

EARLS COURT DESIGN CODESETS BENCHMARK FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

27/01/25

Architects, planners, and urban design experts recently convened at the Earls Court Development Company (ECDC) to discuss the future of design codes and explore the innovative approach ECDC has taken to develop the Earls Court Design Code. The event showcased the extensive process and collaborative approach to the code's formation, while addressing the evolving role of design codes under the new planning framework.

Developed over four years of engagement with the community, stakeholders, and local authorities, the Earls Court Design Code provides a comprehensive framework to guide the transformation of the iconic 44-acre site. Rooted in ECDC's design principles – being good ancestors, creating an Earls Court for everyone and putting the area back on the map with a new West Side Story – the design code offers a model for balancing ambitious development with local needs. It also shows developers how to ensure as masterplan retains its intended integrity and quality of design as the development evolves over many years.

ECDC's Public Realm Inclusivity Panel (PRIP) was also essential in the development of the design code. Formed by ECDC and led by ZCD Architects, the PRIP is a diverse group of residents aged from 16-80 that aims to give a voice to locals who are not usually included in the process of creating development projects. The PRIP has been working alongside the design team for two years, reviewing and assessing evolving designs and the members' perspective was important in ensuring the Earls Court Design Code prioritised accessibility and inclusivity within the public open spaces.

Dinah Bornat, founder of ZCD Architects and leader of the PRIP, said: "The Design Code process is inherently technical and so we approached it very carefully with our local intergenerational group of people, the PRIP, at Earls Court. Over two sessions we carried out a structured review of 65 separate design codes, both site wide and area specific. ECDC were able to agree to all the suggestions, amendments and recommendations that arose from these reviews."

The roundtable on 15th January 2025 was chaired by Esther Kurland, Director of Urban Design Learning, and brought together planning and policy experts from across the private and public sectors. Those that attended worked at organisations such as the Greater London Authority, Create Streets, Historic England and New London Architecture. The discussion highlighted some of the challenges facing design codes, particularly in the wake of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This has removed the mandatory requirement for design codes, albeit Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook has asserted the Government is determined to improve on the design and quality of new homes.

For further information,
please contact:

media@delancey.com

“

“Leading the review of the Earls Court Design Code in partnership with UCL and our panel of experts was a rewarding experience.”

Vicky Payne

Director

Jas Bhalla Works

”

However, this leaves open the questions of whose responsibility it is to lead on forming a design code, and how will it be enforced?

Peer-reviewed by leading design experts – including Vicky Payne, co-author of the National Model Design Code, and Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning and Urban Design at The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL – the Earls Court Design Code has been recognised as a benchmark for future projects.

Vicky Payne, Co-Author of the National Model Design Code, Director (Planning and Urban Design) at Jas Bhalla Works, said: “Leading the review of the Earls Court Design Code in partnership with UCL and our panel of experts was a rewarding experience. Congratulations to the Earls Court Development Company and their design teams on the final draft, which has evolved into a wonderfully ambitious code for an important brownfield site.”

Sharon Giffen, Head of Design at ECDC, said: “The Earls Court Design Code represents a new standard for large-scale urban development sites such as ours. It integrates community voices and sustainability principles to ensure we design a development that reflects the values and aspirations of the people who will live, work and visit here, whilst also delivering a new, cohesive, piece of city that people will be proud of.”

The roundtable concluded with a call to action for the industry and policymakers to learn from codes such as Earls Court’s. Though the process of creating the code was lengthy and complex, only through undertaking this level of engagement will the result be a truly inclusive set of principles that reflect the views of all stakeholders, whilst maintaining the highest standards of design quality.



For further information, please contact:

media@delancey.com

“

“The Earls Court Design Code represents a new standard for large-scale urban development sites such as ours.”

Sharon Griffen

Head of Design

ECDC

”