



Building for a Healthy life

**A Design Toolkit for neighbourhoods,
streets, homes and public spaces**

May 2026





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Building for a Healthy Life

is England's best-known and most widely used design tool for creating places that work better for both people and nature.

Building for a Healthy Life, known as BHL is a Design toolkit to help improve the quality of new communities. It is written to be accessible to everyone involved in shaping places — from local residents and councillors to planning officers, developers and designers. Its purpose is to focus thinking and discussions on what matters most when creating successful, healthy liveable places.



New to BHL? Start here...

For more than 20 years, BHL has been refined by experts in the design of streets, landscape, and placemaking. Their collective experience has been distilled into simple, visual guidance: hundreds of illustrated tips showing what makes new places succeed — and what undermines them.

BHL is a flexible tool, helping to support the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Design and Placemaking PPG. It can be embedded in local policies, provide a framework for design codes and scheme design, and be used to evaluate the success of new places.

New places are complicated, and the parts that matter most often get the least attention. BHL tackles the overlooked elements of design and placemaking: everything outside the front door. Too often, road layouts, bin storage, and car parking are treated as afterthoughts compared with kitchens and bathrooms. The result? Uninviting streets where no one wants to walk, play, or spend time.

BHL shifts the focus. It sharpens the quality of highways, cycle routes, and landscape design so the public realm genuinely works for the people who live in and move through new developments. It's not just about how housing looks; it's about how places function for people and nature. By shaping streets, green infrastructure and movement networks that are safe, accessible and inclusive, BHL helps address health inequalities by improving everyday environments.

The 12 Considerations

Organised across three headings, 12 considerations are presented to help those involved in new developments to think about the qualities of successful places and how these can be best applied to the individual characteristics of a site and its wider context. These three headings will guide you from macro through to micro scale considerations.

The twelve considerations work as prompts rather than tick-box questions, encouraging people to think about context, connections, health, character and practical day-to-day use.

What's changed and what's new in this edition

BHL was last updated in 2020 when NHS England steered the last edition to reflect the principles of its '*Long Term Plan (2019)*'. This 2026 version retains the health focus, but does even more to promote nature-based solutions and active travel, for peoples' wellbeing and to combat climate change. It promotes richer green infrastructure, more ambitious tree planting, and smarter ways to manage surface water — all while making efficient use of land. Active travel is also central to NHS England's prevention strategy.

The 2020 version set out what was needed for active travel. Since then, Active Travel England (ATE) has become a statutory consultee for planning applications of 150 or more homes, and Local Transport Note 1/20 has been published. This version provides more examples of active travel, and ATE have joined the BHL Partnership.

BHL also reflects Sport England's '*Active Design*', published in 2025, with illustrated examples of how the Active Design principles can be achieved in new residential schemes.

In February 2024, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became a legal requirement for planning applications. This edition encourages integrating blue and green infrastructure directly into movement corridors and ensuring they both form connected networks. Strengthening connections beyond the site boundary helps deliver better BNG outcomes and the strategic to detailed implementation of green infrastructure reflects Natural England's '*Green Infrastructure Framework Principles*'.

Planting trees and installing sustainable drainage (SuDS) features along movement networks requires clearer guidance on design and long-term stewardship, as well as thinking about play on the way, seating and social spaces. These details now appear in a revised 'Consideration 11: Blue and Green Infrastructure' which is about making sure the detailed design and management deliver great functional places for people and nature.

The other big change to BHL is to highlight more urban, higher density examples, and to double the number of good examples. This reflects both our long-term partner, Homes England's increasing work on urban regeneration, but also the emphasis in the NPPF and Design and Placemaking PPG on building more homes, making efficient use of land and the value of denser schemes to support walkable neighbourhoods and facilities and services.

Located a short walk from Leeds city centre, the Climate Innovation District is a new sustainable neighbourhood in what was once an industrial landscape. With riverside parks, communal gardens, and pedestrian-friendly streets, the development prioritises well-being and connectivity.



How to use the toolkit

The goal is simple:

More green lights = better outcomes.

Amber and red lights = areas that need work.

The traffic-light system works as follows:

Green light: the proposal performs well against the consideration. A green light allows you to move forward.

Amber light: performance varies — strong in some places, weaker in others. An amber light signals where further work is needed to turn it green.

Red light: the proposal performs poorly and the issue is fundamental. A red light is a clear warning — a prompt to pause, rethink and rework the proposals.



BHL is not a checklist. It's a clear, step-by-step process that helps you deliver liveability, and ensures your proposals align with policy.

Use each consideration as a starting point. Agree collectively what's needed to achieve a green light. Local Authorities and developers can use BHL to help set out what "good" looks like, reflecting distinctive local characteristics which they expect development to reinforce or respond to.

Sometimes, an amber light is unavoidable. External factors — such as third-party land ownership — may limit connectivity or restrict the optimal layout. An amber light may be justified if the development still allows future connections to be made.

BHL aligns with Manual for Streets (2007) and is supported by Homes England's 'Streets for a Healthy Life' (2022). Not all highway authorities have adopted (or fully adopted) these principles, making it difficult for developers to secure a green light under the Healthy Streets consideration. In such cases, an amber light is appropriate, and the developer should not be penalised.

Relationship with policy and guidance

		National Planning Policy Framework	Draft Design and Placemaking PPG
Integrated Neighbourhoods			
1	Natural connections	DP3, TR1, TR4, TR8, DP2-1a	M1, M2, N1
2	Getting around	TR1, TR3, TR4, TR8, DP3(1e), PM1(2f)	M1, M2, M3, M4, B1
3	Facilities, services and stewardship	TR3, TR4, DP4	L2, P4, B1, B2, B3
4	Homes for everyone	HO1, HO5, HO7, HO8, HO9, L3	L2, L3; L4; L5; B3
Distinctive Places			
5	Making the most of what's there	DP3, DP4, N2, N4	L1, I1, I2, I3, N1, B2
6	A memorable character	DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4	I1, I2, I3
7	Well defined streets and spaces	TR4, DP3	P1, P2, P3, M2, L5, B2
8	Easy to find your way around	DP3-1g, TR4	M2; P1, P2; I3
Streets for All			
9	Healthy streets	TR3, TR4; HC1	M1, M2, M4, N1, P1, P2, P3, P4
10	Cycle and car parking	TR2, TR4	M1, M5
11	Green and blue infrastructure	N1, N2, N3; CC1, CC3, F8	N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, C4, L1, P4
12	Back of pavement, front of home	DP3	L5, L6, M5, P2, B3
Building for a Healthy Life			
	Generally	DP4 – The Design Process	Paragraphs 192, 264
	Using the tool as a discussion tool	DP4 – The Design Process	

Building for a Healthy Life is already used by government and its key agencies.



Homes
England

"We use our funding criteria to champion design quality, place-making and sustainability, so that partners can draw on clear standards guidance and funding conditions that raise quality across their schemes. We embed Building for a Healthy Life for all schemes we lead and it's a KPI in our Strategic Plan. BHL sets a clear benchmark for higher quality and sustainability that partners can use to improve outcomes in their developments."

Homes England Strategic Plan



Department
of Health &
Social Care

"Our health is shaped by the places we call home. When the design of neighbourhoods, streets and public spaces keep health and wellbeing in mind, we create environments that can play a powerful role in long-term health. Building for a Healthy Life provides a useful toolkit for so that healthy choices such as walking, wheeling and cycling are accessible and embedded into everyday life for all."

Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy

England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer.



"Non-communicable diseases cause 80% of deaths in the United Kingdom, most of which are recognised as preventable, and they cost the NHS (and the UK economy) £ billions every year. Poor quality urban environments are not solely responsible, but they do a great deal of harm. It is a system-wide challenge and there's no quick fix. We need to consider the 'causes of the causes' and all do our bit to shift the system to make planetary health the top priority in all decisions. Building for a Healthy Life is aimed at the design of new and growing neighbourhoods. If used thoroughly and with integrity, it should help those involved in the development to make their neighbourhoods healthier."

Daniel Black

Research Director, TRUUD (Tackling Root Causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development)

The partnership strengthens with three new players



"Building for a Healthy Life provides a well-established reference point for discussions about design quality within the planning system. Used by local planning authorities and developers, it sits alongside national and local policy, providing greater clarity about what good looks like, and better conversations at the decision-making stage.

The Future Homes Hub has worked with Design for Homes and Homes England on this update to incorporate practitioner feedback about how simultaneously to achieve objectives for amenity, sustainability and nature whilst building more homes. We welcome the steps taken to align BHL with the Government's National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code, strengthening its role as an adjunct to wider design policy and coding. We look forward to continuing to work with the Government and other national and local partners to improve certainty, coherence and consistency in the planning process."

Future Homes Hub



"Safe, attractive routes for walking, wheeling and cycling from the front door to everyday destinations aren't an optional extra – they are essential infrastructure. They underpin healthy lives: improving physical and mental wellbeing, cutting carbon, supporting local economies and, crucially, connecting people to work, school and opportunity. We've seen how resilient these choices are when it matters most – whether it's hire bikes keeping cities moving during transport strikes, or people protected from volatile fuel costs during an oil crisis.

Building for a Healthy Life matters because it gets that right at the start. When active travel is designed in from day one, we create places that are more inclusive, better connected and simply work better for the people who live there. Make it easy to walk, wheel or cycle, and you keep people connected to education and work. It's the practical, common-sense choice that also creates healthier, more liveable places."

Chris Boardman
National Active Travel Commissioner
Active Travel England



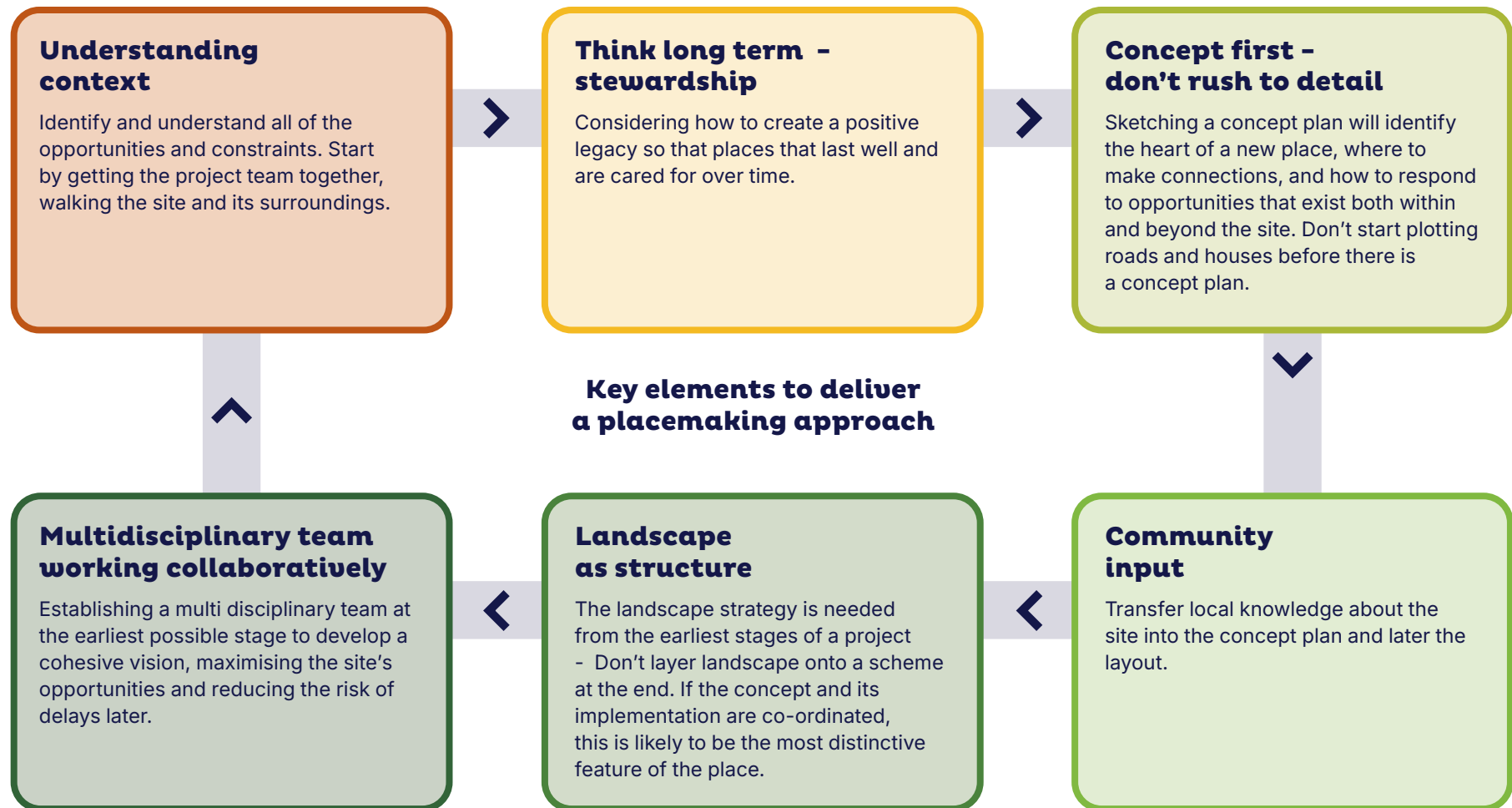
"The 2025 RHS State of Gardening Report shows that gardens cover 4.6% of our land, store 158 million tonnes of carbon and support more than half of the UK's butterfly, amphibian and reptile species. Yet their greatest value lies in how they shape everyday wellbeing. A YouGov poll found 77% of people reported better mental health, 76% better physical health, and 44% improved social wellbeing after gardening.

Front gardens are where these benefits begin. Carefully designed thresholds: green boundaries, planted edges, and spaces for personalisation foster pride, safety and social connection. Integrating soft landscaping, rain gardens and mix of cultivated and native planting for biodiversity creates visual cohesion in even the most varied streetscape. BHL promotes more cultivated streets to help maintain a healthier population."

Clare Matterson
Director General, Royal Horticultural Society

Design process

BHL encourages collaborative working between all those involved in the planning and design process to check what needs to be addressed. It is not designed as a scoring system.





Waddow Heights, Clitheroe

Photo credit: Barratt David Wilson Homes

Assessment Process

BHL is typically suited to developments of around ten homes or more. For smaller schemes, the considerations can still act as helpful prompts, though not all will apply at such a small scale.

Who says what's green, amber or red?

Self-assessment is a practical way to keep BHL front-of-mind throughout a project. It helps ensure all 12 considerations are addressed and provides a clear framework for progressing an application through pre-app.

However, when it comes to decision-making, a self-assessment carries less weight than an independent assessment. If you need independent assessment, help, advice, or training, this is offered by the authors of BHL and the nationwide Design Network, whose members are based locally.

Building for a Healthy Life Commendations

If a development secures at least nine green lights (and no red lights), you can apply for BHL Commendation.

Where formal certification is required, the Design Network will pass the assessment to Design for Homes who can issue certification and marketing materials that help promote the quality and credibility of the scheme.

A Commendation will allow you to use BHL logo on the development and help you showcase its qualities to prospective home buyers.

**Design
Network!**



d:m design:midlands



**DESIGN
WEST**

designe ltd
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designw

A play area at Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire is sunk 1m into the ground. The small flight of steps up to the street allows a hedge to replace the often crude protective metal railings that enclose play areas. Level, step free access is provided away from the busier carriageways.



1. Natural Connections

Connect human and natural networks. Weave human movement routes and natural corridors together. Linking your site to surrounding green and blue infrastructure, streets, paths and habitats is essential for boosting biodiversity, managing water, and supporting walking, wheeling and cycling.

Strong, connected green infrastructure should be a defining feature of every new development. When designed in from the outset, green and blue assets help nature recover, improve air quality, manage stormwater, promote active travel, and create healthy places that people value.

What's needed:

- a. Take an integrated approach to placemaking. Create places that work better for people and nature. Biodiversity space must be high-quality and well-connected. Designing routes for nature alongside routes for people encourages active lifestyles while supporting ecological networks. Incorporating trees, hedges and species-rich verges within streets further boosts biodiversity and helps manage rainwater.
- b. Capture rainwater where it falls. Use water management as an opportunity to create attractive, tree-lined streets and high-quality public spaces. Include habitats such as species-rich grasslands and rain gardens close to home.
- c. Combine planting, water and biodiversity strategies. Integrate these elements directly into your movement network. This approach enhances the value and performance of streets and spaces for both people and wildlife.
- d. Connect new and existing networks. Stitch routes into their surroundings to strengthen both human and natural movement corridors. This supports delivery of Nature Recovery Strategies, the national programme for restoring nature.
- e. Work harder where connections are difficult. Where surrounding conditions restrict easy links, prioritise new routes that help people and wildlife move into, through and beyond the site.
- f. Ensure all routes are safe. Give proper attention to surfacing, lighting and natural surveillance to support safe, comfortable movement for everyone.

Planting makes this a place to walk through. Lawley, Telford.

Photo credit: Garry Hall



"Nature is central to liveability and affects people's quality of life."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 74)

1. Natural Connections



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 1Ga.** Edge-to-edge connectivity means providing streets and paths on all sides of a development. Connect to existing routes, create new ones where needed, and ensure streets and paths can be extended in the future where land next to the site remains undeveloped or brownfield.
- 1Gb.** Think in terms of destinations. Anticipate desire lines and identify the most direct routes between key destinations. Put streets or paths along these lines to encourage more walking and wheeling, especially for short journeys.
- 1Gc.** Provide generous green and blue infrastructure corridors running through the development.
- 1Gd.** Create connected movement routes. Beyond a well-linked internal network of straight or near-straight streets, think about how to connect outward—across the red line—to wider movement networks.
- 1Ge.** Ensure continuous public routes run along the edges of the development. Private drives can restrict pedestrian and cycle movement and cut off the perimeter.
- 1Gf.** Design green and blue infrastructure to link existing and new habitats, while creating locally relevant new habitats within the boundary of the site.
- 1Gg.** Keep hedgerows within the public realm to safeguard their long-term retention, visibility and management.
- 1Gh.** Provide streets and routes that can extend in future, improving long-term connectivity and safeguarding opportunity for growth over time.
- 1Gi.** Ensure adoption to site boundaries so that key connections remain available and well maintained.

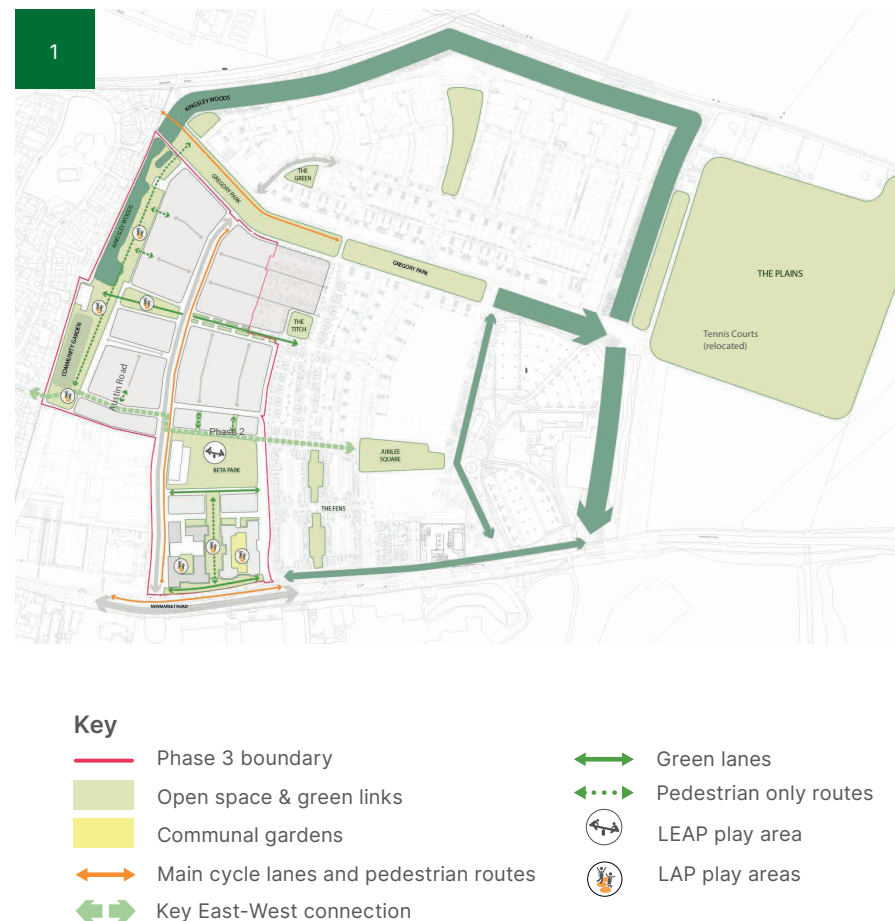


Image reproduced with thanks to
PTE Architects for Hill.

This concept plan illustrates how streets and spaces are interwoven to create a strong movement network for nature and people.

2

Pedestrian paths through large blocks shorten routes - line with hedges and trees to link green infrastructure on and off the site.



3

Manage water close to where it falls using features such as rain gardens.



4

Where there are fewer homes lining a pedestrian route, windows need to be carefully placed to ensure an adequate level of overlooking.



5

Attenuation basins created to capture water need to be designed as naturally as possible to maximise biodiversity and avoid unattractive, heavily engineered features.



6

Trees in verges work well in SuDS. This collects water, slows the flow, and helps nurture street trees.





7

Protect retained hedges to support biodiversity. Make sure they are positioned to the front of homes, rather than behind them where they are often cut back or removed. This will ensure that the contiguity and ecological value of hedges is protected.



8

Given enough space, an existing hedgerow can become a fantastic asset for biodiversity and the attractiveness of a place.



9

SuDS should not disrupt direct pedestrian movement. Where they do, there must be ways for pedestrians to cross.



Credit: Levitt Bernstein

10

Creating space for tree lined paths and avenues is a positive feature in many new developments. Increase the biodiversity potential and resilience of natural features by broadening tree species selection. Around the base of trees, cut the grass less frequently and use mulch to depress weeds.



11

Movement corridors to the edge of a development are made safer when homes are arranged to overlook them at ground level.



12

SuDS, tree lines and hedges should combine with pedestrian routes to improve the walking and cycling experience while supporting nature recovery and tackling climate change.



13

Even in the tightest and most dense city centre schemes there is a need to introduce water and soft landscape to help mitigate overheating.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 1Ra.** Isolating green and blue infrastructure in public open spaces distinct from movement corridors.
- 1Rb.** Streets that do not include green and blue infrastructure.
- 1Rc.** Single or limited points of access for pedestrians and cyclists. This strategy will frequently make car use the most convenient choice for people, particularly for short, local journeys.
- 1Rd.** Severing existing natural connections such as high-quality hedgerows. Retaining existing hedgerows alongside back gardens or only retaining isolated sections of hedgerows.
- 1Re.** Failing to create sufficient open space alongside retained hedgerows.
- 1Rf.** Not using existing good and high-quality trees within a site as an opportunity to create new movement corridors for nature.
- 1Rg.** Storm water management that is too dependent on highly engineered attenuation basins.
- 1Rh.** Placing standard lighting columns alongside retained hedgerows rather than using more gentle lighting solutions to retain dark green corridors for light-sensitive species.
- 1Ri.** Not responding appropriately to existing movement corridors. Failing to anticipate pedestrian and cyclist desire lines.
- 1Rj.** Culs-de-sac based street networks (such as private drives) that frustrate pedestrians and cyclists.
- 1Rk.** Streets and paths that cannot be extended in the future. This includes ransom strips that can prevent routes from being connected in the future.

14

A missed opportunity where run-off could have been treated in a swale before reaching the attenuation basin. Instead surface water run-off contains pollutants while the basin offers no amenity value.



Credit: Kevin Barton, Robert Bray Associates

15

Multiple private drives frustrate pedestrian movement. If private drives are required, ensure a path is placed alongside them.



Credit: PJA

16

Don't let the potential hazards of water management deny any potential for amenity. The potential of these spaces is destroyed by excessive boundaries.



18

Don't allow an existing community to demand a new development introduces barriers that break connections between new and existing streets.



17

Don't miss opportunities to use land to maximise its biodiversity potential.



19

Retained hedges used as boundaries between back gardens quickly lose their value as wildlife corridors and are often removed.



2. Getting around

Enable active travel for short trips. If the right infrastructure is in place, journeys of up to one mile (round trip) can be easily undertaken on foot, and trips of up to five miles can be cycled. Prioritising active travel improves public health, cuts congestion, reduces carbon emissions and boosts local air quality.

What's needed:

- a. Walk, cycle and wheel the neighbourhood. Experience routes first-hand to understand where off-site improvements would be most useful. Talk to local residents and councillors to identify key barriers and opportunities. Explore routes after dark to spot additional constraints.
- b. Test the need for segregation using LTN 1/20. Use measures to slow traffic speeds and reduce traffic volumes, so cycling on the carriageway feels safe. If the street needs to be wide, make sure it's easy to cross, and use taller buildings and large trees to provide enclosure.
- c. Active travel networks should enable easy interchange with public transport, allowing people to continue on longer onward journeys. Locate higher-density development near train stations, bus interchanges and other transport hubs. Good accessibility supports active travel and reduces car dependence.
- d. Provide direct, convenient safe routes. Design streets and paths that link people to key destinations and public transport in the most direct way, making car-free travel the natural choice.
- e. Connect to existing cycle networks. If a local cycle network exists, link into it. If it doesn't, begin one by building or funding new routes to key destinations. Use Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) as a starting point—they provide long-term frameworks for developing local walking and cycling networks.
- f. Prioritise access for all. Make walking and wheeling feel instinctive for everyday trips — from school runs to older residents accessing facilities and services.
- g. Focus on inclusive design. Identify barriers for vulnerable users: blind or partially sighted people, wheelchair users, neurodivergent people, and others with specific needs.
- h. Ensure natural surveillance. Place streets in front of homes, not behind them, so routes feel safe and well overlooked.

Great Kneighton, Cambridge offers a connected street network. Techniques such as filtered permeability have been used to encourage walking and cycling whilst also creating low traffic and low speed streets. Bus services are also routed through the development.



2. Getting around

"Compact and connected development optimises density so an area can best support shops, local facilities and public transport, maximising social interaction and promoting active travel".

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 128)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 2Ga.** Streets that share space fairly between pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles.
- 2Gb.** Cycle friendly streets (see Local Transport Note 1/20) with pedestrian and cycle priority — and protection — across junctions and side streets.
- 2Gc.** The active choice is the easy choice. Provide cycle and cargo cycle parking closer to entrances of commercial, leisure and community buildings than car parking. At schools, provide scooter and cycle parking to help younger children travel actively.
- 2Gd.** Design out car dependent school runs.
- 2Ge.** Deliver or contribute to a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).
- 2Gf.** Provide safe crossings: zebra, parallel, and signalised.
- 2Gg.** Use tight corner radii (<3m) at junctions and side streets to slow turning traffic.
- 2Gh.** Concentrate development around mobility hubs and public transport connections.
- 2Gi.** Support Demand Responsive Transport, car clubs and car sharing.
- 2Gj.** Create safe, short and direct walking and cycling links that make public transport easy and attractive.
- 2Gk.** Support new or improved Park & Ride schemes.
- 2Gl.** Design for 20mph speeds using appropriate design measures and traffic calming.
- 2Gm.** Provide protected cycleways along busy streets.

20

The continuation of the footway across a side junction prioritises pedestrians over motor vehicles.



21

Variations along the street help slow cars and create streets rather than roads.



22

Safer streets increase the amount of parents walking, cycling or scooting their children to school.



Credit: Andrew Cameron Associates

23

Car clubs can help to reduce private car ownership and make more efficient use of land.





24

Tight corner radii on quieter streets help to reduce vehicle speeds and can enable social spaces.



Credit: PJA

25

A busy principal street benefits from both protected cycleways and buildings of stature to enclose the wider space created.



26

Reinforcing pedestrian and cycle priority across a side junction requires drivers to give way to both pedestrians and cyclists when entering and leaving the side street.



27

Bus gates limit traffic flows and give more confidence to cyclists so that the school run becomes a cycle ride.



28

Slowing vehicle speeds is best done by narrowing the carriageway. Build-outs like this are better than speed ramps and can be used where people need to cross the road to access shared facilities and its safe enough to cycle on the carriageway. Care should be taken to avoid creating pinch points on busier streets.



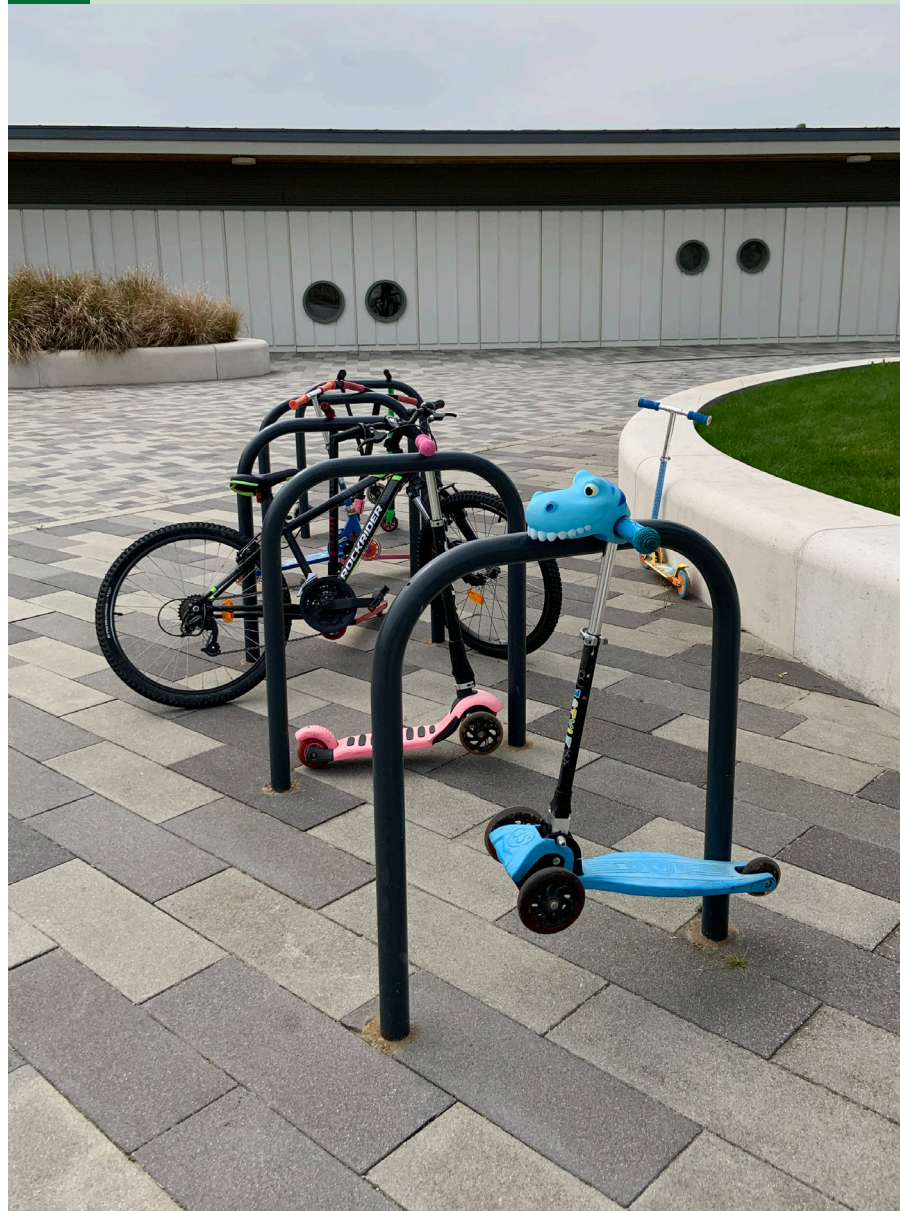
29

Connect to surrounding streets, but filter out motor traffic, and here enhancing the connection point with a pocket park.



30

A mix of stands and safer streets helps even the youngest to make short, regular journeys on bike or scooter, and increases the number of parents walking, cycling or scooting their children to school.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 2Ra.** Travel Plans that don't change behaviour or influence how people choose to travel.
- 2Rb.** Shared footway / cycleways alongside new streets, which compromise safety and comfort for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- 2Rc.** Only providing dropped kerbs at side road junctions, rather than continuous raised crossings which reinforce pedestrian and cyclist priority.
- 2Rd.** Oversized corner radii on residential streets that let drivers turn at high speed.
- 2Re.** Twisting, indirect street layouts designed solely to slow traffic, but which make walking and cycling routes unnecessarily long.
- 2Rf.** Overwide carriageways that take space away from pedestrians and cyclists and encourage faster driving.
- 2Rg.** Serviced parcel developments where pedestrian and cycle routes between phases are blocked or forced into indirect detours.

31

Guard rails increase vehicle speeds and make places more hostile to pedestrians and cyclists.



32

Shared footway and cycle routes put pedestrians and cyclists in direct conflict with each other.



33

Painted cycleways on carriageways do not do enough to protect cyclists.



34 Overwide corner radii make it more difficult for pedestrians to cross the carriageway.



36 Features such as splitter islands are characteristic of higher speed roads than low speed streets.



35 Overwide roads, without sufficient enclosure signal to drivers to go too fast, and make the carriageway too hostile for people to cycle on it.



37 Pedestrians will always seek to follow desire lines and will create routes when they are not provided.



3. Facilities, services and stewardship

Support social life close to home. Create opportunities for people to meet by placing development within easy walking, wheeling or cycling distance of social, leisure and recreational facilities.

What's needed:

- a. Ensure everyday facilities are nearby. Provide access that meet people's daily needs within a short, car free trip. A place becomes a community when it has shared spaces where people can meet.
- b. Deliver a mix of community facilities. Shops, schools, workplaces, health services, leisure facilities, cafés and other meeting places support chance encounters and informal social interaction. They are vital for wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and helping people connect with nature.
- c. Plan for stewardship. Address the management and maintenance needs of community assets early on. Secure their long-term future so valued facilities remain sustainable and well used.
- d. Put facilities where they have the biggest catchment. Locate new facilities where they are easiest for people to reach on foot, by cycle, wheelchair or public transport. This might not always be in the centre of the site, but close to existing residents.
- e. Reserve space early. At the outset safeguard the right locations for facilities so they are located where they will be most needed and most used. In large schemes, use temporary or meanwhile facilities to create a community focus during construction.
- f. Improve before you add. Consider whether enhancing existing facilities would deliver more value than building new ones.
- g. Assess sport and leisure needs. Understand what provision exists for all age groups. Work with local people and health and wellbeing providers.
- h. Use 'play on the way'. Incorporate playful features along routes to make active travel more appealing for children on their way to school and other destinations.
- i. Integrate SuDS into places people use. Use SuDS to help create attractive, accessible streets and public spaces that contribute to a high-quality green network.
- j. Design for vulnerable users. Consider access needs for disabled people, older residents and others who may face barriers to using facilities and public spaces. Avoid physical barriers, and think about the quality of surfacing and the need for lighting and overlooking.
- k. Keep frontages uncluttered. Avoid bin stores, utility boxes and servicing equipment cluttering streets and frontages.

The Tuning Fork cafe at Houlton, Rugby is next to the sales office and a multi-function building that is used for community activities such as yoga classes and a toddlers group.



"The liveability of an area is enhanced when places include an appropriate mix of uses that support everyday activities and promote healthy behaviours."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 23)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 3Ga.** Higher density development in the right places — especially around public transport hubs such as train stations and bus interchanges, where accessibility is greatest.
- 3Gb.** A mix of uses to ensure social activity in the daytime and evening.
- 3Gc.** Land reserved in optimal locations for non-residential uses, ensuring shops, services and community facilities are where people can easily reach them.
- 3Gd.** Active frontages that bring life to streets and make public spaces feel safer and more sociable.
- 3Ge.** Clear ground floor windows for non-residential buildings (avoid obscure glazing) to reinforce activity and natural surveillance.
- 3Gf.** Vertical mixing of compatible uses, such as supported accommodation located above active ground floor uses at the heart of new developments.
- 3Gg.** Attractive public spaces at key junctions and meeting points, creating welcoming squares and places to linger.
- 3Gh.** Frequent benches to support people with mobility difficulties and make walking between places easier and more inclusive.

38

New apartments sit alongside a children's centre. The netting surrounds the rooftop playing pitch.



39

Well maintained public realm and landscape defines public and private spaces. Long term management is essential.



40

Doorstep green spaces provide valuable play spaces close to people's homes.



41

Interpretation material can help people understand why some areas are only infrequently mown.





42

Board walks add value to the quality of public open spaces.



43

Flats above a new parade of shops.



44

Community growing spaces.



45

Concentrating commercial spaces in a single location increases their chances of thriving.



46

Places to eat and drink are important for building social life in new communities.



47

Active frontages require commercial uses to have clear windows to streets and public spaces.



48

Co-locating play space close to the school gates increases the chances of people meeting and encourages children to keep active.



49

Make sure it is clear who is responsible for managing spaces.



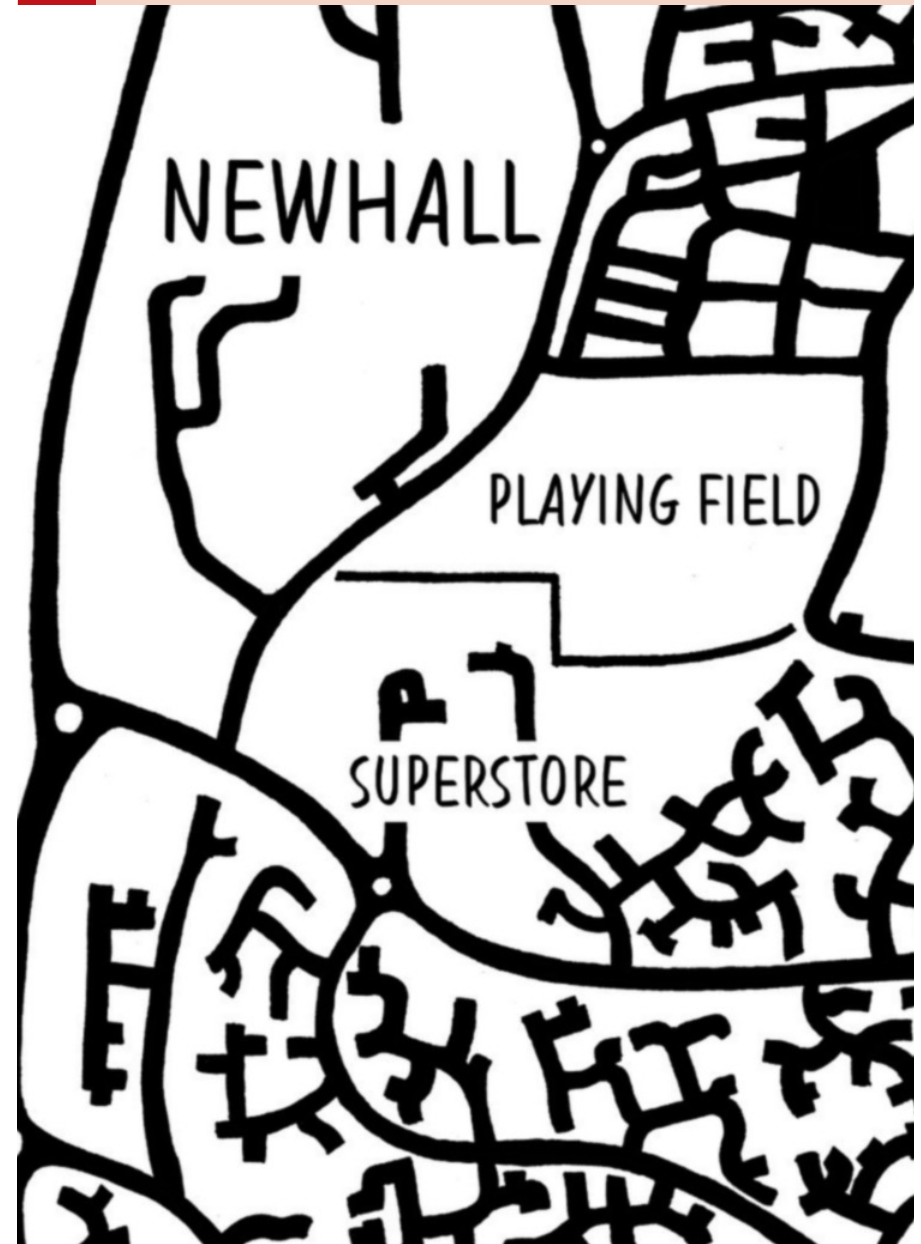


✓ What 'red' looks like

- 3Ra.** Local centres that are hard to reach or unattractive for pedestrians and cyclists, making active travel less likely.
- 3Rb.** Non-residential buildings delivered as isolated parcels, each with its own surface car park set back from the street, creating vehicle dominated, disconnected places.
- 3Rc.** Spaces that are too big. Places that feel oversized, hostile, or confusing hinder pedestrian and cycle movement.
- 3Rd.** Inactive street edges, including blank elevations, service yards facing the street and obscure ground floor windows that remove natural surveillance and reduce vibrancy.
- 3Re.** Play and recreational facilities hidden away rather than located prominently where they build community, feel safe, and encourage both new and existing residents to share space.
- 3Rf.** Failure to anticipate desire lines, particularly between public transport stops and the entrances to buildings, leading to inconvenient, indirect or unsafe routes.

50

Connected movement networks are critical to the vibrancy of community facilities.



51 Don't sever the relationship between buildings and the edge of the street.



53 Make sure that planning applications label ground floor windows as 'two way clear glass' to protect them from advertisement applications that result in obscure windows being created.



52 Active frontages are not created when windows are obscured.



54 Pedestrian routes need to be safe, inviting and inclusive.



4. Homes for everyone

Provide a range of homes that meet local needs. Homes that support the needs of the local area whilst ensuring mixed and balanced communities to create a place for everyone

What's needed:

- a. Respond to local housing needs. Most local planning authorities have policies or guidance on housing requirements. Address these directly or provide evidence to justify your proposed mix.
- b. Use creative engagement methods. Reach the people who stand to benefit most from new development. Understand their housing needs through accessible, inclusive consultation techniques.
- c. Provide a genuine mix of types and tenures. Offer homes that reflect local demand — from first time buyers and families to key workers, downsizers and residents needing supported living.
- d. Maximise opportunities for supported accommodation. Place supported or specialist housing at the heart of new communities, ideally above active ground floor uses such as shops, community spaces or preschools. This supports social, physical and mental wellbeing by enabling older people to stay connected to everyday life.
- e. Ensure access to private outdoor space. Give all residents at least some private outdoor space.
 - For apartments: provide balconies and ground floor terraces.
 - For supported accommodation where this isn't feasible: low sill windows help residents feel visually connected to the wider community

Botanical Place, West Byfleet designed by PRP Architects for Retirement Villages. A regeneration site which puts senior housing close to the heart of town centre and all its daily activities.



"Liveable places have...homes that are integrated with other facilities and designed to be tenure neutral and socially inclusive."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 24)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 4Ga.** Tenure blind design throughout the development. House types, architectural treatments, landscape design and parking arrangements should look consistent regardless of tenure.
- 4Gb.** Apartment buildings may separate tenure by core, but each core must appear identical in design quality, materials, entrances and overall character.
- 4Gc.** A genuine mix of housing typologies that reflects local housing needs and policies, helping to create a balanced, inclusive community.
- 4Gd.** Homes designed with flexibility, allowing residents to adapt them as their needs change over time.
- 4Ge.** Affordable homes distributed across the development, not clustered or visually segregated.
- 4Gf.** Access to suitable outdoor space for apartments and maisonettes — including safe areas for drying clothes.
- 4Gg.** Private outdoor amenity for flats:
 - semiprivate garden spaces for ground floor apartments,
 - balconies or terraces for upper floor homes.

55

People prefer to have their own front doors. Stacked duplex apartments which avoid communal areas and management charges provide a great alternative to standard apartment blocks.



56

Apartments disguised as villas sit very comfortably alongside market sale houses of the same scale. It makes it harder to discern tenure.



57

In denser, larger apartment schemes, put two storey maisonette flats with their own front doors to give families direct street access. Then locate conventional apartments on the storeys above.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 4Ra.** Grouping all affordable homes in one place (except on smaller developments).
- 4Rb.** Dividing places and facilities, such as play spaces, by tenure.
- 4Rc.** Revealing the different tenure of homes through different treatments for landscape, access, and car parking. For example, plan in storage for hiding wheelie bins at the front of all homes, not just homes for private sale.
- 4Rd.** Not using the space around apartment buildings to best effect and where these could easily be used to create small, semi-private amenity spaces allocated to individual ground floor apartments.

58

When social rent houses are provided alongside apartments for market sale or shared ownership, these homes must have the same quality of detailing.



59

Be careful that architectural elements are not delivered more cheaply because they are affordable housing.



61

Bicycle and bin storage needs to be treated with care along the frontages of smaller homes.



60

Be wary of car parking courtyards because the lack of spend on soft landscaping will result in harsh environments.



62

Apartments need to be given the same dignity as homes, with front doors at street level. This has the added benefit of creating more active frontages.



5. Making the most of what's there

Understand the opportunities both within and beyond the red line and respond to them with care and imagination. Some of the most valuable opportunities are the hardest to spot — yet they often shape the character and success of a place for decades. Finding these and using them well will making designing your site easier.

What's needed:

- a. Walk the site and its surroundings with people who know it well — local planners, residents and other stakeholders. Discuss and agree the opportunities and constraints, taking time to build a shared vision that makes use of topography and existing assets.
- b. Explore concept options before committing to a layout. If there are meaningful site features, explore how they might be integrated into the development before fixing the structure.
- c. Identify key views into, out of and across the site so they can inform the layout and character.
- d. Work with the landform. Minimise reprofiling. The less earth you move, the lower the carbon impact — and the more authentic the finished place feels.
- e. Understand how water flows and where it naturally pools on the site. Use this to enhance biodiversity, create character, and support wellbeing.
- f. Bring it all together early. Combine your findings to set the street, block and open-space structure from the outset. A clear framework or concept plan will guide better decisions throughout.
- g. Consider opportunities to daylight homes and for solar gain to warm them. Use orientation and land form to your advantage, but take care not to undermine key urban design principles such as perimeter blocks.
- h. Reuse valuable existing features. Where trees, landscape elements or buildings have value, integrate and reuse them. Retaining structures reduces carbon and reinforce local character.
- i. Treat hedgerows positively. Avoid simply working around existing hedges if it creates awkward or impractical layouts. In some cases, new hedgerows or tree belts may deliver greater biodiversity and a better structure.
- j. Respond positively to neighbouring development. Avoid blank buffer zones between existing and new back gardens.
- k. Use soil and land form intelligently. Work with existing ground conditions. For example, set aside low-nutrient subsoils to establish wildflower meadows rather than importing topsoil.

Brooks Dye Works, Bristol

Photo credit: Acorn Property Group



"Well-designed places and buildings arise from a clearly expressed design concept: a story that explains how the design has evolved and how it shapes the layout, form, appearance and details of the proposed development. This concept may draw inspiration from the site itself, its surroundings or a broader context."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 15)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 5Ga.** Walking the site to understand its character, seeing first hand how distinctive features, views and patterns can shape the design of a new development.
- 5Gb.** Using existing assets as anchors — mature trees, landmark structures, topography and other on site features that can provide identity and continuity.
- 5Gc.** Drawing on positive local characteristics such as street patterns, landscape character, urban grain, plot shapes and building forms. Use these underlying elements rather superficial styling to reflect and reinforce local character.
- 5Gd.** Designing sensitive transitions between existing and new development so that building heights, typologies and tenures feel comfortable and coherent at shared boundaries.
- 5Ge.** Applying the core principles of SuDS — water quantity, water quality, amenity and biodiversity — to integrate water and landscape in ways that are useful, functional and beautiful.
- 5Gf.** Protecting and enhancing habitats, while creating new ones to support biodiversity and strengthen local ecological networks.
- 5Gg.** Interlocking back gardens where new development meets existing rear boundaries, helping the old and new knit together without creating harsh edges or dead spaces.

63

An existing building is retained and extended. Adding balconies transforms the industrial origins to an amenity.



64 Unusual terrain such as these chalk cliffs help make this place memorable.



66 New homes enclose the former parade ground on a redeveloped army barracks.



65 New buildings on the wharf edge reflect the site's industrial history.



67 Mature trees found on this former hospital site have been used to structure blocks and improve walking routes.





68

Trees retained from a factory redevelopment screen new apartment buildings.



69

New homes frame views beyond the site.



Credit: PJA

70

Making use of the topography to tuck underground parking in on the lower levels closer to the valley bottom, with development stepping up the slope.



71

An existing wall has been restored and reused as a strong and distinctive boundary feature.



72 An existing building is used to create a focal point within new green space.



74 Spectacular avenue of retained trees defines the layout of this scheme.



73 Homes overlook a new canal basin created as part of this development.



75 Airing shelters for patients of the former hospital have been retained and now form part of the new park allowing residents to enjoy the view.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 5Ra.** Designing without walking the site first.
- 5Rb.** Funnelling rainwater away in underground pipes as the default water management strategy.
- 5Rc.** Unmanaged gaps between development used as privacy buffers to existing residents.
- 5Rd.** Placing retained hedges between rear garden boundaries or into private ownership.
- 5Re.** Building orientations and designs that fail to capitalise on features such as open views.
- 5Rf.** Not being sensitive to existing neighbouring properties by responding to layout arrangements, housing typologies and building heights.

76

When you have a fantastic asset make sure that all homes are orientated to maximise their aspect.



77

Don't ignore the potential for green space beyond the red line to improve the aspect from homes.



78

Don't turn your back onto public open spaces.



80

Small sections of retained hedgerow do not support biodiversity and undermine layout design



79

Avoid attenuation basins that do not also function as attractive and accessible public open spaces.



81

Don't put all the level changes in back gardens. It results in poor quality private space.



82

Don't orientate homes so flank walks offer little natural surveillance onto public spaces.



6. A memorable character

Create places people remember. Shape places that feel distinctive and rooted. Draw on local architectural and landscape cues to create character that is authentic and memorable.

What's needed:

- a. Create a locally inspired or clearly distinctive place. Take cues from the area, but don't default to imitation. Character should feel connected and credible but doesn't have to be a copy.
- b. Look widely for inspiration. Study the wider context. If local character exists, look beyond surface style — explore the deeper patterns of place. If the context is poor or generic, don't replicate it. Look instead to local history, culture or landscape for inspiration. Always look to raise the bar in terms of quality.
- c. Understand the real sources of character. Positive local character often emerges not from stylistic flourishes but from the fundamental elements:
 - street and block structure,
 - plot pattern (urban grain),
 - green and blue infrastructure,
 - land uses,
 - building form, massing and materials.Get these right and distinctiveness follows naturally.
- d. Use local materials where appropriate. A locally inspired materials palette strengthens a sense of place more effectively than copying traditional details that rely on lost skills or crafts.
- e. Use standard house types well. Standard types can help create character when used intelligently:
 - repeat them to establish rhythm,
 - group them in coherent clusters,
 - focus on how they frame streets and public spaces.
 - High-quality public realm, landscape and boundary treatments can deliver character without construction risk or unnecessary cost.
- f. Respond to site context — brownfield or greenfield. Brownfield sites often offer heritage cues or existing assets to inform character. Greenfield or edge locations usually offer less — so a strong, well considered concept is essential to avoid blandness.
- g. Let social life shape character too. Character isn't only visual. It emerges through public life. Design streets and spaces that support activity, interaction and everyday sociability — these bring places to life.

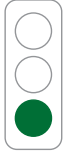
An industrial heritage is a good starting point for creating the character of a place. Wharves along the river Medway shape the design of houses and apartments at Rochester Riverside.



"New places, buildings and spaces...respond to the context, reflecting history, and current and future lifestyles"

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 164)

6. A memorable character



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 6Ga.** A strong, hand drawn design concept that explores multiple ideas and options. Naming the concept helps articulate the vision and guide detailed design decisions.
- 6Gb.** Ask the community what they cherish in their local buildings and landscapes, and use that for your design inspiration
- 6Gc.** Meaningful place names that communicate the character and intent of the development. Names like "Valley View" offer identity and clarity, whereas generic labels such as "Parcels 11 & 12" obscure the underlying design vision—particularly on larger, Multi developer sites.
- 6Gd.** Authentic inspiration from local architecture or landscape, expressed through traditional or contemporary design approaches that respond thoughtfully to context.
- 6Ge.** Structural landscaping used confidently to help establish a memorable, distinctive place identity.
- 6Gf.** Memorable spaces and building groupings, created through considered composition rather than relying solely on architectural detail. Group buildings to form end points to vistas down a street, to turn corners and to create a clear building line to the street.
- 6Gg.** House types that respond to local character, heritage and design codes. Most standard house types can be adapted, although modifications need to be carefully managed because this is where structural defects in untested modifications will be occur.

83

Urban townhouses with a warehouse-inspired gables project that this site had a former industrial use.



84

Use your house types to create a sense of composition. Use materials to bond together very different building forms.



86

Local buildings provide a strong source of layout and architectural inspiration, creating a memorable street.



85

Local stone provides a strong connection to the place alongside traditional architectural detailing.



87

A mix of house types works best when form and materials create an obvious rhythm.





88

Exterior balcony structures and climbing plants can be used to add landscape character to a place.



Credit: PJA

89

The choice of surface materials is important when you are creating a housing square.



90

Be honest when you are mimicking the character of a mews street. Get the dimensions right so it looks and feels like an intimate space.



91

Medium scale blocks need generously proportioned courtyards with strong landscaping.



92

Create atmosphere in small spaces between buildings in an urban setting. Introduce as much landscaping as you can, with lighting and seating.



Credit: PJA

93

Strong axial tree planting strengthens the quality of this space.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 6Ra.** Letting a pre set sequence of house types dictate the layout. Designing by sales mix or coverage rate rarely produces a coherent or distinctive place.
- 6Rb.** Prioritising standard products over placemaking. Unmodified house type ranges that ignore local context, heritage or design codes undermine character. Re-elevation and bespoke adjustments should be the norm.
- 6Rc.** Using poor imitations of architectural details to create character. Superficial or inaccurate replication weakens credibility and often looks pastiche.
- 6Rd.** Arranging buildings without regard for the street scene, resulting in disjointed frontages and a lack of cohesion.
- 6Re.** Referencing generic, forgettable developments nearby as justification for repeating the same approach.

94

Don't randomly vary the size of gables, the pattern of windows, the width of modules and the positioning of each home's access. Grouped buildings need coherence.



95

Character cannot be delivered with a few token period details, especially when the stylistic treatment is piecemeal and unconvincing.



96

Elaborate details such as stonework arches need to be used as the originals would have been, such as to frame a glazed light to a Georgian door.



97

Blind windows only work in a façade where there are multiple windows so that closing off one does not unbalance the elevation.



98

Always consider the balance of fenestration to solid brick elevation.



99

Adding details like a bay window to the lower storey of a blank gable only highlights the lack of windows to the upper storey.



100

Different roof shapes and pitches, setbacks, building widths and heights have to be designed carefully to avoid creating a visual jumble.



7. Well defined streets and spaces

Shape streets and spaces with strong enclosure. Create a clear, legible network of streets and public spaces that feel well-defined by buildings and/or structural landscaping. Ensure principal facades and front doors face the street or public realm — this is essential to creating places that feel safe, active and welcoming.

What's needed:

- a. Use perimeter blocks. This creates streets with well-defined public fronts and private backs. This structure supports activity, clarity and safety.
- b. Deliver active frontages. Active frontages are created when buildings present front doors and plentiful windows to the street. They are essential for a lively and well overlooked public realm.
- c. Balconies, terraces, front gardens and bay windows help to enliven streets and give larger buildings — such as apartments or supported living — a more human scale.
- d. Ensure buildings relate well to their context. Buildings should respond to each other and to the public spaces they frame, creating a coherent street scene. Enclose the space with buildings so that it feels like an outdoor room — tighter is often better.
- e. Review layouts and elevations together. Look at all the drawings — including substations and small structures — to understand what people will actually see moving along the street.
- f. Frame positive views. Frame the principal elevations of buildings or key landscape features to create streets that feel safe, active and welcoming.
- g. Design strong street corners. Corner buildings need special attention and where a building addresses two streets or a street and an open space, orientate the front door to the more important route.
- h. Use 3D tools to test spatial qualities. Simple hand drawn sections, physical models or computer-generated models can all help you judge enclosure, scale and the overall feel of streets and spaces.
- i. Animate the edges of apartment buildings. Give all ground floor apartments their own front door to the street. This supports activity and provides space for semiprivate terraces between the pavement and building.
- j. Ensure commercial frontages are truly active. Shops and other commercial ground-floor uses must have clear glazing so activity is visible and the street feels safe and engaging.



"Specifying that key routes and public spaces are well activated by surrounding buildings can create places which feel safe and overlooked."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: P4iii)

7. Well defined streets and spaces



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 7Ga.** A clear, hand drawn concept that shapes the structure of streets and spaces. Explore several options early, name the concept, and use it to guide how streets, corners, block structures and spaces will be detailed.
- 7Gb.** Meaningful place names that reinforce identity. Names like "Valley View" give a development clarity and character, especially on larger or multi developer sites. Generic labels such as "Parcels 11 & 12" weaken the design vision.
- 7Gc.** Design rooted in local architectural or landscape character, expressed through traditional or contemporary approaches that respond sensitively to context.
- 7Gd.** Strong structural landscaping that helps frame streets, define spaces and create memorable, coherent environments.
- 7Ge.** Well composed streets and building groupings where placement, massing and relationships between buildings contribute to a distinctive spatial character.
- 7Gf.** Re elevated house types suited to the local context.
- 7Gg.** Standard house types can be adapted — keeping fixed structural elements while modifying elevations — to support local distinctiveness and follow design codes.

101

Lots of windows and front doors make streets feel friendly and safe.



102

Taller buildings can help enclose wider streets.



104

Buildings front on to the street and provide overlooking on to the central green space. Variable street widths add character.



Credit: PJA

103

Street corners require special attention. Make sure that buildings face onto streets and public spaces.



Credit: PJA



105 Use taller buildings to add stature to street corners.



Credit: Andrew Cameron Associates

106 When a plot borders green spaces place the building to the edge to provide rich views of natural landscape.



107 Taller buildings help enclose and define large spaces.



108 Strong boundaries create an edge to the street.



109 Where the public space is curved, the buildings need to curve with it.



111 Ground floor apartments need strong boundary details to create adequate privacy.



110 Repetition of formal elements can create particularly strong street edges.



112 Position front doors carefully to animate street corners





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 7Ra.** Distributor roads with restricted frontage access, creating vehicle-dominated corridors and undermining active, people-focused streets.
- 7Rb.** Broken or fragmented perimeter blocks, including blocks with acute angles that produce unusable gardens, awkward leftover spaces and poorly defined corners.
- 7Rc.** Blank or largely blank elevations facing streets and public spaces, removing natural surveillance and deadening the street scene.
- 7Rd.** Lack of front boundaries, trees or street planting, resulting in weak enclosure and featureless streetscape.
- 7Re.** Apartment buildings with single or limited points of access, reducing activity, surveillance and a sense of welcome.
- 7Rf.** Staggered, inconsistent building lines caused by mixing front and side parking arrangements, creating messy, incoherent street edges.
- 7Rg.** Poorly designed street corners, including blank side elevations, garages on corners, or long runs of fencing or walls enclosing back gardens.
- 7Rh.** Buffer zones between new and existing development that create unwanted corridors or spaces between back gardens, whether accessible or not.
- 7Ri.** Single aspect homes on corners, missing opportunities for dual aspect living, better surveillance and improved street animation.
- 7Rj.** Plotting house types without responding to site opportunities, wasting space and undermining character, legibility and spatial quality.

113

Avoid excessive variation in building shapes.



114

Do not place flat over garage homes as an edge to the street.



115

Do not allow buildings to turn away from public spaces.



116

Do not place play areas or other public spaces behind buildings.



117

Do not orientate the backs of homes to the street.



118

Blank gables are not a good way to turn a street corner.



119

Strong natural surveillance is needed to public routes and public spaces.



120

Do not place an incoherent collection of buildings at the end of a street or view point.



8. Easy to find your way around

Help people navigate by using legible features. Use strong, memorable features to help people form a mental picture of a place to make it more inclusive. Make it obvious which routes are important for getting around by reinforcing their movement function through all aspects of design.

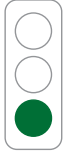
What's needed:

- a. Start with adopted streets and public spaces. Use the primary street network and main public spaces to create a legible structure. Where possible, frame views to distinctive features on or beyond the site to help people get oriented.
- b. Use straight, direct streets. Prioritise simple, direct routes. Avoid overly curvilinear layouts that make navigation confusing and which encourage higher vehicle speeds.
- c. Create a simple street hierarchy. Design streets that are visibly different from one another — for example, 'main/busy' vs. 'side/quiet'. Avoid overcomplicated hierarchies with too many categories such as "primary/secondary/tertiary".
- d. Use street trees to support legibility. Vary street dimensions and tree planting to signal hierarchy and help people distinguish between different types of streets. Clear variations in character for streets is more effective than relying on housing "character areas".
- e. Use non-residential uses and landscape features as landmarks. Parks, water features, civic buildings, play spaces and other non-residential uses can help people orient themselves and improve the clarity of movement through a place.



"Successful development depends upon a movement network that connects destinations, places and communities within the site and beyond its boundaries, and has a positive impact on the quality and character of place."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 164)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 8Ga.** Concept plans designed with legibility in mind. The structure of streets and spaces help people intuitively understand how to move through the place.
- 8Gb.** Use streets as the primary wayfinding tool. Principal streets are clearly distinct from minor streets. Differences can be expressed through:
 - spatial proportions,
 - building typologies,
 - building-to-street relationships,
 - landscape strategies, and
 - boundary treatments.
- 8Gc.** Incorporate features that support navigation for people with visual, mobility or cognitive limitations, ensuring the environment is inclusive for all.
- 8Gd.** Frame views toward key features — both within the site and beyond it — to help people orient themselves and reinforce mental mapping.
- 8Ge.** Develop landmarks, focal spaces or distinctive features. Reinforce them through coordinated landscape design, building placement, hard landscaping and boundary treatments.
- 8Gf.** Create simple, logical street patterns. Stick to formal or relaxed grid structures, which naturally support clear navigation.
- 8Gg.** Use crossroads and junctions for placemaking. Introduce features or spatial cues that aid orientation and strengthen character.

121

Simple street patterns that frame views of local landmarks aid navigation.



Credit: Barratt David Wilson

122

A straight street is used to make it easy to find your way around.



Credit: Barratt David Wilson

123

The location of street trees helps create a street hierarchy. Off-plot street trees identify principal streets and avenues.



124

In quieter mews streets, form and materials play a important role in helping people orientate themselves.



125

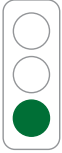
Frame views of features on or beyond a site



126

Stepping building heights up at corners can help people find their way.





129

Even a small change in building heights can highlight street corners.



127

Distinctive building elements can help people form a mental map of a place.



128

A change in the style and form of architecture is another way to help people find their way around.



130 Highlighting these balconies makes for a distinctive street corner.



131 Sizeable mature trees bigger than the homes around them are a good wayfinding feature.



132 Formal avenue planting can highlight primary streets.



133 Building types can be used to emphasise key routes.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 8Ra.** No meaningful variation between street types, leaving users unable to distinguish main routes from quieter streets.
- 8Rb.** Confusing, meandering street patterns that disorient users and make navigation difficult.
- 8Rc.** Disconnected streets, paths and routes, resulting in poor permeability and forcing unnecessary detours.
- 8Rd.** A lack of differentiation in building types, uses, densities or landscape treatments, leading to places that feel monotonous and hard to read.
- 8Re.** Culs-de-sac dominated layouts, which frustrate direct movement and weaken legibility.

134

Avoid excessive variation in building shapes and disorientating arbitrary curving street patterns.



135

Key frontages such as those to public spaces will not be memorable if they are comprised of house types where there is no strong pattern.



137

Blank walls and garages in prominent locations will fail to create places that people remember.



136

Key frontages need a strong pattern to become memorable features.



9. Healthy streets

Streets are places that encourage people to be healthy. They are different to roads because they balance the movement of motor vehicles with the need for people to walk, wheel and cycle with ease. They are comfortable to cross, and allow people to come together to chat, for children to play, and for people to be active.

What's needed:

- a. Create busy and quiet streets with low vehicle speeds. Design all streets so pedestrian and cycle priority is clear, and motor vehicles move at low speeds.
- b. Balance 'movement' and 'place'. Streets should function as places to be, not just corridors to travel through.
- c. Segregate cycle routes on busier and faster roads. Cycle lanes on the carriageway can be appropriate on less busy roads with lower speed limits.
- d. Reinforce pedestrian and cycle priority at side junctions by design with continuous footways, and measures to slow turning traffic.
- e. Integrate green and social features. Street trees, rain gardens, swales, and seating improve comfort, character and microclimate.
- f. Avoid vehicle-dominated 'spine' or 'distributor' roads. Design streets to be multifunctional. Avoid layouts that serve only vehicle movement and parking.
- g. Make streets easy to cross. Introduce zebra crossings or similar features on busier routes to support safe, convenient crossing.
- h. Ensure natural surveillance. Front doors should face streets and public spaces to create well-overlooked, safer environments.
- i. Design for everyone. Create inclusive streets that work for people with diverse mobility, visual, hearing and neurodivergent needs. Footways should be level and free from obstructions such as lighting columns and cluttered street signage.

"New development can also include site specific enhancements to achieve biodiversity net gain."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 91)





✓ What 'green' looks like

- 9Ga.** Streets designed for people, not just for moving vehicles.
- 9Gb.** 20mph (or lower) design speeds, supported by street geometry, traffic calming and formal 20mph designations.
- 9Gc.** Tree lined streets with enough space above and below ground for healthy long-term growth, supported by clear maintenance and stewardship arrangements.
- 9Gd.** Tight corner radii (3m or less) to keep turning speeds low and make crossings shorter and safer.
- 9Ge.** Places to sit, chat and play within the street, supporting social interaction and everyday activity.
- 9Gf.** Continuous pavements and cycleways across side streets and service accesses, reinforcing pedestrian and cycle priority.
- 9Gg.** Routes that follow real desire lines, providing the most direct paths between the places people want to travel to.
- 9Gh.** Rich, layered landscape that adds sensory interest — through colour, scent, texture and sound — creating streets that feel attractive and engaging year round.

138

Play-on-the-way, seating, SuDS, and biodiversity combine in this linear park to create a compelling route for walking, wheeling and cycling.



139

When you want people to walk, you have to give them places to rest. Two rows of trees combine on this broad footway to create shade for the benches. The 20mph limit makes the bench more likely to be used.



140

Take every opportunity to fill the street with high quality landscaping.



141

Tight corner radii (<3m) keep turning speeds low and make crossings shorter and safer.

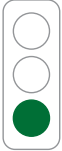


Credit: Tibbalds

142

To get people sitting outdoors, multiple benches are needed so that people can choose who they sit next to and how far they need walk.









✓ What 'red' looks like

- 9Ra.** Roads designed primarily for cars, with little regard for people walking, wheeling or cycling.
- 9Rb.** Ignoring the user hierarchy set out in Manual for Streets, placing motor vehicles above vulnerable users.
- 9Rc.** Wide, sweeping corner radii (6m or more) that encourage high speed turning and make crossings longer and less safe.
- 9Rd.** Over wide carriageways (6m+) that promote faster vehicle speeds and reduce space for landscape, footways and cycle routes.
- 9Re.** Highways engineering solutions that complicate or lengthen pedestrian and cycle movements instead of simplifying them.
- 9Rf.** Street trees handed to individual occupiers, risking inconsistent maintenance, premature removal, or long-term failure.
- 9Rg.** Distributor roads with minimal frontage access, typically served by private drives, resulting in inactive, vehicle dominated corridors.
- 9Rh.** Streets lined by rear garden fences and rear accessed parking.
- 9Ri.** Painted white line cycle routes, whether on pavements or carriageways — offering poor protection and often creating conflict.
- 9Rj.** Speed control through exaggerated street alignment shifts, wasting land, undermining legibility, and creating disorienting environments.

145

Wide sweeping corners increase vehicle speeds.



146

Distributor roads with no frontage access do not create residential streets.



147

Do not forget that the smallest streets also need to include street trees.



148

Along residential streets, the speeds of vehicles should not require pedestrian refuges.



149

Forward visibility plays increase vehicle speeds and are frequently used for car parking.



150

Do not allow junctions and other accesses into a development to be engineered in a way that encourages higher vehicle speeds.



151

Landscaping needs to reflect the scale of the street.



10. Cycle and car parking

Well-designed developments make walking, wheeling and cycling the natural choice for short trips. This boosts physical activity, improves air quality, reduces congestion and enhances the street scene. Streets also need to provide sufficient, well integrated car parking that reflects local car ownership patterns and the availability of public transport.

What's needed:

- a. A mix of types of parking — there isn't a single best solution.
- b. Meet LTN 1/20 requirements. Provide one secure cycle space per bedroom. Ensure at least one cycle space is as easy to access as a car parking space — convenience encourages cycling.
- c. Plan for realistic levels of demand. Car and cycle parking should match actual local need and prevent displaced or antisocial parking on surrounding streets.
- d. Use shared and unallocated parking. When designed into the street, shared spaces create flexibility and make more efficient use of land.
- e. Integrate landscape and parking. Invest in landscape to improve the appearance of both parking and cycle storage. Trees with under-planting soften the visual impact of cars, provide shade and improve air quality.
- f. Think about the availability and frequency of public transport. Use this to shape your parking strategy. Anticipate realistic levels of demand and design out anti-social parking.
- g. Provide creative, safe and convenient cycle parking. Cycles can be expensive, so security is the number one priority when people choose where to store their cycles. Houses need different solutions for cycle parking from apartment blocks but both need to be convenient. Communal cycle stores are particularly vulnerable to cycle theft so make them very visible.
- h. Rear parking courts should be used carefully because they often waste space due to the extra access and circulation areas they need. However, they can still be useful as part of a mix of parking options.
- i. If a rear courtyard is needed, ensure it is:
 - well overlooked,
 - landscaped to a high standard,
 - designed for safety and ease of use.

Apartments at Eddington, Cambridge.
Securing bicycles near the entrance, in full view of both residents and the public, makes people feel safer than storing them in an unsurveyed room with a single point of access.



10. Cycle and car parking

"Public spaces, particularly streets, should support activities such as socialising, informal play, resting and movement. Their success depends on being functional, attractive and accessible places that people enjoy."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 144)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 10Ga.** Convenient, secure cycle parking that makes it easy for residents to choose to cycle over the car.
- 10Gb.** Secure, well overlooked cycle parking near entrances to schools, shops and community facilities — positioned as close as, or closer than, car parking or drop-off bays.
- 10Gc.** Plan for realistic levels of demand. Car and cycle parking should match anticipated local need and prevent displaced or antisocial parking on surrounding streets.
- 10Gd.** Landscape used to integrate parked cars into the street, softening visual impact and improving overall quality.
- 10Ge.** Frontage parking broken up with regular green relief, ideally one planted space for every four parking bays.
- 10Gf.** Designing out or antisocial parking, anticipating likely problem areas and controlling them from the outset.
- 10Gg.** A range of parking solutions, tailored to context, density and user needs.
- 10Gh.** Small, well overlooked parking courtyards, with active ground floor habitable rooms providing natural surveillance.
- 10Gi.** Staying current with emerging electric vehicle technologies, ensuring infrastructure and layouts can adapt over time.
- 10Gj.** Creative, attractive cycle and car parking solutions, especially important in higher density settings where space is limited.

152

Small setbacks to a terrace will accommodate a store for cycles and bins, a car, and vital landscape.



153 Parking within the block should be treated as an opportunity for landscaped amenity, complete with seating.



154 Frontage parking should be generously landscaped, well-enclosed and overlooked.



155 Unallocated on street car parking helps discourage pavement parking.





156

With narrow fronted terraces, putting cars round a central square is still convenient and its easier to absorb parking into the landscape.



Credit: PJA

157

Thick and tall hedges are a good way to integrate frontage parking for terraced homes.







✓ What 'red' looks like

- 10Ra.** Putting all cycle storage in garages or sheds, with convoluted access to them making cycling inconvenient and less secure.
- 10Rb.** Over-reliance on frontage parking, which dominates the street scene and reduce opportunities for landscape.
- 10Rc.** Car parking that push vehicles on to pavements or designated cycle routes, creating conflict and safety issues.
- 10Rd.** Frontage parking with little or no soft landscaping, resulting in harsh, car-dominated streets.
- 10Re.** Parking courtyards enclosed by fencing, lacking natural surveillance, good lighting or quality detailing — making them unattractive and unsafe.
- 10Rf.** Excessive reliance on tandem parking, which is inconvenient and often unused as intended.
- 10Rg.** Failure to anticipate displaced or anti social parking, allowing it to spill into streets, verges or public spaces.
- 10Rh.** Street views dominated by parked cars, garages or driveways, undermining character and walkability.
- 10Ri.** Car parking spaces that are too narrow, or driveways too short — leading to obstructed footways and unusable spaces.
- 10Rj.** Cycle parking placed further from entrances than car parking, discouraging its use and contradicting active travel priorities.
- 10Rk.** Assuming garages will be used for everyday parking, despite evidence that they are often used for storage. Garages that are too narrow to get a cycle passed a parked car.

159

If homes cannot have parking accessed from the front, be careful not to create stark courtyards or rear streets lined with back fences and parking.



160

Over reliance on tandem car parking arrangements can contribute towards anti-social and obstructive pavement parking.



161

Do not provide car parking where it is isolated and lacks natural surveillance opportunities from neighbouring homes.



162

Apartments should not be exposed directly to the headlamps and exhausts of cars. A threshold needs to be created with either hard or soft landscaping to offer residents a good quality of life.



163

Do not place garages in front of the building line or in other prominent locations.



164

Frontage car parking must be balanced with generous amounts of dense soft landscaping to help avoid car dominated environments.



11. Green and blue infrastructure

Embed landscape and water into the structure of the place. Within '[Natural Connections](#)', the key elements of green and blue infrastructure will already have been fixed through the design of streets and public spaces. Their location and scale establish the framework, and this consideration ensures the detail delivers a functional and beneficial landscape and public realm.

What's needed:

- a. Design SuDS around the core principles: Quantity, Quality, Amenity, Biodiversity. Amenity means creating places for people to enjoy, not fenced-off engineering features.
- b. Avoid steep sided basins and fenced barriers. Instead:
 - make SuDS easy to see and reach
 - Safe to play around and in
 - incorporate seating, steps
 - encourage interaction so people can understand how water is managed locally
- c. Create variety along walking routes. Vary the character of spaces along a journey. Break up long linear routes with punctuation points and subtle shifts in shape or treatment. Varied journeys feel shorter, more enjoyable and more memorable.
- d. Use imaginative planting — colour, scent, texture, screening, framed views. Landscape is just as powerful a way to create distinctive character as buildings.
- e. Provide frequent benches. Place seating throughout streets and open spaces to support rest, sociability and inclusive access.
- f. Add 'play on the way'. Include playful elements along everyday routes so children enjoy walking. Use robust, low maintenance items — hard wearing mounds, stepping stones, re-purposed trunks as climbing features. Distribute play opportunities along routes rather than concentrating everything in one place. Make larger play areas engaging too.
- g. Soak before draining. Design SuDS to hold and infiltrate rainwater naturally. Only the excess should flow to attenuation basins. Avoid placing overflow pipes at the bottom of features — doing so prevents water soaking into the soil.
- h. Keep water management above ground. Reduce hidden pipework and use shallow channels or swales so water is visible and legible. Keeping drainage above ground improves maintenance, increases transparency and creates more opportunities for nature and amenity.

Multifunctional green and blue assets provide leisure opportunities at All Saints Gardens, Barrington.

Photo credit: Barratt David Wilson.



“ Nature is central to liveability and affects people’s quality of life. Natural features are integrated into well-designed development and include natural and designed landscapes, trees, high quality public green spaces, wildlife-friendly planting and water, to enable biodiversity to thrive”

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 74)



✓ What 'green' looks like

- 11Ga.** Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain through features such as species rich grasslands and diverse planting that supports pollinators and wildlife.
- 11Gb.** Creating movement and feeding corridors for wildlife, including hedgehog highways, bird boxes, swift bricks and bat boxes.
- 11Gc.** Naming spaces by their character and function — e.g. "park", "woodland", "allotments", or "wildflower meadow" — rather than the generic "POS". Clear naming helps set expectations for use, stewardship and design quality.
- 11Gd.** Designing running routes (e.g. parkrun) on larger developments, along with other features that encourage physical activity, sociability and regular outdoor use.
- 11Ge.** Capturing and managing water close to where it falls, using rain gardens, swales, and permeable surfaces. Make water visible and legible so people can connect with it.
- 11Gf.** Creating a connected habitat network that enables daily interaction with nature. Wildlife will not thrive in disconnected back gardens, artificial lawns or heavily mown grass.
- 11Gg.** Ensuring natural surveillance, so public open spaces feel safe, and welcoming.
- 11Gh.** Providing a connected, accessible network of open spaces, with paths and routes that invite movement into, across and through the landscape.
- 11Gi.** Integrating sports and play facilities into the wider public realm.
- 11Gj.** Putting in place clear, well considered management and stewardship arrangements, whether publicly managed or privately delivered.

165

Use features such as board walks to increase the leisure value of sustainable urban drainage schemes.



166

Attenuation basins can provide multifunctional playable space.



167 Add benches so people can sit and enjoy the quality of public open spaces.

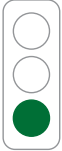


169 Enclosure, water and planting working together to manage the risk of overheating in this urban square.



168 Allow people to connect with water, using SuDS as multifunctional amenity even as here within a raised podium landscape.





171 Attenuation basins can create spectacular spaces if afforded high quality landscape.



172 Natural materials can be re-purposed to create play on the way features within the landscape.



173 Varying mowing regimes will add sensory and natural diversity.



174 Under planting trees will increase the biodiversity potential of places.





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 11Ra.** Surface water managed through large, steep sided, fenced basins — engineered holes that are unsafe, unattractive, inaccessible and cut off from everyday use.
- 11Rb.** Leftover scraps of land (usually small, grassed areas) that provide no meaningful public, private or biodiversity value and quickly become neglected.
- 11Rc.** Large expanses of impermeable surfacing, which worsen flood risk, reduce biodiversity and make spaces hotter and less pleasant.
- 11Rd.** Open spaces without clear, usable paths, preventing people from moving comfortably through them — and making it impossible to maintain distance when required (e.g., during public health restrictions).
- 11Re.** Play areas which don't relate to the character of the place, are boring and flat. Don't spend more on the fence than the play equipment within it
- 11Rf.** Buildings that turn their backs on open spaces, creating inactive edges, poor surveillance and environments that feel unsafe or unloved.
- 11Rg.** Poor-quality finish, detailing and maintenance, which quickly undermines the value of public open space and reduces community confidence in the place.

175

Do not sever the relationship between homes and green infrastructure.



176

Do not create places for water with no amenity value and are difficult and expensive to maintain.



177

It is important to work closely with the Highway Authority to ensure street trees are delivered and design details are robust.



178

Open spaces need to be well overlooked and have a clear purpose.



179

The long term management and ownership of soft landscaping needs to be carefully considered.



180

Narrow strips of soft landscaping between two hard surfaces will rarely take successfully.



181

Public open space need strong natural surveillance opportunities at ground level.



12. Back of pavement, front of home

Get thresholds right. Work through every plot and make sure the threshold between the back of the pavement and the front of the home is carefully resolved. This small zone has a major impact on how attractive, safe and welcoming a place feels. Front gardens give residents a reason to be outside and space to interact with neighbours, combating social isolation and improving liveability.

Strong, clear separation between public and private space encourages residents to personalise their frontage and offers opportunities to integrate level changes, utility boxes, cycle storage and waste bins discreetly.

What's needed:

- a. Safety and security are enhanced by clear separation between public and private spaces. Define private space with a strong vertical boundary treatment. This can include hedges and dense planting, but ground cover planting or grass won't provide enough height.
- b. Resolve level changes early. Check and design level differences between the plot and the street at the outset — don't leave this to the construction stage. Level changes can provide privacy but may also reduce natural surveillance or compromise inclusive access. Plan ramps, steps, planting and thresholds so they work for everyone.
- c. Provide meaningful outdoor space for apartments. Outdoor amenity is essential for all apartment residents. Ground floor homes should have terraces with appropriate screening. Upper floors need balconies for fresh air, relaxation and practical needs such as drying clothes.



" Access for servicing, including refuse collection, deliveries and removals should be integrated into the design of developments at an early stage. Bin stores and collection points should be designed so they are carefully located within the streetscape and are not visually obtrusive."

(Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance: 121)

12. Back of pavement, front of home



✓ What 'green' looks like

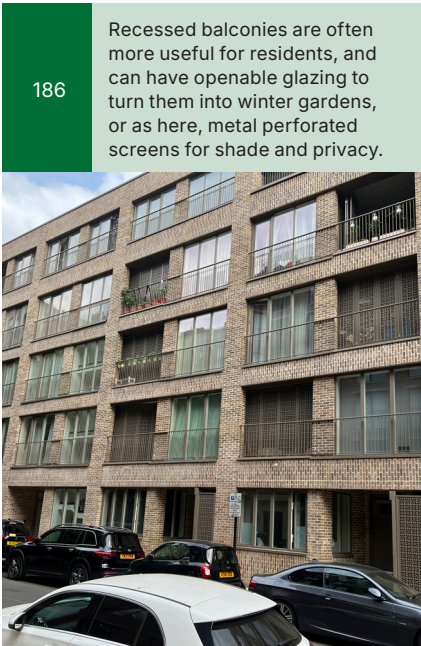
- 12Ga.** Defensible space with strong, high quality boundary treatments that enhance the street scene and clearly define private space.
- 12Gb.** Boundary treatments that add ecological value — such as hedges, mixed planting or locally characteristic materials — supporting biodiversity while reinforcing local identity.
- 12Gc.** Well integrated waste storage and utility boxes, positioned discreetly and designed as part of the frontage.
- 12Gd.** For terraces and town houses, if rear garden storage is expected, provide direct street access so bins don't migrate permanently to front doors.
- 12Ge.** Front garden spaces that foster sociability, offering small opportunities for residents to personalise their frontage and interact with neighbours.
- 12Gf.** Ground floor apartments with their own front doors and semiprivate terraces, helping to animate the street and reducing pressure on internal communal areas.
- 12Gg.** Terraces or balconies for upper floor apartments, increasing natural surveillance, adding life to the street, and giving residents direct access to fresh air.
- 12Gh.** No leftover, ambiguous spaces — every inch of land has a clear public or private function, avoiding the unmanaged gaps that undermine quality.
- 12Gi.** Apartment access via decks rather than enclosed corridors, where appropriate, enabling cross ventilation and reducing the amount of enclosed shared circulation.

182

Front gardens can create valuable sociable spaces, adding to the quality of the street and home.



Credit: Mole Architects





188

Dwarf walls and railings create a strong edge to this footpath and give residents a greater sense of privacy whilst still providing strong natural surveillance opportunities.



189

Boundary walls make an excellent job of hiding wheelie bins if they are tall enough.



190

The height of the estate railings helps to provide definition until landscaping matures.



191

The use of soft landscaping helps to soften this wall bringing more green into the street.



192

For apartment buildings of a modest scale, deck access arrangements are a cost effective way of providing access and cross ventilation. Ensure that secure access is provided from street level. A boundary wall protects the route to the front door, and provides a boundary to the parking.



193

By providing a formal treatment to the setback, residents are encouraged to personalise the thresholds to their homes.



194

Simple threshold designs can work well if they are not accompanied by utility boxes.



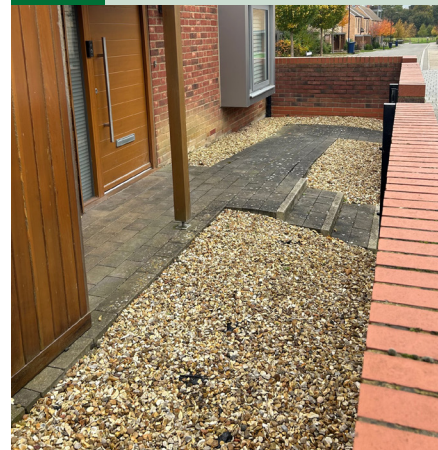
195

Town houses need a strong strategy for waste storage that is located to the front of the property.



196

Where a house type is wide enough, a ramp provided laterally can supplement steps up to the front door from the pavement edge. Each of the two routes to this front door have their own street access.



197

Boundary treatments can be a key way to reinforce local character. Also note how the meter boxes have been painted to match the facing material





✓ What 'red' looks like

- 12Ra.** Poorly considered threshold spaces between pavement and building façades, undermining the quality, safety and attractiveness of the street.
- 12Rb.** Narrow, tokenistic grass strips that are impractical to maintain and add no meaningful value to the frontage.
- 12Rc.** Ineffective waste storage solutions for terraces, where bins are meant to be kept in rear gardens but end up cluttering front doors and pavements.
- 12Rd.** Cheap, low quality detailing, such as "slab on edge" edging or concrete screed with pebbles — both of which create cluttered, unattractive thresholds.
- 12Re.** Prominent external pipes, flues and utility boxes that visually dominate façades and degrade the character of the street.
- 12Rf.** Leftover slivers of land between or beside buildings with no clear public or private purpose, often becoming neglected over time.
- 12Rg.** Poorly resolved level changes, creating awkward access, reducing surveillance, or producing unusable spaces.

198

It is important that all apartments have some form of private amenity space.



199

Changes in level need to be carefully designed to avoid unattractive solutions.



200

The lack of boundary treatments can draw the eye to poorly located utility boxes and covers.



201

Terraces and town houses without a strong waste storage strategy will degrade the quality of the street.



202

Ground floor apartments need a connection to the street by providing them with their own front doors and semi-private terraces.



203

Landscaping between car parking spaces need some vertical protection to help establish planting.



204

Pieces of land to the sides of buildings without any clear public or private function or defined ownership.



205

Don't turf land up against the edge of the street. Small bits of turf are also impractical to maintain.



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