HOUSING STANDARDISATION AND DESIGN QUALITY IN THE NORTH EAST

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Authorship and contributions

This report was developed collaboratively with workshop participants. The case studies and project material were provided by participating housing associations and architects.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on workshops, public events, and a roundtable held alongside the **Housing Standardisation** exhibition at the Farrell Centre in Newcastle in 2026, bringing together housing associations, architects, and local authorities from across the North East of England. The events and exhibition examined how national regulations, local policy, and voluntary best-practice standards are interpreted, translated into briefs and house types, tested against real project constraints, and reviewed once homes are occupied.

A key finding is that design quality depends not only on the standards themselves, but on whether organisations have the governance, evidence, and feedback routes to interpret, apply, and update them. One recurring issue was that learning following building handover is rarely captured or shared, despite housing associations being the long-term stewards of the homes they deliver.

The report sets out six recommendations for housing associations and the architects and consultants they work with. Rather than prescribing a single model, they provide a framework for strengthening design governance, organisational learning, and the translation of standards into better housing outcomes.

1. Make design governance explicit: assign clear ownership, authority, and review cycles.

Housing organisations should assign clear responsibility for the maintenance of documents and decisions that inform design quality, such as standards, house types, specifications, project briefs, and procedural manuals, and processes related to authorising change control, implementing design review, and signing off gateway approvals. This makes outcomes more consistent, gives voluntary standards enough backing to survive cost and programme pressure, and protects continuity when staff or consultants change.

2. Create and maintain an evidence protocol and learning register for each project and house type range.

Organisations should define what evidence is captured at each project stage, who holds it, and who can act on it, with formal exchange routes between teams that currently hold evidence separately. This avoids project learning being lost between teams and stages, and makes both formal and informal evidence available for later review within housing programmes and organisations.

3. Define the fixed and flexible elements of standard house type ranges.

House types should be treated as adaptable, not fixed, with each range specifying what must stay constant, what can change, and what evidence justifies turning a one-off project change into a portfolio-wide update. This keeps the cost and consistency benefits of standardisation while letting types respond to site conditions and changing requirements.

4. Stress-test briefs and procurement routes against design quality risks.

Before procurement, acquisition, or planning submission fix key decisions, organisations should test the brief against known risks to quality and the realities of the chosen delivery route, recording non-negotiable requirements, permissible trade-offs, and decision owners. This gives organisations more control over whether design intent survives delivery, and reduces late-stage compliance checking and abortive redesign.

5. Use accessibility standards as a baseline for a wider adaptability and healthy neighbourhood test.

Rather than treating Part M compliance as an endpoint, organisations should use accessibility standards as the starting point for a wider test covering the dwelling, threshold, street, and neighbourhood together – adaptability, healthy ageing, social contact, and access to everyday amenities. This supports long-term usability and wellbeing, and helps make accessibility part of mainstream housing rather than a separate specialism.

6. Translate project learning into future briefs, house types, specifications, and standards.

Learning from completed projects, live delivery, and long-term use should be fed back formally into development requirements, with significant changes tested against existing house types or piloted before wider rollout. This turns accumulated project learning into formal changes to future briefs, house types, specifications, and standards, helping organisations respond to recurring problems and regulatory or technological change.

The report also points to a possible North East housing design network, enabling practitioners to exchange knowledge and practice across organisations.

INTRODUCTION
MAKING PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE VISIBLE

This report documents discussions held at the Housing Standardisation in the North East exhibition and event series, held at the Farrell Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, between February 2026 and August 2026. The exhibition showcased recent housing projects from the North East of England produced by housing associations and their architects, and examined how standard house types and accompanying organisational design guidance are adapted during the design and development process. Practice participants developed exhibits to explore how housing association-led design governance produces housing projects that respond to mandatory national regulations, local policy requirements, voluntary good-practice standards, local contexts, housing markets, and customer and stakeholder preferences. Events included closed workshops with participants from housing associations and architects, and complementary public presentations and a roundtable, which expanded on these themes by exploring how housing associations and practitioners navigate the pressures of financial viability, building procurement, regulatory change, house type standardisation, housing management and stewardship, and changing resident needs.

Participants identified well-considered regulations and standards as an essential precondition for housing quality. However, they explained that for externally developed standards to be effectively implemented within housing projects and long-term organisational programmes, it is necessary for practitioners within housing associations and their architects to continually interpret existing standards and anticipate emerging requirements to refine and adapt their approaches to design governance. Processes of interpretation, implementation and evaluation include the translation of emerging standards into design briefs, specifications, and standard house types; testing standards against actual site constraints, delivery options and procurement processes; and evaluating outcomes after construction and resident occupation when operational learning is considered at its most valuable.

Organisational learning after project handover and resident occupation was commonly identified by participants as important for enhancing their approaches to design governance and housing standardisation, and often ineffectively shared within housing associations and with their partners. This challenge matters because housing associations are responsible not only for delivering new homes but also for their long-term stewardship. Capturing and transferring learning can improve design quality throughout a home's lifecycle. Therefore, a key issue is lifecycle evidence translation: how the long-term effects of design decisions are evidenced, and how that learning is fed back into future development decisions.

Within housing associations, this translation depends on formal and informal design governance processes, and on the evidence or practitioner knowledge that underpin everyday decision-making in the design, delivery, and operation of homes. The workshops therefore examined different

aspects of organisational design governance and how standards are produced and interpreted, rather than simply complied with, and how this affects housing design and quality.

While all new homes must meet mandatory regulations, differences in housing quality and outcomes are often shaped by voluntary or best-practice design standards and the different spatial and user assumptions they represent. The standards adopted by a housing association for a specific housing project or programme, and the design governance processes and housing design expertise that inform negotiation about the application of these standards, are commonly embedded in routine practice and often overlooked...

This report aims to reveal some of this practice knowledge and design governance processes used by housing associations, architects, and local authorities, to negotiate what quality means in a particular context through a situated interpretation of more general standards, briefs, and technical requirements. It presents practice-based case studies and shared examples of good practice identified during the workshops and public events in the form of practical recommendations. These recommendations are intended for use by housing associations and architects or consultants working with them as reference points that can be shared internally, or with clients and partners, when negotiating design governance principles and practices used to enhance design and build quality across housing projects and programmes. These recommendations are intended to stimulate reflection by practitioners on the effectiveness of existing frameworks for design governance within housing associations and priorities for their continuing development within their organisational context, rather than prescribing a single or linear approach for adoption across the North East of England.

RECOMMENDATION #1

MAKE DESIGN GOVERNANCE EXPLICIT: ASSIGN CLEAR OWNERSHIP, AUTHORITY, AND REVIEW CYCLES.

Good design governance needs clear ownership and processes to effectively translate design ambitions. Housing organisations should assign explicit responsibility for the key documents and decisions that shape quality, such as development standards, house types, specifications, project briefs, and approval routes. This should also include agreements on version control, review cycles, update triggers, a standards hierarchy, and the authority to approve project-specific departures, as well as consideration of the evidence needed to communicate design quality to different stakeholders and their priorities.

Learning from completed projects, including construction and maintenance problems, resident feedback, and technical performance, should feed back into future development projects to avoid repetition or inconsistencies in design decisions and trade-offs.

BENEFITS

Strengthens consistency in design quality outcomes, gives voluntary standards the organisational authority to survive cost and programme pressure, creates transparency in decision making, and provides continuity across staff and consultant changes.

IMPLEMENTATION

Create a design governance map and ownership matrix setting out who owns each key document, when it is reviewed, what can trigger an update, and who has authority to sign off a departure from the standard. Define a clear hierarchy of legal minimums, organisational standards, project ambitions, and permissible trade-offs, and ensure that decisions at each level are recorded and accessible to teams and consultants at every project stage, and integrated with project, commercial, and board decision-making processes.

STANDARDS AS DRIVERS OF DESIGN GOVERNANCE

How housing associations and developers implement and potentially exceed national or local design standards is largely defined by their design governance framework. It needs to support both programme-level consistency and project-level differences. The framework sets out the processes needed for transparent decision-making and on when to strengthen design quality ambitions or accept trade-offs, thereby determining design quality outcomes. It typically includes consideration of how internal development standards, design preferences, and specifications are established and approved, as well as how these organisation-specific standards interact with national and local design quality requirements.

Housing design standards cover a wide range of performance requirements and expectations, from national regulations and standards to local authority policy, organisational standards and specifications, house type ranges, and project-specific constraints and briefs. While national and local standards provide a baseline, they do not by themselves create a design quality ambition. An important driver of design ambition is nurturing a design quality culture supported by organisational design governance, in which mandatory standards are a safety net and not a maximum target. This requires both mandatory and voluntary standards to have clear ownership and a formal route into project briefs, design reviews, procurement decisions, asset management, future adaptation, and long-term stewardship.

The workshops highlighted how some standards are formally owned within housing associations by technical or design and delivery teams, while others are adopted more informally through common practice, organisational culture, individual preferences, or long-standing relationships between housing associations and architects. A potential problem of informal routes is that decisions are made repeatedly and inconsistently across different projects, which can be partially addressed through recording and sharing of decisions and testing when regulations or staff and consultants change. For voluntary standards to be consistently adopted and survive cost, programme, and procurement pressures, they also require senior leadership approval and clear organisational authority.

Beyond formal design governance processes, the professional judgement by architects can play an important role in adopting, interpreting, and challenging standards when translating a client's project brief into design. For example, they might maintain or adapt elements of a house type range across different projects and organisations. Architects can therefore hold important parts of a housing association's working knowledge, especially where they are established, long-term collaborators. But this can also create a governance risk when knowledge and learning from projects depend on external consultants, individuals, or a small number of internal design experts that might not be involved in future projects.

What matters for consistency – whether knowledge sits with internal teams or external consultants – is that key design documents and decisions have clear ownership, review points, handovers, and routes into future development decisions. Design governance frameworks should therefore set out how knowledge and evidence from projects is recorded and shared, and who has the responsibility and authority to translate that knowledge into design outcomes and longer-term design guidance. Key decisions, especially by design and development teams, should be documented so that they are accessible and can be revisited by others, with lessons learned recorded and translated for different audiences and contexts, across the organisation and its project teams. This supports a culture of active review and improvement of organisational design governance processes, in which the whole-life value of design decisions and design quality can be considered. Voluntary standards in particular can only become effective when they are clearly authorised, resourced, and translated into design guidance and decisions.

Design quality governance and iterative updates to standards



CASE STUDY

THIRTEEN HOUSING GROUP STRATEGIC STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

Thirteen Housing Group treats space and accessibility standards as a board-level commitment rather than a response to what local planning authorities may require. Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) and Thirteen's other technical requirements are written directly into the brief for every land-led scheme, alongside planning, policy, and design expectations. This is then followed through with a consultant route map that is modelled on a RIBA Plan of Work but tailored to Thirteen's own requirements and is issued to the design team at appointment stage.

The implication for Union Village, Middlesbrough, was that although the local authority had no policy commitment for NDSS or M4(2), Thirteen Housing Group's own design standards required these higher regulatory standards to be met.

Union Village

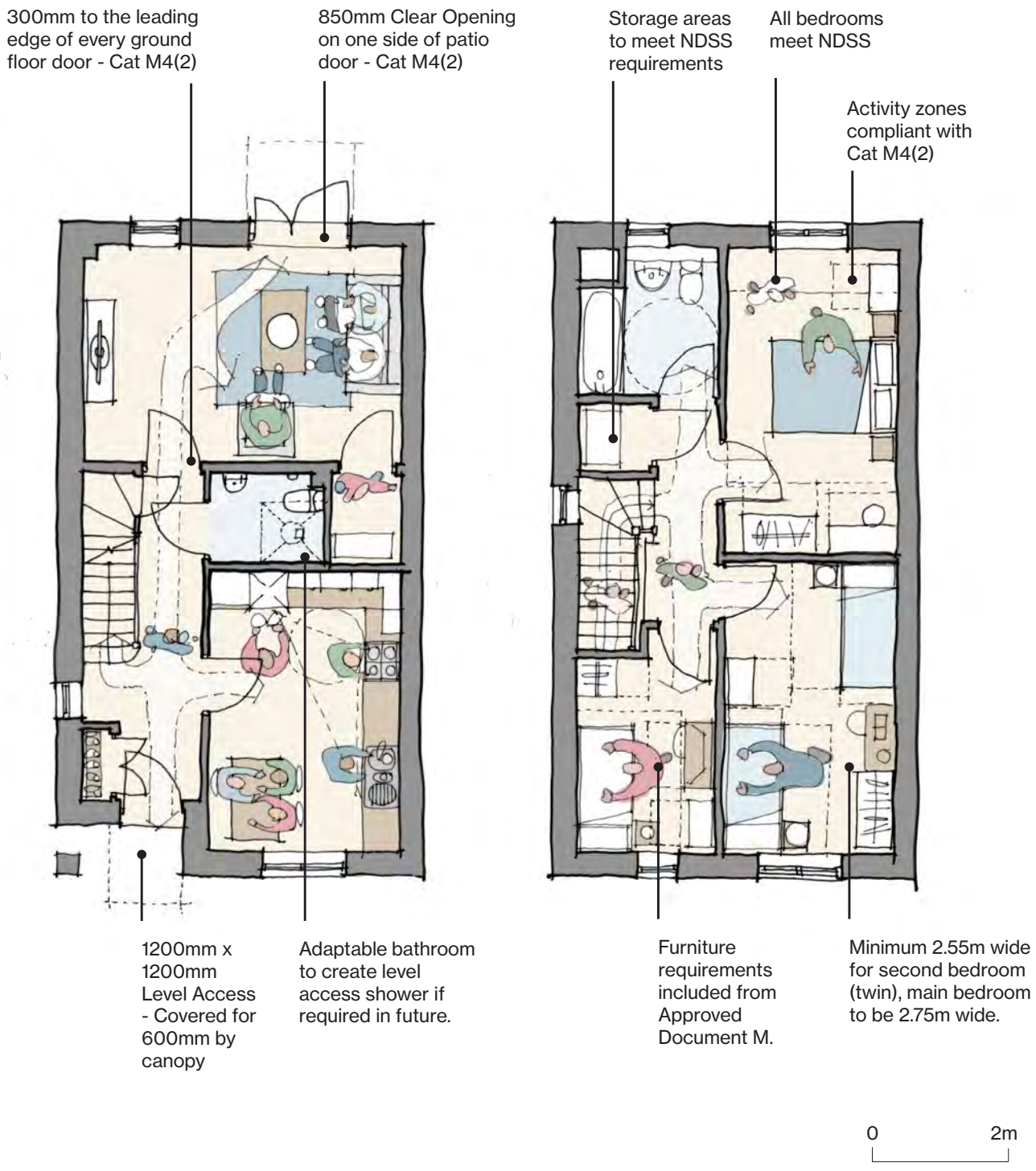




Photographs: Esh Construction

Location:
Gresham, Middlesbrough
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Thirteen Group
Contractor:
Esh Construction
Architect:
IDPartnership
Local planning authority:
Middlesbrough Development Corporation (Application formerly managed by Middlesbrough Council)

Diagram of an example plan form (HT12) annotated with how standards are used



GENTOO DESIGN TOOLKIT

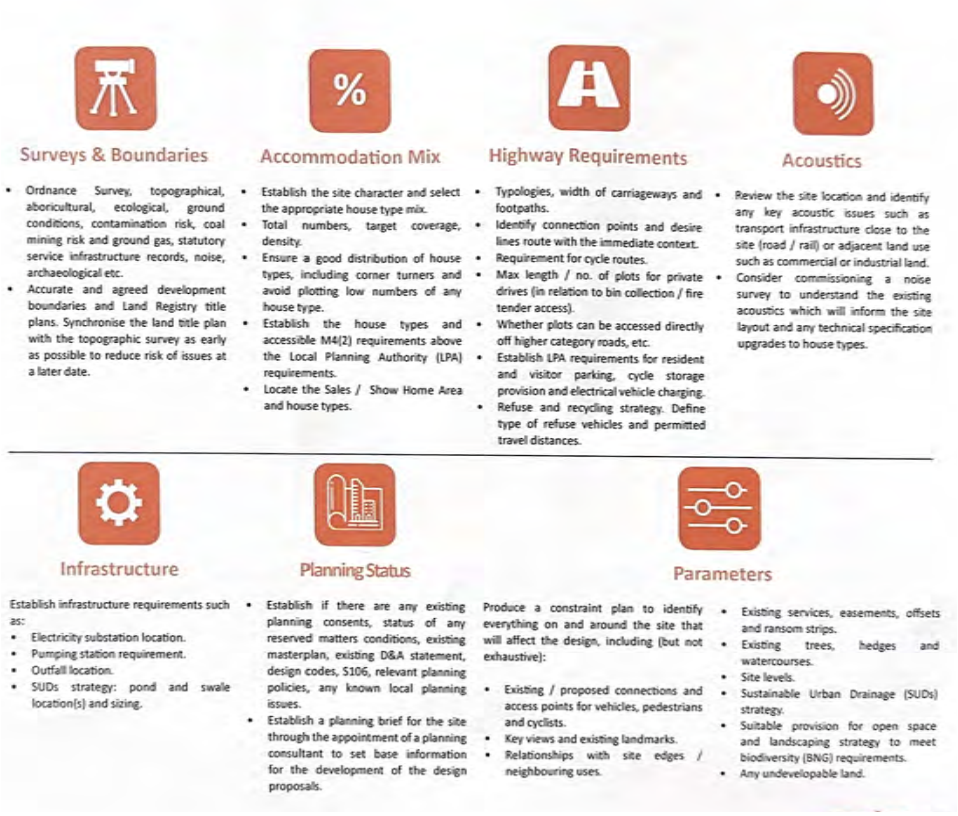
Gentoo introduced a consultant-facing design guide to connect consultant information requirements with formal approvals at concept, pre-planning, and pre-start stages. The Gentoo Design Toolkit explains the design process and what the housing team requires, so that consultants design to those expectations from the outset, alongside practical management requirements such as avoiding long shared bin alleyways.

The guide frames its purpose in similar terms: it sets out clear tasks and deliverables at each project stage, aligns Gentoo's requirements with Building for a Healthy Life, and positions itself as enabling rather than restricting design, providing designers with the information they need so that they can focus on the site-specific response rather than working out what Gentoo requires from scratch. It is built around Gentoo's house type portfolio and delivery requirements specifically, functioning less as a rulebook and more as a shared reference point that lets consultants understand Gentoo's expectations without repeated back-and-forth at each approval stage.

Hilltop Park site plan



‘Establishing a Project Brief’ from Gentoo Planning Guide



Surveys & Boundaries

- Ordnance Survey, topographical, aboricultural, ecological, ground conditions, contamination risk, coal mining risk and ground gas, statutory service infrastructure records, noise, archaeological etc.
- Accurate and agreed development boundaries and Land Registry title plans. Synchronise the land title plan with the topographic survey as early as possible to reduce risk of issues at a later date.

Accommodation Mix

- Establish the site character and select the appropriate house type mix.
- Total numbers, target coverage, density.
- Ensure a good distribution of house types, including corner turners and avoid plotting low numbers of any house type.
- Establish the house types and accessible M4(2) requirements above the Local Planning Authority (LPA) requirements.
- Locate the Sales / Show Home Area and house types.

Highway Requirements

- Typologies, width of carriageways and footpaths.
- Identify connection points and desire lines route with the immediate context.
- Requirement for cycle routes.
- Max length / no. of plots for private drives (in relation to bin collection / fire tender access).
- Whether plots can be accessed directly off higher category roads, etc.
- Establish LPA requirements for resident and visitor parking, cycle storage provision and electrical vehicle charging.
- Refuse and recycling strategy. Define type of refuse vehicles and permitted travel distances.

Acoustics

- Review the site location and identify any key acoustic issues such as transport infrastructure close to the site (road / rail) or adjacent land use such as commercial or industrial land.
- Consider commissioning a noise survey to understand the existing acoustics which will inform the site layout and any technical specification upgrades to house types.

Infrastructure

Establish infrastructure requirements such as:

- Electricity substation location.
- Pumping station requirement.
- Outfall location.
- SUDs strategy: pond and swale location(s) and sizing.

Planning Status

- Establish if there are any existing planning consents, status of any reserved matters conditions, existing masterplan, existing D&A statement, design codes, S106, relevant planning policies, any known local planning issues.
- Establish a planning brief for the site through the appointment of a planning consultant to set base information for the development of the design proposals.

Parameters

Produce a constraint plan to identify everything on and around the site that will affect the design, including (but not exhaustive):

- Existing / proposed connections and access points for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Key views and existing landmarks.
- Relationships with site edges / neighbouring uses.
- Existing services, easements, offsets and ransom strips.
- Existing trees, hedges and watercourses.
- Site levels.
- Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) strategy.
- Suitable provision for open space and landscaping strategy to meet biodiversity (BNG) requirements.
- Any undevelopable land.



Movement

- Establish optimum site access position for vehicles.
- Assess existing site use for any pedestrian movement routes / PROW's and requirements for retention or diversion within the design development of the site layout.
- Consider LPA requirements for sustainable movement and transport and key linkage to context services and facilities to minimise vehicle use.

Public Open Space

- Minimum area and locations.
- Site to accommodate links to desire line routes such as safe routes to school, existing and adjacent PROW, public transport etc.
- Retain open areas that form sensitive or attractive view corridors.
- Play area and offset requirements.
- Can SUDS areas be Green and Blue infrastructure i.e. integral to open space and biodiversity strategy?

Placemaking

- Character vision – establish the existing typology for streets, spaces, build form, details and facing materials.
- Materials choices, boundary treatments and landscape strategy.
- Is there an existing design code for the site?
- Establish the LPA planning policy for design quality assessments.

Car Parking / External Storage

- Parking policy - no. of spaces per dwelling.
- Garage size (regular or large 6x3) and does it count as a parking space.
- Bay and drive widths (if different from standards set out in Plotting Book).
- Establish any additional accessibility standards M4(2) or M4(3) provision.
- Visitor parking requirements.
- Bin / cycle storage and rear access requirements.
- Policy on electric vehicle charging provision.

Wider Connectivity

- Establish the surrounding context and services beyond the site.
- Consider important linkage routes that would provide direct movement towards local services, facilities, bus stops, and routes to schools which can be incorporated into the layout to support connectivity.

Residential Amenity Standard

- Establish the LPA requirements for separation distances (e.g. back-to-back, front-to-front, back-to-side, front-to-side).
- Establish early indicative finished floor levels to understand the level arrangements between plots and potential for increasing the separation distances if the level difference between plots are greater than LPA requirements.
- Minimum rear garden depth (typically 10m) or LPA requirement.

Biodiversity

- Establish a Biodiversity Action plan (BAP)
- Understand the BNG requirements.
- Identify areas of high biodiversity value.
- Arboricultural report.
- Priority species mitigation and enhancement (e.g. bats, birds, great crested newts etc)

Sales / Show Home Area

- Gentoo to advise on optimal position for the Sales / Show Home Area.
- Position to be prominent and close to the site access.
- Gentoo to advise on the housetype mix for the Sales / Show Home Area.

RECOMMENDATION #2

CREATE AND MAINTAIN AN EVIDENCE PROTOCOL AND LEARNING REGISTER FOR EACH PROJECT AND HOUSE TYPE RANGE.

Housing organisations should define what useful evidence can be captured at different project stages, how it is recorded, who it should be shared with, who interprets it, and who has authority to translate it into a change to a brief, standard, house type, specification, or procurement requirement. This requires building formal exchange routes between teams that currently hold evidence separately. The approach to collecting and translating lifecycle evidence should be proportionate to the project and distinguish between technical performance, resident experience, and operational feedback.

BENEFITS

Prevents project learning being lost between teams and stages and makes different formal and informal evidence reviewable.

IMPLEMENTATION

Establish evidence prompts and protocols at key briefing, design review, pre-construction, handover, defects, and operational stages. Each project should produce a learning register recording key lessons, evidence source, action owner, and decision taken and identifying opportunities for organisational dissemination. For house type ranges, a periodic cross-team forum could review accumulated feedback and agree changes before these are translated into updated standards and briefs. Where appropriate, evidence should be shared with external consultants and partners.

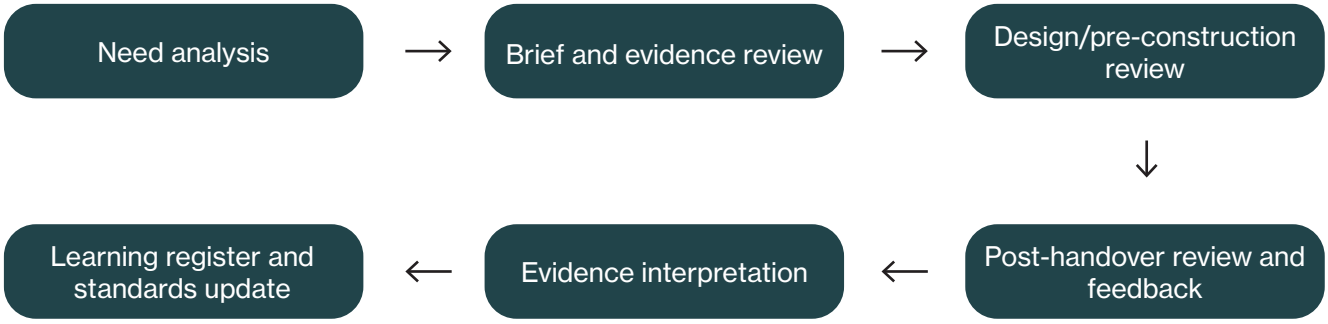
EVIDENCE AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

How evidence is collected, interpreted, and translated into design decisions can be as important to housing design quality as the standards and briefs that inform individual projects. Evidence can take many forms and is generated at many different points across the development cycle. Development managers have knowledge of procurement constraints and viability trade-offs, design teams understand design decisions and their consequences, maintenance and operational staff know what fails in use and over time, and residents understand how their homes actually perform. Architects working with several housing organisations can also hold comparative knowledge about how different standards and design approaches perform.

However, evidence and design insights are often tacit and not gathered systematically, and can be held by individuals rather than formally by an organisation. The challenge is also often not a lack of practitioner knowledge or evidence, but how it is consistently recorded, formatted, interpreted, and shared with internal and external stakeholders, and how this can occur at the right time and be communicated in a way that various stakeholders can easily understand. For evidence to improve designs, it therefore has to be readily available and translatable into development decisions, design requirements, and operational plans while considering their long-term impacts. This lifecycle evidence translation requires judgement about what counts as evidence, how significant it is, the cost and feasibility of acting on it, and whether its consequences are project-specific or affect wider standards and practice.

The workshops identified post-handover learning as a common weakness in current practice. For example, RIBA Stage 7 post-occupancy evaluation is often not undertaken or internally collected post-completion data is not shared. Defects and completion reports cannot replace direct discussion with residents, operational teams, and the original design team to assess whether a building works as intended.

Evidence to learning flow



Barriers for translating evidence into future practice

Reactive response

Evidence is often only collected when a housing provider needs to respond to a problem.

Standardisation or revision

Formal evidence is typically only sought when standards, specifications, or unit types are being revised.

Informal knowledge loss

If learning is not formalised it lives through people; when they leave, the information leaves.

Why evidence is hard to capture and use

Barriers appear across timing, resources, organisational culture, and feedback routes.

Delayed or missing POE

Post-occupancy reports are delayed, absent, or not linked back into future design.

Resources and access

Evidence takes time and cost to document, organise, and make accessible to others.

Organisational silos

Different teams might not work together effectively; a more holistic evidence route is needed.

Post-handover gap

Designers often do not receive delivery, post-occupancy, and maintenance feedback.

Cultural resistance

Evidence might be resisted when challenging existing norms (e.g. parking provision).

Weight and risk

Once captured the value of evidence has to be assessed, meaning that the risk aversion associated with sharing potentially poor performance data must be overcome.

Only extremes recorded

Exemplary cases and failures are captured; routine performance is often a gap.

Limited evidence from housing in use

Evidence of how homes are lived in, altered, and managed is often under-developed.

Note: Learning might not inform future development decisions because evidence is held by separate teams, recorded and shared inconsistently, lacks sufficient contextual information, or has no clear assigned responsibility for action. Diagram is a synthesis of workshop discussion.

Development and design problems can also arise when local authorities do not have formal, adopted policy, when housing need assessments are out of date, or when planning requirements such as parking standards are disproportionate and too high to be viable. Housing associations and their architects might therefore have to conduct their own studies, interpret and test policy, or negotiate how it applies to a specific project. This can create uncertainty and additional cost, but also prompt reflection on the adequacy of existing internal development standards.

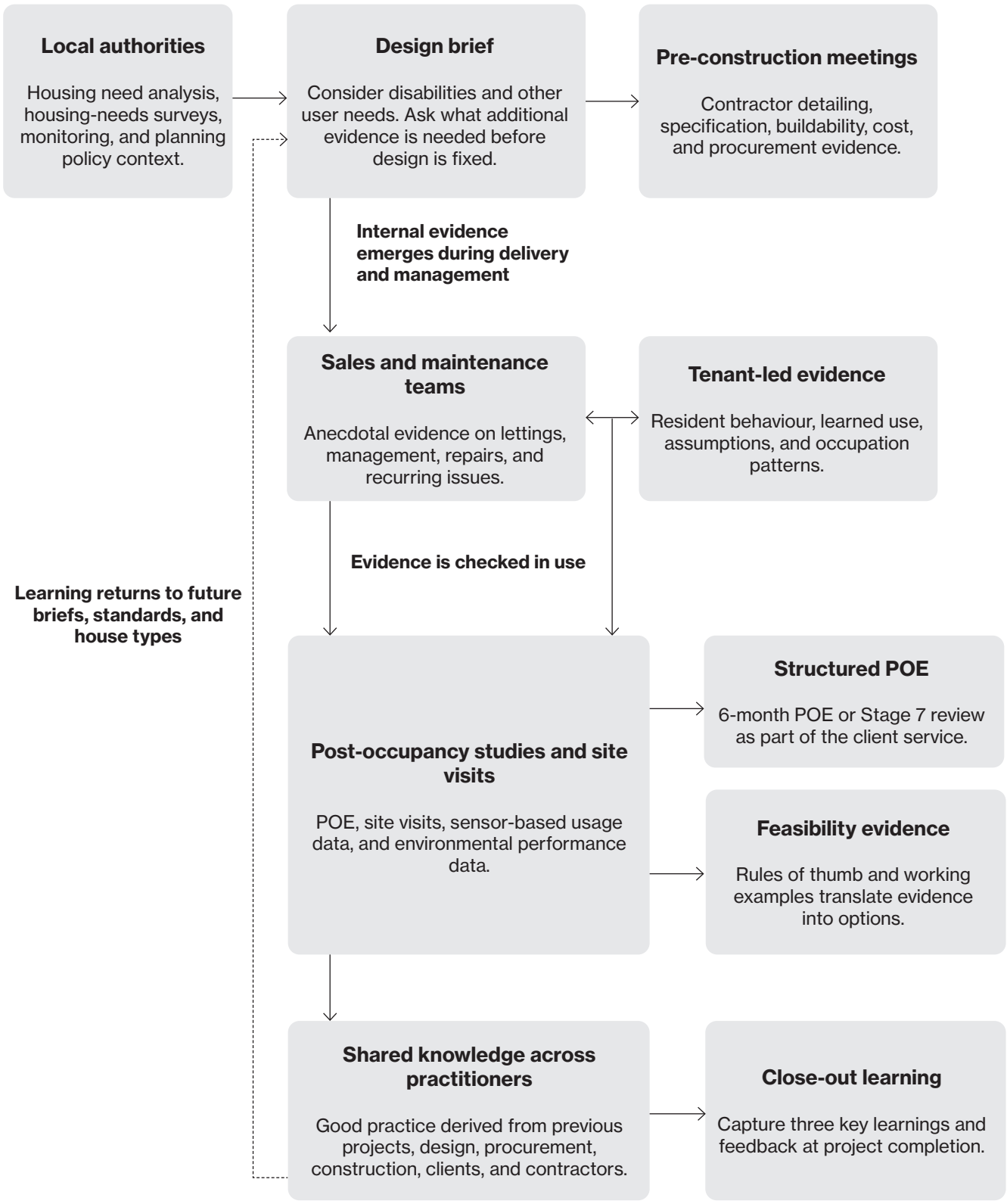
Part of the difficulty in evidence-based or informed decision-making is timing. The need for evidence or more information often only emerges after the consequences of past design decisions become apparent in use. Unless these issues are captured and fed back into design documents and guides when they are reviewed, mistakes can be repeated without learning from past projects.

In everyday practice, useful evidence often does not have to be formal or quantitative. For example, even anecdotal feedback from maintenance teams or residents can reveal design problems that might not be captured otherwise by regulations, defects reports, or performance data. However, this feedback becomes more useful when the full context is known – whether a problem is isolated or recurring, where it occurs, what type of home or site it affects, and how it relates to design, specification, construction, occupation, or operation. In particular, both technical evidence and resident and operational feedback should be considered together.

For evidence to be translated into design changes, organisations need to have a process for assessing its significance, transferability, and likely cause, while assigning clear responsibility for actioning relevant changes to design documents and processes. Pre-construction review and post-occupancy learning are particularly important points in the review cycle, as design-and-build discussions can capture lessons about buildability, specification, and cost, while post-handover evidence can show how homes perform in use and what might have to change in future projects.

When learning is not formally recorded, the built project can become the only “record” of what changed, why it changed, and whether it improved design quality. Built projects and case studies can therefore help evidence what good design quality looks and feels like, but they should be supported by formal records of the decisions, trade-offs, and learning that informed them.

Evidence and organisational learning



Note: Diagram is a synthesis of workshop discussion.

CASE STUDY

CLASPER VILLAGE, GATESHEAD

In Clasper Village, P+HS Architects used named user characters to stress-test the design of a 252-home scheme. Each persona represented a distinct set of needs and was used to test decisions at neighbourhood, street, and home scale. The personas were used to consider how people would move around the site: whether people could move around the site without anxiety and find their way to work or school; whether bins, bike stores, parking, and the paths between them created unnecessary daily friction; and whether homes met residents' accessibility and sociability needs.





1. Gable Fronted Properties



2. Coal Gardens



3. Tree-Lined Boulevard



4. Clasper Green



5. Chambers Courtyard - Lower



6. Chambers Courtyard - Higher



7. The Toll House & Redheugh Bridge

Location:
Gateshead
Developer:
Taylor Wimpey
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Gateshead Council

USER CHARACTERS		SCENARIOS USED IN PLANNING	TESTING AGAINST
Elderly / Retired	 Edith & Bill	**Edith & Bill** are looking for a community orientated home which can be adapted to their mobility needs as required. Key Design Features to fit their needs: • Active front gardens with low boundary treatments to promote conversation, • Community garden spaces, • Easy to navigate routes with landmarks and nodes, • Connected routes framing key views including regular resting points.	**Edith & Bill** live in a ground floor flat that overlooks Chambers Courtyard. They enjoy watching young families use the courtyard and sometimes potter out for a catch-up with their neighbours. A few times a week they catch the bus, just outside, into central Gateshead to pick up a paper and do their shopping.
Young Professionals	 Stephan and Marie	Stephan & Marie are wanting an attractive modern home close to local amenities with easy access to the city centre. Key Design Features to fit their needs: • Active outdoor spaces and connections to wider footpath and cycle networks. • Spill out outdoor space for entertaining friends, • Strong connections to surrounding infrastructure, • Attractive modern aesthetic.	Stephan & Marie have just bought their first home and are excited about living in Clasper Village. They both work in central Newcastle and love that they can run to the office as part of their commute.
Disabled Residents	 Ezra and Violet	Ezra & Violet are wanting a fully accessible home that caters to Violet's needs within an active community. Key Design Features to fit their needs: • Corner turning property to promote activity and connection, • M4 Cat2 home that caters to Violet's current needs and can easily be adapted as and when requirements change. • Level access to good local footpaths with regular resting and viewing points.	Ezra & Violet live in one of the corner turner properties that overlooks the central 'green corridor'. As a M4 CAT 2 home, it caters for Violet's needs. She enjoys sitting out on her porch with Ezra chatting to her neighbours as they pass by. Occasionally, due to there being level access, she heads over to the nearby orchard when it's sunny.
Young Families	 Ayaan, Mila and Indie	Ayaan & Mila are looking for a family home within a vibrant community with safe outdoor spaces for Indie to play and interact with other families. Key Design Features to fit their needs: • Lively family friendly community with opportunities within the landscape for incidental meetings. • Interesting play spaces and footpath routes that can be locally explored, • Overlooked spaces shielded from traffic movement to allow for independent play.	Ayaan & Mila recently moved into one of the 2-storey homes with their 5 year old Indie who is about to start at the nearby primary school. Their new home means Indie has multiple places to play with her friends while she's young and also relax and socialise when she gets older.
'Right - sizer' residents	 Rose, Carlos and Doug	Rose & Carlos are on the hunt for a spacious modern property with plenty of outdoor communal space and walking routes. Key Design Features to fit their needs: • Equal hierarchy of routes to allow for safe pedestrian movement, • Links to wider footpath routes for walks with Doug, • Shared communal gardens to allow for a grow your own mentality, • Incidental meeting spaces that allow for spontaneous social interaction with others in the community.	Rose & Carlos have both recently retired and wanted to move to the area due to the abundance of communal gardens, where Rose enjoys gardening with her friends, and safe walkable streets which Carlos looks forward to going on walks to nearby open green spaces with his dog Doug.

RECOMMENDATION #3

DEFINE THE FIXED AND FLEXIBLE ELEMENTS OF STANDARD HOUSE TYPE RANGES.

Standard house types offer the benefits of standardisation and can improve the consistency of design quality, maintainability, approval processes, and cost predictability. They should be seen as adaptable rather than fixed. Each house type range and related development standards, including the Employer's Requirements, should identify which elements are fixed, which are flexible, and what evidence is needed before a project-specific adaptation becomes an update of the whole portfolio.

Reviews of house type portfolios should also define when an otherwise successful type needs redesign because of changing regulation, energy systems, cost inflation, demographics, cultural expectations, accessibility requirements, or maintenance and buildability feedback.

BENEFITS

Supports efficient delivery and consistency in design quality, while allowing house types to respond to site context and project-specific briefs, providing cost certainty, and saving time by reducing uncontrolled one-off changes.

IMPLEMENTATION

Develop a house type review protocol with notional-site testing, accessibility and technical requirement checks, design-quality review, cost review, maintenance input, and a route for converting repeated project changes into standard range updates. The protocol should distinguish between one-off site adaptation, pilot redesign, and full portfolio revision.

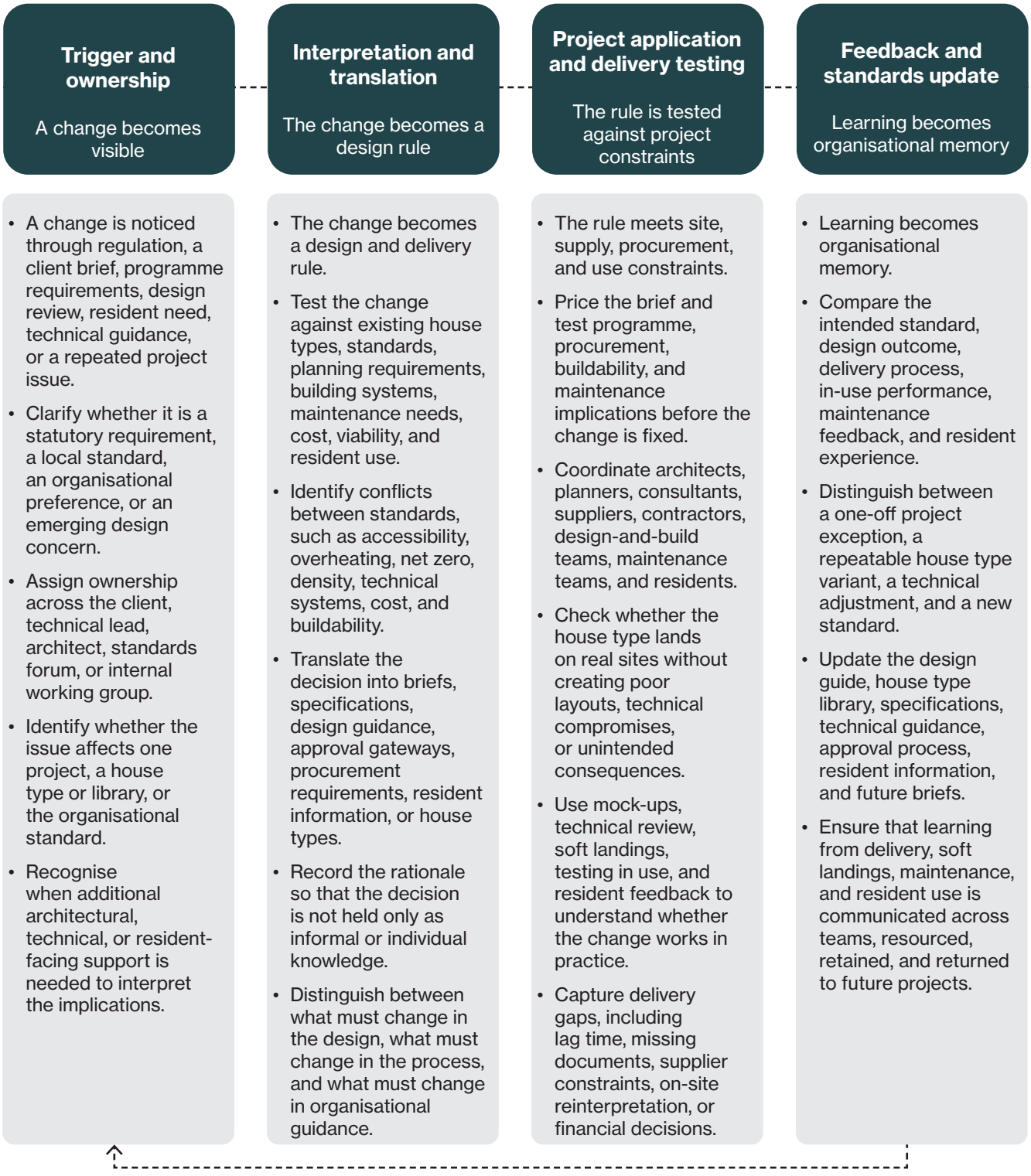
INTELLIGENT STANDARDISATION: HOUSE TYPES AS ADAPTABLE SYSTEMS

In the workshops, standard house types were repeatedly discussed as an important means of ensuring design quality and financial viability, as they reduce repeated design work, create consistency in design standards, simplify approval processes, and improve long-term building maintenance. They function as important organisational design documents by enabling communication and agreement across different teams and their expertise on technical design, feasibility, management, and operational requirements. Standard house types translate organisational standards and knowledge into physical homes. As a result, when new regulations, technical standards, or site constraints are introduced, standard house types often become a way of testing and negotiating what change means in practice.

A good house type was described in the workshops as a “chassis”, whose main structure remains while adapting to different site conditions and project requirements. New house types therefore often emerge in response to site constraints or briefs with project-specific needs. Developing or updating them requires balancing regulations, cost, maintenance, and design quality – a process that is iterative rather than linear. Some standardised types can have very long lifecycles if they are regularly refined through repetition, accumulated learning, and user feedback. An effective and adaptable house type range defines both the fixed and flexible elements, as well as when a project-specific change should become an update to the standard range and should consider impacts on the wider design context of street, landscape, and neighbourhood. However, updates to house type ranges can be slow and costly, as they require input and agreement from many different internal and external stakeholders.

House types should be reviewed when a regulation or the assumptions on which the design of a type was based change, which can include energy performance, demographic change, or the long-term performance of components. At the same time, inherited types such as the Tyneside flat show that older models can continue to hold social and urban value as long as they can adapt to contemporary accessibility, energy, maintenance, and resident expectations or requirements.

Standard change, house type, and organisational learning



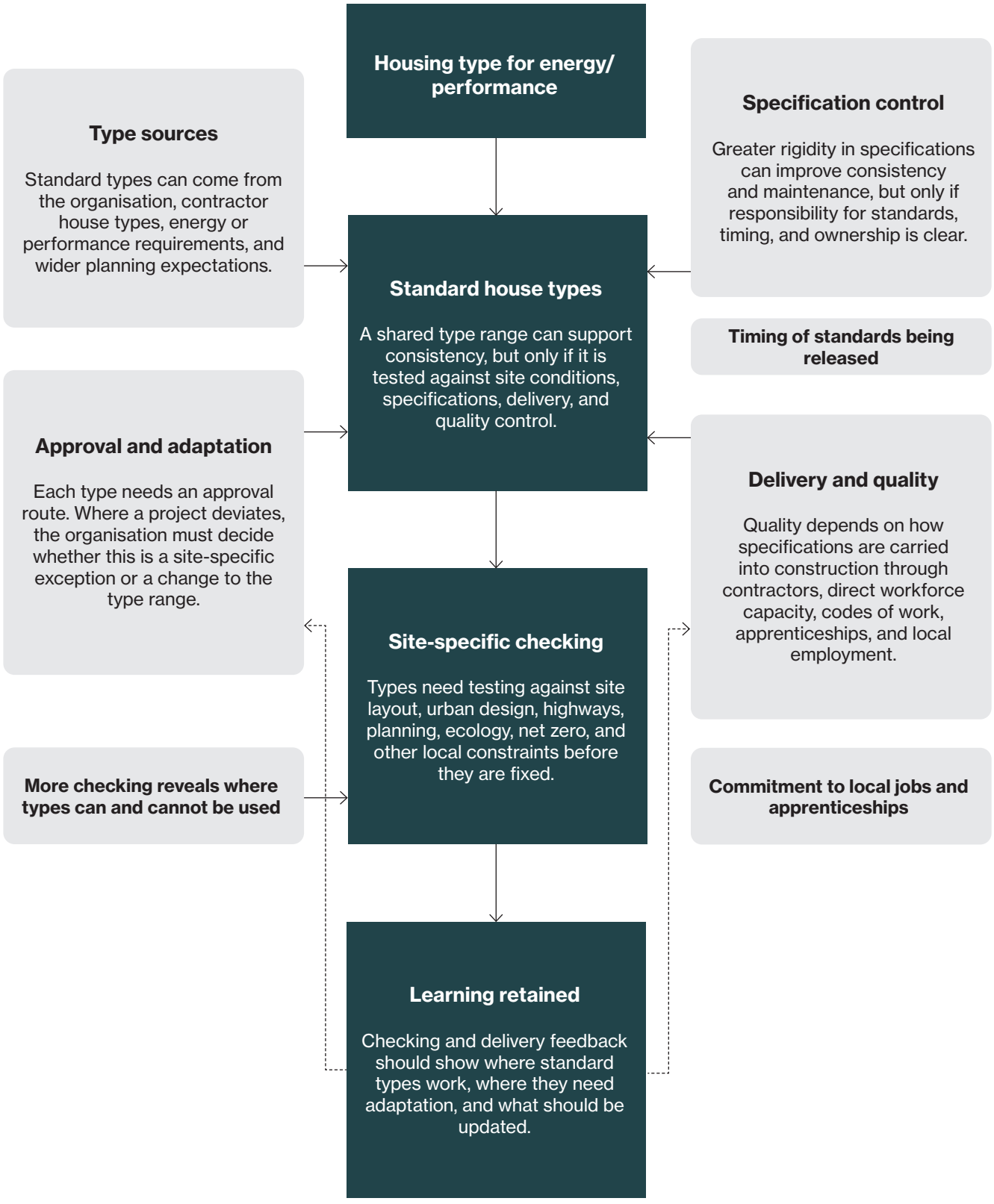
Learning loop: Learning should inform future briefs, standards, house types, technical guidance, and resident support. If the loop is not maintained, the same issues can reoccur and result in repeated informal workarounds.

Decision: Is this a project exception, a repeatable house type variant, a technical change, or a change to the standard? The answer determines whether learning stays local or updates the design guide, specifications, and house type range.

Cross-cutting questions: Who owns the change? What document changes? When are architects, technical, delivery, maintenance, and customer service teams involved? What should become standard? How is learning recorded, communicated, resourced, and retained?

Note: The diagram describes a circular loop between change triggers, review of standard house types at the project or portfolio level, the way design decisions are recorded and evidence-based and potentially feed back into the change trigger. Diagram is a synthesis of a workshop process map.

House types, specifications, and delivery quality



Note: Planning, procurement, and project-specific constraints along with house types and specifications determine the design of delivered homes, with feedback from the development process and post-handover informing future projects. Diagram is a synthesis of a workshop process map.

CASE STUDY

GENTOO HOUSE TYPE REVIEW

In Gentoo's house type portfolio, two house types evolved from 2020 onward through heat-pump retrofits, resident feedback, M4(2) compliance, and a 54-item value-engineering review that cut costs while consciously protecting what residents valued.

Across their evolution, the two types absorbed four distinct kinds of pressure: technical change, resident feedback, regulatory requirements, and cost. The review process weighed each change against what staff and residents had actually found to matter, keeping some costs the group judged worth retaining and cutting others that weren't. The following pages set out each of these changes in turn.

Gentoo gathers this evidence through three channels: a two-year post-occupancy defects period generating informal feedback during site visits; formal surveys; and Gentoo Voice, an opt-in resident panel with online design questions and incentives that are used to keep responses varied and representative.



Photograph: Gentoo Group (The Finchale at Cricketers Hill)

The evolution of 2B/3P house type (HT2)



1. HT2B: 2020 Portfolio Issue

Designed by P+HS to RIBA Stage 3 as part of the concept housetype range, providing a general needs bungalow in detached format only.

Not technically tested or confirmed to meet local housing needs. Developed to technical stage and delivered on site in detached form within the Cricklewood Road development, providing lessons informing the Re-plan exercise in 2021.



2. HT2B: 2021-24 Replan

Internal layout replanned in response to tenant feedback from the Cricklewood Road development. Living, dining, and kitchen combined to single open-plan space. Bedrooms repositioned to provide improved external views. Bathroom proportions increased to support greater movement and allow potential level-access shower option for M4(1) provision. Larger radiator panels installed.



3. HT2B: Feb. 2025 M4(2) Variations

Further iteration of the internal layout to provide M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable dwelling compliance, including key movement requirements such as level-access thresholds, hallway widths, turning spaces, level-access shower option, door opening leading-edge offsets, repositioned furniture and movement zones, and M&E height and location adjustments. Minor adjustments made to achieve ROSPA Gold certification.



4. HT2B: Oct. 2025 Value Engineered Version

Value engineering review included the following adjustments:

• Addition of gable window to allow housetype to be plotted as a street corner turner type.

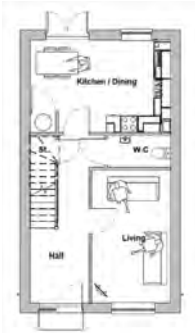
• Reduction of feature brick soldier coursing on elevations.

• Adjustment of roof pitch and eaves/wall plate height to reduce build height.

The evolution of 2B/3P house type (HT7)







1. HT7A: 2020 Portfolio Issue

Designed by P+HS to RIBA Stage 3 as part of the concept housetype range, providing a general needs house in detached format only. Not technically tested or confirmed to meet local housing needs. Two roof form options:

• Type A: gable-on

• Type B: front-to-back pitched roof.

Developed to technical stage and delivered on site in more commercially viable semi-detached and terraced forms within the Leeway Green development.



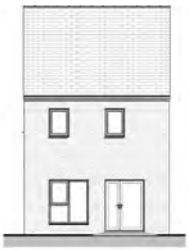




2. HT7A: 2021-24 Replan

Customer feedback on the heating provision of the air source heat pump system resulted in larger radiator panels being installed, and in some rooms, repositioned or furniture zones adjusted to accommodate.







3. HT7B: Feb. 2025

Iteration of the internal layout to provide M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable dwelling compliance, including key movement requirements such as level-access thresholds, hallway widths, turning spaces, a level-access shower option in the ground floor WC, door opening leading-edge offsets, repositioned furniture and movement zones, and M&E height and location adjustments. Minor adjustments were made to achieve ROSPA Gold certification.







4. HT7A: Oct. 2025 Value Engineered Version

Value engineering review included the following adjustments:

• Reduction of feature brick soldier coursing on elevations (maintained on principal front elevation and omitted to secondary gable/ rear).

• Adjustment of roof pitch and eaves/wall plate height to reduce build height.

• Minor adjustment to window proportions to reduce extent of glazing.

CASE STUDY

UNION VILLAGE

In Union Village, IDPartnership adapted Thirteen Housing Group's standard house types to deliver the design ambition. They softened entrances to the site with curved walls and changes in enclosure to continue the residential character without closing the development off. They also arranged homes around shared communal gardens instead of standard rear plots, and created site-specific corner types to maintain the character of the development. In each case, the underlying house type stayed the same; what changed was how it was arranged, bounded, and combined with adjacent homes to respond to the specific conditions of the site.



Image: Esh Construction

Location:
Gresham, Middlesbrough
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Thirteen Group
Contractor:
Esh Construction
Architect:
IDPartnership
Consultants:
Civil and Structural Engineering: CK21, Landscaping: One Environments
Local planning authority:
Middlesbrough Development Corporation (Application formerly managed by Middlesbrough Council)

1. The house types were designed at key locations to provide high levels of natural surveillance. Further windows were added to the house types on corner plots to provide double frontages and further surveillance. Although due to viability reasons the amount of glazing was reduced from what is shown in the diagram, the concept was still apparent in the finished product.

2. A gateway is implied by using higher walls in the area and incorporating a 'gate pier' within the detailing of the wall.

3. The road surface material is changed from tarmac at the entrances, to help imply a gateway, creating interest in the streetscene and to help slow traffic.

4. Robust Boundary Treatments - Boundary walls are used around the perimeter of the development to provide clearly definable private space in front of the housing.







CASE STUDY

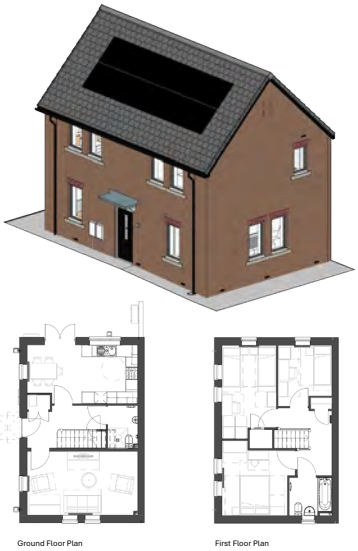
THIRTEEN HOUSE TYPE RANGE

The top row shows the original Thirteen Housetypes, designed to meet current standards and legislation. The following rows then show the same housetypes but re-elevated to be sensitive to their locations.

Housetype 12, 3B/5P



Housetype 11, 3B/5P



Main Avenue, Cowersley, Huddersfield







Highmoor Lane, Cleckheaton, Huddersfield







Union Street, Gresham, Middlesbrough







CASE STUDY

NEWBIGGIN LANE, HARTBURN WALK, WANSFELL AVENUE

P+HS reworked the historic dual-door Tyneside flat across three over-55s schemes in Newcastle, carrying tenant feedback from each scheme into the next. It was at the third scheme, Wansfell Avenue, that Part M4(2) requirements first applied to the type. The downstairs unit met the standard, but the upstairs unit could not, because M4(2) requires step-free access. From the first scheme, the stair to the upper flat was deliberately kept straight, so that a stairlift could be retrofitted later if needed.

Location:
Newbiggin Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2019
Developer:
Tolent Living / Newcastle City Council
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council



Ground Floor



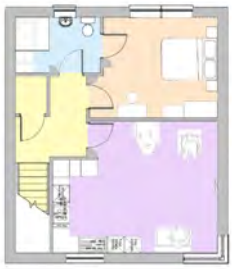
First Floor



Location:
Hartburn Walk, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2020
Developer:
Newcastle City Council Fairer Housing Unit, Tolent Living, Your Homes Newcastle
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council



Ground Floor



First Floor



Location:
Wansfell Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2021
Developer:
Tolent Living / Newcastle City Council
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council



Ground Floor



First Floor



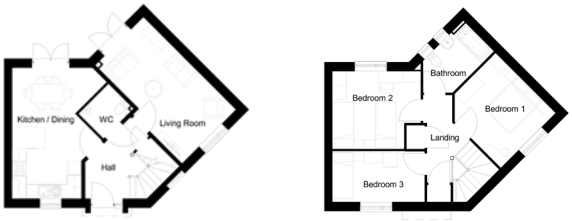
Photographs: P+HS Architects

CASE STUDY

WESTDALE ROAD

In Westdale Road, Thornaby, JDDK utilised Thirteen's standard house types but adapted the elevations and structured the site layout to give the development a strong, distinct frontage onto the busy adjacent interchange. They also created bespoke house types to complement the standard houses and better integrate the development with its specific surroundings.

Bespoke House Type H, 3B5P



Ground Floor First Floor

Adapted House Type I, 3B5P



Ground Floor First Floor



Location:
Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Thirteen Housing Group
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Local planning authority:
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council





Photographs: Sally Ann Norman

RECOMMENDATION #4

STRESS-TEST BRIEFS AND PROCUREMENT ROUTES AGAINST DESIGN QUALITY RISKS.

Before procurement, acquisition, planning submission, or other key design decisions are fixed, housing organisations should stress-test the project brief against design quality risks. This should cover the principal quality risks and project constraints, including the likely procurement or delivery route.

Stress-testing the brief against previous challenges and learning should identify and record unresolved decisions and tensions, decision owners, non-negotiable quality requirements, permissible trade-offs, and review points. Before choosing a procurement route, how much design control and safeguards are required to protect a project's quality ambitions should be assessed.

BENEFITS

Gives organisations greater control over whether design intent survives procurement and delivery pressures, while making design decisions more transparent and consistent. It reduces abortive redesign and late compliance checking by identifying quality risks, trade-offs, and departures from organisational standards before change becomes difficult or impossible.

IMPLEMENTATION

Develop a brief stress-test at the end of RIBA Stage 1, early Stage 2, or an equivalent gateway before acquisition or contract commitment. Use it to integrate relevant learning from previous projects, and update it when the procurement route, standards context, viability position, resident requirements, or project brief changes. Create, in parallel, a procurement quality-risk assessment identifying the level of design control, review, and sign-off required for the chosen route.

USING A DESIGN BRIEF AND PROCUREMENT ROUTE TO PROTECT DESIGN QUALITY

The project design brief is an important design governance tool that sets out the project-specific needs and quality ambitions in relation to national and local standards, internal development standards, and Employer's Requirements. A strong brief can align policy, standards, site constraints, cost constraints, programme requirements, procurement route, ecological conditions, resident needs, maintenance considerations, and long-term stewardship concerns before design decisions become fixed or too costly to change.

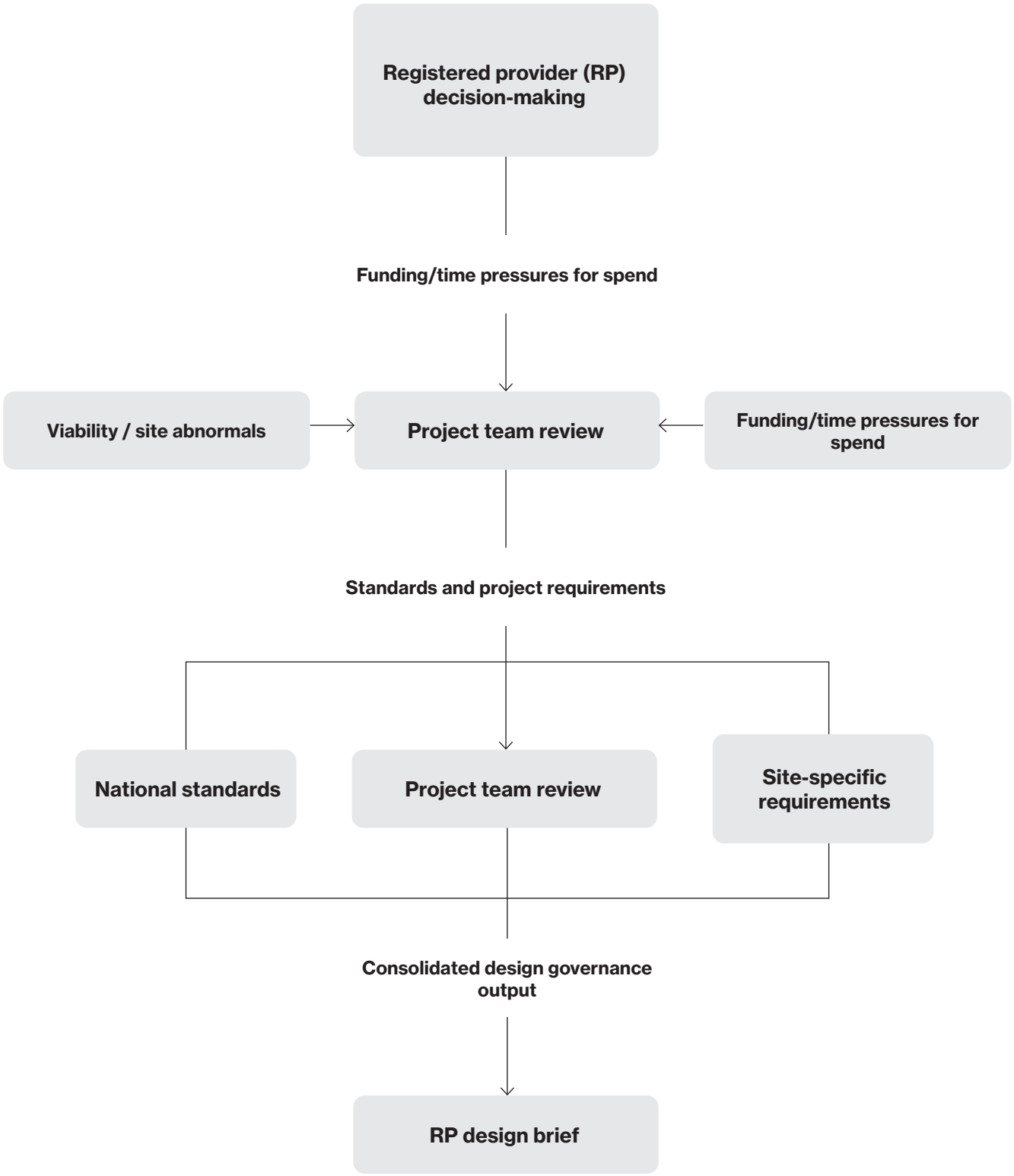
A project-specific brief is essential for good design outcomes and should define the quality aims, non-negotiable standards, permissible trade-offs, and approval routes for departures from organisational development standards. It should form the basis for transparent and evidence-based design decisions.

Design briefs should consider common design challenges and learning from past developments by integrating them or allowing further testing before procurement, acquisition, planning submission, or other key decisions are made on new projects. This "stress testing" can help identify key quality risks and project constraints, as well as how these might be resolved. It should be repeated when significant changes to the procurement, viability, or delivery occur.

The procurement route is a key factor in how the brief and design ambitions are translated into new homes. Package deals, Section 106 acquisitions, developer-led schemes, design-and-build routes, and design- or community-led procurement create different degrees of influence over the principal design and development decisions. Where the registered provider enters the development process late, design governance often shifts from design authorship to retrospective compliance checking. While this can achieve required standards, it weakens the ability to shape more ambitious design quality. Thus, different procurement routes necessitate varied responses and priorities. For example, in Section 106-based purchases, the brief and acquisition checklist should compensate for reduced design influence.

Although compliance checking occurs in all projects, it is especially important in externally acquired, complex, or high-risk schemes, and should be conducted where possible while relevant design can still be changed. Early evaluations against the project brief can identify quality risks and inform the level of design control, review, compliance checks, and sign-off needed for a specific project.

Design brief formation and review



Note: Diagram is a synthesis of a workshop process map.

CASE STUDY

AMBERLEY AND HARROGATE

Amberley and Harrogate Street is an example of how a design brief can survive a complete change in procurement route. The scheme was originally procured as a fully modular building system, with the modular housing provider's product shaping the available plans, frontages, cladding, and some site layout parameters. Partway through procurement, that provider went into administration. Thirteen asked the architect JDDK to rebuild the scheme using its standard house-type range instead, while keeping the original site concept and layout intact. The site had existing service corridors that could not practically be diverted or integrated into the natural streetscape. The proposed design retained them by reimagining them as shared communal gardens spanning between private rear gardens, turning what would have been residual ungoverned space into secure play and amenity areas, while still responding to the surrounding street pattern.





Images: JDDK Architects

Location:
Hendon, Sunderland
Completion:
Ongoing, completion due 2028
Developer:
Thirteen Housing Group
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council

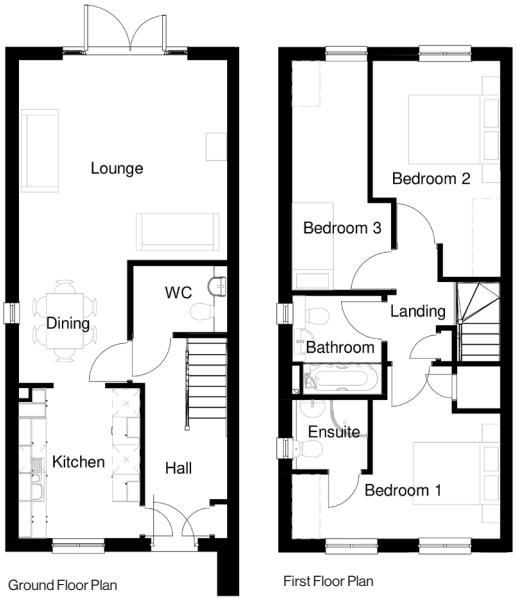
Proposed site plan: Modular scheme



Proposed site plan: Thirteen house type scheme



Example Modular House Type, “Dallington”, 3B5P



Example Thirteen House Type, “HT12”, 3B5P



CASE STUDY

WEST DENTON

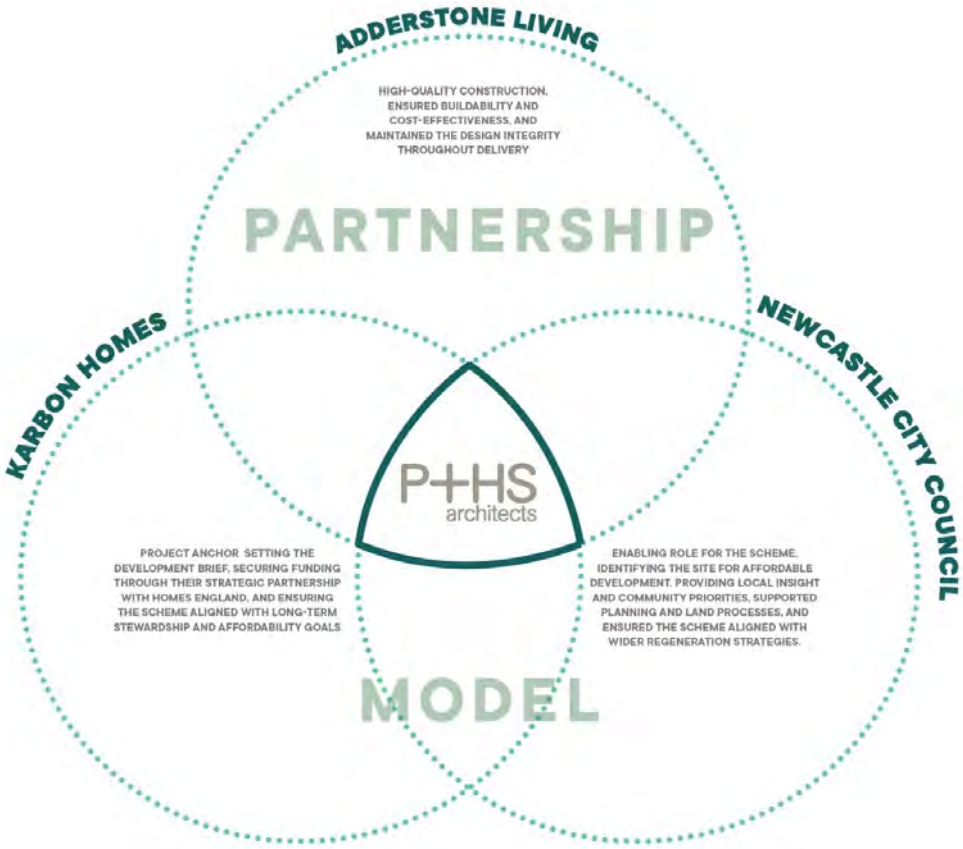
In West Denton, four partners – Newcastle City Council, Karbon Homes, contractor Adderstone Living, and P+HS Architects – were aligned from the earliest stages, so that the scheme's design ambition could be delivered despite obstacles and revisions, as no single party had to absorb the cost alone. As responsibilities were settled before design decisions were fixed, the partnership could absorb a real threat to the brief, i.e. public consultation objecting to the loss of green space, by jointly re-evaluating the scheme, rather than one party quietly cutting the design ambition to resolve the objection alone.





Photographs: The Bigger Picture & P+HS Architects

Location:
West Denton, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Karbon Homes and Newcastle City Council (Fairer Housing Unit)
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council


ADDERSTONE LIVING
HIGH-QUALITY CONSTRUCTION, ENSURED BUILDABILITY AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS, AND MAINTAINED THE DESIGN INTEGRITY THROUGHOUT DELIVERY
PARTNERSHIP
KARBON HOMES
NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL
P+HS architects
PROJECT ANCHOR SETTING THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF, SECURING FUNDING THROUGH THEIR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH HOMES ENGLAND, AND ENSURING THE SCHEME ALIGNED WITH LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP AND AFFORDABILITY GOALS
ENABLING ROLE FOR THE SCHEME, IDENTIFYING THE SITE FOR AFFORDABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDING LOCAL INSIGHT AND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES, SUPPORTED PLANNING AND LAND PROCESSES, AND ENSURED THE SCHEME ALIGNED WITH WIDER REGENERATION STRATEGIES.
MODEL

RECOMMENDATION #5

USE ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS AS A BASELINE FOR A WIDER ADAPTABILITY AND HEALTHY NEIGHBOURHOOD TEST.

Housing organisations should use accessibility standards as the starting point for a broader lifecycle test of adaptability, healthy ageing, inclusion, daily routines, public realm quality, and social support. The test should be multi-scalar and consider the dwelling, threshold, street, and neighbourhood scales as well as management implications together.

The test should also ask whether the proposed housing actively supports public health in practice, including thermal comfort, damp and mould prevention, access to everyday amenities, social contact, green space, and right-sizing or future movement between homes.

BENEFITS

Improves long-term usability, reduces future adaptation costs, supports health and wellbeing, and helps avoid spatial segregation by embedding accessibility into mainstream housing and neighbourhood quality.

IMPLEMENTATION

Adopt a multi-scalar and lifecycle accessibility and health checklist for briefs and design reviews. Use an accessibility narrative to explain and test suitability for daily life in the home and neighbourhood: threshold conditions, resting points, refuse, cycle and parking access, overlooking, communal spaces, routes to amenities and transport, support or stewardship requirements, and the scope for future adaptation.

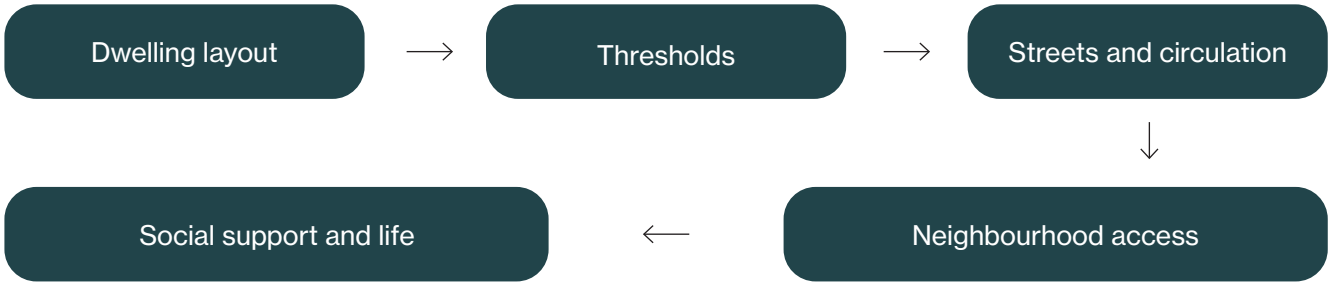
ACCESSIBILITY, HEALTH, AND INCLUSIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS AS KEY DESIGN QUALITY AMBITIONS

The event Homes for Life: Designing Accessible Homes and Neighbourhoods extended the discussion of housing standards to health, ageing in place, inclusion, dignity, social support, and neighbourhood quality. The central argument was that housing should be understood as part of public health infrastructure, as home, neighbourhood, transport, amenities, social support, and loneliness can all affect wellbeing.

A more ambitious interpretation of Part M, rather than minimum compliance, was presented as essential to a longer-term design quality and housing adaptation ambition that creates "accessible life" across neighbourhood, street, and home scales. Part M Category 1 – Visitable dwellings M4(1) is mandatory for new homes, while Category 2 – Accessible and adaptable dwellings M4(2) and Category 3 – Wheelchair user dwellings M4(3) are applied selectively. Together, they provide important design baselines, but no category on its own represents the diverse and growing needs of ageing populations, disabled residents, intergenerational households, or the different limits created by tenure, site conditions, and financial viability.

Rather than simply meeting a Part M category, many projects and house types discussed benefitted from a more nuanced or hybrid accessibility strategy to support residents with different needs and lifestyles, and to enable greater future adaptability of homes. Assessing accessibility only through technical or quantitative criteria limits design, and more qualitative and human-centred forms of evaluation, including user narratives, are needed to test whether homes and neighbourhoods can

Accessibility as multi-scalar design quality



support everyday use. Throughout the event, there was strong support for introducing M4(2) as the general minimum standard for homes instead of M4(1), while recognising that particular projects might require or justify different approaches.

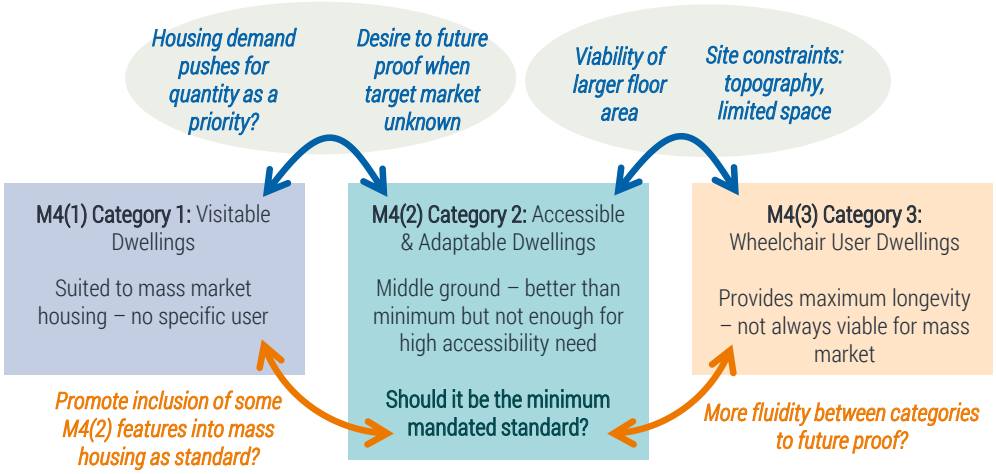
Accessibility also needs to be considered and tested beyond the dwelling and common assumptions about typical household structures and privacy, care, domestic work, and adaptability needs. While a home can meet a technical minimum standard, it can still fail households and their daily needs if thresholds, streets, routes to amenities, seating, green space, transport access, social contact, and neighbourhood legibility are not designed together. At the same time, not meeting one element of a standard does not necessarily mean that the overall accessibility ambition fails, provided that the departure is justified and compensated for by the wider design approach.

CASE STUDY

VALIANT CLOSE

In several projects, JDDK shows that a hybrid approach to accessibility standards can be beneficial to all parties. In the house types they developed for Newcastle City Council, JDDK moved from a standard M4(2) bungalow to what the practice calls a 'Category 2 Plus' type, retaining the M4(2) baseline but adding specific M4(3) features.

JDDK's accessibility diagram



Valiant Close shows the same hybrid logic applied in the other direction, starting from a higher standard and selectively reducing it based on the specific resident group. The 17-home independent-living scheme sits alongside a day support centre, so residents' care needs were already partly met by on-site provision. JDDK therefore dialled down the M4(3) standard: retaining wide entrances, wheelchair transfer space, and generous bedroom circulation and turning areas, but dropping the fully accessible bathroom and enlarged kitchen, since residents received meal support from the day centre and made minimal independent use of their kitchens.

Location:
Hendon, Sunderland
Completion:
2022
Developer:
Sunderland City Council
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council



Photograph: JDDK Architects



M4(2) 'Plus' Bungalow for Newcastle City Council

- Hybrid approach to standards internally
- Allows for wheelchair movement rather than just mobility
- Makes future adaptation easier by adding features.
- But, it is about accepting a larger floor area at outset

Wheelchair transfer / storage zone

Turning provision

Bed access zones





Photographs: Sally Ann Norman





Hybrid 1B and 2B bungalow types in Valiant Close, Sunderland

- Hybrid approach to standards internally
- Features retained:

Wheelchair transfer / storage zone

Turning provision

Bed access zones

Entrance hall clear access

- Features adapted:

No provision for accessible bath

Kitchens not fully compliant in capacity and layout

CASE STUDY

CLASPER VILLAGE

In Clasper Village, P+HS Architects set out to design ‘accessible life’ explicitly across three scales. At neighbourhood level, routes were designed to connect through the site rather than enclose it, with legible landmarks and consistent architectural cues helping residents orient themselves, and active frontages supporting a sense of safety on shared streets. At street level, a ‘10-metre threshold’ treated everyday friction such as bins, bike storage, parking, and the paths between them, as a core design problem, with traffic calming built into street geometry and surface treatment rather than relying on signage. At home level, a mix of houses with different accessibility standards were paired with generous semi-private porches that let residents pause, sit, and greet neighbours without needing to commit to a formal shared space.









Active Frontages



Communal Gardens



Connection to the Wider Context



Retaining green Infrastructure



Incidental Meeting Places



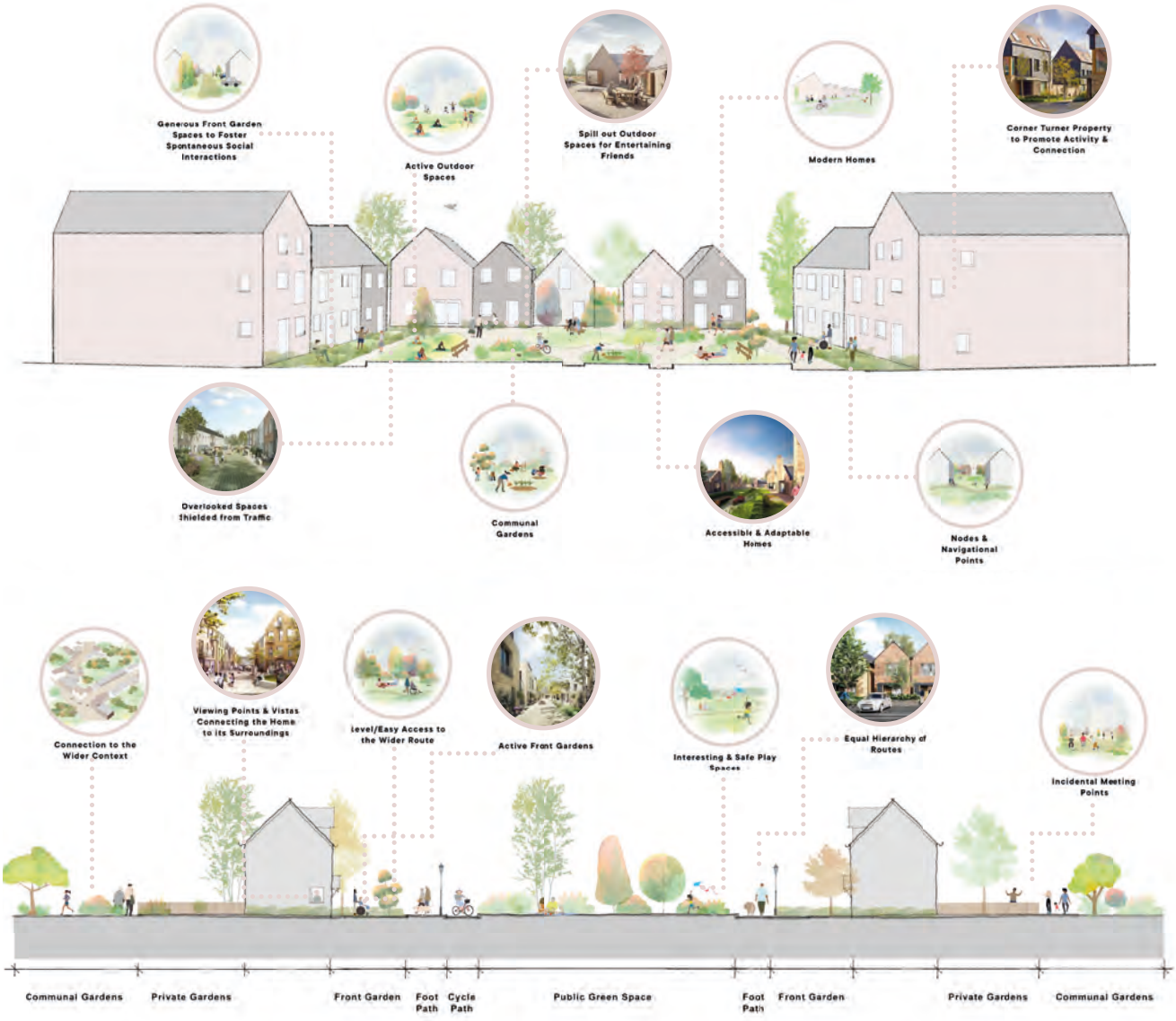
Key Node Points



Equal Hierarchy of Routes

Location:
Gateshead
Developer:
Taylor Wimpey
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Local planning authority:
Gateshead Council




Generous Front Garden Spaces to Foster Spontaneous Social Interactions
Active Outdoor Spaces
Spill out Outdoor Spaces for Entertaining Friends
Modern Homes
Corner Turner Property to Promote Activity & Connection
Overlooked Spaces Shielded from Traffic
Communal Gardens
Accessible & Adaptable Homes
Nodes & Navigational Points
Connection to the Wider Context
Viewing Points & Vistas Connecting the Home to its Surroundings
Level/Easy Access to the Wider Route
Active Front Gardens
Interesting & Safe Play Spaces
Equal Hierarchy of Routes
Incidental Meeting Points
Communal Gardens
Private Gardens
Front Garden
Foot Path
Cycle Path
Public Green Space
Foot Path
Front Garden
Private Gardens
Communal Gardens



CGI of Clasper Village



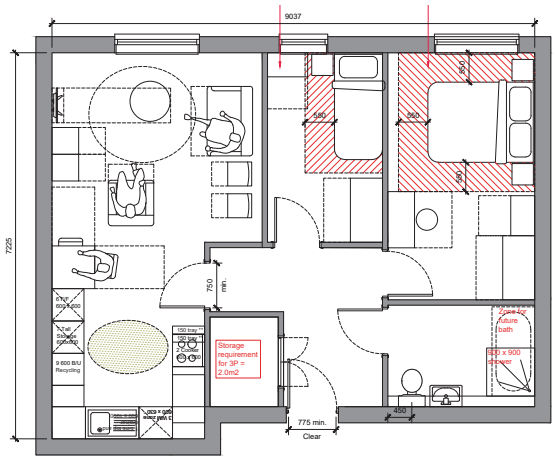
Sketch study for the 'Power of the Porch'



CGI of incidental meeting places

The Home: Part M Ladder study by P+HS

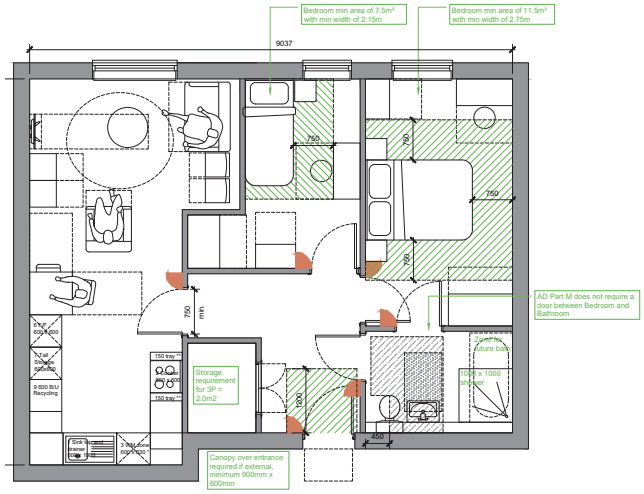
- Approved Document M (Volume 1) defines M4(1), M4(2) and M4(3).
- M4(2) - Accessible and adaptable dwellings.
- Our baseline approach: M4(2) as standard across the scheme.



CAT 1 NDSS - 2B3P
61m²

Requirements:

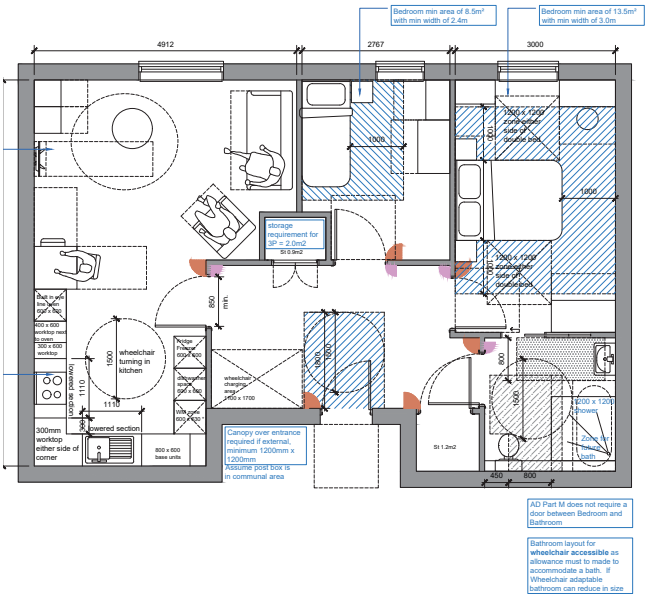
- Double Bedroom min area of 11.5m² with min width of 2.75m.
- Single Bedroom min area of 7.5m² with min width of 2.15m.
- Minimum clear doorway widths dependant upon if approached head on. Minimum 750mm clear width required when corridor width is 900mm and approached head on.
- A corridor width is not reduced to below 750mm at any point due to obstructions (i.e. radiators).



ADM CAT 2 - 2B3P
61m²

Requirements:

- A 300mm clear nib at Entrance door, clear for a depth of 1200mm.
- 300mm Clear leading edge to all doors indicated -
- Minimum clear doorway widths dependant upon if approached head on. Minimum 750mm clear width required when corridor width is 900mm and approached head on.
- Double Bedroom min area of 11.5m² with min width of 2.75m.
- Single Bedroom min area of 7.5m² with min width of 2.15m.
- A 750mm wide clear path from Bedroom doorway to window.
- 750mm Clear zone around sides and foot of double bed & one side of single bed.



ADM CAT 3 - 2B3P
75m²

Requirements:

- Minimum 1500mm clear turning circle within Entrance.
- A 300mm clear nib at Entrance door, clear for a depth of 1800mm.
- 1050mm Clear width for the Hallway. A minimum 1200mm clear width is required when not approached head on.
- All doors to provide 850mm clear opening (915mm door leaf)
- 300mm Clear leading edge to all doors indicated.
- 200mm Clear following edge to all doors indicated.
- Double Bedroom min area of 13.5m² with min width of 3.0m.
- Single Bedroom min area of 8.5m² with min width of 2.4m
- A 750mm wide clear path from Bedroom doorway to window.
- 1200mm x 1200mm clear zone inside of Bedroom door.
- 1000mm Clear zone around sides and foot of double bed & one side of single bed.
- Living / Kitchen min area of 3P = 27m²
- Length of worktop for 3P = 4730mm, plus 1800mm (6530mm total) for **Wheelchair Accessible**.
- 2200mm minimum clear low level / height adjustable worktop.
- Pull out shelf required under oven.
- Ceiling structure to Bedroom and bathroom to be strong enough for an overhead hoist with a load of 200kg.
- A door entry phone with remote door release facility is provided in the main living space and Principal Bedroom.
- Suitable provision is made in the Principal Bedroom for future bedhead controls.

RECOMMENDATION #6

TRANSLATE PROJECT LEARNING INTO FUTURE BRIEFS, HOUSE TYPES, SPECIFICATIONS, AND STANDARDS.

Housing organisations should adopt formal and informal processes to translate project learning into future development requirements. This should build on evidence from completed projects, live delivery, long-term use, and previous departures from agreed development standards.

Where a change has significant spatial, operational, cost, or resident implications, organisations should test it against existing house types, notional sites, or selected pilot projects before wider application.

BENEFITS

Improves future performance, reduces repeated errors, protects quality under cost pressure, and makes house type ranges more resilient to future regulatory and technological change.

IMPLEMENTATION

Use the evidence protocol and learning register from Recommendation 2 to trigger standards updates. Review learning at key stages such as practical completion, defects review, regular house type review, and major regulatory changes. Each update should record the evidence source, the decision, the affected documents, and the implementation owner.

ENABLING ACTION

There is a potential for creating an informal North East housing design network for practitioners to exchange knowledge and best practice.

CONNECTING REGULATORY CHANGE, DELIVERY, MAINTENANCE, AND FUTURE STANDARDS

New and emerging regulations, standards, and technologies can affect house type ranges, plan depth, facade design, storage, plant, bathrooms, thresholds, ventilation, overheating, maintenance access, density, procurement, dwelling usability, and development cost and viability. Examples discussed during the workshops included the NDSS, Part L, Part O, Future Homes, Part M, heat pumps, MVHR, and rainwater harvesting, all of which have different design, operational, and organisational implications. For registered providers, adopting these regulatory changes effectively means integrating requirements related to design, delivery, maintenance, and future standards from the outset and considering the long-term impacts and costs of decisions rather than only short-term compliance.

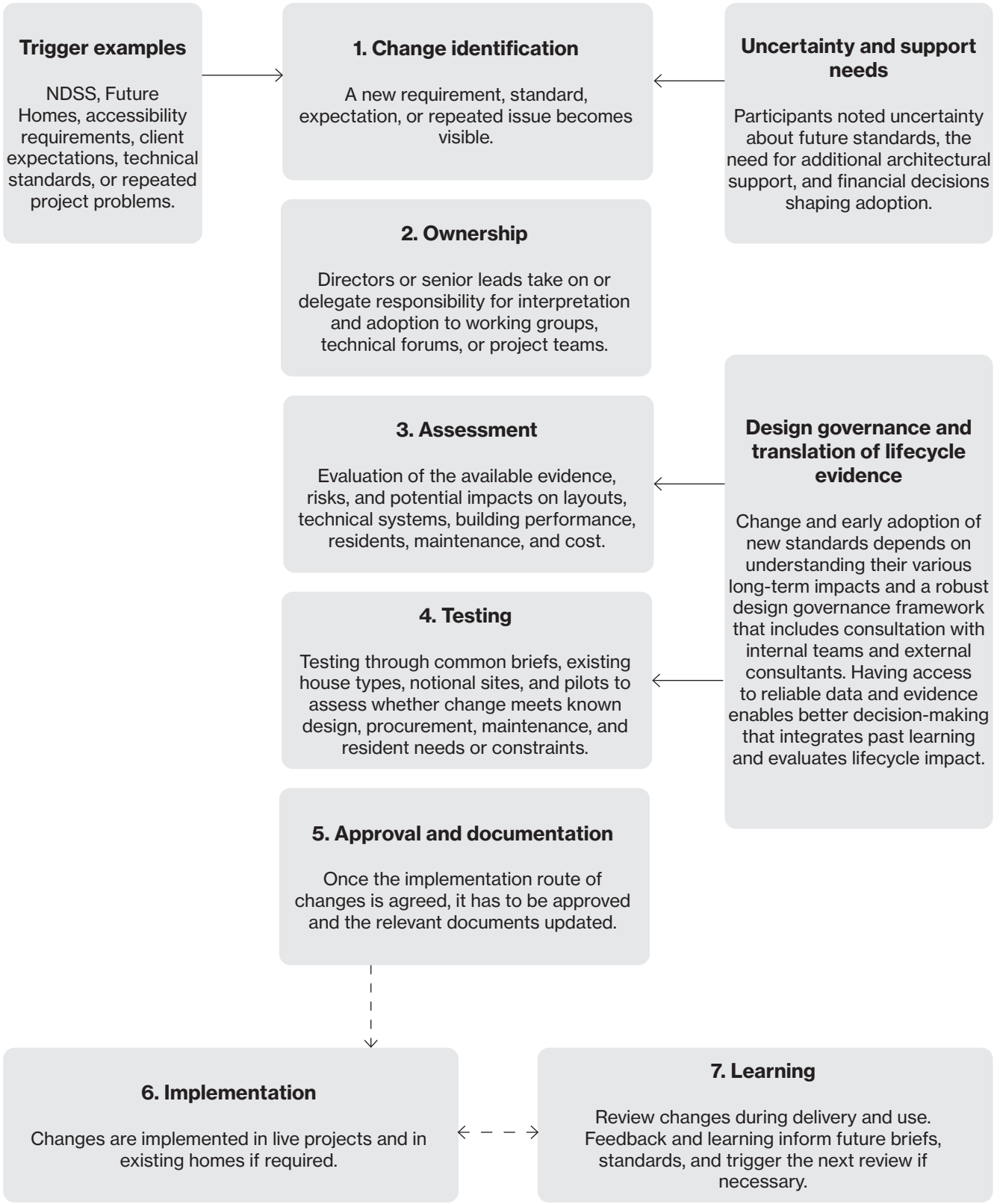
The starting point for managing change should be the existing design governance framework, knowledge, and organisational learning. Housing organisations already hold significant evidence from completed projects. This evidence should be reviewed whenever standards, technologies, or internal requirements are updated, so that future decisions do not treat each change as a new problem. The review should also identify requirements that are no longer needed or supported by evidence.

As higher standards are difficult to introduce at the end of the design process, new homes and house types should be designed to that specific requirement from the beginning, which is a particular challenge for homes that are acquired from someone else. Technical changes can have spatial, operational and cost implications that should be considered early to ensure that the design outcomes perform as intended. Future standards should therefore be tested against layout quality, buildability, maintenance access, handover, and long-term operational needs.

New regulations can also affect schemes that have already been designed, are under construction, or are already inhabited. Existing house types, homes, and delivery standards should therefore be reviewed whenever a significant change occurs, and clear responsibility should be assigned across teams for testing, updating, and sign-off before the change affects live projects, including responsibility for sharing this information effectively between decision-makers.

Where a change is likely to have significant spatial, cost, or management implications, notional site testing or limited piloting should be considered to help evaluate potential impacts in greater detail before wider adoption within an organisation and across its housing stock. The value of this testing or piloting depends on findings being clearly recorded, shared, and translated back into the design documents that shape future development projects.

Implementation of changes in standards



Note: Diagram is a synthesis of workshop discussion.

CASE STUDY

LOVELL HOMES HOUSE TYPE RANGE

Recently, Blake Hopkinson undertook a review of the house type portfolio of Lovell Homes. Producing a portfolio review of this kind takes considerable effort: Lovell's own process involves critically reviewing existing sites, assessing as-built product, auditing the current portfolio against the marketplace, and refining proposals through repeated working group review before sign-off. That effort is compounded by the number of departments with a stake in the outcome including commercial, marketing, and procurement teams. On a recent 56-house market-sale range, that need for cross-departmental agreement meant a project predicted to take six months took twenty-four. Considering the pace of change, it is important to think about future requirements from the outset. Lovell’s process builds this in explicitly, with future-proofing for evolving planning needs named as a distinct step in the review, treating the portfolio as something that has to anticipate change, not just respond to it once a new requirement arrives.

The Process

LOVELL

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PRODUCT

- *Critical reviews of existing sites*
- *As built product assessments*
- *Desktop review of house type portfolio*
- *Review of marketplace competition*
- *What are the current and emerging marketplace trends?*
- *Future proofing for evolving and future planning needs*
- *Establishing a range with tools to place make and secure Building For Healthy Life credits*

→ Develop brief and scope

↓

Design development

refine → present → Working group reviews → Collate feedback → refine

Outcomes

- Retention of product that works well
- Improve kerb appeal
- Provide standard plotting templates and plotting guidance
- Create a consistent brand with elevation options for key scenarios
- Improve design and construction cost efficiency
- Provide product that plots efficiently to increase land value and returns
- Identifying gaps in the range

The Process

LOVELL

Dec 22 to Feb 23 | Feb 23 to Oct 23 | Oct 23 to Mar 24

Existing product review and briefing	House type design	Planning package	Technical package
Review existing package	Develop house type layouts	House type planning packs including elevation options	Develop linked REVIT models
Agree scope of retained and new house type requirements	Develop elevation ranges	Intelligent plotting templates	• Co-ordinate with Lovell fit out specification • Co-ordinate with supplier design • Energy assessments • Structural review • Develop range of standard details • Ease of producing marketing and sales material
Define Lovell, customer and legislative brief and specification requirements	Finalise extent of range and sign off with schedule of house types	Plotting matrix	
Define the market position against competitors		Plotting guide	

Develop technical specification and agree format of planning and technical models →

The following organisations have supported the **Housing Standardisation in the North East** exhibition and prepared the information:

Blake Hopkinson Architecture + Design
Darren Blake (Director)

Gentoo
Abby Cassady (Senior Development Manager), Joanne Gordon (Homes and Development Director)

IDPartnership
Grace Paul (Associate), Tom Gibbons (Principal Town Planner)

JDDK Architects
Clair Sanders (Director), Megan Gill (Architectural Assistant), Samantha Dixon (Associate)

Karbon Homes
Sarah Robson (Executive Director of Development and Asset Management), Tom Rigby (New Homes Technical Lead)

MawsonKerr
Daniel Dyer (Associate), Will Mawson (Director)

P+HS
Katie Shepherd (Associate Director and Residential Lead), Nathan Sanders (Associate), Rebecca Cairney (Commercial Marketing Manager), Eva Carrasco (Architectural Designer)

Thirteen Housing Group
Stuart Hutchinson (Head of Design and Architectural Services)

EXHIBITED PROJECTS

GENTOO
WITH BLAKE HOPKINSON
ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

CRICKETERS HILL

DESIGNING ATTRACTIVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN GROUND CONSTRAINTS

Location:
Carley Hill, Sunderland
Completion:
2026
Developer:
Gentoo
Contractor:
RE:GEN Group
Architect:
Blake Hopkinson Architecture
Consultants:
Billinghurst George & Partners (Structural & Civil Engineers), One Environments (Landscape Architects), RNJ Partnership LLP (Cost Consultant)
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council (2022)
Development context:
Brownfield site
Site area:
4.4 ha
Number of homes/density:
115 / 26 dph
Dwelling mix:
17 x 2B3P, 38 x 2B4P, 4 x 3B3P, 31 x 3B5P, 17 x 3B6P, 8 x 4B6P
Tenure mix:
8% rent to buy, 15% shared ownership, 76% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing
Parking spaces per home:
1-2 per dwelling
Architect selection process:
Framework Appointment
Funder:
Gentoo Group, Homes England & Brownfield Land Release Fund
Construction cost:
£2,523/m^2
Building procurement:
Direct award through Prosper via the New Build Framework



Constraints plan

The Cricketers Hill development occupies a former brownfield site adjacent to an existing residential estate at Carley Hill, Sunderland. The site sits adjacent to existing residential buildings and historically accommodated a school building and grounds prior to demolition.

The design accommodates undevelopable land in the form of steep topographical gradients and a quarry head easement zone dividing the site. Movement routes and amenity open space landscape occupy these spaces and inform the formation of the development cells within the design. Pedestrian movement routes were carefully integrated into the design, with buildings oriented to enhance passive surveillance, support safe and comfortable movement, and create strong connections to the existing movement network.

The 115 dwellings offer differing tenure types for affordable rent, rent to buy, and shared ownership, which meet the local housing need and are designed to provide Nationally Described Space Standard levels of accommodation.





Photographs: Gentoo and Blake Hopkinson Architecture

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility, Part L for energy efficiency, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- National Design Guide
- Manual for Streets
- Secured by Design

Voluntary standards:

- Sunderland City Council: Development Management Supplementary Planning Document

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

Since its inception in 2020, the Gentoo housetype range has proven popular with residents of Sunderland. The contemporary design-led ethos of the range provides an instantly recognisable Gentoo identity incorporating key features:

- Co-ordinated elevation styles using a simple range of form, facing materials, and openings that maximise daylighting and provide visual consistency across developments.
- A range of occupancy sizes from two bedroom through to four bedroom family dwellings within building types including bungalows, apartments, and two storey dwellings that provide the tools to placemake and form co-ordinated street compositions.
- A range of gable fronted dwellings which can be used diligently to create vista points, mid street markers or corner turning plots to enhance a street scene and placemaking.
- Accessibility compliance in the form of Building Regulations Approved Document M, providing M4(1) Visitable Dwellings and M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings.
- Dwellings designed to provide Nationally Described Space Standard compliance in forming internal spaces and storage provision.

Consistent use of a limited but high-quality facing material palette that is consistent throughout each development including:

- The use of locally sourced facing brickwork blends providing a recognisable character using contemporary detailing.
- Anthracite grey large format windows and entrance doors.
- Slate grey pitched roofs with complementary anthracite grey roof joinery and black rainwater goods.
- Higher than typical floor to ceiling heights.
- A-rated SAP, near carbon zero energy performance as standard.

At Cricketers Hill, collaborative working between the client, consultant team, and local authority underpinned and enabled a successful development.

The existing ground level constraints, including the topography and quarry head easement zones, required early collaboration with the engineering consultant to establish non-developable zones to form the basis of the design development. The choice of housetype met the client capacity targets to satisfy the LA housing needs requirements, whilst the development zones informed the depth of housetype choice to meet LA separation distance requirements. Various iterations of the design accommodated the constraints and key design drivers to establish the site layout.

Gentoo identified the tenure mix for the development pre-tender, and this informed the adoption of an alternative specification for the kitchen and bathroom designs and equipment for the properties which were to be rent-to-buy or shared ownership. The M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings provided Gentoo with the option of providing bathrooms that could be future-adapted or constructed to accessible requirements pre-tender to meet residents' needs.

Responding to the everyday cost of living pressures families face and Gentoo's drive to achieve a net zero range, all gas provision within the development was designed out and each house was provided with heating from air source heat pumps.





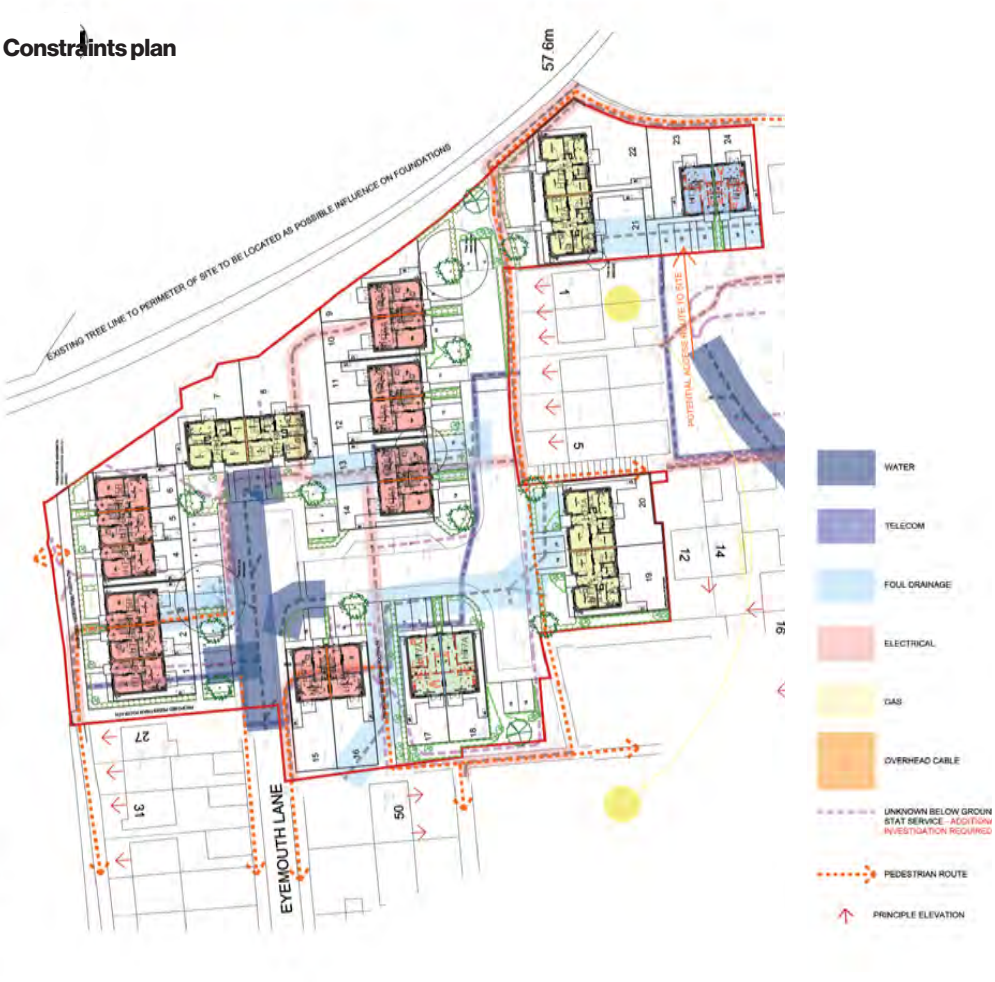


1. Site boundary
2. Initial site photograph
3. 3D visual site layout

LEEWAY GREEN

INTEGRATING AFFORDABLE HOUSING INTO A BROWNFIELD INFILL SITE

Location:
Carley Hill, Sunderland
Completion:
2022
Developer:
Gentoo
Contractor:
Esh Construction Limited
Architect:
Blake Hopkinson Architecture
Consultants:
JNP Group (Structural & Civil Engineers)
Southern Green (Landscape Architects)
Hall & Partners (Cost Consultant)
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council (2020)
Development context:
Brownfield site
Site area:
0.63 ha
Number of homes/density:
24 / 38 dph
Dwelling mix:
8 x 2B3P, 14 x 2B4P, 2 x 3B5P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing
Parking spaces per home:
1-2 per dwelling
Architect selection process:
Framework Appointment
Funder:
Gentoo Group Funders & Homes England Grant
Construction cost:
£2,188/m²
Building procurement:
Tendered through Prosper via the Construction services lot



The Leeway Green development occupies a former brownfield site within an existing residential estate at Carley Hill, Sunderland. The infill site sits adjacent to existing residential buildings and historically accommodated residential properties prior to demolition. Remaining below-ground service apparatus needed to be integrated into the development to limit diversion costs and added complexity in achieving a viable development density.

The proposed dwellings align with existing building lines to provide legibility and integration into the existing streetscene. End of street vista buildings provided visual termination to movement routes. Pedestrian movement routes were carefully integrated into the design, with buildings oriented to enhance passive surveillance, support safe and comfortable movement, and create strong connections to the existing movement network.

The 24 dwellings provide 100% affordable rent tenure to meet the local housing need and are designed to provide Nationally Described Space Standard levels of accommodation.





Photographs: Gentoo and Blake Hopkinson Architecture

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility, Part L for energy efficiency, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- National Design Guide
- Manual for Streets
- Secured by Design

Voluntary standards:

- Sunderland City Council: Development Management Supplementary Planning Document

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

Since its inception in 2020, the Gentoo housetype range has proven popular with residents of Sunderland. The contemporary design-led ethos of the range provides an instantly recognisable Gentoo identity incorporating key features:

- Co-ordinated elevation styles using a simple range of form, facing materials, and openings that maximise daylighting and provide visual consistency across developments.
- A range of occupancy sizes from two bedroom through to four bedroom family dwellings within building types including bungalows, apartments, and two storey dwellings that provide the tools to placemake and form co-ordinated street compositions.
- A range of gable fronted dwellings which can be used diligently to create vista points, mid street markers or corner turning plots to enhance a street scene and placemaking.
- Accessibility compliance in the form of Building Regulations Approved Document M, providing M4(1) Visitable Dwellings and M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings.
- Dwellings designed to provide Nationally Described Space Standard compliance in forming internal spaces and storage provision.

Consistent use of a limited but high-quality facing material palette that is consistent throughout each development including:

- The use of locally sourced facing brickwork blends providing a recognisable character using contemporary detailing.
- Anthracite grey large format windows and entrance doors.
- Slate grey pitched roofs with complementary anthracite grey roof joinery and black rainwater goods.
- Higher than typical floor to ceiling heights.
- A-rated SAP, near carbon zero energy performance as standard.

At Leeway Green, collaborative working between the client, consultant team, and local authority underpinned and enabled a successful development.

The infill development successfully knitted the housing into vacant, unused land within the existing residential estate. This required the use of certain housetype models to suit the width and depth of infill openings onto the existing street to meet local authority separation distance requirements, whilst accommodating existing statutory services constraints and meeting the client's brief for housing capacities and accessibility requirements. The design integration needed to satisfy Northumbria Police in forming a safe and secure development, ensuring the design met the Secured by Design 'Silver' standard.

Responding to the everyday cost of living pressures families face and Gentoo's drive to achieve a net zero range, all gas provision within the development was designed out and each house was provided with heating from air source heat pumps.







1. Site boundary
2. Initial site photograph
3. 3D visual site layout

IDPartnership

UNION VILLAGE, GRESHAM

A NEW IDENTITY FOR GRESHAM

Location:
Gresham, Middlesbrough
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Thirteen Group
Contractor:
Esh Construction
Architect:
IDPartnership
Consultants:
Civil and Structural Engineering: CK21, Landscaping: One Environments
Local planning authority:
Middlesbrough Development Corporation
(Application formerly managed by Middlesbrough Council)
Development context:
Urban brownfield (former terraced housing demolished as part of a Housing Market Renewal Programme)
Site area:
3.1 ha
Number of homes/density:
145 homes (109 houses and 36 apartments) at 53 dph
Dwelling mix:
79 x 2B3/4P; 58 x 3B4/5P; 8 x 4B/6P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing
Parking spaces per home:
1 to 1 ratio adopted due to town centre location
Architect selection process:
Direct appointment from client
Funder:
Homes England and Brownfield Housing Fund
Construction cost:
£20 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build



Masterplan

Union Village is a new neighbourhood in central Middlesbrough, blending modern homes with local heritage. The development provides 145 bungalows, houses, and apartments arranged to support a safe, inclusive community, with homes clustered around secure communal gardens. A landmark three-storey apartment block on Borough Road is designed with dual-aspect entrances to enable natural surveillance. The streets are carefully considered to prioritise pedestrians and create a landscape led setting within an urban environment.

The site had stood vacant for over 20 years after earlier terraced housing was cleared as part of the Housing Renewal Programme, and regeneration was delivered through a partnership between Thirteen Group, Homes England, Middlesbrough Council, and the Tees Valley Combined Authority, after exploration of private commercial redevelopment proved unviable.





Top: **Aerial view of scheme**; Bottom: **Example housing street**
Photographs: Andrew Heptinstall

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility, Part L for energy efficiency, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- National Design Guide
- Building for a Healthy Life
- Manual for Streets
- National Planning Policy Framework,
- Planning Practice Guidance

Voluntary standards:

- Housing Local Plan (2014)
- Core Strategy DPD (2008, policies not superseded/ deleted);
- Saved Policies from Middlesbrough Local Plan (1999);
- Regeneration DPD (2009, policies not been superseded/deleted only
- Thirteen Group Specification

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

From inception, standards, regulations, and guidance drove the design of the scheme. Planning policy, Nationally Described Space Standard, and the National Design Guide, to name a few, informed the process, but there was also a joint aspiration across the entire team to create something different. Utilising Thirteen's standard housetypes, the scheme was visualised. To create a sense of place, the units were re-elevated, and, importantly, the use of the standard housetype block was re-imagined. By reducing the rear gardens and creating a communal garden at the centre, the design sought to bring a sense of community back to the area.

Due to the land being empty for years, it became a hotspot for crime and antisocial behaviour. As part of the scheme, Thirteen entered Corporation Agreements with key agencies to focus on drugs and sex work within the area. It was therefore important to address these issues so that a sense of community could be achieved, demonstrating the importance of the Secured by Design guidelines.

Secured by Design in architecture and the built environment is an approach that builds safety and security into the planning and design of buildings and spaces from the outset, rather than adding protective measures later.
Through regular discussions with the Local Authority and key consultees, including the Secured by Design Officer, the design progressed. Permeability of the development was a major discussion point, with too much permeability leading to rat runs and joyriding, but too little leading to dead ends and unsurveilled areas where ASB could occur. The progression of layout designs is shown to the right.

It was also important to form gateways into the development to deter any people who don't live in Union Village from entering the estate. Thirteen's standard housetypes were modified to create large window openings that provide active frontages and natural surveillance so entrances to the site are overlooked. The diagram to the right shows other Secured by Design principles adopted within the design.

Since completion of the scheme, fly-tipping reports have been reduced by 65%, ASB reports have gone down by 83%, and crime reports have gone down by 64%. Together with key partners and stakeholders, a safe, modern, and welcoming neighbourhood has been created with a foundation for long-term community growth. Monthly meetings, shared garden events, and new resident networks are helping shape a positive, community-led culture.

RE-IMAGINING THE STANDARD HOUSING BLOCK

As the design is centred on restoring a strong sense of community within the area, the traditional housing block arrangement has been re-imagined. While maintaining the standard 21m back-to-back distance, private rear gardens have been reduced to a minimum to create a secure communal garden at the heart of each block. These shared spaces are designed to provide safe, welcoming outdoor areas where children can play and residents can gather and socialise.

Each home retains a private rear garden of approximately 3–4m in depth, suitable for a seating area and a washing line. A 1,800mm close-boarded fence provides privacy between neighbouring plots. The boundary treatment facing the communal garden is reduced to 1,100mm, enabling passive, natural surveillance and encouraging residents to actively use and overlook the shared space.

Residents have already begun forming community groups to establish allotments and personalise these gardens, reinforcing local ownership and stewardship. Access is provided via two secure, keypad-controlled gates from the street, allowing both residents and maintenance teams to manage the spaces safely. The gardens have also held a number of community events and get-togethers.

1. Secured by Design principles diagram



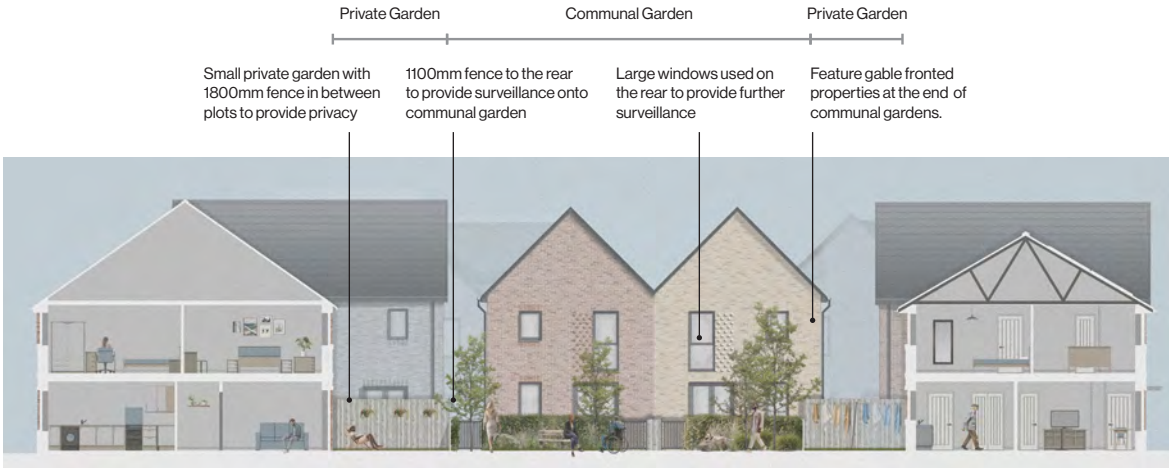
1. The house types were designed at key locations to provide high levels of natural surveillance. Further windows were added to the house types on corner plots to provide double frontages and further surveillance. Although due to viability reasons the amount of glazing was reduced from what is shown in the diagram, the concept was still apparent in the finished product.

2. A gateway is implied by using higher walls in the area and incorporating a 'gate pier' within the detailing of the wall.

3. The road surface material is changed from tarmac at the entrances, to help imply a gateway, creating interest in the streetscene and to help slow traffic.

4. Robust Boundary Treatments - Boundary walls are used around the perimeter of the development to provide clear definable private space in front of the housing.

2. Illustrative section of a housing block



Feature corner of apartment block; Communal garden





Photographs: Andrew Heptinstall

JDDK Architects

AMBERLEY & HARROGATE STREET

RE-INTERPRETING THE TRADITIONAL STREET FORMAT FOR MODERN HOUSING



Proposed site plan
Thirteen house type scheme

Location:
Hendon, Sunderland
Completion:
Ongoing, completion due 2028
Developer:
Thirteen Housing Group
Contractor:
Esh Construction
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Consultants:
Portland Consulting Engineers, Fairhurst Landscape
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council
Development context:
Regeneration of vacant site of former terraced housing
Site area:
3.1 ha
Number of homes/density:
96 residential dwellings / 30.9 dph
Dwelling mix:
Bungalows: 21 x 2B3P
2-storey house: 36 x 2B3P, 5 x 2B4P, 13 x 3B5P, 15 x 4B5P, 6 x 4B6P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing, accessible housing
Other uses:
Public open green space, SuDS, shared resident gardens
Parking spaces per home:
1 space per 2/3 bed, 2 spaces per 4 bed
Architect selection process:
Procurement Framework
Funder:
Homes England and Brownfield Housing Fund
Construction cost:
£2815/m^2
Building procurement:
Design and Build

This regeneration scheme re-imagines a long vacant site of former terraced housing into a vibrant new neighbourhood of 96 affordable and energy-efficient homes, with private and shared gardens, solar PV panels, electric vehicle charging points, and future-proofed sustainable living in mind.

The grain of the former Amberley Street and Harrogate Street is retained within the proposals, with the former back lanes reinterpreted as shared resident gardens providing semi-private areas for children to play safely and neighbours to connect, whilst the main terraced streets have been broken down into a hierarchy of spaces, each with a central green hub, retaining the urban grain but removing the rat-runs created by the previous long, straight streets.

Visually, the homes offer a contemporary interpretation of Sunderland's traditional terraces, with distinctive coloured brick panels inspired by the interior of the local St Ignatius' Church, while the coloured hues celebrate the city's glass-making heritage.





Top: **Proposed visual of typical shared resident garden**; Bottom: **Proposed visual streetscape**
Images: JDKK Architects

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility, Part L for energy efficiency, Part O for ventilation, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- Building for a Healthy Life
- Secured by Design

Voluntary standards:

- Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan
- Retention of existing access to surrounding properties
- Local Housing Needs Assessment
- Client standard house types and specification
- Client requirement to maximise compliance with Part M4 (2) "Category 2 - accessible and adaptable dwellings
- Best practice principles of community creation, natural surveillance, and urban fabric integration

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The site, which formerly accommodated traditional terraced properties along Amberley Street and Harrogate Street, presented challenges relating to existing routes and services crossing the site, alongside opportunities offered by its sustainable location and good local amenities. The area had attracted anti-social behaviour during its longstanding vacant state, and so designing for community safety, including the use of Secured by Design standards, was key to the design intent from the start.

The existing street grid gave access to the remaining surrounding properties, whilst the former back lanes accommodated mains service routes to these properties and so needed to remain as non-private space; their lack of natural surveillance, however, contradicted Secured by Design, Building for a Healthy Life, and National Design Guide standards.

JDDK's design retains the grid form of the existing streets but manipulates their character, splitting them with central green spaces and creating shared surface cul-de-sacs; this encourages pedestrian connectivity but reduces vehicular movement to create streets that also function as social spaces. The proposed dwellings echo the previous terraced form to ensure natural surveillance and connectivity to the street, and promote overall community safety.

The back lanes have been reinterpreted as shared semi-private resident gardens, retaining the existing services and offering an additional layer of open space to encourage resident interaction and play, whilst maintaining privacy and security. Each dwelling also has a private garden area, forming a buffer to the shared gardens beyond.

The original scheme was developed around volumetric modular housing, which explored the potential of house type standardisation to control build quality, improve delivery speed and consistency, and maximise density through their constrained footprint (which was limited to the width capable of lorry transportation). There were, however, limitations to this; the modular provider was unable to provide single-storey dwellings, and so, to meet the client's requirement for 20% of the dwellings to be bungalows, these units were planned as a separate timber frame package. This influenced the site layout, forcing the bungalows to be clustered in one area to accommodate the differing construction methods without conflict, rather than allowing a more mixed community.

The modular construction also required all connected units to be level, with no steps between plots, which introduced plateaus and retaining walls to accommodate the small north-south gradient. This impacted on achieving Building Regulations Approved Document M4 (2) Category 2 standards for accessible and adaptable dwellings for some dwellings, which was a client requirement.

As the scheme progressed, commercial issues meant that the modular provider was no longer able to deliver the scheme, and so proposals reverted to Thirteen's standard house types. JDDK's site design was adapted to accommodate these types, and the integral embedding of standards at the early stages meant that the scheme concept could be adapted to retain the achieved standards for accessibility, Secured by Design, and Building for a Healthy Life, amongst others, without loss of design intent or significant redesign.

This move away from the full standardisation of modular construction opened opportunities to improve the scheme quality, permitting steps between plots to better address the site levels. Bungalows could now be mixed throughout the site to create an inclusive community, and a wider range of dwelling footprints and elevational treatment options allowed the layout to be more responsive to the site context and surroundings. This, however, came at the expense of the scheme density, reducing the number of units achieved by 7%.

The learning gained through the two approaches has reinforced the value of embedding housing standards from the outset as a driver of design concept, as well as highlighting both the benefits and limitations of maximising standardisation versus the ability to be responsive to a site.

1. Example Modular House Type, "Dallington", 3B5P



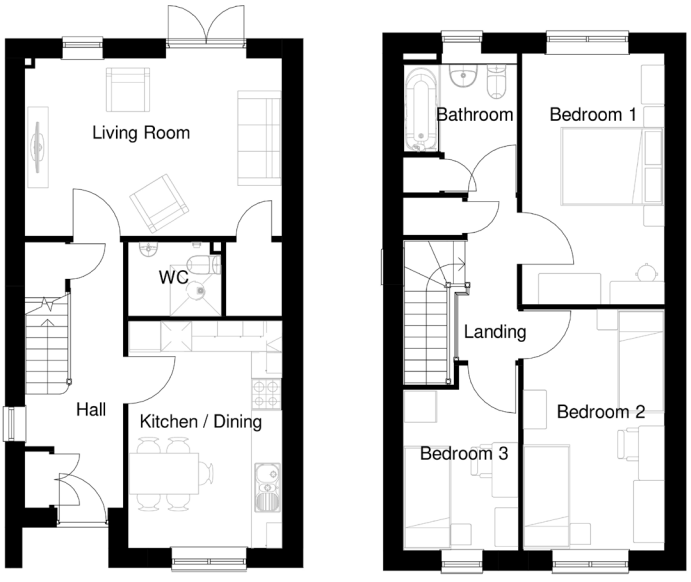
Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan

Proposed Modular scheme



2. Example Thirteen House Type, "HT12", 3B5P



Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan

Proposed Thirteen house type scheme



0 2m

VALIANT CLOSE

ADAPTING ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS TO THE NEEDS OF SPECIFIC USERS



Site plan with bungalow type distribution

Location:
Hendon, Sunderland
Completion:
2022
Developer:
Sunderland City Council
Contractor:
Tolent Living
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Consultants:
Portland Consulting, Elliott Associates, Sunderland City Council Landscape
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council
Development context:
Redevelopment of former site of NDRC day centre
Site area:
0.7 ha
Number of homes/density:
17 dwellings / 24.3 dph
Dwelling mix:
Bungalows: 5 x 1B2P, 12 x 2B3P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
Supported housing, Accessible housing
Other uses:
Specialist disabilities day support centre on site
Parking spaces per home:
1 per home
Architect selection process:
Direct Appointment
Funder:
Sunderland City Council
Building procurement:
Design and Build

Valiant Close is a unique and collaborative initiative dedicated to enhancing the well-being, freedom, and independent living of individuals with physical disabilities. The development provides 17 single-storey homes for supported living, co-located alongside a purpose-built day resource centre.

The 17 bungalows are a mix of 1- and 2-bedroom dwelling types to meet a variety of tenure needs, and all types have been elevated with a consistent style to create a cohesive development.

The orientation of the bungalows ensures a balanced distribution of sunlight throughout the day while maintaining privacy from the adjacent busy road. The dwellings overlook a communal landscaped garden featuring bespoke artwork and a retained mature tree, providing an attractive and community focused setting for residents. Each bungalow also offers level-access private garden areas, enhancing residents' sense of independence and well-being.





Top: **Bungalows overlooking communal courtyard garden**; Bottom: **Bungalow elevation with level access**
Photographs: Sally Ann Norman

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M
- Local policy standards
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- Secured by Design
- Building for a Life 12

Voluntary standards:

- Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan
- Lifetime Homes
- Surrounding acoustic conditions
- Local Housing Needs Assessment
- User specific specification, client requirement to maximise compliance with Building Regulation M4 (3) "Category 3 – Wheelchair User Dwellings"
- Best practice principles of community creation, natural surveillance, and urban fabric integration

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

Valiant Close is a mixed-use development comprising the Northeast Disabilities Resource Centre (NDRC) and 17 supported living bungalows designed to promote independent living for individuals with physical disabilities.

JDDK worked closely with NDRC and Sunderland City Council to design the bungalows to follow, as far as practicable, the standards set out in Building Regulations Part M, Approved Document M(4) Volume 1, Category 3 'Wheelchair User Dwellings'. Whilst not a mandatory requirement, the target standard reflected both NDRC's mission and the specific requirements of the resident group. Each bungalow provides wheelchair accessible circulation and dedicated wheelchair storage, alongside kitchens with adjustable countertops, which can be raised or lowered to suit individual users. Bathrooms are equipped with level-access showers, with the provision for a bath to be retrofitted later if a resident's needs or preferences change. This future-proofing approach to incorporating standards reflects a long-term view of occupancy and avoids the cost and disruption of later modification.

Certain elements of the standard were adapted where needed for the benefits of the specific users; externally, the requirement for in-curtilage accessible parking was foregone in favour of a resident communal garden and remote parking area, as NDRC identified that their parking requirements were more for the benefit of visitors and carers rather than the residents themselves.

In addition to formal accessibility standards, the design included elements of research-led best practice. The bungalows are arranged with primarily east-west aspects, ensuring a balanced distribution of sunlight across all dwellings throughout the day. As well as an environmental consideration, access to natural light is closely linked to wellbeing, and for residents who may spend extended periods at home, the quality of daylight within their dwelling is of heightened importance.

The site strategy features a garden cul-de-sac arrangement, informed by JDDK's own standards for supported housing design. The inward-facing arrangement creates natural surveillance between dwellings and an informal community that contributes to security and a sense of belonging. It also orientates the principal outlook from each bungalow onto the communal garden rather than the busy surroundings, providing a calm, sheltered, and pleasant visual environment, which is important for a resident group that may experience anxiety or vulnerability in open, busy settings.

The communal landscaped garden at the development heart hosts the retained mature tree and provides an accessible outdoor resource for residents who may have limited ability to access wider green spaces in the city. Bespoke artwork adds a layer of personalisation, reinforcing residents' sense of ownership over the environment.



Bespoke artwork and landscaped garden



Cohesive elevational treatment

Photographs: Sally Ann Norman

Bungalow type 1: 1 bed 2 person, Wheelchair Accessible



Bungalow type 2: 2 bed 3 person, Wheelchair Accessible



Building Regulations Approved Document M(4) Volume 1, Category 3, 'Wheelchair User Dwellings' – Key Features at a glance

1. **Entrance Hall;** with 1.5m turning area and opening space adjacent each internal door
2. **Wheelchair Space;** fixed size zone for wheelchair storage and transfer
3. **Double bedroom;** with 1m movement space to all sides of bed, plus additional 1.2 turning areas
4. **Wet Room;** with 1.5m turning area and defined access zones per fitting
5. **Kitchen;** with 1.5m clear access zone to all units, and specialised kitchen fittings

3. Bungalow type 3: 2 bed 3 person, General Needs (above Category 3 features not applicable)



WASHINGTON OLD SCHOOL

ADAPTING THE NATIONALLY DESCRIBED STANDARDS FOR SPECIFIC USERS AND EXISTING SPACES



Overall development floor plan

Location:
Washington, Sunderland
Completion:
2023
Developer:
Sunderland City Council
Contractor:
Brims Construction
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Consultants:
Fairhurst, McNally & Thompson, Sunderland City Council Landscape, Surveyors
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council
Development context:
Conversion and extension of derelict building
Site area:
0.21 ha
Number of homes/density:
15 dwellings / 71.4 dph
Dwelling mix:
Apartments: 15 x 1B1P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
Supported housing for vulnerable adults
Other uses:
Staff accommodation and meeting room
Parking spaces per home:
10 spaces for whole development
Architect selection process:
Competitive tender
Funder:
Homes England
Construction cost:
£3,650 / m^2
Building procurement:
Design and Build

This project stands as a beacon of sustainable redevelopment, demonstrating the potential to transform a long-abandoned historical building into a vibrant community asset. It skillfully preserves the architectural heritage of the Victorian era while addressing urgent contemporary social needs by providing secure, long-term housing for vulnerable adults.

The design is not just practical but thoughtful, incorporating stylish, modern amenities that significantly enhance the quality of life for its residents, alongside upgrading the thermal performance of the building, enhancing accessibility, and integrating a complex fire strategy into the constraints of the Victorian schoolhouse. The beautiful, communal courtyard, filled with lush vegetation and wildlife, offers a serene space for relaxation and community interaction, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being among the residents.





Top: **Existing building and landscaped courtyard with extension to left**; Bottom: **Aerial view of development**

Photographs: Top, Sally Ann Norman; bottom, Elliot Nichol

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility and Part B for fire safety
- Nationally Described Space Standard

Voluntary standards:

- Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan
- Need to retain existing building fabric
- Client brief specific to user group, future flexibility for alternative occupants
- In-house knowledge of specialist supported housing design and repurposing of existing buildings

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The conversion of the Washington Old School building presented an opportunity to critically engage with the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) in the context of supported accommodation and the constraints of an existing building. JDDK's work with Sunderland City Council required reconciliation of the mandatory national NDSS standards against the specific needs of vulnerable residents transitioning toward independent living, while respecting the heritage character of the Victorian school building.

From the outset, the aim was to achieve the minimum NDSS standards within the spatial constraints of the existing building fabric, but tailored to the needs of residents with learning disabilities and with potential future adaptation for elderly residents in mind.

The double-height hall spaces with exposed trusses and Victorian fenestration patterns presented both challenges and opportunities. In these spaces, mezzanine floors were added to create compliant bedroom spaces; these not only maximised natural light from the large feature windows to create unique and engaging spaces, but also allowed the area requirements of the NDSS to be met (a target floor area of 37m^2 for a single-person dwelling) within the fixed spaces of the existing building through the creation of additional floor space.

JDDK's interpretation of space standards also offered flexibility in response to the diverse needs within supported housing contexts, with units 1, 2, 14, and 15 designed to feature separate kitchens rather than open-plan arrangements. This flexibility offers a choice for residents in how housing standards can be adapted to accommodate varying levels of independence and support requirements.

The existing building also required careful consideration of Building Regulations standards, particularly in relation to Part M (access) and Part B (fire safety). Achieving a fully accessible development was critical, with level access provided around the perimeter of the building and to each entrance. To accommodate the slight fall across the site, floor levels were raised in the two new western extensions and ramped, with shallow gradient footpaths integrated alongside complementary steps to achieve a fully inclusive and integrated approach.

The scheme also surpassed minimum Building Regulations standards for fire safety, updating safety measures in a historically significant building by seamlessly integrating fire-resistant materials while preserving architectural integrity.

Apartment type 1: Duplex layout with bedroom mezzanine to meet NDSS standards within a confined building fabric



Apartment type 2: Separate kitchen to support specific user needs



Apartment type 3: Open plan living space to support accessible movement



Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) Requirements

1. **Single bedroom;** min. 2.15m wide, min. 7.5sqm floor area
2. **Built In Storage;** minimum area of 1sqm
3. **Floor Area;** minimum total of 37sqm (or 39sqm where bath included)

0 2m

WESTDALE ROAD

PROMOTING BEST PRACTICE SITE DESIGN PRINCIPLES WITHIN SITE CONSTRAINTS

Location:
Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Thirteen Housing Group
Contractor:
T Manners & Sons
Architect:
JDDK Architects
Consultants:
Portland Consulting Engineers, Layer Studio
Local planning authority:
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Development context:
Urban regeneration site
Site area:
1.1 ha
Number of homes/density:
37 residential dwellings / 32.7 dph
Dwelling mix:
Bungalows: 5 x 2B3P; 2-storey houses: 15 x 2B3P, 15 x 3B5P, 1 x 4B6P; dormer bungalow: 1 x 4B7P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing, accessible housing
Other uses:
Public and shared resident green space
Parking spaces per home:
1-2 spaces per home plus additional visitor spaces
Architect selection process:
Competitive tender
Funder:
Homes England, Tees Valley Combined Authority Brownfield Housing Fund
Construction cost:
£2,650 / m²
Building procurement:
Design and Build

Site development diagrams





Prominently located on a busy junction in the heart of Thornaby, the Westdale Road site previously housed two substantial tower blocks, Anson House and Hudson House, which formed a visual landmark in the area. Following extensive consultation, the continued maintenance and refurbishment of the towers to maintain modern living standards was deemed unviable and their demolition was approved, creating the opportunity for a new development with a re-interpreted sense of place.

The resulting scheme has created 37 new affordable homes, with a mix of two, three and four bedroom houses and bungalows offering adaptable and accessible accommodation as part of a mixed and sustainable community to support the local population.

Utilising Thirteen's standard house types, the design focused on furnishing these with contemporary crafted bespoke elevations, to create a unique character that enhances the setting including the retained existing tree, new landscaping buffers, shared gardens and strategic pedestrian links.





Top: **Elevated view of Westdale Road development**; Bottom: **Shared semi-private resident garden**
Photographs: Sally Ann Norman

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility and Part B for fire safety
- Local policy standards for accessibility - 50% of dwellings to meet Building Regulation M4 (2) "Category 2 - accessible and adaptable dwellings"
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- Secured by Design,
- Building for Life 12
- Stockton-on-Tees SPD - Parking Provision for Developments

Voluntary standards:

- Creation of a 'flagship' development suiting the visually prominent site
- Client standard house types and specification, client parking requirements
- Best practice principles of community creation, natural surveillance, and urban fabric integration

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The brief by Thirteen was for a visually recognisable 'flagship' development suited to its location, utilising a selection of one- and two-storey house types from their existing standard range to create a mixed community with a clear sense of place.

Thirteen's house types already achieved several base standards, including compliance with Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) and Building Regulation M4 (2) "Category 2 – accessible and adaptable dwellings" within their internal layouts. JDDK's focus was therefore to reconcile the arrangement of these properties to create a functional, sustainable community with a notable character, within the constraints of this relatively small site, its single vehicle access point, and outward looking nature.

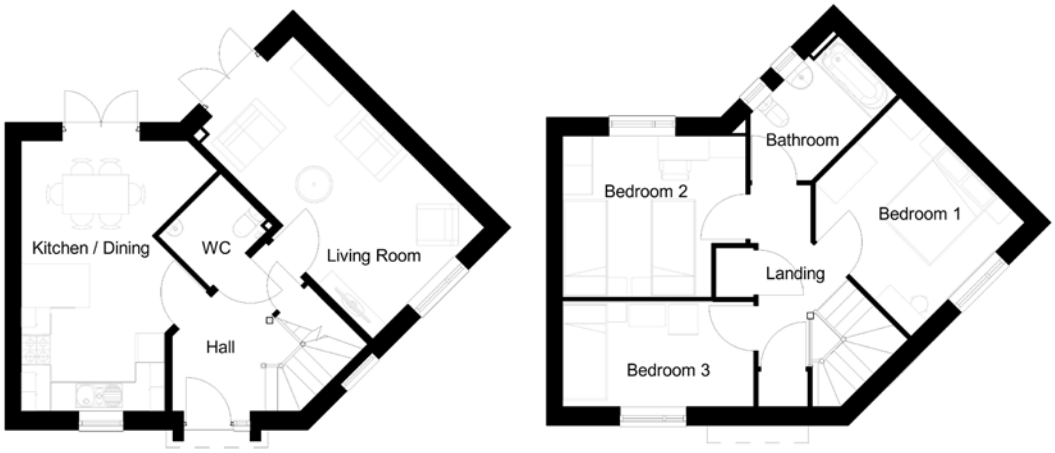
The starting point for the design was to integrate the development with its surroundings in line with the guidance of Building for Life 12 and the National Design Guide. The relationship to the existing road junction and adjacent school was key, with the development needing to face outwards to the road to form a key vista stop at the intersection, but face away from the school for privacy and security. These principles, alongside the retention of the existing mature tree and established single vehicle access point, defined the site layout.

Creating a strong visual mass and continuous frontage to the roundabout was a key aim; however, with a 3-storey house type not meeting the client's brief, a gable-fronted roof line was instead introduced to increase the perception of height. The introduction of a bespoke cranked house type allowed the frontage to follow the road curve with minimal access gaps between properties.

To avoid introducing a secondary access road alongside the roundabout to serve this frontage, a rear parking court was required to satisfy the local and client-led parking standards, but the site lacked the depth to add a further layer of internal frontage to overlook this. Therefore, to align with both formal standards and JDDK's architect-specific best practice urban design standards that promote interlocking rear gardens and visually connected parking areas, the design took a creative approach to connectivity by introducing a shared resident garden between the private rear gardens and the public parking area. This shared space acts as a buffer between the public parking and the private homes, utilising visually permeable boundaries to offer connectivity without compromising security. The result is a semi-private communal space which encourages activity, play, and resident interaction.

This approach enabled the surrounding dwellings to fully face the main street, with a clear north-south route introduced to give connectivity between the existing houses to the north and the town centre and bus stop to the south. A formal green around the retained mature tree acts as a focal point, whilst corner buildings address the street in two directions and create a clear sense of place.

1. Bespoke House Type H, 3B5P. Ground and first floor plan



2. Accessible House Type I, 3B5P. Ground and first floor plan



MawsonKerr

+HOME

HOME OF 2030 – VAUX HOUSING

The +Home cluster at Vaux is the real-life version of MawsonKerr's winning design for the RIBA Home of 2030 competition. Working with igloo, MawsonKerr took ideas about low-carbon living and turned them into actual homes that work for the long term. The focus is on flexibility, creating layouts that you can easily move around as your life changes. It's a design that's age-friendly and kind to the planet, but stays rooted in Sunderland's industrial history.

Each home comes with a decent-sized balcony to create space for growing plants, alongside shared spots for gardening and meeting the neighbours. It's sustainable design that puts community first, creating a bold new look for the city's skyline while making sure the day-to-day stuff – like planting or saying hello – is easy.

Location:
Sunderland
Completion:
2026-2028
Developer:
Sunderland City Council - Igloo Regeneration
Contractor:
Various
Architect:
MawsonKerr Architects (MKA), Open Studio Architects (OSA)
Consultants:
Camlins, Cundall, Useful Projects
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council (2021)
Development context:
Brownfield
Site area:
1.64 ha
Number of homes/density:
135 units/80 dph
Dwelling mix:
1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses and apartments, 2 bedroom stacked maisonettes
Tenure mix:
Private rent and sale
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing
Other uses:
Includes small commercial units
Parking spaces per home:
No on-site parking (off-site parking provided in a multistorey)
Architect selection process:
Competitive tender
Funder:
Homes England, Sunderland City Council, NECA, Levelling Up Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund, ERDF
Construction cost:
~£3,000/m^2
Building procurement:
Design and Build



Image: Renderloft





Top: **Vaux 2030, Vaux Housing**; Bottom: **Vaux 2030: +Home to the left, Connector to the right**

Image: Top, MawsonKerr Architects; bottom, Renderloft

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M(4)2 and M(4)3
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- Secured by Design,
- National Design Guide
- National Model Design Code (NMDC)

Voluntary standards:

- Building for a Healthy Life (BHL)
- Building with Nature (BwN) Standards
- Airtightness of 0.6, Triple Glazed Windows
- Sunderland Residential Design Guide SPD
- Riverside Sunderland Masterplan
- igloo "People, Place, Planet" (PPP) investment tool

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS: VAUX HOME OF 2030 (CLUSTER 4)

igloo Regeneration supported a shared design process between Sunderland City Council's regeneration ambitions, the applicant team, and the two joint-winning Home of 2030 design teams (the +Home and Connector Housing proposals), alongside a wider technical consultant team. The central challenge was to translate national standards and best-practice ambitions into a deliverable, city-centre demonstrator that could succeed in a live housing market, while still proving what high-quality, future-facing housing looks like in Sunderland: age-friendly, low-impact, healthy, and scalable.

Using mandatory standards as a design generator: space, accessibility, and adaptability

Rather than treating the Nationally Described Space Standard and Part M as end-stage compliance checks, the team used them to structure flexible living from the outset. The cluster provides 16 homes across houses, maisonettes and apartments, designed with a considered mix of accessibility categories. Crucially, the standards baseline was paired with the Home of 2030 brief's requirement for lifetime adaptability. Plans were developed to be spatially efficient yet generous in use: clear circulation, rooms that can change function, and reliable opportunities for home-working. This approach treated space and accessibility standards as drivers of dignity, long-term usefulness, and market resilience, not as constraints to work around.

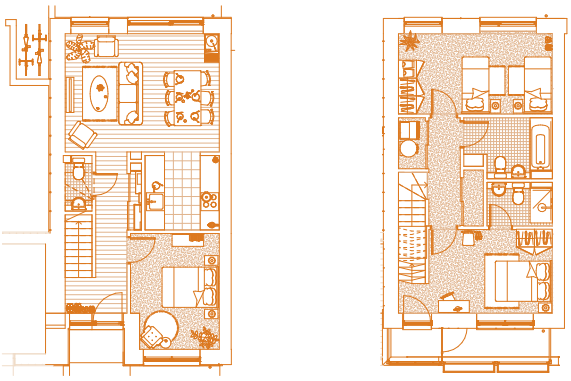
Going beyond minimums: amenity, outdoor space, and a car-free local response

Voluntary good-practice ambitions were embedded through both performance intent and everyday liveability. At Vaux, this was translated into design outcomes residents will actually use: multiple private external amenity spaces, including balconies, terraces and winter-gardens, conceived as genuine "outdoor rooms" that extend the home across seasons in a dense setting. The +Home approach also uses an external framework to host balconies in a modular way, reinforcing the idea that homes can be adapted and upgraded over time rather than fixed at first occupation.

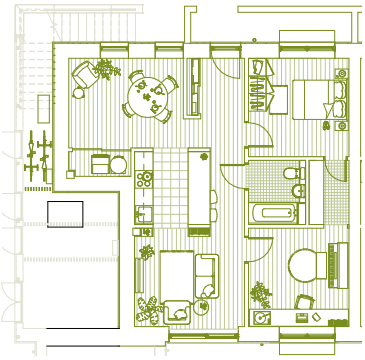
In parallel, the scheme responds to local context and regulation through a clear access strategy: no vehicle access into the cluster, prioritising walking and cycling, supported by cycle provision aligned with (and exceeding where appropriate) local guidance, and refuse storage sized to local authority expectations. Within the block, a secure communal courtyard is designed as shared social infrastructure, with seating, informal play and growing spaces. This turns wellbeing and landscape aspirations into a daily, visible resource – helping the cluster operate as a community, not just a collection of units.

The key learning from Vaux Home of 2030 is that housing standards are most powerful when used as place-making tools. NDSS and Part M establish a non-negotiable baseline for quality and accessibility, while voluntary benchmarks and demonstrator ambitions provide a framework for protecting long-term performance and everyday wellbeing against value engineering.

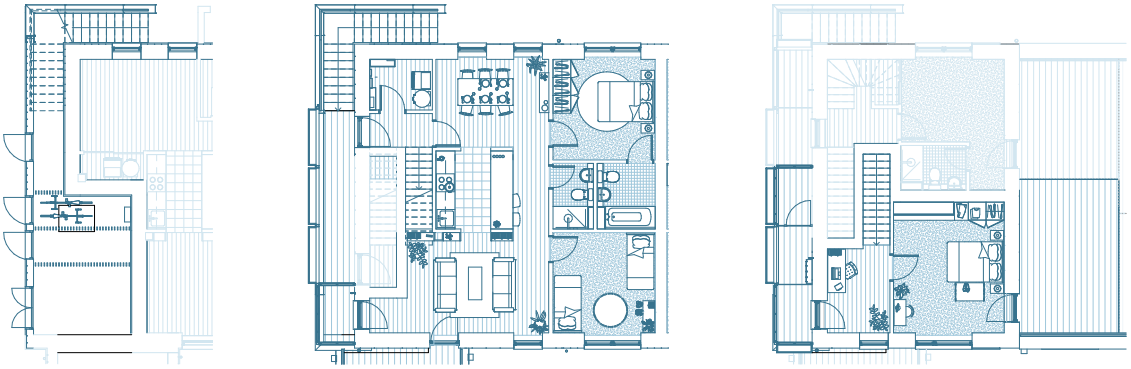
Little Yellow House



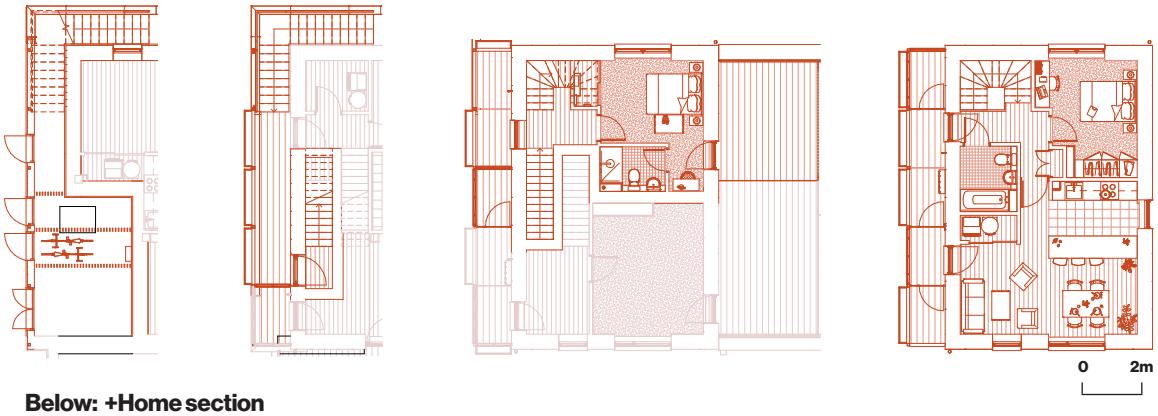
Ground Floor Apartment



First Floor maisonette



Top Floor maisonette



Below: +Home section



VAUX HOUSING

AN EXEMPLAR OF HIGH-DENSITY CITY LIVING AND WORKING



House type variety

Location:
Sunderland
Completion:
2026-2028
Developer:
Sunderland City Council - Igloo Regeneration
Contractor:
Various
Architect:
Proctor & Matthews Architects (PMA) and MawsonKerr Architects (MKA)
Consultants:
Camlins, Cundall, Useful Projects, Elliott Wood
Local planning authority:
Sunderland City Council (2021)
Development context:
Brownfield
Site area:
1.64 ha
Number of homes/density:
135 units/80 dph
Dwelling mix:
1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses and apartments, 2 bedroom stacked maisonettes
Tenure mix:
Private rent and sale
Housing needs of residents:
General needs housing
Other uses:
Includes small commercial units
Parking spaces per home:
No on-site parking (off-site parking provided in a multistorey)
Funder:
Homes England, Sunderland City Council, NECA, Levelling Up Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund, ERDF
Construction cost:
~£3,000/m^2
Building procurement:
Design and Build

The Vaux housing neighbourhood forms the first phase of Riverside Sunderland's transformation, masterplanned by Proctor and Matthews Architects, with contribution from MawsonKerr Architects on many of the housing clusters. Vaux has been designed as an exemplar of high-density city living and working. The neighbourhood is inspired by the history, topography, and rich cultural heritage of Sunderland, whilst adopting a Smart City infrastructure and a sustainable development model that will contribute to the city's carbon-neutral ambition.

Vaux will provide 91 houses and 41 apartments set on the edge of the dramatic River Wear gorge. The development will extend this district up to the escarpment edge, creating a bold new silhouette inspired by Sunderland's historic industrial skyline.





Top: **Pele 1**; Bottom: **Edge houses and Pele 2**

Image: Top, MawsonKerr Architects; bottom, Renderloft

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M(4)2 and M(4)3
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- Secured by Design
- National Design Guide
- National Model Design Code (NMDC)

Voluntary standards:

- Building for a Healthy Life (BHL)
- Building with Nature (BwN) Standards
- Pele 1: designed to Passivhaus Standard
- Sunderland Residential Design Guide SPD Riverside Sunderland Masterplan
- igloo "People, Place, Planet" (PPP) investment tool

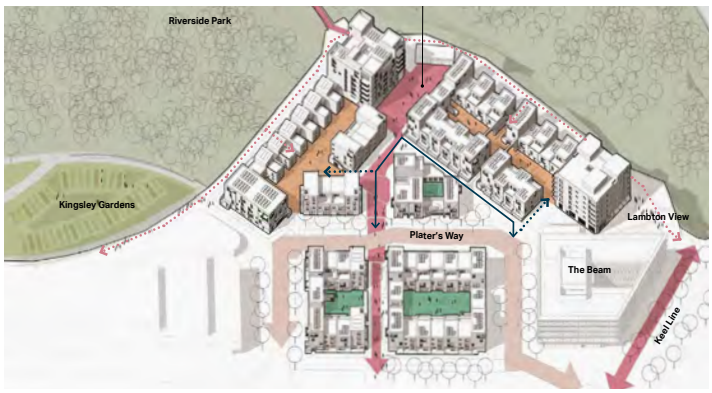
DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

As the development manager for the Vaux neighbourhood, igloo worked in a close "shared design" partnership with Sunderland City Council (the client) and our lead architects, Proctor & Matthews and MawsonKerr. Our process was governed by the need to translate high-level national standards into a tangible, local "Sunderland" vernacular that could withstand the unique challenges of a city-centre housing market. The following reflective statement outlines how our design guidance and specific house types served as a bridge between regulation and community-building.

Our practice critically engaged with the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) and Building for a Healthy Life criteria by developing the "Sunderland Courtyard House". While volume-builder models often treat space standards as a maximum limit, we used them as a baseline to reintroduce the "Sunderland Cottage" typology. By integrating a "plinth and pavilion" structure, we met mandatory accessibility and internal volume requirements while creating a private outdoor courtyard—a local interpretation of the "Sunderland Cottage" that provides a high-quality alternative to suburban gardens in a dense urban setting. This required a rigorous shared technical process to manage "form factor" (the ratio of external surface to floor area), ensuring thermal efficiency without sacrificing the aesthetic of the neighbourhood.

Furthermore, we promoted voluntary excellence through the Passivhaus standard and Building with Nature (BwN). For the "Pele House" apartments, we engaged with high-density standards to create a landmark silhouette that avoids the "perimeter block" default. Inspired by medieval Northumbrian watchtowers, these apartments provide a bold skyline silhouette while meeting national building safety standards through robust, modern structural frames. This process informed our future practice by proving that "Smart City" infrastructure and car-free mews can be reconciled with local highways regulations. By removing cars from the streets, the area between houses becomes "mews" and "courtyards" for social interaction, prioritising Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) and local biodiversity.

This collaborative success has now become the blueprint for subsequent projects at Farringdon Row and Sheepfolds, embedding these enhanced sustainability and social-interaction processes into the core of our client's long-term housing strategy. The success of the Vaux design process lay in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) being treated as a living document. By creating a clear hierarchy of "Streets, Squares, and Mews", we moved away from the "perimeter block". We proved that by sticking to a shared set of "People, Place, Planet" principles, we could meet the rigours of national planning law while delivering a site that feels uniquely and unmistakably like Sunderland.



Axonometric



Graphic "Sunderland Cottage"

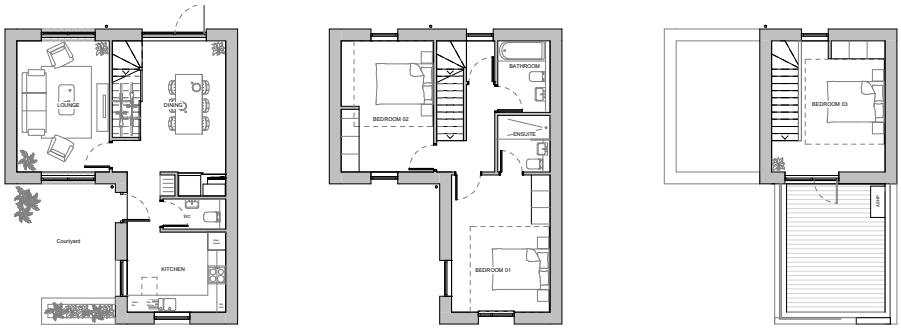
PMA 3B6P Townhouse



PMA Stacked Maisonette - 2no. 2b4p



MKA Edge House



MKA 3B4P Townhouse



0 2m

P+HS

WEST DENTON

A COMMUNITY-FOCUSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Location:
West Denton, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2024
Developer:
Karbon Homes and Newcastle City Council (Fairer Housing Unit)
Contractor:
Adderstone Living
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Consultants:
BGP and One Environment
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council (2022)
Development context:
Established suburban residential area
Site area:
2.22 ha
Number of homes/density:
45 Units / 20.3 dph
Dwelling mix:
9 x 2B3P; 16 x 3B4P; 16 x 3B5P; 4 x 4B7P; 1 x 6B
Tenure mix:
(13%) affordable rent, (17%) shared ownership and (67%) rent-to-buy
Housing needs of residents:
Affordable family housing and specialist residential care
Other uses:
Two sports pitches
Parking spaces per home:
2 spaces (2–3 bed); 3 spaces (4 bed)
Architect selection process:
Framework competition
Funder:
Private
Construction cost:
£7.3 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build



Concept site layout

West Denton is a high-quality affordable housing development designed to meet local housing needs and create a safe, welcoming place to live. The scheme delivers 45 new homes, comprising two-, three-, and four-bedroom dwellings, alongside new community sports pitches.

The layout and dwelling designs respond carefully to their surroundings, reinforcing the character of the existing neighbourhood while improving access, safety and legibility. Community feedback, gathered through two public consultation events, directly informed the evolving design.

A strong focus on durable, low-maintenance materials supports long-term quality and value. Together, the homes and community facilities contribute positively to the wider area and support long-term social wellbeing.





Top: **Semi-detached house**; Bottom: **Typical street scene**
Photographs: The Bigger Picture & P+HS Architects

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards:

- Department for Education - Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards, April 2015 (specifically section 3)
- Building Regulations 2010 Approved Document M: Volume 1 Dwellings, M4(1) Category 1: Visitable dwellings – with regard to the whole building
- Building Regulations 2010 Approved Document M: Volume 1 Dwellings, Part M4(3) Category 3: Wheelchair user dwellings – with regard to the wheelchair user bedroom, en-suite bathroom and visitors toilet
- BS 9266:2013 'Design of accessible and adaptable general needs housing – Code of Practice'
- Fire Safety standards should conform to Building Regulations and consider BS 9991 in relation to the profile of end-user group
- Secured By Design
- NDSS

Voluntary Standards:

- Newcastle City Council pledge to promote lifetime neighbourhoods
- Newcastle City Council goal to be carbon neutral by 2050

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

At West Denton, the project provided a valuable opportunity to engage closely with national and locally interpreted housing standards while addressing the needs of residents. From the outset, house types and design guidance were developed collaboratively with the client. Internal layouts were tested against space standards to ensure homes comfortably accommodated their intended households, provided storage, and allowed flexibility for changing needs. This approach went beyond compliance to create dwellings that support everyday life and long-term usability.

A key focus was aligning internal standards with external form. Plan depth, ceiling heights, window placement, and elevation proportions were carefully considered to maintain clarity, cohesion, and durability while meeting daylight and space requirements. This coordination also strengthened the legibility and safety of streets and communal areas, helping to foster a sense of belonging and integration within the wider neighbourhood.

The specialist accommodation home offered a further lens through which to apply standards. Care requirements were integrated into the layout of bedrooms, communal spaces, and outdoor areas to balance privacy, safety, and a homely environment. This element provided insight into how specialist guidance can be embedded in general housing workflows, informing future residential and care projects.

Sustainability and long-term performance were central to the project's design approach. Durable materials, low-maintenance detailing, and straightforward construction methods were prioritised to ensure resilience and ease of upkeep. These decisions supported both regulatory compliance and recognised best practice, helping to ensure that the homes remain functional, efficient, and well maintained over time.

Community consultation was a critical part of the process. Feedback directly informed decisions on layout, access, and amenity provision, ensuring that compliance with standards worked hand in hand with local context and resident needs. West Denton demonstrates how the careful application of standards, collaborative guidance, and reflective practice can produce homes that are compliant, meaningful, and enduring.



Proposed streetscape

House Type 1



Ground Floor



First Floor

House Type 2



Ground Floor



First Floor

House Type 5



Ground Floor



First Floor

Accommodation Key

- Circulation
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Living Room
- Kitchen / Dining

0 2m

HAMMINKELN PLACE

AFFORDABLE HOMES DESIGNED FOR COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION



Sketch site plan

Location:
Sedgefield, County Durham
Completion:
2022
Developer:
Livin Housing
Contractor:
Esh Construction
Architect:
Hardwick Homes
Consultants:
CJ Emm Ltd, BDN, Southern Green, Apex Acoustics, Lichfields, Hamilton Willis
Local planning authority:
Durham County Council (2020)
Development context:
Edge-of-village, mixed-use site
Site area:
2.3 ha
Number of homes/density:
71 Homes / 30.9 dph
Dwelling mix:
43 x 2B3P; 22 x 3B5P; 6 x 4B6P
Tenure mix:
100% affordable rent
Housing needs of residents:
Family and smaller homes, including accessible dwellings
Parking spaces per home:
2 spaces (2–3 bed); 3 spaces (4 bed)
Architect selection process:
Direct appointment
Funder:
Homes England
Construction cost:
£7.3 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build

Hamminkeln Place delivers 71 new homes, including two-, three-, and four-bedroom dwellings, creating a contemporary, tenure-blind neighbourhood in Sedgefield. The scheme transforms a former garage site into a well-connected, family-friendly community while retaining the approved entrance and dwelling numbers and avoiding costly underground service diversions.

Homes are carefully positioned to face streets and open spaces, supporting pedestrian movement, natural surveillance, and active frontage. House types share a consistent depth, allowing flexible combinations and varied street scenes while controlling costs. The layout incorporates landscaped green spaces and pathways that link homes, encouraging social interaction and enhancing the character of the area.

A focus on high-quality materials and design detailing ensures a cohesive, attractive streetscape. The development provides a safe, accessible, and welcoming environment for residents and contributes positively to the wider community, reinforcing local identity and supporting long-term social wellbeing.





Top: **Completed front elevation**; Bottom: **Semi-detached two-bed unit**
Photographs: P+HS Architects

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations and associated Approved Documents, including Part M for access and use, Part L for energy performance, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- All homes meet Nationally Described Space Standard.
- Homes England funding requirements. The design responded to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- National Design Guide, and Durham County Plan. Local standards were applied, including Durham County Council Highways Design Guide and updated parking requirements.
- The scheme also adhered to site-specific outline planning parameters and reserved matters approvals, ensuring all statutory and local obligations were fully satisfied.

Voluntary standards:

- Building for a Healthy Life to guide street layout, landscaping, natural surveillance, and pedestrian connectivity.
- Secured by Design principles were applied to reinforce safety, defensible space, and secure access.
- HAPPI principles informed daylight provision, adaptable layouts, and long-term usability, supporting inclusive housing.
- P+HS house type library and level strategy checklists ensured repeatable quality, compliance with Part M, and cost-effective buildability.
- Lessons from Hamminkeln Place also fed into our practice guidance, influencing future affordable housing schemes.

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The design team used house types as a live design tool rather than fixed products. Working closely with Believe Housing, layouts were aligned with the Nationally Described Space Standard and Homes England funding requirements from the outset. Each plan was designed to share the same front-to-back depth. This allowed types to be swapped and combined as highways guidance changed, without compromising space standards, daylight, or build efficiency.

Durham County Council updated its highways standards during the planning process, increasing road widths and parking requirements. The layout was revisited and homes repositioned to provide two spaces per dwelling while avoiding large areas of hard surfacing. Some parking was arranged in tandem, with hedges and tree planting introduced between drives. This response balanced local highways standards with good practice in placemaking and reinforced a commitment to people-first street design.

Access formed a second area of critical engagement. Levels were coordinated with the civil engineer to meet Approved Document M, ensuring level thresholds and clear, practical routes from rear parking through gardens into homes. This required detailed section work and careful adjustment of finished floor levels across the sloping site. The process strengthened internal compliance reviews and informed updated level-strategy guidance within the practice.

The project also tested how tenure-blind principles could sit alongside cost certainty under a Design and Build route. By carefully controlling brick palettes and detailing across repeated house types, visual variety was maintained without increasing complexity. Fenestration strategies maximised daylight while separating ventilation and escape requirements in a cost-effective way.

The completed homes meet mandatory standards, respond to local regulation, and provide flexible, accessible accommodation. The project deepened the practice's understanding of adaptable typologies, coordinated level design, and standardisation as a tool for quality. These lessons are now embedded across subsequent affordable housing projects.



Proposed streetscape

House Type B(G)



Ground Floor



First Floor

Accommodation Key

- Circulation
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Living Room
- Kitchen / Dining

0 2m

House Type C



Ground Floor



First Floor

House Type D



Ground Floor



First Floor

NOLAN HALL, JARROW

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT LIVING THROUGH DESIGN AND COMMUNITY

Location:
Jarrow, South Tyneside
Completion:
2025
Developer:
Karbon Homes
Contractor:
Able Construction (Northern) Ltd
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Consultants:
CK21, Artis Consulting Ltd, Southern Green
Local planning authority:
South Tyneside Council (2022)
Development context:
Specialist supported living scheme within an established residential area
Site area:
0.47 ha
Number of homes/density:
11 bungalows, 1 staff house / 25.5 dph
Dwelling mix:
1 x 2B3P; 4 x 1B2P; 4 x 2B3P; 2 x 1B2P; 1 x 4B4P
Tenure mix:
100% supported living
Housing needs of residents:
People with complex learning disabilities requiring on-site support
Shared communal spaces including hobby room, landscaped gardens, central courtyard
Parking spaces per home:
1.25 / unit, unallocated
Architect selection process:
Direct appointment
Funder:
South Tyneside Adult Social Care
Construction cost:
£3 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build



Site plan

Nolan Hall Supported Living Village provides a safe, inclusive environment for people with complex needs and learning difficulties. The scheme combines bungalows and apartments with on-site staff accommodation for multiple care providers, ensuring continuous, high-quality support.

Residents benefit from a mix of private and shared spaces, including hobby rooms, landscaped gardens, a central courtyard to foster community connections and opportunities for independent living. The design responds to the specific needs of each user, balancing accessibility, wellbeing and social engagement.

P+HS Architects worked closely with Karbon Homes and South Tyneside Adult Social Services to create homes that are practical, adaptable and integrated into the wider neighbourhood to support residents to live confidently and remain part of the local community.





Top: **Supported living bungalow units**; Bottom: **Six bedroom staff unit**
Photographs: P+HS Architects and Karbon Homes

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Part M for accessibility, Part L for energy efficiency, Part B for fire safety, Part H for drainage, and Part Q for security.
- Homes are designed to meet statutory requirements for specialist housing and accessibility, including circulation, door widths, and adaptable layouts.
- South Tyneside Council planning policies and site-specific outline permissions informed layout, density, and integration with neighbouring streets.
- Guidance from the Housing for Adults with Learning Disabilities Design Guide and Homes England supported living standards. This ensures homes support independence, safety, and wellbeing while remaining fully compliant with national and local regulations.

Voluntary standards:

- Building for a Healthy Life informed shared courtyards, landscape, and pedestrian connectivity.
- HAPPI principles guided daylight, adaptability, and long-term usability.
- Secured by Design reinforced safety and defensible space for residents with complex needs.
- P+HS internal guidance, including house type libraries and level strategy checklists, ensured consistent quality across bungalows and staff accommodation. Thoughtful design of private and communal spaces supports social interaction, autonomy, and wellbeing.

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The project approached Nolan Hall as an opportunity to design housing that supports independence, social inclusion, and wellbeing. The scheme comprises 11 bungalows for residents with complex learning disabilities and a four-bedroom on-site staff house. Each bungalow provides single-level, accessible living, with layouts accommodating mobility aids, flexible furniture arrangements, and clear circulation. Shared spaces include hobby rooms, landscaped gardens, and a central courtyard to encourage social engagement. Some homes also include private outdoor areas for personal respite, supporting dignity and autonomy.

From the outset, the design team collaborated closely with Karbon Homes, South Tyneside Adult Social Services, and potential end-users. Workshops informed the placement of communal areas, circulation routes, and private gardens. Feedback guided bedroom, entrance, and bathroom layouts to balance privacy with support access. This co-design approach ensured that the village responded to individual needs while fostering a sense of community.

Staff accommodation required careful integration to provide continuous care without dominating the residential environment. Layouts, access routes, and shared spaces were coordinated to allow staff to respond efficiently while maintaining residents' privacy and normal routines.

Accessibility and adaptability were central to enabling safe and independent movement. Homes were designed to accommodate future mobility or sensory needs.

Landscaped courtyards and gardens support safe access, natural surveillance, and therapeutic activity, while materials and finishes were selected for durability, safety, and sensory comfort.

The project strengthened the practice's understanding of specialist housing for people with learning disabilities. Nolan Hall demonstrates how co-design, accessible layouts, adaptable homes, and integrated staff accommodation can promote independence, safety, and inclusion.

Lessons from the project now inform future supported-living schemes, embedding adaptable design, collaborative processes, and people-centred placemaking within the practice, and helping to create homes that are both compliant and genuinely empowering for residents and staff.

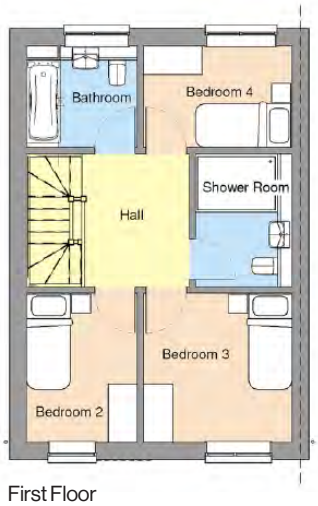


Proposed streetscape

House Type G



Ground Floor



First Floor

House Type E



Ground Floor

House Type F



Accommodation Key

- Circulation
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Living Room
- Kitchen / Dining

0 2m

Ground Floor

FATHER JAMES WALSH

AFFORDABLE HOMES DESIGNED FOR COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION



Site plan

Location:
Hebburn, South Tyneside
Completion:
2025
Developer:
Karbon Homes
Contractor:
Able Construction (Northern) Ltd
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Consultants:
CK21, Artis Consulting Ltd, Southern Green
Local planning authority:
South Tyneside Council (2022)
Development context:
Urban brownfield redevelopment
Site area:
0.65 ha
Number of homes/density:
10 dwellings, 1 staff unit / 16.9 dph
Dwelling mix:
10 x 2B3P; 1 x 6B6P
Tenure mix:
100% supported living
Housing needs of residents:
Specialist accommodation for autism and complex learning disabilities
Staff accommodation, communal courtyard, hobby space
Parking spaces per home:
22 spaces (including disabled and visitor parking)
Architect selection process:
Appointed by South Tyneside Housing Ventures Trust
Funder:
South Tyneside Adult Social Care
Construction cost:
£3.6 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build

Father James Walsh specialist supported living scheme in Hebburn provides ten two-bedroom bungalows for people with autism and complex learning disabilities, alongside a six-bedroom staff bungalow.

The scheme integrates sensitively into the local neighbourhood, retaining mature boundary trees and enhancing the streetscape along Hedgeley Road. Developed collaboratively with Karbon Homes, South Tyneside Council, South Tyneside Adult Social Care and residents' representatives, the design balances homely, welcoming environments with essential safety features.

Single-storey layouts, clear wayfinding, and a hierarchy of private, semi-private, and communal spaces support autonomy. Sustainable measures ensure low operational impact. The development demonstrates how specialist housing can combine accessibility, regulatory compliance and wellbeing-focused design to create lasting, inclusive homes.





Top and bottom: **Supported living bungalow units**
Photographs: P+HS Architects and Karbon Homes

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations (Parts M, Q, B, L), ensuring accessibility, safety, and energy efficiency. Dwellings adhere to AD Part M Category 3 for wheelchair access and the Nationally Described Space Standard.
- Local planning policies, including the South Tyneside Local Plan, guided layout, massing, and site integration. National guidance such as the National Design Guide supports placemaking.
- Technical Housing Standards and the Equality Act 2010 ensure homes are inclusive.
- Site-specific planning conditions and STHVT requirements were applied to maintain safety, security, and suitability for residents with complex needs.

Voluntary standards:

- Design Homes guidance supported safe, observable layouts.
- HAPPI recommendations influenced accessibility, communal spaces, and user autonomy.
- Internal P+HS guidance shaped anti-ligature fittings, robust finishes, and adaptable layouts.
- Lifetime Homes and BS 9266:2013 standards provided future-proof accommodation.
- Design Council publications, including Building for a Healthy Life and Delivering Healthy Communities, informed external appearance, streetscape integration, and landscape.
- Biodiversity by Design and sustainability best practice minimised environmental impact.

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

The Father James Walsh scheme spans a 0.65-hectare flat site, bordered by mature trees and neighbouring bungalows. By retaining the existing hedgerows and creating a clear hierarchy of private, semi-private, and communal spaces, the design promotes natural surveillance, security, and social interaction. The central courtyard and private gardens provide residents with choice and a sense of control, helping to reduce anxiety and support their independence and autonomy.

Collaboration between P+HS and Karbon Homes, South Tyneside Council, Adult Social Care, and stakeholders guided the design, translating guidance into practical solutions. Dwellings met AD Part M Category 3 requirements for accessibility and wheelchair use. Circulation and wayfinding were considered through gables, contrasting materials, and front door markers, helping residents orient themselves while maintaining privacy. Staff and communal areas were positioned to allow observation without compromising comfort.

Particular focus was given to en-suite and wet room design. Anti-ligature basins, WCs, and shower panels were coordinated with services to minimise risk. Doors, windows, and joinery were robust, using anti-ligature hardware and concealed fixings. Heating, lighting and ventilation responded to residents' sensory and operational needs.

The design process required negotiation of trade-offs, including balancing domestic appearance with safety, privacy with oversight, and sustainability within budget and site constraints. A fabric first approach, low-energy heating, water efficiency, and mechanical ventilation reduced operational impact.

Residents benefit from autonomy, dignity, and safety; staff operate efficiently; and the development contributes positively to the streetscape and wider community. The scheme demonstrates how regulatory compliance, user-focused design, and sustainability can coexist with domestic scale, inclusivity, and long-term value, providing a benchmark for future supported housing projects.



Drone shot of full specialist accommodation site

Bungalow Type A



Bungalow Type B



Accommodation Key

- Circulation
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Living Room
- Kitchen / Dining

0 2m

REESTONES PLACE

AFFORDABLE RENT-TO-BUY HOMES WITH COMMUNITY AT THE HEART

Location:
West Denton, Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2020
Developer:
Newcastle City Council Fairer Housing Unit, Tolent Living, Your Homes Newcastle
Contractor:
Tolent Living
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Consultants:
CK21 + Colour
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council (2019)
Development context:
Constrained urban infill adjacent to existing residential estate
Site area:
0.5 ha
Number of homes/density:
21 units / 42 dph
Dwelling mix:
3 x 4B7P; 8 x 2B4P; 10 x 3B5P
Tenure mix:
100% rent to buy (first UK council-led scheme)
Housing needs of residents:
Families seeking affordable housing with pathway to ownership
Landscaped central courtyard, home zone
Parking spaces per home:
2 per unit
Architect selection process:
Appointed through client selection
Funder:
Newcastle City Council, Homes England
Construction cost:
£6.9 million
Building procurement:
Design and Build



Development sketch



House type mix

Reestones Place delivers 21 affordable Rent to Buy homes for Newcastle City Council's Fairer Housing Unit, comprising 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom dwellings on an urban site in Kenton. The scheme respects its context, creates a strong entrance, reduces adopted highway, and maximises the number of homes on site.

A landscaped central courtyard establishes an intimate home zone that encourages neighbour interaction and natural surveillance. Contemporary design with large windows and recessed doors enhances natural light, wayfinding, and street presence all while a material palette references the adjacent estate.

Developed collaboratively with Tolent Living, P+HS, Your Homes Newcastle, and the council, the project combines functional layouts, sustainable construction and accessibility. Early take-up demonstrated strong demand for Rent to Buy, providing residents with a route to ownership while remaining connected to the community.





Top and bottom: **Row of mixed units**
Photographs: P+HS Architects

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- Building Regulations, including Parts M (accessibility), L (energy efficiency), and Q (security).
- Homes meet the Nationally Described Space Standard for internal layout and usable space.
- Newcastle City Council planning policies shaped site coverage, scale, and integration with the surrounding estate.
- National guidance, including the National Design Guide, informed layout, form, and orientation.
- Technical Housing Standards, access regulations, and local highway requirements ensured dwellings are safe, accessible, and functional.
- Site-specific planning conditions and council requirements guided orientation, privacy, and courtyard design.

Voluntary standards:

- Secured by Design Homes supported safe, observable layouts.
- Design Council publications, including Building for a Healthy Life and Delivering Healthy Communities, influenced street hierarchy, home zone, and landscaping.
- P+HS guidance informed materials, daylighting, and external finishes to reference local context.
- Lifetime Homes and BS 9266:2013 provided future-proof adaptability.
- Sustainability best practice minimised energy and water use while improving ecological value.
- Voluntary approaches complemented mandatory standards, creating homes that are safe, practical, welcoming, and durable while contributing positively to community streetscape character.

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

Reestones Place demonstrates how constrained urban sites can deliver high-quality, accessible, and sustainable homes for families while supporting community cohesion. The layout maximises dwelling numbers and reduces adopted highway by orienting homes around a central courtyard, creating an intimate home zone that encourages interaction and natural surveillance. Site constraints, including proximity to existing housing, guided plans while ensuring privacy and maintaining a domestic scale.

Collaboration with Newcastle City Council, Your Homes Newcastle, Tolent Living, and stakeholders ensured dwellings met both practical and aspirational requirements. Homes were designed for flexibility, daylight, circulation, and safety, while recessed doors, large windows, and a considered material palette help residents orient themselves and integrate with the streetscape.

Trade-offs included balancing site coverage, highway provision, privacy, and access. Optimising the courtyard and street layout allowed maximum dwellings while maintaining high-quality outdoor spaces, providing safe areas for children, and fostering a sense of belonging. Sustainable measures included high levels of insulation, energy-efficient heating, water-saving fittings, and ecological landscaping, reducing operational impact and futureproofing homes.

As the UK's first council-led Rent to Buy scheme, the project illustrates how affordable tenure can support households to save for home ownership while remaining connected to the community. Early uptake demonstrated strong demand, confirming the model's social and economic impact.

The project informs future design by showing how design can reconcile site constraints, accessibility, sustainability, and tenure innovation, delivering safe, functional, and welcoming homes.

Residents benefit from autonomy, privacy, and long-term value, while the development strengthens the local streetscape, enhances ecological performance, and contributes positively to Newcastle's housing portfolio, demonstrating how well-designed homes can support social inclusion and long-term community wellbeing.



Sketch perspective

House Type B(G)



Ground Floor



First Floor



House Type C



Ground Floor

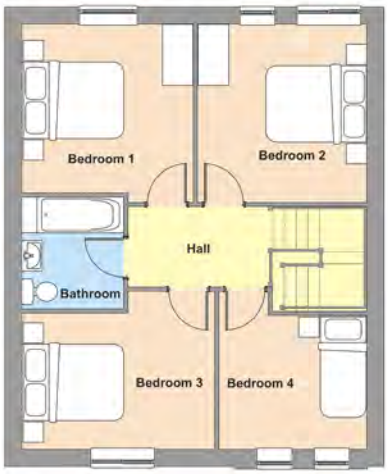


First Floor

House Type D



Ground Floor



First Floor

WANSFELL AVENUE & STAPLEFORD COURT

INTEGRATED SPECIALIST AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Wansfell Avenue Elevation



Wansfell Avenue

Location:
Newcastle upon Tyne
Completion:
2021
Developer:
Tolent Living
Contractor:
Tolent Living
Architect:
P+HS Architects
Consultants:
BGP, Colour, Wilson Gray Consulting
Local planning authority:
Newcastle City Council (2020)
Development context:
Wansfell Avenue - urban infill; Stapleford Court - Green Field
Site area:
Wansfell Avenue - 0.40 ha; Stapleford Court - 0.37 ha
Number of homes/density:
Wansfell Avenue - 14 - 35.0 dph; Stapleford Court - 17 - 45.9 dph
Dwelling mix:
1–2 bed supported apartments, 1–2 bed flats, 2-bed bungalows
Tenure mix:
Affordable rent and specialist housing
Housing needs of residents:
Adults with learning difficulties/ autism, older people, accessible/ adaptable homes
Parking spaces per home:
1 per unit
Architect selection process:
Direct appointment
Funder:
Newcastle City Council (Housing Revenue Account)
Construction cost:
Part of the £27 million Annuity 2 programme
Building procurement:
Competitive procedure with negotiation

Stapleford Court and Wansfell Avenue form part of Newcastle's £27m Annuity 2 programme, delivering 199 affordable homes across eight sites for Newcastle City Council's Fairer Housing Unit and Your Homes Newcastle, in partnership with Tolent Living.

The programme was established to address housing need across the city through a coordinated approach. Together, these schemes provide a diverse mix of specialist apartments, accessible bungalows and flats designed to support independent living, social inclusion and long-term affordability.

Stapleford Court at Wansford Avenue delivers supported apartments for residents with learning difficulties and autism within a secure, welcoming environment. Wansfell Avenue provides accessible homes for people aged 55+, promoting independence and connection. The sites created a safe, high-quality neighbourhood that collectively generates meaningful social and environmental impact.





Top: **Stapleford Court**; Bottom: **Wansfell Avenue**
Photographs: P+HS Architects

STANDARDS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDANCE

Mandatory standards and guidance:

- CABE's Building for Life12, 2016 edition
- BREEAM Multi Residential, Very Good;
- All units to be fully wheelchair accessible and adaptable and meet the minimum requirements of Building Regulations 2010 Part M4 (2) Category 2 Accessible
- Wheelchair Housing Design Guide, third edition by Stephen Thorpe and Habinteg Housing Association
- Secured By Design
- All units built in accordance with the overarching 'care ready' design features that underpin 'age-ready' housing as recommended by HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation)
- BS 9991:2015 Fire Safety standards
- BS 9266:2013 Design of accessible and adaptable general needs housing – Code of practice
- Nationally Described Space Standard
- 'Jack and Jill' Bathrooms
- Sprinkler designed to BS 9251
- Full compliance with Your Homes Newcastle Landscape Design Advisory Note
- (BRE) Housing Quality Mark (HQM) 3 star

Voluntary standards:

- Building for a Healthy Life
- Habinteg guidelines
- Housing LIN Occupational Therapist's Access Checklist
- Homes should help reduce fuel poverty and contribute towards the Council's objectives of lowering the City's CO2 emissions

DESIGNING WITH HOUSING STANDARDS

We received a very detailed brief for the project, however, on review, many of the standards, when applied, caused unexpected results. Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) set minimum areas needed for each apartment, against which all funding was measured, however, when designing to the Wheelchair Design Guide, the areas needed to be significantly larger.

The early iterations of the design for Stapleford Court included dual aspect apartments (as per HAPPI principles); however, this created inefficient and expensive designs.

The entrance halls in each apartment and bungalow are all larger than expected - this is to include a space to store a wheelchair, and allow transfer to an indoor chair.

Through a good working relationship with Newcastle Council and various workshops, we managed to fine-tune the original brief to focus on the aspects that were actually wanted.

Feedback from current occupiers indicated that when internal windows were included in apartments, more often than not, blinds are permanently closed. As such, we agreed that the dual aspect windows could be removed, and the layout was updated.

At Wansfell Avenue, we agreed that the wheelchair transfer space would not be initially needed for the majority of tenants, so instead added an additional cupboard. Whereas at Stapleford Court, we kept the transfer space in, as the end users had a higher chance of requiring it.

In both cases, this ensures the apartments remain flexible for any potential end users.



Wansfell Avenue

Stapleford Court



Ground Floor

First Floor

House Type 2



House Type 7



WORKSHOPS

23 April 2026
Design Governance and Design Quality

14 May 2026
Integrating New Design Standards into Design Processes

18 June 2026
From Project Evidence to Organisational Learning

9 July 2026
Reviewing Findings

Participants

- **Abby Cassady** (Senior Development Manager, Gentoo Group)
- **Chris Smith** (Associate, P+HS Architects)
- **Clair Sanders** (Director, JDDK Architects)
- **Clare Lane** (Associate Architect, P+HS Architects)
- **Daniel Dyer** (Associate and Yorkshire Lead, MawsonKerr)
- **Darren Blake** (Managing Director, Blake Hopkinson Architecture)
- **David Abercrombie** (Technical Director, Group Projects, Taylor Wimpey)
- **Dr Dhruv Sookhoo** (Senior Lecturer in Architecture and Urbanism, Manchester School of Architecture)
- **Fiona Evans** (Housing Delivery Officer, Newcastle City Council)
- **Grace Paul** (Associate Architect, IDPartnership)
- **Henrietta Pissarro** (Associate Architect, P+HS Architects)
- **Katie Shepherd** (Director, P+HS Architects)
- **Lucia Alonso Aranda** (Researcher, Royal College of Art)
- **Marie Kiddell** (Partnership and Development Director, Thirteen Housing Group)
- **Nathan Sanders** (Associate Architect, P+HS)
- **Neil Brooks** (Design and Planning Manager, Taylor Wimpey)
- **Prof Sam Jacoby** (Professor of Architectural and Urban Design Research, Royal College of Art)
- **Dr Seyithan Özer** (Researcher, Royal College of Art)
- **Stuart Hutchinson** (Head of Design and Technical, Thirteen Housing Group)
- **Tom Gibbons** (Principal Town Planner, IDPartnership)
- **Tom Rigby** (New Homes Technical Lead, Karbon Homes)
- Will Mawson (Co-Founder and Director, MawsonKerr)

EVENTS

23 April 2026
Delivering Affordable Housing: Design Quality and Standards

- **Daniel Dyer** (Associate and Yorkshire Lead, MawsonKerr)
- **Fiona Evans** (Housing Delivery Officer, Newcastle City Council)
- **Katie Shepherd** (Director, P+HS Architects)
- **Stuart Hutchinson** (Head of Design and Technical, Thirteen Housing Group)
- **Tom Gibbons** (Principal Town Planner, IDPartnership)

14 May 2026
Homes for Life: Designing Accessible Homes and Neighbourhoods

- **Clair Sanders** (Director, JDDK Architects)
- **Henrietta Pissarro** (Associate Architect, P+HS Architects)
- **Prof Rose Gilroy** (Professor of Ageing, Policy and Planning, Newcastle University)
- **Will Clarke** (Chartered Architect, P+HS Architects)

18 June 2026
Life and Death of Housing Types

- **Abby Cassady** (Senior Development Manager, Gentoo Group)
- **Daniel Dyer** (Associate and Yorkshire Lead, MawsonKerr)
- **Darren Blake** (Managing Director, Blake Hopkinson Architecture)
- **Dr Heba Sarhan** (Director, Project Commonplace)
- **Lucia Alonso Aranda** (Researcher, Royal College of Art)
- **Nathan Sanders** (Senior Architect, P+HS)
- **Prof Rosie Parnell** (Professor of Architecture and Pedagogy, Newcastle

University)

9 July 2026
Housing Standardisation Roundtable

- **Abby Cassady** (Senior Development Manager, Gentoo Group)
- **Clair Sanders** (Director, JDDK Architects)
- **Dr Dhruv Sookhoo** (Senior Lecturer in Architecture and Urbanism, Manchester School of Architecture)
- **Henrietta Pissarro** (Associate Architect, P+HS Architects)
- **Prof Sam Jacoby** (Professor of Architectural and Urban Design Research, Royal College of Art)
- **Tom Gibbons** (Principal Town Planner, IDPartnership)

CREDITS

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All images, unless otherwise stated, are by the architects.

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