



Developing a Decent Neighbourhood Standard: Rationale & Universal Dimensions

The Road to a Decent Neighbourhood
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Why Neighbourhoods matter?

Neighbourhoods are more than buildings, services and infrastructure. They are the spatial and structural link between housing and communities, ecosystems where daily life happens, and places of opportunity and belonging. At a time when policy and public attention is turning once again to the hyper-local – from public safety to community voices– the question is not so much whether neighbourhoods matter, but more pertinently how we define what makes them decent, and fit for the purpose of supporting communities to thrive.

Decent Neighbourhood Standard (DNS)

The [Decent Neighbourhood Standard \(DNS\)](#) framework aims to offer a practical tool to help residents, communities, policymakers, place-based and place-making organisations set out what makes a neighbourhood truly decent.

Purpose & Inspiration

The DNS builds on the spirit and core themes of the Decent Homes Standard, with its universal expectations around housing quality, and clear accountability structure for achieving and maintaining quality. The DNS widens that quality lens from the closed system of a home to a wider and more fluid system of the neighbourhood. This new standard expands the focus of ‘decency’ to encompass not just housing but the full spectrum of physical, social, environmental, and institutional determinants of place-based wellbeing. While ambitious in its scope, the DNS is not being developed as an aspirational wish list, but rather a pragmatic framework that helps answer two critical questions:

- **What is the minimum level of provision and services needed in any neighbourhood to ensure a decent quality of life?**
- **And who is accountable for delivering and sustaining that?**

Policy Momentum

The DNS aligns with and builds upon current UK and West Midlands strategies, including:

- *The UK Government’s Plan for Neighbourhoods*
- *The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods*
- *The Design Council’s Design for Neighbourhoods*
- *The WMCA’s Inclusive Growth Framework*

We are seeking to bring together these efforts by creating a coherent and adaptable framework that enables communities and institutions to align their work around shared neighbourhood outcomes, and provide a robust evidence base to inform policy making and investment.

What drives this work?

- 1 Clarifying Accountability:** Typically in neighbourhoods there is an accountability vacuum and no single entity or organisation holds responsibility for the overall quality of a neighbourhood. The DNS addresses this gap by promoting shared accountability and promoting a coordinated, multi-sector and multi-actor governance structure.
 - 2 Tackling Inequality** In many places, communities still lack access to essential services and infrastructure. The DNS highlights or exposes where there is uneven or inadequate provision and creates a basis for targeted action and investment to address these gaps.
 - 3 Empowering Communities** Through participatory diagnostics and community stewardship models, the DNS creates clear pathways for resident influence and ownership, affecting meaningful, community-led neighbourhood change and improvements.
 - 4 Enabling Resilient, Inclusive Growth** Environmental, social, and economic resilience are all critical to sustainable growth. The DNS supports the creation of neighbourhoods that are low-carbon, inclusive, and equipped to adapt to future challenges.
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The [DNS deploys](#) a bottom-up and top-down methodology drawing on the grounded analysis of seminal urban design and neighbourhood frameworks to derive universal themes, while also utilising neighbourhood diagnostics and collaborative and participatory research methods to gain critical community insights and embed co-design approaches in the development of neighbourhood specific qualitative and quantitative metrics.

The applied frameworks analysed include:

- *Design for Social Sustainability* - community participation, adaptability, wellbeing
- *WMCA Inclusive Growth* - connected communities, equity, opportunity
- *The Place Standard* - local place assessments and resident insights
- *Quality of Life Framework* - subjective wellbeing, health, security
- *15-Minute/20-Minute City* - access to daily needs, mobility, local green spaces

Baseline Grounded Analysis and Neighbourhood Diagnostics

The neighbourhood diagnostics have been designed as a core element of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard methodology to identify ‘push and pull’ factors and allow communities themselves to define their neighbourhoods, identify priorities, define minimum quality standards for their neighbourhood, and highlight existing or potential hazards.

These questions include:

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?

The Four Universal Dimensions of a Decent Neighbourhood

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

The Witton Lodge Community Association Demonstrator

North Birmingham is home to first DNS demonstrator with Witton Lodge Community Association based in neighbourhoods of Perry Common with strong social and community assets but with infrastructure and service challenges and concerns around public safety and crime. Through co-designed methods and neighbourhood diagnostics, WLCA and its residents will help to shape a tailored local DNS, mapping zones of accountability and setting the stage for resident-led monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning around neighbourhoods.

A Call to Action

This framework is a practical, place-based response to the critical questions: what are the minimum quality standards of decent neighbourhoods, what are the key variables that make up that standard and how do we deploy those to improve the quality of neighbourhoods for all communities.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard offers a framework grounded in seminal theory, and shaped by community insights. Our ambition is to create meaningful change through policy and practice to improve quality of life through improving the quality of neighbourhoods, focusing strategy and investment, empowering local communities, and leading an evidence-based, collaborative transformation of neighbourhoods across the West Midlands and nationally.



Figure 1: The Decent Neighbourhood Standard

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

The 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 better region, fostering collaboration across society, industry, and academia. CNM has a strong track record in research spanning digital innovation, infrastructure, people and skills, and housing and communities. The Centre's Housing and Communities research programme seeks to create long-term and sustainable impact, contributing towards new evidence bases around core themes of housing need and affordability, housing quality, neighbourhoods and place-making, health and wellbeing, net zero transitions and tenant engagement.

www.thenewmidlands.org.uk

Social Life is an independent research organisation created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. Our work is about understanding how peoples' day-to-day experience of local places is shaped by the built environment - housing, public spaces, parks and local high streets - and how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas.

www.social-life.co

