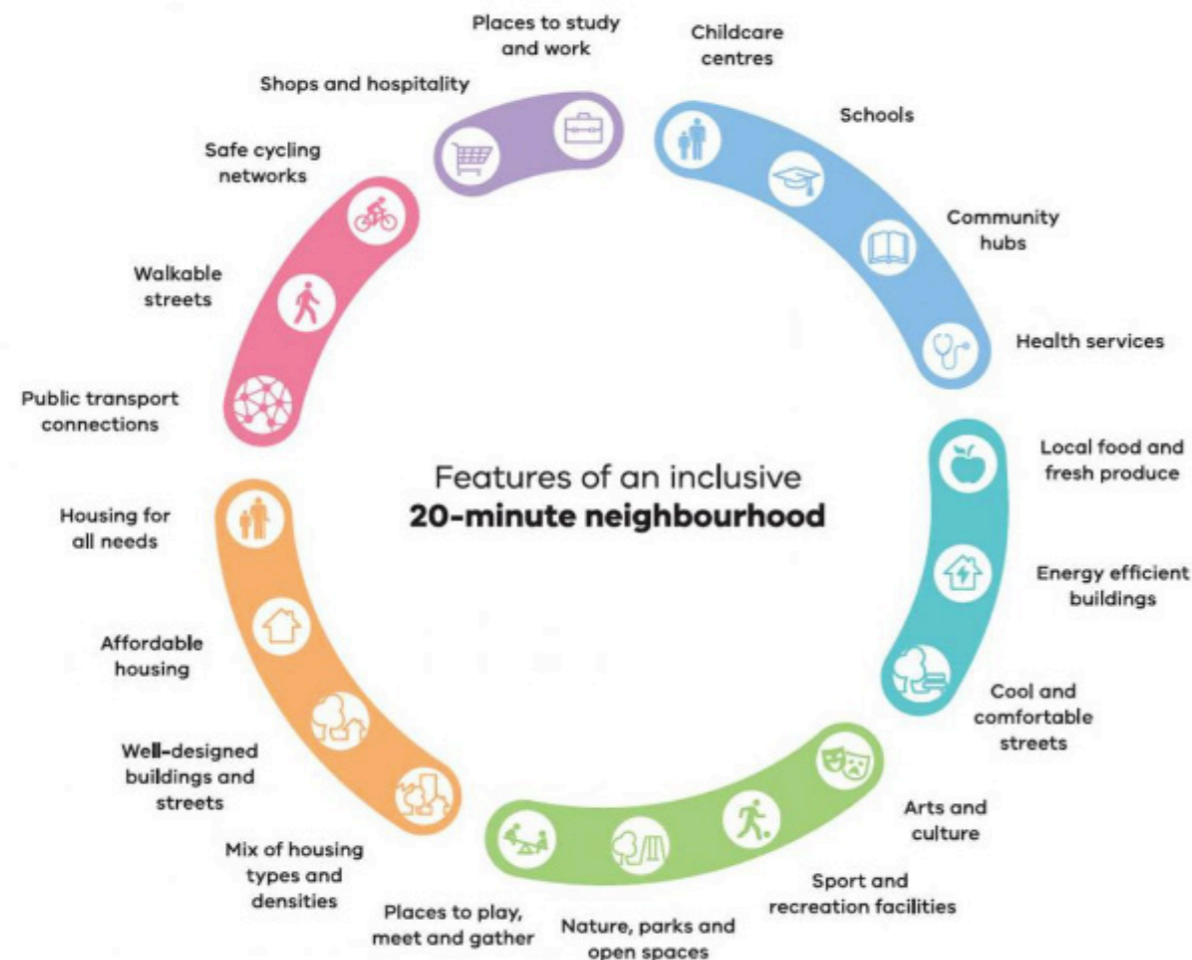
Established: Popularised in 2020 by Carlos Moreno but based on older planning principles.

Used: Paris, Melbourne, Portland, other global cities.

Scope: Urban mobility and planning. Implemented at the neighbourhood and city levels.

Users: City planners, policymakers, and sustainability advocates.

Case Study: C40 cities approaches to different 15-minute cities across the world.¹¹



C6: Features of an inclusive 20-minute neighbourhood

¹⁰ Moreno, C. (2020) The 15-Minute City: A new urban model. Paris: Mairie de Paris. Available at: <https://www.paris.fr/pages/le-paris-des-quarts-d-heure-15820>

¹¹ https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Benchmark-15-minute-cities?language=en_US

The framework's relevance to the Witton Lodge Decent Neighbourhood Standard

- **Establishing a baseline and monitoring neighbourhood quality:** Mobility and accessibility of services are relevant to the area with regard to establishing a minimum standard of distance or time walked. Conducting baseline social infrastructure assessment or community assets mapping can help understand proximity of different communities to key assets and identify gaps.
- **Supporting flourishing communities, local insights and participation:** This is addressed in the majority of this framework in terms of availability of social and support spaces. For Witton Lodge, this also will mean the mix of people who are accessing the available infrastructure.
- **Strengthening influence, accountability and stewardship across North Birmingham:** Coordination and stewardship between different actors on service provision within the 15-minute neighbourhood is important, especially when identifying who can deliver and maintain assets which are lacking in the area.
- **Achieving sustainable and inclusive development:** Green spaces and links were important for WLCA residents. Mapping and maximising natural assets is key. Understanding the availability of nature parks close by, as well as the assessment of sports and recreation facilities and their maintenance arrangements would be part of the DNS standard.

From the collaborative WLCA workshop there were a few comments on 15 and 20-minute neighbourhoods framework:

Participants identified what is available in the area, looking through the list of amenities that the framework provided them with. It was suggested that in close proximity to WLCA there are sufficient shops and hospitality, places to study and work, childcare centres, schools, community hubs, health services, local food and fresh produce, sports and recreation facilities, nature, parks and open space, mix of housing types and densities, public transport connectedness.

From the elements which were less well-defined energy efficient buildings emerged, some were available and the EcoHub was one, but not all buildings in the area were to that standard. Participants indicated that whereas there is some arts and culture activities there are not many venues, similarly the places to play meet and gather - there are some but maybe not sufficient for everyone. Walkability of streets was also deemed as needing improvement, as well as provision of cycling networks. Affordability of housing was also deemed insufficient.

“In B24 we live in a 80% 20-min neighbourhood” – Workshop participant

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