



**James Small-Edwards AM**  
**Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee**

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

10 March 2026

(Sent by email)

Dear Mr Reed,

**Committee response to MHCLG Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Consultation**

I am writing to submit the London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee's views to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) consultation on the Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

Our response focuses on proposals to improve the practical application of design tools to deliver better quality and more inclusive and responsive design outcomes, which fall under questions 7, 9 and 11 from the consultation. Much of the evidence we have heard on this relates to the London context. Nevertheless, the Committee is of the view that this provides useful learning that could be applied within national design guidance.

The Committee has also recently written to the Mayor concerning the GLA's response to the growing housing "design disconnect" – between what residents want to see built in the capital and what is being delivered<sup>1</sup>.

**Question 7: Are there any aspects where clarity, accessibility or practical application could be improved to support design and placemaking outcomes?**

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<sup>1</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [Better Design for London - Letter | London City Hall](#), 2026

Yes. Evidence presented to the Committee has shown particular promise in the use of Design Codes and Design Review Panels to effectively engage stakeholders in the design of buildings in the capital.

## **Design Codes**

In the Committee's meeting on 8 December 2025, we heard that Design Codes and Neighbourhood Plans have real potential to improve design quality and local engagement. We also heard that they can provide greater clarity around design principles, which can help to prevent delays and ensure consistent quality. Robert Kerr from ADAM Architecture made a persuasive case that "Design Codes can raise the bar for design", arguing that "if written objectively and in as condensed a manner as possible, [Design Codes] can be very powerful"<sup>2</sup>. Robert Kwolek, from Create Streets, argued that when done well, Design Codes establish "a very clear ask at the beginning", hopefully eliminating the back-and-forth negotiation between developers and planning officials, providing confidence to residents about the sort of place this will be<sup>3</sup>.

Our panel of experts also pointed to the most effective use of Design Codes as those that incorporated early-stage community engagement. Holly Lewis, from We Made This and one of the Mayor's Design Advocates, spoke of the potential for Design Codes to act as a "route for capturing early-stage ambitions for sites, for places and for neighbourhoods from local people that sets the rules for development in those areas"<sup>4</sup>. However, Ms Lewis highlighted that these tools are still relatively new in their use in the planning system, and as such, there was still some work to do before they are effectively operationalised to achieve this.

The Draft Design and Placemaking PPG provides a description that states:

*"Design codes are requirements which specify parameters for the physical development of a site, area or development type. They help deliver the local plan vision by translating broad planning policies into specific, visual and measurable design parameters, and design code guidance"<sup>5</sup>.*

The Committee also heard evidence from design and planning experts on the importance of clear and simple Design Codes for the purpose of accessibility and inclusion in the design and placemaking process. Without them, Design Codes risk being inaccessible to many stakeholders, particularly those without planning expertise. On this basis, it is the view of the Committee that the above description of 'Design Codes' from the Draft PPG should follow the same principles and its language be made simpler to be understood by a wider audience of stakeholders.

## **Recommendation 1:**

**In the new Design and Placemaking PPG, the MHCLG should promote the use of design codes by councils that are created in close conjunction with a broad range of local residents (who are paid for their time to ensure representation is broad).**

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<sup>2</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>3</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>4</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

<sup>5</sup> MHCLG, [Draft for consultation - Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#), 2025, p. 72

## **Recommendation 2:**

**The language and description of ‘Design Codes’ in the Draft Design and Placemaking PPG should be reviewed and made clearer and simpler, using more accessible and inclusive language to be understood by all stakeholders in the design and placemaking process.**

### **Design Review Panels**

London has a decade of experience in delivering Design Review Panels (DRPs). There are DRPs now being implemented in all boroughs but one, according to the recent Placeshaping Capacity Survey (2024)<sup>6</sup>. The Committee heard from Sarah Considine, Head of the GLA’s Design Unit, that “the Design Review story in London is a positive one”, with a “rich scene of design review panels” across the city, deemed to be an important part of the infrastructure of design scrutiny<sup>7</sup>.

Greater clarity is needed about the role and purpose of Design Review Panels. The Committee heard that Design Review Panels “can provide an effective set of controls” to address the design deficit, described as the gap between what residents want to see built in their communities and what is being delivered<sup>8</sup>. Yet, their application and impact vary across boroughs. The new Design and Placemaking PPG could offer clearer guidance on their remit which would improve consistency and design outcomes.

Accessibility and community representation could also be strengthened. Evidence presented to the Committee suggested that some panels may reflect professional design preferences more than public opinion, and do not always guarantee outcomes aligned with local aspirations. Robert Kwolek from Create Streets specifically called for “more weight to be given to community views”<sup>9</sup>. While Robert Kerr supported the use of panels as “constructive critics”, not as bodies to “dictate design”<sup>10</sup>. Mr Kerr argued that the role of the Design Review Panel “should not be there to solve the problems and redesign”, but rather to “help guide and shape” the proposals, particularly working to support those stakeholders may not have the “same design expertise” through the process<sup>11</sup>.

## **Recommendation 3:**

**For MHCLG to include clearer guidance on Design Review Panels (DRPs) in the Design and Placemaking PPG to improve their quality and consistency, and enable their recommendations better reflect communities’ design preferences and aspirations. Guidance to be informed by learning from examples of best practice, community and stakeholder feedback, as well as London’s 10-year track record of delivery.**

**Q9: What additional considerations or clarifications might be necessary to ensure planning practice guidance supports inclusive and culturally appropriate design and placemaking?**

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<sup>6</sup> GLA, [Placeshaping Capacity Survey](#), 2024

<sup>7</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

<sup>8</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>9</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>10</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>11</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

## Public polling and community research

As part of this submission, the Committee wanted to emphasise that there ought to be greater emphasis placed on systematically incorporating public polling and community-led research into decision-making.

Evidence presented to the Committee has highlighted a design disconnect between what residents want to see built in their neighbourhoods and what is actually being built. Lucy Bush from Demos told the Committee that nationally, “We have a majority – about 67 per cent of people – saying that they feel absolutely powerless when it comes to decisions that are made around new development coming into their local area”<sup>12</sup>. Through design that is not responsive to citizens’ preferences and aspirations, the planning system risks progressing development that is not supported by local people which in the long-term undermines democratic support for development and thus endangers development which is desperately needed, such as housebuilding.

We heard that clearer expectations for how community insight is gathered, interpreted and applied could contribute towards enabling more inclusive design and placemaking, based on specific place-based intelligence and engagement. Guests at our meeting, referred to examples of how this can be done, including Create Streets’ visual preferences surveys<sup>13</sup>, UCL Bartlett School’s Citizen Science Academy<sup>14</sup> and the Community Conversations series carried out by the London Housing Panel to inform the London Plan consultation<sup>15</sup>. Government can unlock the insights from this research and open it up for wider consumption as part of its work informing the design and placemaking PPG.

### Recommendation 4:

**The MHCLG should collate and publishing evidence-based reports of relevant regional community research to inform its approach to future building and place design, drawing on the examples from London of visual preference surveys, the UCL Bartlett School’s Citizen Science Academy and London Housing Panel’s Community Conversations.**

### Q11: What other tools would support this?

#### Early-stage and ongoing community engagement

The Committee heard how the use of evidence-based approaches within a London context has provided useful insights from residents’ lived experiences. Insights that include what works and does not in the design of buildings in the capital. We heard overwhelmingly from guests that effective community engagement, early-stage and ongoing throughout the process, is critical to successful design and support for development. Dinah Roake from the London Housing Panel identified that “people were open to new development if they were brought in early and clearly told what they could influence”<sup>16</sup>. We heard how the London Housing Panel has effectively used deliberative processes to engage residents, such as Community Conversations to inform the London Plan.

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<sup>12</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>13</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>14</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 1](#), 2025

<sup>15</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

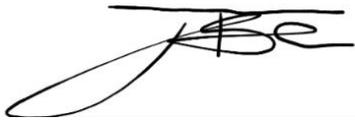
<sup>16</sup> London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee, [8 December 2025 Meeting Transcript, Panel 2](#), 2025

**Recommendation 5:**

**The MHCLG should encourage boroughs to embed structured early-stage engagement (deliberative workshops, co-design methods, upstream policy engagement) in major schemes, supported by guidance on resourcing and best practice through the Design and Placemaking PPG.**

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 21 April 2026. Please send your response by email to the Committee's Clerk, Saleha Fazal (Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk).

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JSE', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

**James Small-Edwards AM**  
**Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee**