



North Birmingham Decent Neighbourhood Standard: Erdington High Street

Summary Report
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This is a summary report. For details, please refer to the full report.

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Finally, we are grateful to Professor Guy Daly, Chair of the Housing and Communities Leadership Board at the Centre for the New Midlands, for his expert review of this report in draft.

Foreword

At Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA), we know that neighbourhoods matter.

This report marks an important step forward in the development of a Decent Neighbourhood Standard. Building on the first WLCA Demonstrator Report, which established the case for a neighbourhood standard and sets out its core dimensions, this report moves the agenda from concept to implementation.

Using Erdington High Street as a practical test case, it shows how the Standard can be translated into evidence, action and indicators. The findings highlight significant strengths, including strong community spirit, an active high street and valued local institutions, but also an area facing serious and persistent pressures - concerns about safety and crime, health and economic inequalities, gaps in social infrastructure and weak accountability.

The importance of this report lies not only in what it identifies, but importantly in what it now makes possible.

The North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board provides the governance structure to oversee this next phase - moving into implementation: turning evidence into action, embedding the framework in local decision-making, and delivering visible improvements for residents through sustained partnership and follow-through.



Afzal Hussain, Chief Officer

Witton Lodge Community Association



Introduction

Why a decent neighbourhood standard?

What is the minimum level of provisions, infrastructure and services in a neighbourhood to enable a decent quality of life for everyone?

Who is accountable for the quality of those provisions - and who should be?

What does decency mean in the context of neighbourhood quality and how is it enacted?

Britain has had a Decent Homes Standard since 2001- a clear, enforceable, minimum standard for the quality of the home. It has no equivalent for the neighbourhood, the unit of place that connects homes, everyday life and communities. The Decent Neighbourhood Standard (DNS) aims to create a practical shared framework to establish collective accountability and minimum standards at a neighbourhood level.

Aims and Objectives

The Witton Lodge Community Association DNS Demonstrator is a longitudinal, collaborative research programme. This is the second project of the demonstrator that starts to operationalise the framework

at specific location. The primary output is a benchmarked neighbourhood quality data dashboard. The project aims are to: conduct a baseline assessment of local quality; develop benchmarked indicators; build a prototype monitoring dashboard to foster community deliberation; identify data gaps for future research; and deploy dashboard insights to support strategic planning and regional partnerships.

Ultimately, all four DNS dimensions remain critically important to fully understand what makes a neighbourhood decent, grounded in local community insights, collective accountability, stewardship, and lived experiences.

Methodology

DNS Dimension 1 involves primarily desk research analysing secondary data, enhanced by stakeholder and community engagement. The fundamental methodology comprises organisational engagement, stakeholder and resident surveys identifying thematic priorities, site visits, indicator development, data mapping, and comparative analysis benchmarking Erdington directly against city and national averages.



Context

Policy Context

The growing importance of neighbourhoods in national policy

Since March 2025, the UK's policy landscape has undergone a significant shift toward place-based governance and systemic planning reform. Central to this shift is the continuous push for reforms in planning and local government, anchored by the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

- **The updated Decent Homes Standard:** The overhaul of the standard in 2026 establishes mandatory quality, energy, and safety regulations for housing, introducing stricter enforcement measures and significant landlord fines.
- **The 2026 National High Streets Strategy:** Committed £150 million for immediate aesthetic restoration and £301 million for 'Innovation Partnerships' to integrate housing, healthcare, and green spaces into traditional retail cores.

Local policy shifts in the West Midlands and Birmingham

Throughout Birmingham and the West Midlands, we (WLCA, CNM and SL) have continued to engage with and promote the approach of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard as the programme evolves. CNM hosted a roundtable in partnership with SL and WLCA in June 2025 at which we engaged with the WMCA, and other national and regional stakeholders.

- **Birmingham Draft Local Plan 2044:** In the Birmingham Draft Local Plan, Erdington is designated as a Centre for Change a vision focused on delivering new public squares, better shop frontages, and pedestrianisation.
- **West Midlands Combined Authority:** The Combined Authority leads the West Midlands Growth Plan, utilising a £232 million regeneration fund for high streets. The Inclusive Growth framework informed the creation of the Decent Neighbourhood Standard.

Unpacking 'Decency'

We conceptualise decency as a baseline standard and evaluative framework translating the Decent Homes Standard's regulatory spirit to the neighbourhood. It aims to address accountability gaps, tackle inequalities, and ensure communities possess the infrastructure to thrive.

Our core question is:

"Are we acting in a way that delivers a decent quality of life for residents in a neighbourhood?"

Examined literature frames decency not as a rigid rulebook, but as a negotiated, humane, and social practice. Avishai Margalit define a decent society as a 'moral minimum' protecting human dignity, a foundation for tolerance, and a humane flexibility prioritising the spirit of the law.

Decency is an 'ethic of everyday life' characterised by fairness, consideration, and reasonable restraint. Visually, this can mean mandating cleanliness, orderliness, and a welcoming atmosphere. However, standardising societal expressions risks marginalising vulnerable populations if weaponised as a tool for social exclusion to enforce strict middle-class values.

Because decency is pro-social and co-constructed, the practice of applying the Decent Neighbourhood Standard is just as important as the framework itself. Crucially, flexibility must be built into the standard, as a perfectly orderly neighbourhood risks creating dead urban spaces lacking vital creative disorder.

Ultimately, decency provides a flexible minimum standard addressing the accountability vacuum, requiring democratic co-design and structures that give local residents genuine agency to influence and maintain their own shared spaces.

Neighbourhood Demonstrator - Erdington

The context of the High Street

The High Street

Erdington High Street hosts around 300 local businesses, providing diverse goods and services. The Erdington Business Improvement District is active in the area.

Demographic & socio-economic profile

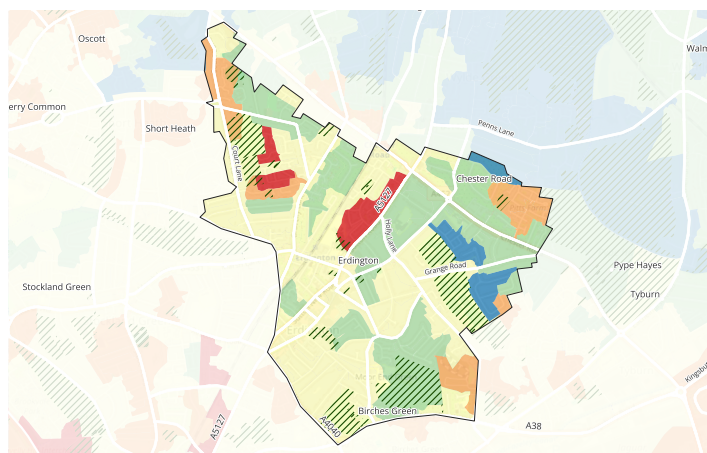
Erdington Ward has a total population of 21,552, making it the 19th most populous ward of Birmingham's 69 wards. It has a slightly older demographic and a lower minority ethnic population than the city average. Erdington is mid-ranking for deprivation levels, about 27% of children (1,429) live in low-income households, ranking the ward 51st in the city for child poverty. The resident employment rate is 66%, which is above the city average. Approximately 24% of residents have no qualifications.

North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board

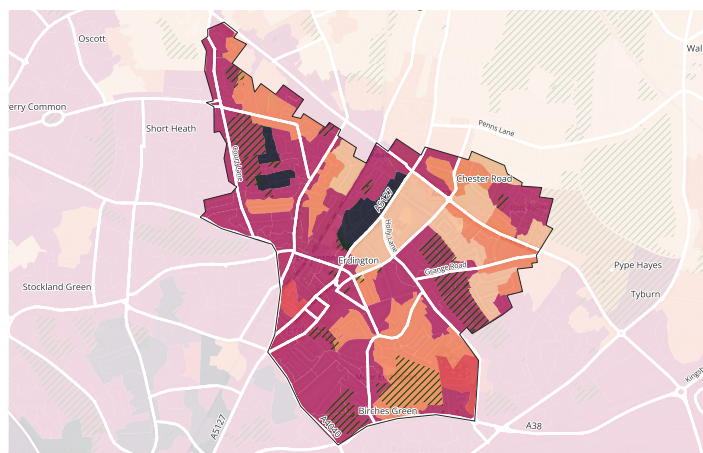
The North Birmingham Economic Recovery (NBERB) Board is an action-focused partnership. We continued our engagement with the board, presenting interim findings of this project at their meeting in February 2026. The Board's work is focused on the topics of opportunity, belonging and safety, which have guided the work in this report. WLCA is a foundational partner and pivotal driver within the NBER Board, utilising its influence to support local regeneration, housing initiatives, and community-led employment programmes.

Erdington Community Dynamics

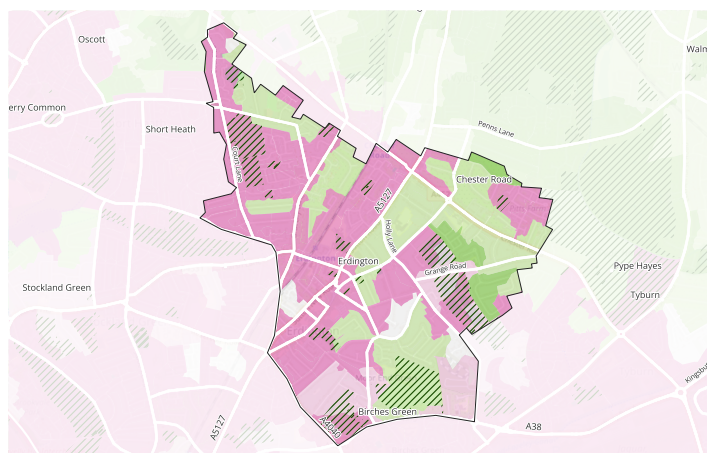
Community Dynamics is a methodology developed by SL that maps data that predicts how people are likely to feel about where they live. In Erdington we mapped Erdington ward using Community Dynamics methodology.



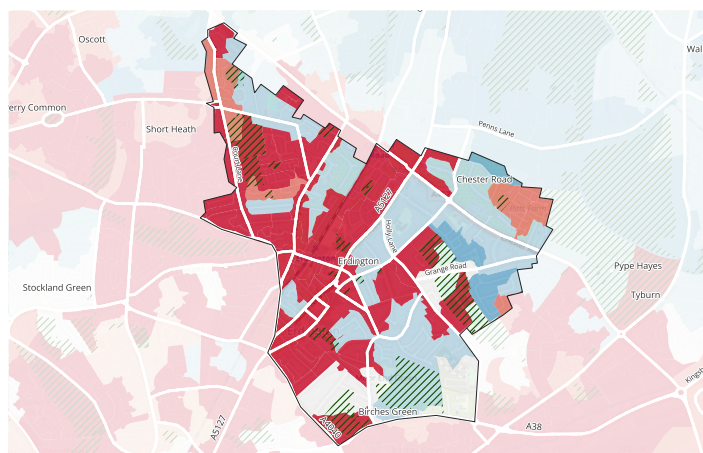
Predicted well-being



Predicted safety



Predicted neighbourliness



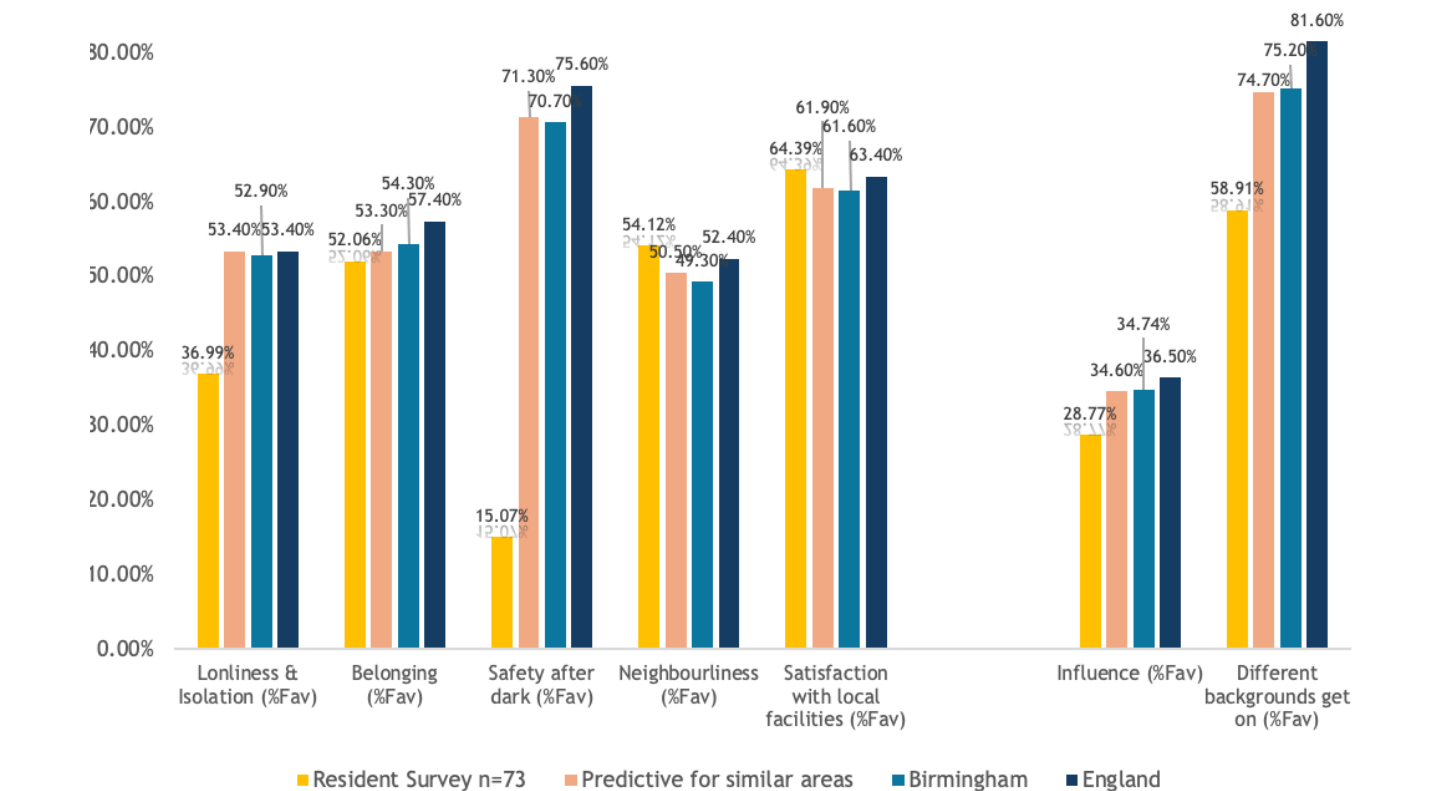
Predicted Belonging

“Erdington has huge potential. There are lots of great people and community here but poor decisions by policy makers.” - Resident survey respondent

Primary data collection

We ran two online surveys to understand the baseline needs of local organisations and residents living around and engaging with Erdington High Street. The survey was developed to focus on the three overarching NBERB priorities of opportunity, safety and neighbourliness and incorporated questions from the Community Dynamics, allowing for a benchmark exercise to take place.

- **View of Erdington High Street:** Both groups praised the cultural diversity and transport links but widely condemned the physical environment as dirty, run-down, and intimidating.
- **Community cohesion and belonging:** Residents frequently report strong personal belonging and cohesion, whereas local organisations perceive a heavily fragmented and socially isolated local community.
- **Influence and volunteering:** Both cohorts agree residents lack influence over local decision-making, while financial instability and demanding workloads severely restrict volunteering.
- **Safety and crime:** Safety concerns persist universally, driven primarily by visible drug activity, anti-social behaviour, unmanaged accommodations, and poor public street lighting.
- **Financial management, isolation and support needs:** Organisations perceive significantly higher rates of financial hardship, profound mental distress, and emergency food bank reliance than surveyed residents actively reported.
- **Satisfaction with local services and overall environment:** While public transport is rated highly, respondents negatively view the neglected physical environment, excessive street litter, and poor retail offerings.
- **Priorities for future improvement and change:** Urgent priorities include tackling local crime, strictly regulating accommodations, thoroughly cleaning streets, revitalising retail, reopening the library, and empowering residents.



Comparison between survey responses and predictive data using Community Dynamics

DNS Dashboard for Erdington

Sense of belonging

Uses Community Dynamics predictive data to measure indicators like neighbourliness, belonging, resident influence, and loneliness.

Indicator	Measure Type
INDICATOR 1.1. NEIGHBOURLINESS	<i>metric measure: % agreeing, predictive</i>

Safety

Combines Police and Crime incident statistics covering high street, community, and serious crimes with Community Dynamics predictive safety perception data.

Metric	Measure Type
INDICATOR 2.1: SAFETY	<i>metric measure: % feeling unsafe, predictive</i>
INDICATOR 2.2: HIGH STREET CRIME	<i>metric: incidents per 1,000 residents; date: March 2024/25</i>
INDICATOR 2.3: COMMUNITY CRIME	<i>metric measure: incidents per 1,000 residents</i>
INDICATOR 2.4: SERIOUS CRIME	<i>metric measure: incidents per 1,000 residents</i>

Opportunity

Blends DWP, ONS, MHCLG, and NHS data to evaluate indicators like employment, social infrastructure, public health, and transport.

Indicator	Measure Type
INDICATOR 3.1: JOBS & EMPLOYMENT	<i>metric measure: %; *count; date: 2024/25</i>
INDICATOR 3.2: OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	<i>metric measure: %; date: 2025</i>
INDICATOR 3.3: POVERTY PREVENTION	<i>metric measure: score</i>
INDICATOR 3.4: SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION	<i>metric measure: various</i>
INDICATOR 3.5: SATISFACTION WITH SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE	<i>metric measure: % satisfied</i>
INDICATOR 3.6: TRANSPORT & ACCESSIBILITY	<i>metric measure: %; *index</i>
INDICATOR 3.8: HIGH STREET HEALTH	<i>metric measure: various</i>
INDICATOR 3.3: POVERTY PREVENTION	<i>metric measure: various</i>
INDICATOR 3.3: POVERTY PREVENTION	<i>metric measure: %</i>

Findings

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging

Erdington's predictive data for neighbourliness and belonging tracks near city and national averages, although resident's ability to influence is reportedly low. Residents (primarily an older, established, predominantly White British population) report stronger belonging and higher satisfaction with interpersonal relationships than organisational respondents. Local organisations, who directly serve the most marginalised and economically precarious residents, observe much higher levels of social isolation and financial hardship. This divergence reflects the nuanced reality of a neighbourhood.

Theme 2: Safety

Erdington's violent crime sits below city averages, but drug offences significantly exceed both local and national rate. However, merely fifteen percent of surveyed residents feel safe after walking out after dark, well below the seventy one percent predictive benchmark.

This underscores an important methodological point to consider when qualifying decency, that quantitative crime counts measure the incidents reported, but they do not measure the pervasive sense of vulnerability and fear that erodes daily quality of life. They also do not capture under-reporting of crime, something that can be prevalent in low trust areas with higher levels of deprivation.

Theme 3: Opportunity

The Opportunity theme encompasses the broadest range of indicators and captures an underlying tension in Erdington's character: it is a place with real economic activity and community assets - a functioning High Street with approximately 300 businesses, a library (prior to its temporary closure), a health and well-being hub and strong public transport connectivity - while at the same time experiencing significant labour market disadvantage, health inequalities, and weak social infrastructure.

"There are many positive aspects to Erdington including a great community spirit, and the local BID and voluntary groups are doing a great job. The old baths development will help a lot. Oikos café is an asset. Some issues are nationwide and not particular to Erdington. Our High Street has relatively few empty/boarded up outlets, but the old precinct is very jaded, and needs to be kept clean, safe, with regular activities to keep people interested in visiting." - Resident survey respondent



Erdington High Street, March 2026

Towards a Typology of Decency for the DNS Dashboard

The Erdington DNS dashboard focuses on three thematic priorities: Sense of Belonging, Crime and Safety, and Opportunity and Local Economy. Drawing on secondary data, Community Dynamics predictive benchmarks and the resident and organisational survey findings, it offers an initial analysis of neighbourhood quality in Erdington to date. The picture it shows is of a neighbourhood with strong social assets and community resilience operating in an area of persistent deprivation, compromised safety, and under-performing public infrastructure. The dashboard analysis allows us to develop a preliminary working typology of what ‘data decency’ looks like across the DNS indicators. This will be refined and co-produced with residents and community groups in Dimension 2, but it provides an initial framework for how different indicators should be read, monitored and held to account:

Decency Type	Indicators	Implication for accountability
Trajectory to zero	<i>Violent crime, robbery, drugs offences, criminal damage</i>	No comfortable resting point; decency = year-on-year reduction; accountability falls primarily to public sector bodies West Midlands Police, BCC, and WMCA strategic crime partnerships.
Statutory / regulatory	<i>GP and dental access; library provision; anti-social behaviour response</i>	Legal duties exist. Decency = meeting statutory entitlements. Failure constitutes a breach of duty, not just an aspiration gap.
Advisory / best-practice	<i>High street vacancy; retail mix; fast food density; transport connectivity</i>	No legal floor, but national guidance (High Street Task-force; NHS planning standards; 15-minute city) provides reference points. Decency = approaching advisory norms over a defined period.
Relative benchmark (reach comparators)	<i>Safety perception; belonging; influence; well-being satisfaction</i>	Decency = reaching Birmingham average as minimum benchmark and England average as aspirational target. Requires regular resident survey to track.
Composite / contextual	<i>IMD score; living environment IMD; ESA claimants; long-term illness</i>	No single threshold; decency = reduction in relative deprivation rank over time and sustained improvement in metric scores.

What decency means for Erdington

For Erdington, decency represents an essential baseline standard ensuring the physical and social environment remains entirely free from hazards, crime, and neglect. Currently, the area experiences a stark decency failure, widely described as dirty, run-down, and intimidating due to open drug use and unmanaged accommodations. Achieving decency demands rigorous environmental maintenance, proactively tackling persistent litter, and actively revitalising local retail offerings.

Crucially, decency is an active, pro-social shared collective resource requiring robust accountability structures and community stewardship that empower residents to influence decisions and protect vital social infrastructure like the library. However, this pursuit of order should be democratically co-designed, carefully balancing safety improvements without weaponising decency to marginalise vulnerable populations or erode the neighbourhood’s highly valued, diverse, multicultural spirit.

Recommendations

The following practical recommendations are addressed to specific stakeholders or groups of stakeholders:

Residents and Community Groups

Residents should proactively participate in future insights phases and sustained community surveys. Concurrently, local community groups should collaboratively map existing social infrastructure to highlight critical gaps.

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA)

WLCA can deploy the DNS dashboard immediately for internal strategic planning and external advocacy.

WLCA should establish a regular resident survey panel to validate indicators and systematically collect vital footfall data through the upcoming Erdington Enterprise Hub.

Anchor Institutions and Local Businesses

The Erdington BID should coordinate targeted environmental cleaning and vital local safety improvements.

Birmingham City Council (BCC)

The City Council should prioritise the reopening of Erdington Library and align internal monitoring frameworks with the dashboard. Furthermore, planners should adopt a proactive stance toward strictly regulating unmanaged accommodations and severely restricting low-quality retail applications on the high street.

North Birmingham Economic Recovery Board

The Board should formally adopt the dashboard as its shared foundational evidence base, establishing a standing agenda item featuring named accountability leads to systematically monitor ongoing progress.

NBERB is also the appropriate body to facilitate the priority data collection needed to fill gaps in the dashboard, particularly for High Street Health and Social Infrastructure Provision metrics. The DNS findings give NBERB a powerful advocacy brief.



Erdington High Street, March 2026



Erdington High Street



Erdington Library

West Midlands Combined Authority

The WMCA should use Erdington as a pilot for neighbourhood economy initiatives, building on the investment already committed to WLCA.

WMCA is ideally placed to support the development of a regional DNS programme, with Erdington as a demonstrator pilot. The combined authority's strategic remit and data infrastructure make it a natural home for a regional neighbourhood quality monitoring framework, one that could establish baselines across the West Midlands' most deprived urban areas.

West Midlands Police

The police should enhance visible street presence to specifically combat the pervasive public fear surrounding drugs and severe anti-social behaviour building on past successes.

The police should implement a strictly gender-sensitive policing approach to sufficiently protect uniquely vulnerable older female community residents.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

The Erdington DNS Demonstrator has national policy implications that go beyond a single neighbourhood programme. There is no neighbourhood-scale equivalent of the Decent Homes Standard, and therefore no clear minimum standard for the quality of the environment outside people's front doors - this gap could be filled by the DNS.

The DNS programme provides an opportunity for locally grounded, place-based policy development. The Erdington Demonstrator is an operational example of what a DNS would look like in practice, with a structured indicator framework, benchmarked data, a decency typology, and accountability recommendations.

MHCLG should pilot a formal Decent Neighbourhood Standard programme, modelled on the Decent Homes Standard, in priority neighbourhoods identified through the Pride in Place programme.

Conclusions & Next Steps

Erdington as a Decent Neighbourhood Standard Demonstrator

The May 2025 WLCA DNS demonstrator report¹ was a conceptual and exploratory project. It established the case for a Decent Neighbourhood Standard, defined the four universal dimensions of the emerging standard, and explored them through engagement with WLCA staff, volunteers and residents. The project demonstrated that the DNS framework was coherent, community grounded, and capable of being adapted to a specific organisational and place-based context.

This new report, focusing on Dimension 1 in Erdington, marks a significant shift: from conceptualisation to operationalisation. The DNS data dashboard for Erdington is a practical output, a set of indicators, populated with real neighbourhood data, that can be used immediately by WLCA for strategic planning, external advocacy and ongoing monitoring. It can be deployed to answer the pragmatic question “what does the evidence tell us about neighbourhood quality in Erdington right now, and where are the gaps and deficits against a reasonable standard of decency?”

The DNS data dashboard for Erdington presents a neighbourhood of competing quality tensions and trade-offs: a community with a strong sense of belonging, social capital, and measurable assets operating under conditions of deprivation, a safety perception deficit, and a primary care infrastructure gap that is reinforcing prevailing health inequalities. It can be argued that these issues are the cumulative consequence of decades of under-investment, local authority financial constraints, inadequate regulation, and the absence of a meaningful accountability framework for neighbourhood quality.

The Decent Neighbourhood Standard is a practical tool for enabling and enacting accountable, measurable, and community-grounded neighbourhood improvements.



Erdington Library

This report demonstrates that the data infrastructure for a DNS in Erdington can be built from existing sources, enriched by engagement and community survey, and structured into a monitoring tool that is immediately useful for strategic planning and advocacy.

It has also demonstrated that ‘data decency’ - the first-order question of what the evidence tells us about neighbourhood quality - is incomplete on its own. The next phase of research of DNS Dimensions 2 to 4 will develop the DNS dashboard further from a diagnostic tool to a driver of positive and accountable change in neighbourhood quality.

¹ <https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/dnsreport/>

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

www.wittonlodge.org.uk

The Centre for the New Midlands (CNM) is the only independent, not-for-profit think tank for the West Midlands. The Centre creates a space to debate and shape better region, fostering collaboration across society, industry, and academia. CNM has a strong track record in research spanning digital innovation, infrastructure, people and skills, and housing and communities. The Centre's Housing and Communities research programme seeks to create long-term and sustainable impact, contributing towards new evidence bases around core themes of housing need and affordability, housing quality, neighbourhoods and place-making, health and wellbeing, net zero transitions and tenant engagement.

www.thenewmidlands.org.uk

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

www.social-life.co