

RAVENSBURY

Urban Design Review

Sue McGlynn Urban Design Ltd

This document was produced by Sue McGlynn Urban Design Ltd for Circle Housing Merton
Priority. Released March 2015. All graphics and images produced by Clare Baker and Garry
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About the project

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Background

In 2010 the London Borough of Merton transferred all of its housing stock to Circle Housing Merton Priory following a successful ballot of tenants. Some 9,500 former council homes were transferred, including the Ravensbury estate.

The Transfer Agreement included a requirement that Circle Housing Merton Priory bring all the transferred homes up the Merton Standard, effectively 'Decent Homes Standard' improvements plus some locally agreed enhancements. The Agreement required that all these works be completed by December 2015.

The Merton Standard works are well advanced across Merton, with over two thirds of the improvement works completed. However in

preparing the plans for the delivery of the works to the outstanding homes, Circle Housing Merton Priory have come to doubt the value for money case of investing in what are, in some instances, homes and neighbourhoods of a very poor standard. As a result Circle Housing Merton Priory is currently exploring regeneration-based alternatives for three specific estates, including the 192 home Ravensbury estate.

Circle Housing Merton Priory see two main options:

1. The continuation of the Merton Standard works as originally planned
2. The regeneration of Ravensbury including the demolition of some homes and improvement of others to provide a total of 396 homes.

About the study area

The Ravensbury Estate is located between Mitcham and Morden, towards the south east of the London Borough of Merton. The area has a predominantly suburban and residential character, typically with 1,2 and 3 storey houses, mainly of the inter-war and post-war period. The nearest district centre to the estate is Morden, just over 1 kilometre to the west - about a 15 minute walk. A small parade of shops is located on Morden Road, opposite the estate.

Morden Road runs along the northern and western boundaries of the estate and The

River Wandle forms the southern boundary. The river valley creates a sequence of major green spaces that surround Ravensbury on three sides: Morden Hall Park, Ravensbury Park and Watermeads Nature Reserve. Mitcham Common and Golf Course lie about 1.5km further east. These extensive green spaces and the mature trees of the historic park of Morden Hall give Ravensbury an attractive setting and feels very much to be at the 'soft edge' of London. The only visible built-up edge to the site is at the north-eastern corner where there is a small estate of business units and to the north Deer Park Gardens.



Above: Merton in the wider London context: Map showing the location of Merton and Ravensbury in relation to the city.



Right: Site context map.
Source: HTA Design LLP

Testing the case for regeneration

As part of their regeneration plans for Ravensbury, Circle Housing Merton Priory is continuing to build up a 'layered' approach to the evidential case, including assessment of building condition and viability of regeneration options.

Another layer in the evidential case will be to examine the quality of the built environment within Ravensbury, with particular reference to

permeability and access; usable private and communal open space; densities; adjacencies and overlooking of spaces. This will require a comprehensive and impartial review of the existing Ravensbury estate from an urban design perspective.

In January 2015 Circle Housing Merton Priory commissioned Sue McGlynn Urban Design Ltd to carry out the review.



Above: View of Ravensbury Estate
Image: Google Earth.

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BOROUGH OF MITCHAM
CYCLING ON
FOOTPATHS
PROHIBITED
BY ORDER
R. H. WHITE
TOWN CLERK

About the Review

Process | Methods

Process

This study sets out to evaluate Ravensbury against the established principles of good design and does not attempt to make aesthetic or value judgements on the architectural style of Ravensbury. Instead it concentrates on the physical, spatial and environmental aspects of the design and the quality of the neighbourhood that results.

The National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance on Design endorse the principles set out in a number of previous documents, such as the *Urban Design Compendium*, *Safer Places: The planning system and crime prevention, Manual for Streets 1&2*, *The Mayor's London Plan (chapter 7)*, and older documents such as *By Design*. A comprehensive commentary on better design can be found in Circle Housing's own publication *Design Guide for Development Use*.

The National Planning Policy Framework (para.58) defines well-designed places as places that:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
- optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

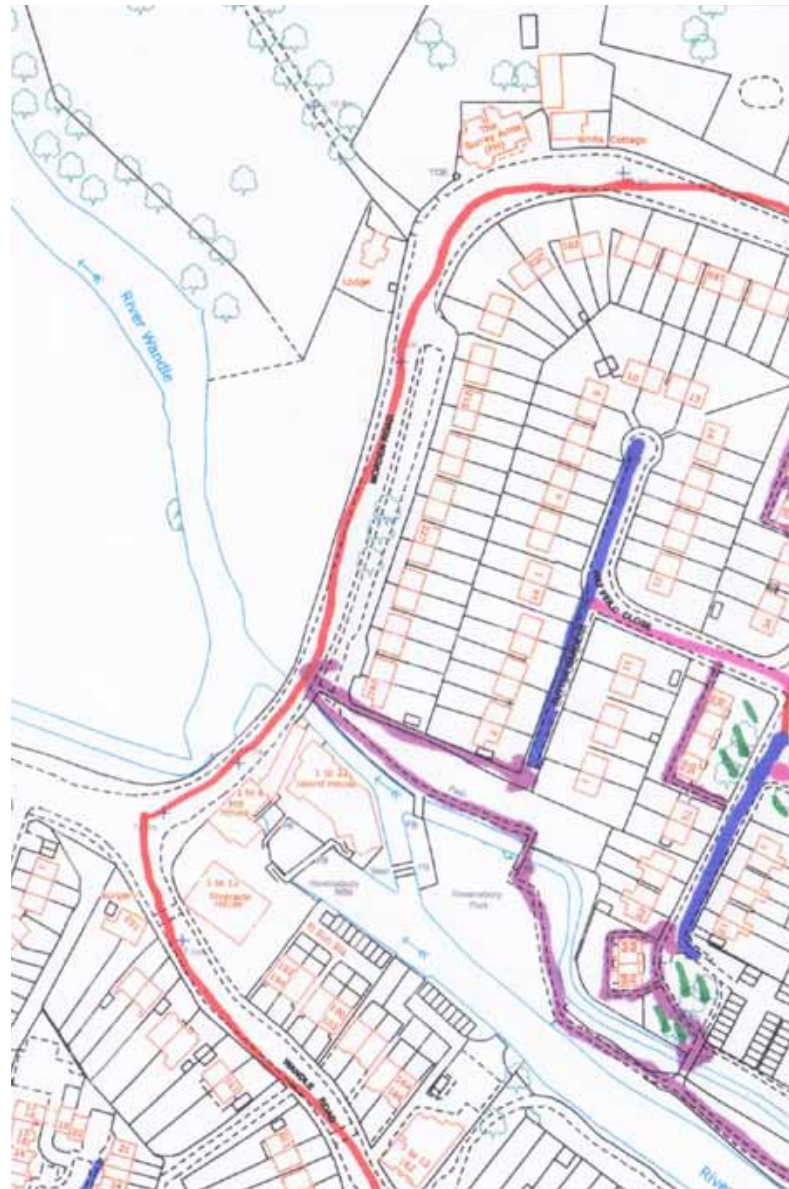
Methods

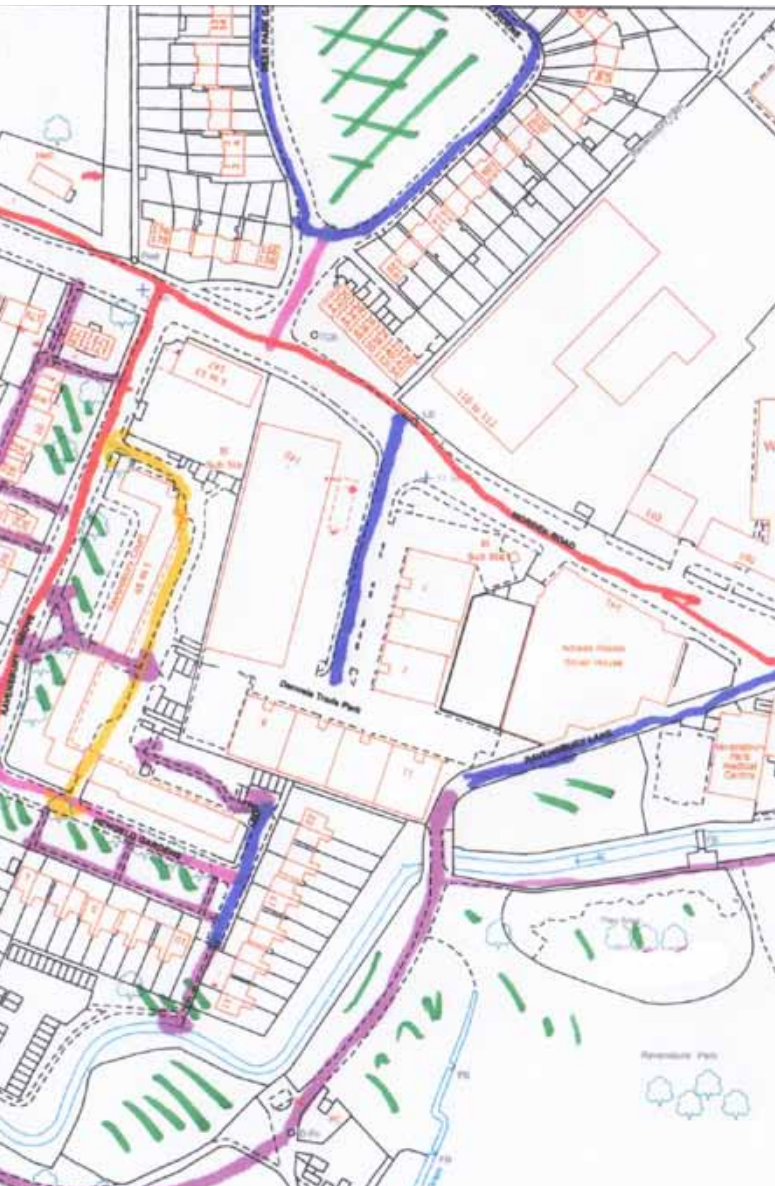
The review involved an assessment of the elements of the built environment of Ravensbury identified in Circle Housing Merton Priory's brief. These are:

- Urban structure and access
- Building layout and alignment in relation to routes
- Façades and their interfaces with public spaces
- Height and massing
- Density and mix
- Building, landscape and public realm quality

A number of key measures were used to evaluate these elements and their performance in relation to current best practice urban design principles and policy:

- Relative integration of the estate with its surrounding area, using techniques developed by Space Syntax Ltd;
- Building position relative to routes to reveal the degree of definition of public and private spaces, using 'figure ground' analysis;
- The extent to which buildings provide active frontage to all public routes for safety, surveillance and sociability, by mapping 'active', 'passive' and 'dead' frontage;
- Photographic survey of buildings, landscape, streetscape and open space quality.





In addition, simple mapping and recording of other characteristics of the estate were compiled with a combination of on-site observation and use of secondary sources where data already exists. These are credited in the report where used.

The commission took place over 4 weeks in late January and February 2015. The surveys were carried out during weekdays and during working hours so no assessment has been made of the night-time experience of Ravensbury, such as lighting levels or parking.

The report is in three sections dealing with the main themes of analysis:

1. Urban structure
2. Layout
3. Quality of the external environment

Each section of the report provides an explanation of the methods used, an account of the analysis, followed by conclusions and key findings.

At the end of the report, the overall performance of Ravensbury is summarized against the Building for Life 12 criteria, the Government and industry endorsed assessment method for residential development.



Review themes

Urban structure | Layout | Quality of the external environment

Urban structure

Urban structure is an important spatial measure of social inclusion or exclusion and therefore a significant factor in deciding whether to refurbish or regenerate Ravensbury.

This section evaluates two aspects of Ravensbury's urban structure, integration and connectivity. Each aspect is considered at two scales – the wider context within which Ravensbury is set and the immediate surroundings of the estate.

Integration: Assessing the 'depth' of Ravensbury relative to the wider area of south-west London and to its locality. This is an important measure of the extent to which residents have access to public transport and all the other opportunities that living in a capital city offer. Accessibility at this scale is often a significant indicator of life chances and residential value.

Connectivity: Assessing the relative interconnectedness of routes around and within the estate. This type of analysis reveals the nature of pedestrian access and the ease, convenience and safety of moving around the immediate neighbourhood. Accessibility at this scale is often a significant indicator of legibility and perceived safety of routes in the locality.



Above: A fully connected 'deformed grid' in the Merton district.



Above: A 'Radburn' layout in Grove Hill, Hemel Hempstead, with segregated routes and a confused building arrangement.

Space Syntax

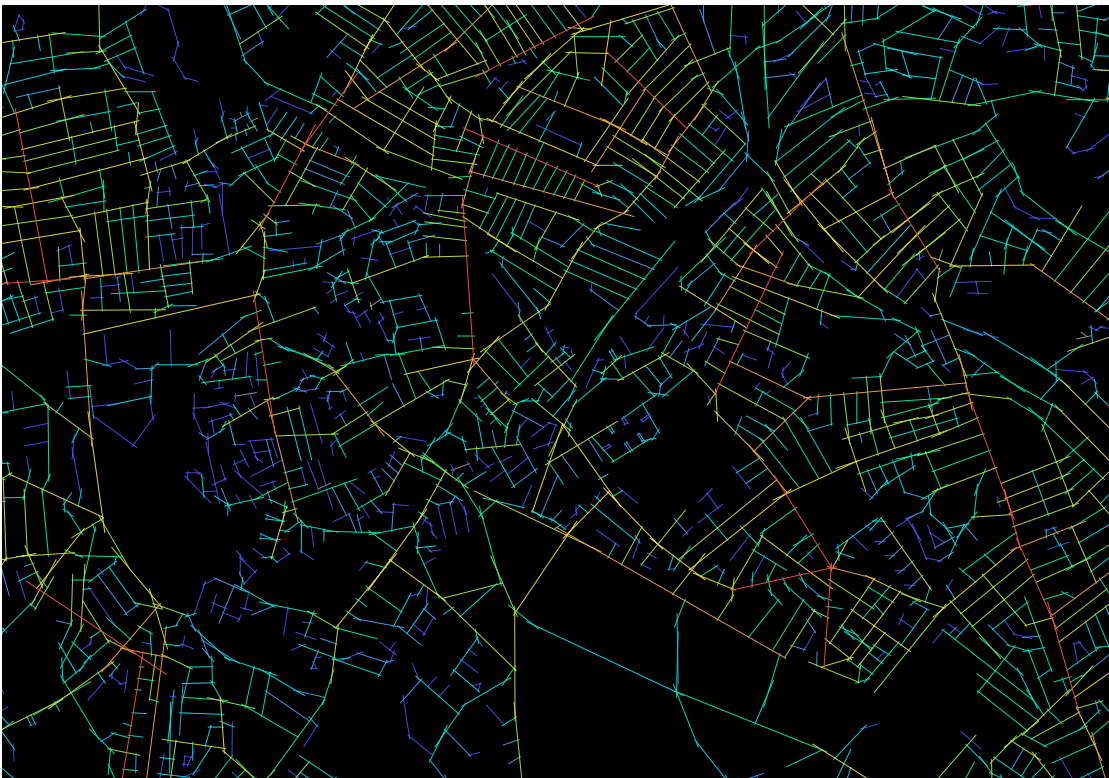
We have used Space Syntax theory and its techniques of analysis to measure Ravensbury's level of integration and connectivity. The study area for the analysis was defined by bounding features such as railways, rivers, major routes and open spaces and encompasses most of the district of Merton.

Research since the 1970s by Bill Hillier and his colleagues at The Space Syntax Laboratory, University College London has led to a fundamental understanding of the relationship between spatial design and the use of space, the emergence of land uses and longer-term social outcomes.

Analysis of connected street systems reveals a structure of a few long straight lines that form the main settlement-wide movement routes.

The remainder, the more numerous and shorter lines, represent the more local movement system. These are the quieter streets that carry less movement but are still connected to the wider movement network.

In the hierarchical movement systems introduced from the 1950s onwards, the pattern of development is very different, with pedestrians frequently segregated from vehicular movement at the local level. The very ends of the movement system are the culs-de-sac so familiar from the 1960s onwards in both public and private sector housing development. This has frequently resulted in pedestrian paths that are routed along the backs of property with little or no surveillance, that are less direct and legible and have a very low quality of walking experience.



The wider Merton context in 'axial line' form, showing routes open to all modes of transport and coloured for integration.

Recent design guidance has recognized that we need streets that are designed for all modes of movement to be integrated within the same space; streets that are convenient for vehicular movement but are also safe, convenient and attractive for walking and cycling at a local scale (Manual for Streets 1 and 2, Building for Life 12).

Hillier et al's Space Syntax approach uses a number of geometric measures to represent the relative connectivity of the 'segments' of public space, defined by drawing lines, called 'axial lines', through the system being analysed.

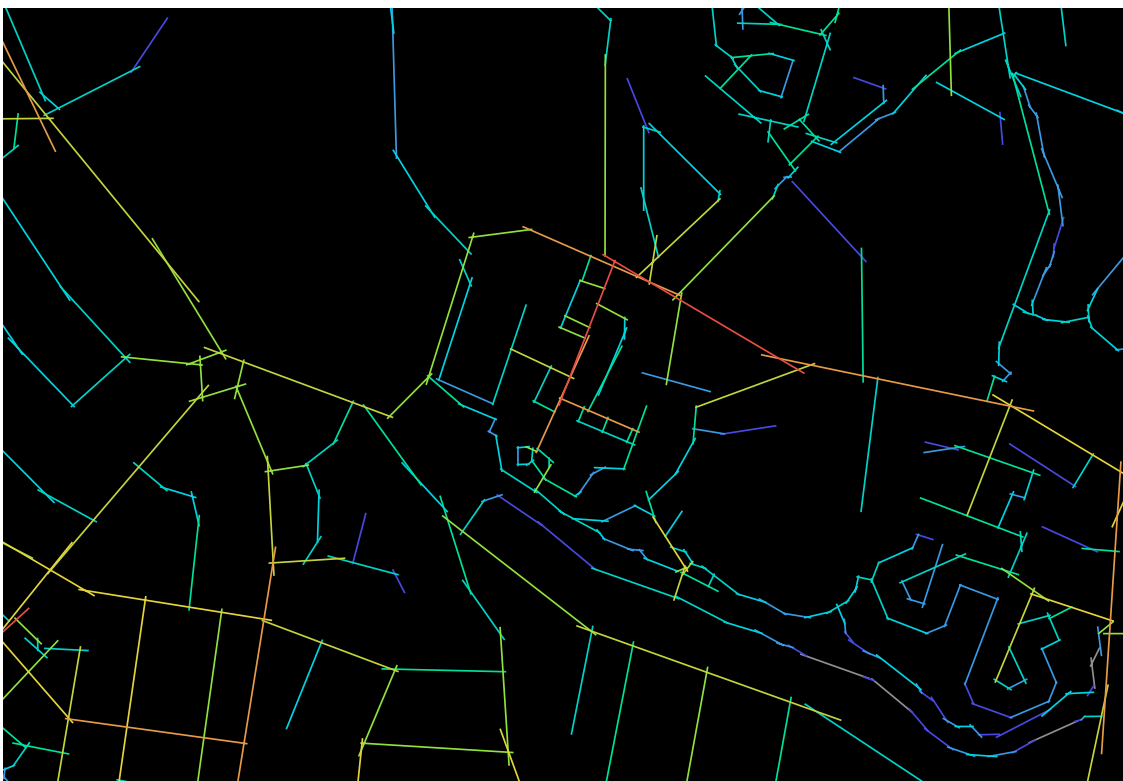
These studies show that the movement intensity along any line segment – that is, any length of line with an unobstructed view from one end to the other – depends on the segment's pattern

of connections to all the other segments in a given area around it.

Segment length depends on the bendiness of the corridor with the longest segments tending naturally to pick up the largest number of connections.

The most intensive movement will flow along these straightest, most-connected segments (in hotter colours in the diagram), while the shortest, least-connected segments will be quietest; as shown by the cooler colours.

The geometry of a layout has a pronounced effect on actual and perceived connectivity and legibility as well as actual and perceived levels of safety.



Ravensbury in axial line form for pedestrian-accessible routes, analysed for integration.

Wider context: accessibility








Accessibility is well- documented in transport and planning policy documents and Ravensbury falls within an area with a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 2, defined as 'poor' by The London Plan. This rating reflects the peripheral location of Morden and Mitcham within the Greater London area.

The PTAL score is used as an initial basis for determining housing density and parking ratios as defined in the London Plan and so has implications should the decision to regenerate Ravensbury be taken. Generally, the higher the score, the higher the housing density with significantly reduced car parking levels. In lower PTAL areas, such as at Ravensbury, dense flatted development is unlikely to be acceptable and parking levels need to reflect the relevant London Plan or local authority standards compatible with the likely car ownership levels.

Ravensbury has a reasonable range of public transport options within a 15 minute walking radius. The underground station at Morden is a 15 minute walk but the Belgrave Walk tram stop is only a 5 -minute walk, accessed via Ravensbury Path. Two other tram stations, Phipps Bridge and Merton, also fall within the 10 and 15 minute radii and the estate is also relatively well-served by bus services on the London and Morden Roads.

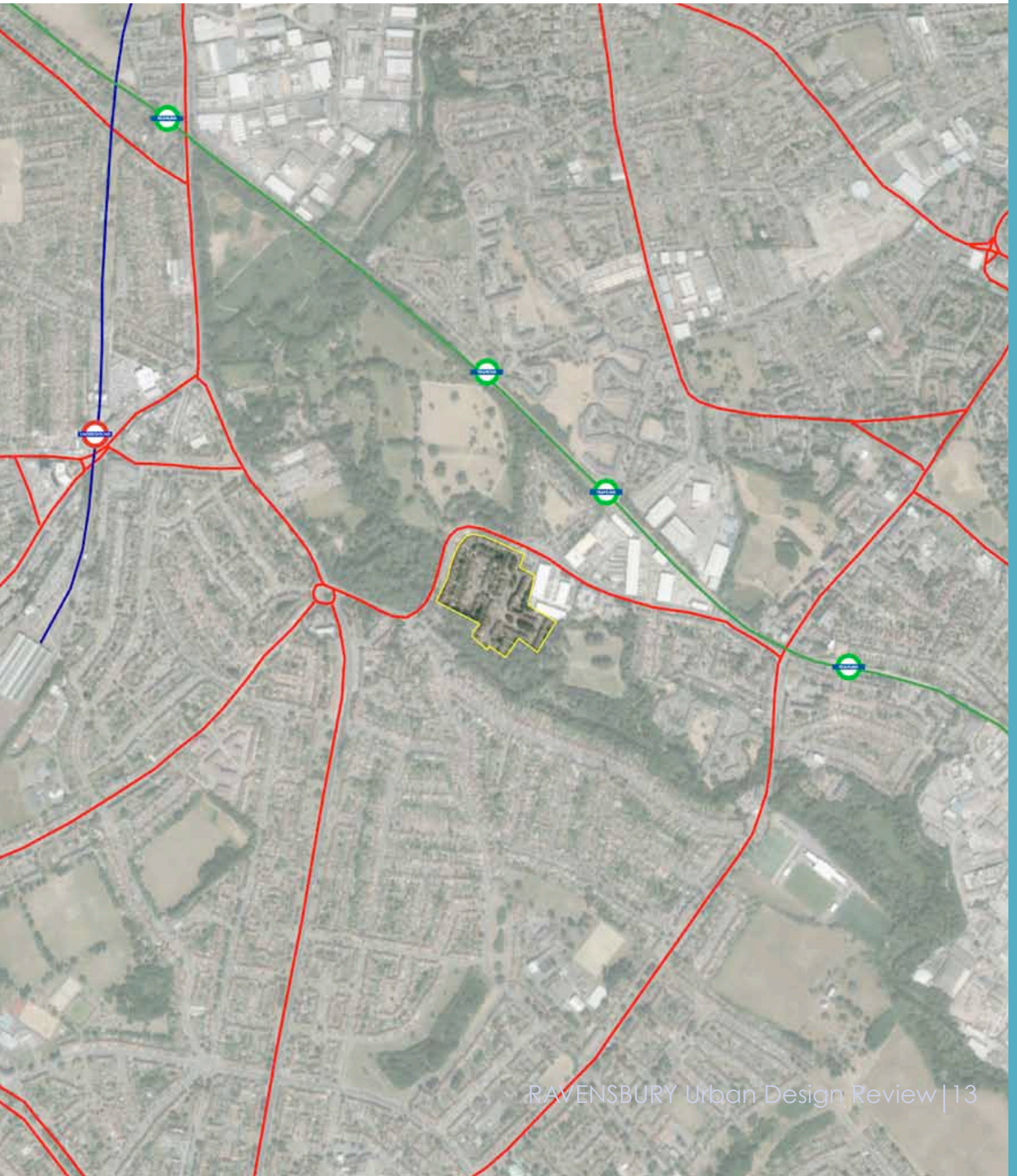
A summary diagram of accessibility is included [here](#).

Key:

-  National rail
-  Tram stop
-  Underground station
-  Underground rail line
-  Overground railway line
-  Strategic route
-  Tram line

Right: Major access and movement infrastructure for Ravensbury and surroundings.





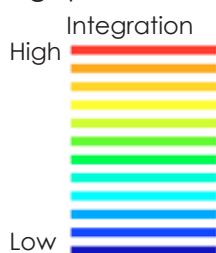
Wider context: Integration analysis R8

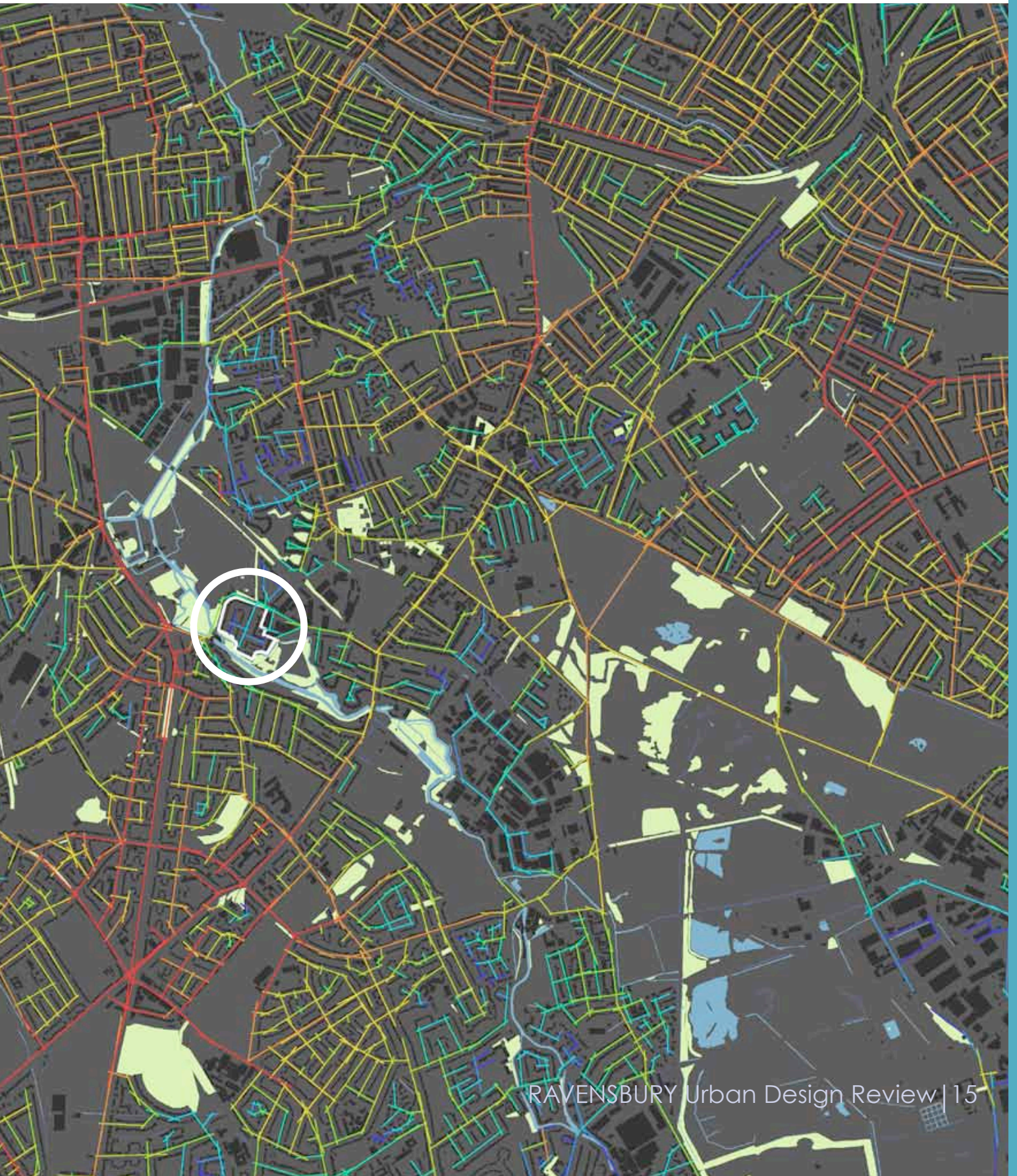
Using the Space Syntax 'Depthmap' software, here we perform graph analysis on an 'axial map' of the study area of wider Merton. The axial lines are drawn through routes available for use by all movement modes but exclude routes accessible only to pedestrians and cyclists.

Integration is a measure of the average depth of a space to all other spaces in the system. The spaces of a system can be ranked from the most integrated to the most segregated. The software applies a relative colour scheme to help show a route's level of integration, with the most integrated routes appearing in warm colours (red, orange yellow) and the most segregated routes showing in cooler colours (greens, blues, purples). As such, integration analysis is a measure of 'depth' in the system.

As Ravensbury is embedded within a large city it cannot be analysed as a closed system. 'R8' is used here to help routes near the edge of the area modelled from showing as overly 'cool' when in effect they are just located at the edge of the study area.

As the diagram shows, Ravensbury is in a relatively isolated location within the Borough and is consequently 'deep' from the most integrated routes that provide access to the wider area of south London and beyond. Movement is disrupted in this part of the Borough by the river valley and its flood plain and the canals, railways and commons lying within it. These green wedges can be traced following the course of the Wandle and other tributaries of the River Thames and is very visible in the space syntax diagram as a 'gap' in the street grid of south London.



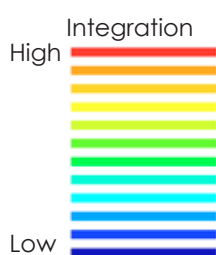


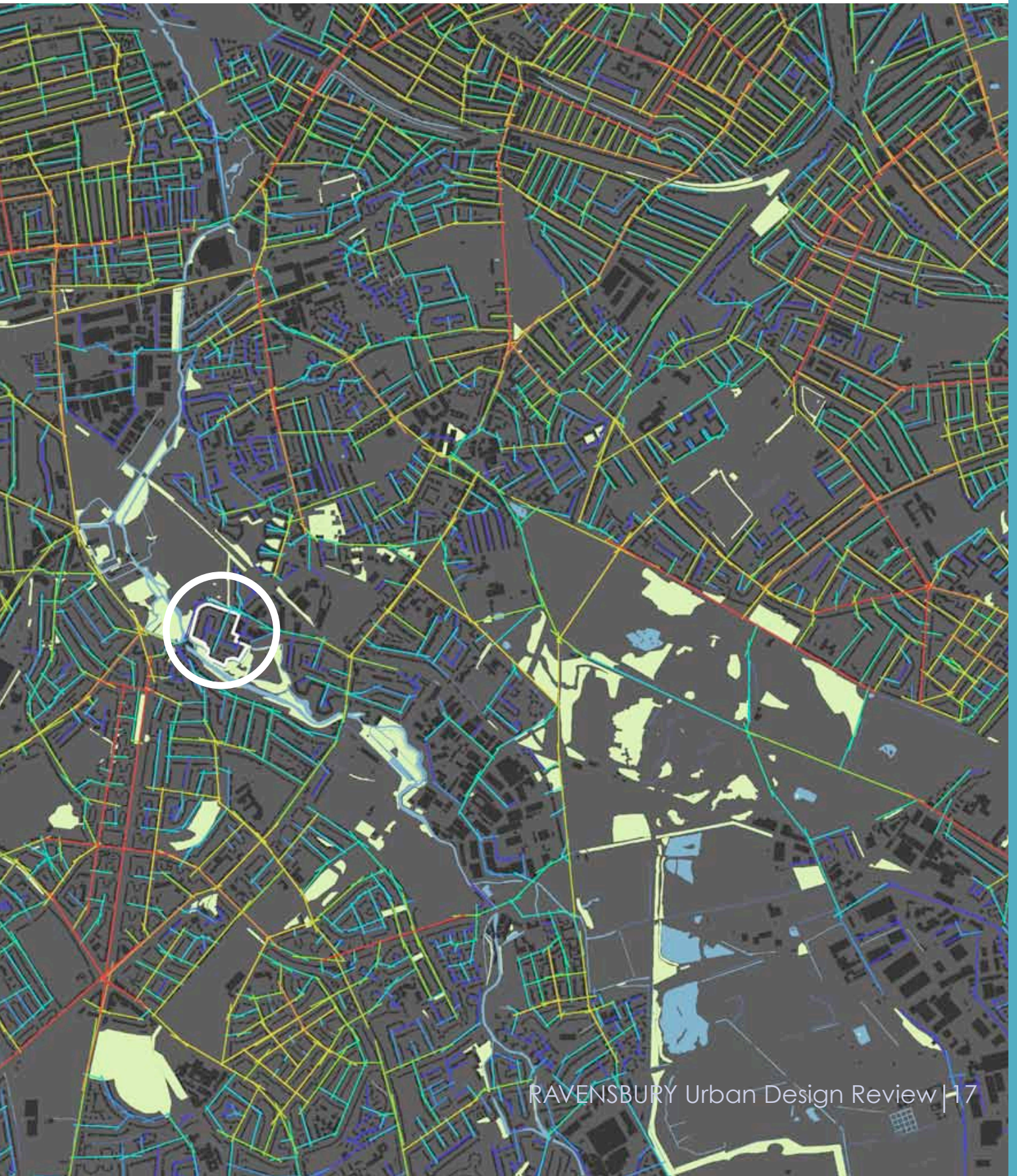
Wider context: Integration analysis R3

As before, integration analysis is useful as a measure of 'depth' in the system. Here we change the analysis to R3 as this is an important consideration for assessing the walkability of a movement system. Radius 3 has been shown to be a 'tipping point' for modal choice; areas deeper than R3 within a system show a marked shift towards motorised travel, likely because routes become unnecessarily indirect and complicated.

As the diagram shows, virtually the whole area south of Mitcham and Morden is relatively 'cool' indicating that many journeys will require three -step changes of direction (R3) or more. This is a strong indication that the car will increasingly be the mode of choice, even for short journeys. In these circumstances, not only will car ownership likely to increase but also car use.

The estate is adjacent to the Morden Road which has an important movement function in the study area. Movement is intensified along Morden Road owing to this disruption of the movement grid and the lack of alternative routes. As a location, Ravensbury benefits from its proximity to and direct connection with Morden Road as it provides the link between the main radial routes of Mitcham and Morden.



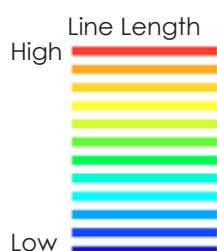


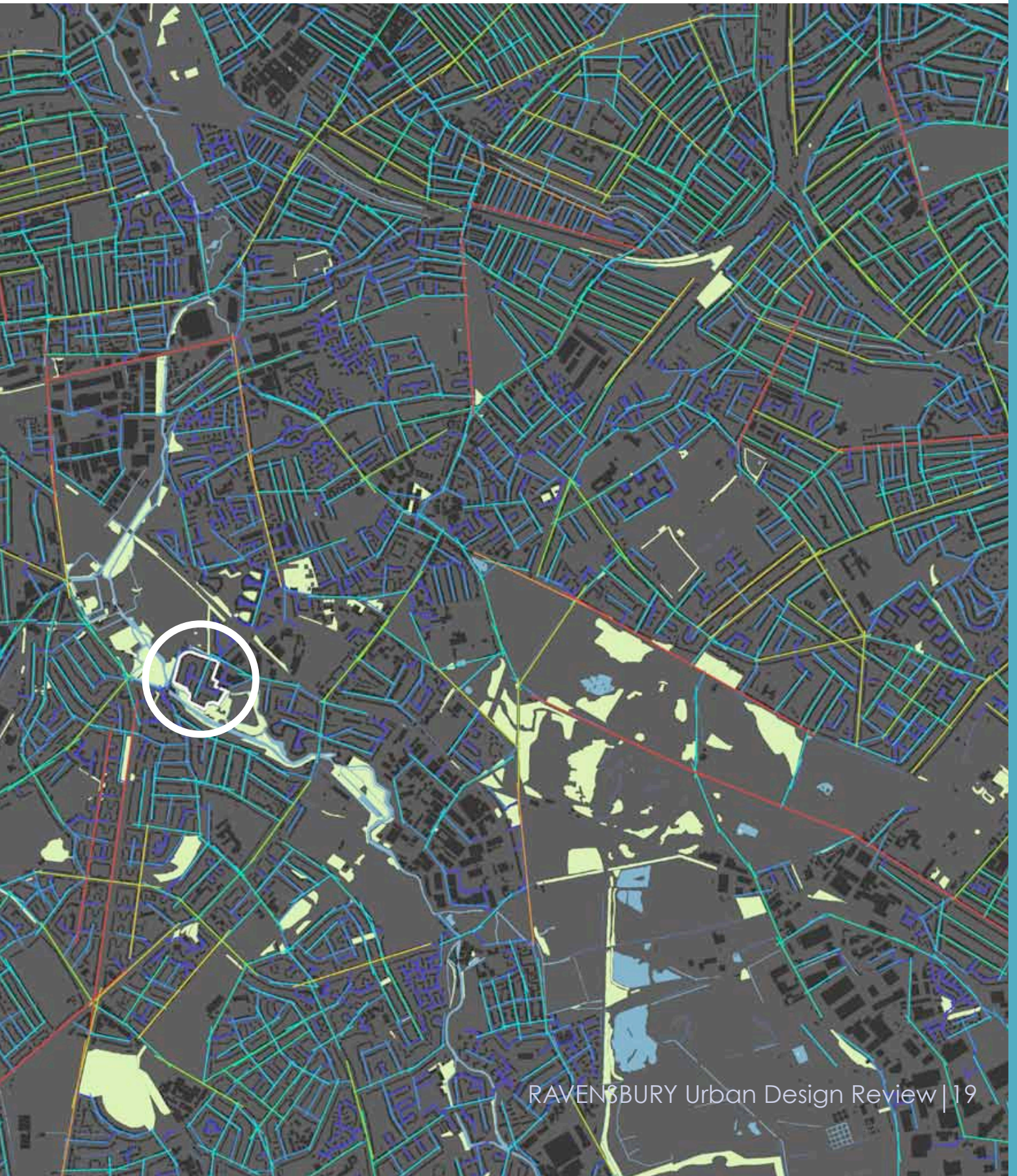
Wider context: line length across the study area

Line lengths can be used as a proxy for intelligibility. Longer sight lines allow you to see further ahead on your journey, identify possible junctions and route options and assess alternatives in terms of direction and convenience. This is an important feature of movement networks as it allows us to move confidently even in unfamiliar places as we are able to judge which routes are part of the overall movement system and which give access only to more local areas. By contrast, short lines with frequent changes of direction mean it is difficult to understand at ground level how one route relates to another and whether the route you are on will take you in the right direction.

Again, the colour system in the diagram denotes line length, with warm colours representing the longest lines in the study area and blue and dark blue the shortest. The analysis, as shown by the diagram, reveals a very high number of 'cool' lines in the whole study area. This is in part caused by the widespread truncation of routes where they meet rivers, railway lines and extensive areas of green space.

In addition, the space syntax analysis confirms observation on the ground, or by Google Street view, that the relatively small number of longer, warmer-coloured lines identify historic routes or those dating from the 19th and early- to mid-20th century periods of suburban development.





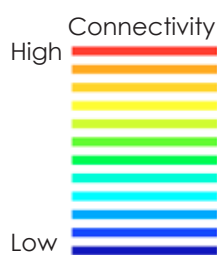
Local context: Integration Analysis (R3)

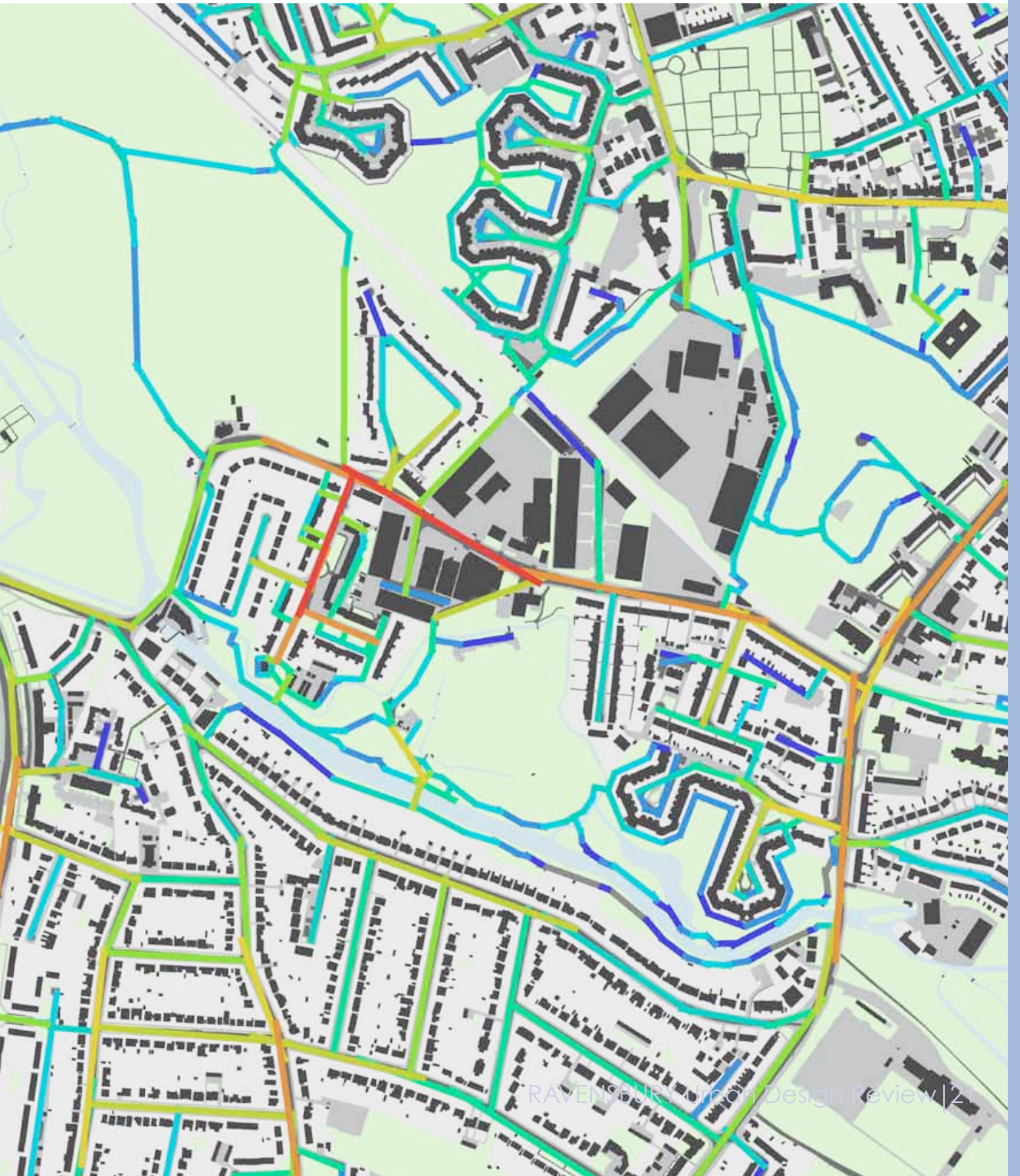
The analysis of the wider context has shown that Ravensbury is located in a relatively isolated part of the Borough. Moving to the site in more detail, we can see that low levels of integration are apparent here too. Ravensbury is defined and bounded by the River Wandle, parks, open spaces and the railway line to the north. This means that the estate cannot be anything other than a segregated enclave, almost regardless of the design of the layout.

On the one hand this creates a quiet residential environment but on the other hand restricts movement options for residents and is likely to encourage more trips to be taken by car.

Being a cul-de-sac, the current layout of the estate re-inforces this 'natural' separation but it remains very 'shallow' in terms of walkability to both the urban facilities on Morden Road and the leisure and play facilities afforded by the riverside and other green spaces. This perhaps explains why residents value this seclusion so highly – they have the benefit of a quiet and secluded neighbourhood combined with direct and convenient connections to local facilities, services and recreation spaces.

The challenge for every new development in the Borough is to make small but potentially significant improvements in integration, particularly when situated in an already relatively isolated location such as Ravensbury. However, opportunities to achieve this at Ravensbury are limited by the enclave nature of the site.





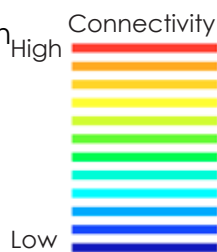
Local context: Connectivity analysis

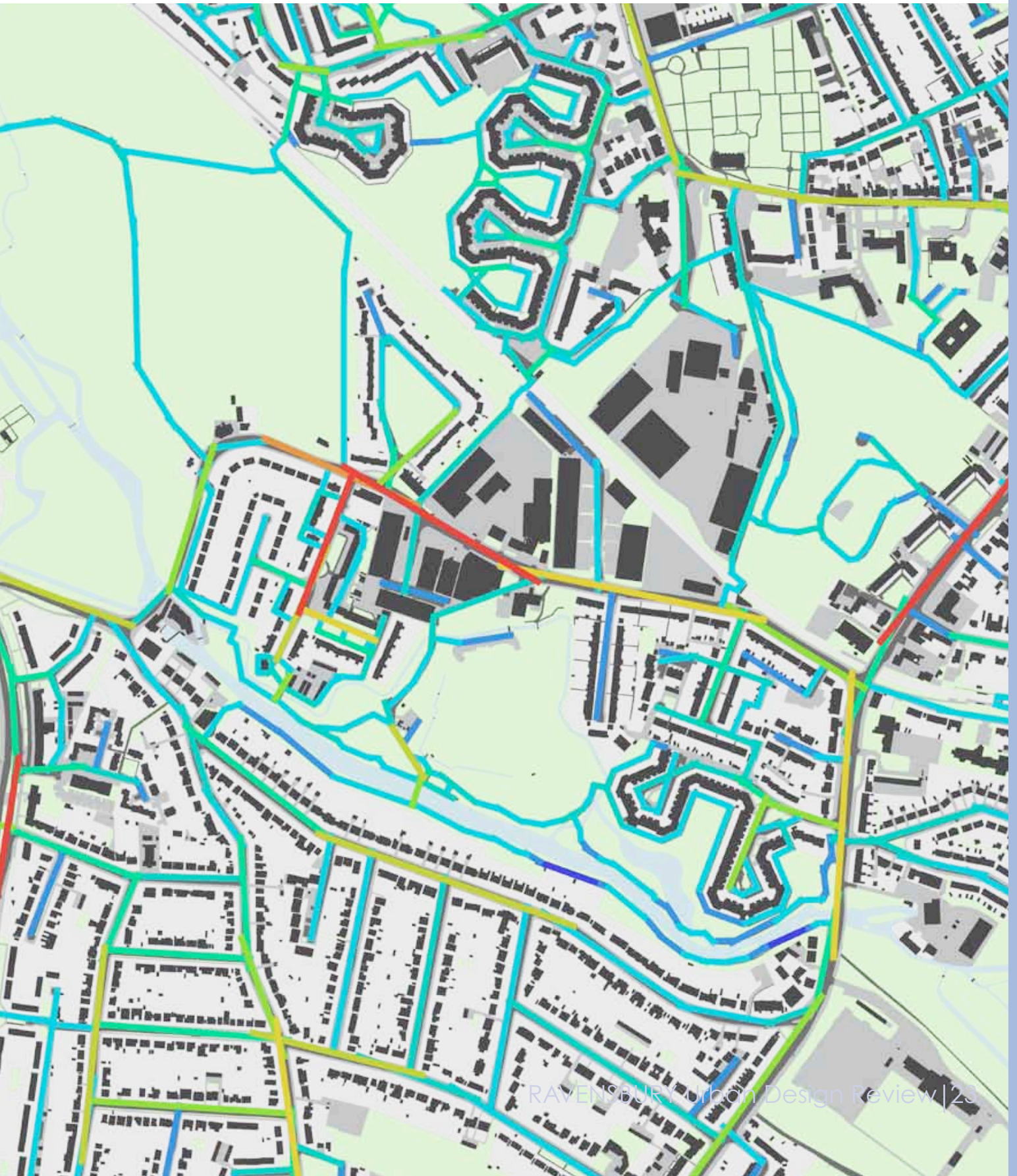
Connectivity can be used as a proxy for the intelligibility of a layout. The ability to understand how the route you are on is connected to other routes has been shown to be a key factor in developing a 'picture' of an overall system. Poorly connected routes give little information about an overall structure and make navigation more difficult, whereas highly visible, connected routes allow users to gather a great deal of information about the place they are in and whether they can move through it easily and without backtracking. Put simply, connectivity is a measure of the number of times a line in the model is connected onto other lines. In this type of analysis, axial lines are drawn for all connections including footpaths and cycle paths.

The analysis shows that the section of Morden Road adjacent to the estate is 'hot'. This is because many vehicular, pedestrian and cycle connections converge on this section of the road. This explains the location of the small parade of shops as it is here that local movement is intensified.

However, it should be noted that this is a quantitative assessment of connection not a qualitative one. Many of the connections shown may not be easy or pleasant to use in all weathers or times of the day.

The other point to note is that within Ravensbury the vehicular routes are relatively 'warm' by comparison with the pedestrian and cycle routes, which show as 'blue' in the analysis. Although the estate is very shallow to the green spaces of the riverside and parks the connections between the two are not as legible. The regeneration of the estate could provide the opportunity to improve this situation, by making better connections between the estate and the nearby 'green' routes and play spaces.





Urban structure summary

The various scales of the Space Syntax analysis show that this part of the Borough is relatively isolated. The combination of the peripheral location of the site within south London and the natural and other boundaries that surround Ravensbury make it an enclave. The overall isolation of the estate cannot be significantly improved. However, the seclusion and absence of through traffic is valued highly by residents and adds to the attraction of the location as a residential environment.

1. Ravensbury is located in a peripheral location of the Greater London area and this is reflected in its PTAL classification of 'poor' (2). However, the estate does have a reasonable range of public transport options within a 15 -minute walking isochrone.
2. A number of natural and other barriers create very strong edges around the estate and restrict movement and access locally and to the surrounding area. This is likely to encourage both higher car ownership and higher car use.
3. As a location, Ravensbury benefits from its proximity to and direct connection with Morden Road which has an important movement function in the local area. Movement is intensified along Morden Road owing to the distortion of the street grid by extensive areas of green infrastructure and the lack of alternative routes.
4. Ravensbury is very 'shallow' in terms of walkability to both the urban facilities on Morden Road and the leisure and play facilities afforded by the riverside and other green spaces. This perhaps explains why residents value this seclusion so highly: they have the benefit of a quiet and secluded neighbourhood combined with direct and convenient connections to local facilities, services and recreation spaces.
5. It is important not to make the estate over- permeable as this will undermine seclusion for residents and disperse movement and activity without any real gains in wider connectivity.
6. The regeneration of the estate could provide the opportunity to make better pedestrian connections between the 'everyday' routes within the estate and the nearby 'green' routes, play spaces and other footpath and cycling routes.

Layout

The previous section analysed various aspects of the movement network in both the wider area and locality of Ravensbury. This section evaluates the layout of buildings on the estate and the way that they are oriented to streets, pedestrian routes and open spaces.

The purpose of the analysis is to assess whether the building layout and facades provide the required level of surveillance and activity to animate the streets and communal open spaces as well as ensuring the privacy and security of gardens.

Two aspects are considered:

- Building layout
- Building interfaces

Building layout

The following sequence of 'figure ground' diagrams illustrates the ways in which buildings define both public and private spaces. They compare the pattern seen in Ravensbury with that of the surrounding area.

A 'figure ground' plan highlights either the 'figure', ie the enclosed space of buildings or the 'ground', ie the 'unbuilt' open space in either public or private ownership.

The first 'figure ground' plan maps only the buildings in black. The street network is clearly visible and well-defined on the Ravensbury estate, as it is in the majority of the surrounding residential areas. This is because there is a strong and consistent correlation between building alignment and the line of the street. This can be seen at the external perimeter of the estate where the building line follows the curved edge to Morden Road as well as the internal perimeter where buildings follow the simple rectilinear street layout.

Right: A 'figure ground' diagram of the wider Merton area, with Ravensbury estate outlined in yellow. Note the uniformity of the both Ravensbury and the housing to the south of the river built in a similar period.





The second figure ground plan maps only the open space in black ie the 'unbuilt' space. In the residential areas immediately around the estate most of this is either the public space of the street or is enclosed as private front and rear gardens. At Ravensbury and Deer Park Gardens the distribution of open space shows a different pattern, with significant areas being given over to communal spaces at the front of buildings as well as the private space of rear and front gardens. However, there are few ambiguous spaces within Ravensbury and buildings are used to make very clear distinctions between the communal spaces of the estate and the private spaces of the home.

Right: Unbuilt space is revealed in this reverse of the normal 'figure ground' diagram and shows how the buildings define public space and enclose private space.





Building interfaces: Active frontages

One of the most important features of 'perimeter block development' is that building fronts and entrances should be oriented to face the street. This sets up the mutually re-inforcing relationship of active and well-surveilled public spaces at the front of dwellings and private spaces away from public view at the rear. The importance of this relationship for creating safe, lively and sociable places is recognized in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning policy Guidance on Design.

The logical extension of this is that all streets and pedestrian routes should be lined by the front of buildings rather than their sides and backs. The following sequence of diagrams adds a further layer to the analysis by indicating the position of building entrances and mapping the 'transparency' of building facades at ground floor level where they are adjacent to publicly-accessible space.

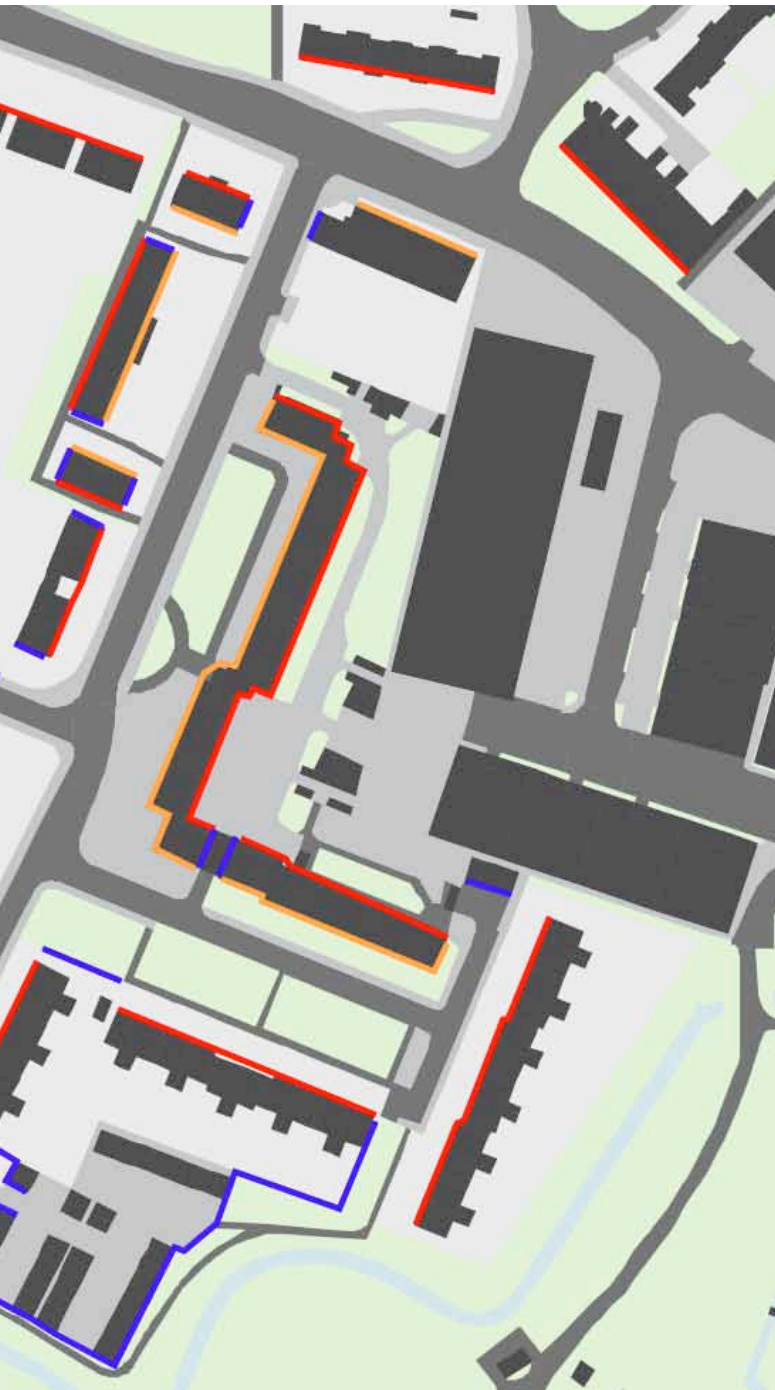
Building facades have been mapped according to the following classifications:

- Active frontage is defined as facades that having both doors and windows of inhabited rooms (ie not bathrooms, storerooms, lobbies or garages) at regular intervals along the street or route to provide surveillance as well as contact and movement between inside and out.
- Passive frontage is defined as facades with only windows of inhabited rooms but no doorways, providing surveillance but no contact between public and private space.
- Dead frontage is where the edge to the public space or route is a blank wall or wall that is effectively blank, for instance rows of garage doors or where windows are obscured.



Key:

- Active
- Passive
- Dead



1. Ravensbury Court: 'Passive frontage' but good surveillance to the street and communal space.
2. Ravensbury Grove flats, again showing 'passive frontage' but with good surveillance.
3. 'Active frontages' of Ravensbury Court face the internal space rather than the public space.
4. Semi-detached 'Orlit' houses with 'active frontage' in Hatfield Close.

Building interfaces: Doors and building entrances

As the diagrams illustrate, the analysis at Ravensbury shows two different responses. This may indicate that it was planned and designed at a period when theories of residential layout and movement were in transition.

The houses all face the streets in a consistent manner, providing continuous active frontage with doors and windows. Private amenity space is provided away from public view at the rear of properties. However, the entrances to maisonettes and flats are all switched to the 'rear' of the buildings, minimizing contact and activity with the streets. The archways in Ravensbury Court provide pedestrian access from the street fronts to the dwelling entrances at the rear.

The maisonette typology does at least ensure continuous passive frontage. Living rooms rather than bedrooms are adjacent to the ground floor street edges and communal spaces. However, maisonettes have no external amenity space and the ground floor units do not have independent entrances from the street. The 2-storey flats have access only to a small terrace or balcony but this does overlook the street without having direct access from it.

There is very little dead frontage to the main routes of the estate. The exception to this pattern is the edges of the garage courts and the pedestrian paths that have no frontage at all. This issue could be addressed and rectified by regeneration of the estate.

In summary, most building facades contribute positively to the surveillance, liveliness and activity of streets and communal spaces.



Key:

- Flat entrance/exit
- Double doorway
- Single doorway



1. Rear access to flats on Ravensbury Grove. All gates to flats were open at the time of visit.
2. Ground floor entrances for the maisonettes inside Ravensbury Court.
3. Entry to the upper floor maisonettes in Ravensbury Court.
4. Terraced houses with shared access to rear gardens.

Layout summary

1. The figure ground plans show that Ravensbury adopts a similar 'perimeter block' pattern of development to surrounding residential areas.
2. There is a strong and consistent correlation between building alignment and the line of the street. This can be seen at the external perimeter of the estate where the building line follows the curved edge to Morden Road as well as the internal perimeter where buildings follow the simple rectilinear street layout.
3. There are few ambiguous spaces within Ravensbury and buildings are used to make very clear distinctions between the communal spaces of the estate and the private spaces of the home.
4. Most building facades contribute positively to the surveillance, liveliness and activity of streets and communal spaces. Houses all face the streets in a consistent manner, providing continuous active frontage with doors and windows. However, the entrances to maisonettes and flats are all switched to the 'rear', reducing contact and activity between buildings and streets.
5. There is very little dead frontage to the main routes of the estate. The spaces with the least intervisibility and surveillance are the garage courts and the pedestrian paths. This issue could be remedied during the regeneration of the estate.

Quality of the external environment

This final theme of the review assesses the quality of the external environment of the estate. It reviews Ravensbury from an urban design point of view and concentrates on the physical, spatial and environmental aspects of the estate's design.

It does not include stock condition of buildings or a detailed analysis of dwelling types as this is provided in other baseline studies.

The elements reviewed are:

Buildings

- Building character, types and massing
- Density and mix

Public realm

- Streetscape
- Landscape
- Open spaces

This part of the review primarily uses photos to identify characteristic types of buildings and spaces and highlights key issues of quality and use.

Building character, density and mix

The majority of the area surrounding Ravensbury is characterized by post-war suburban housing, typically detached, semi-detached or in short terraces and of one or two storeys in height. Although constructed during the same period, the Ravensbury Estate has a distinctive identity, mainly by virtue of its secluded setting and landscape but also because of the formal arrangement and massing of building groups to define spaces and sub-areas within the estate.

It has three very different characters: The busy, urban edge to Morden Road; the green and 'rural' edge to the River Wandle; and the secluded communal and private spaces within the estate.

Building types are:

2-storey, semi-detached pre-cast concrete Orlit houses, around the perimeter and mainly the western half of the site

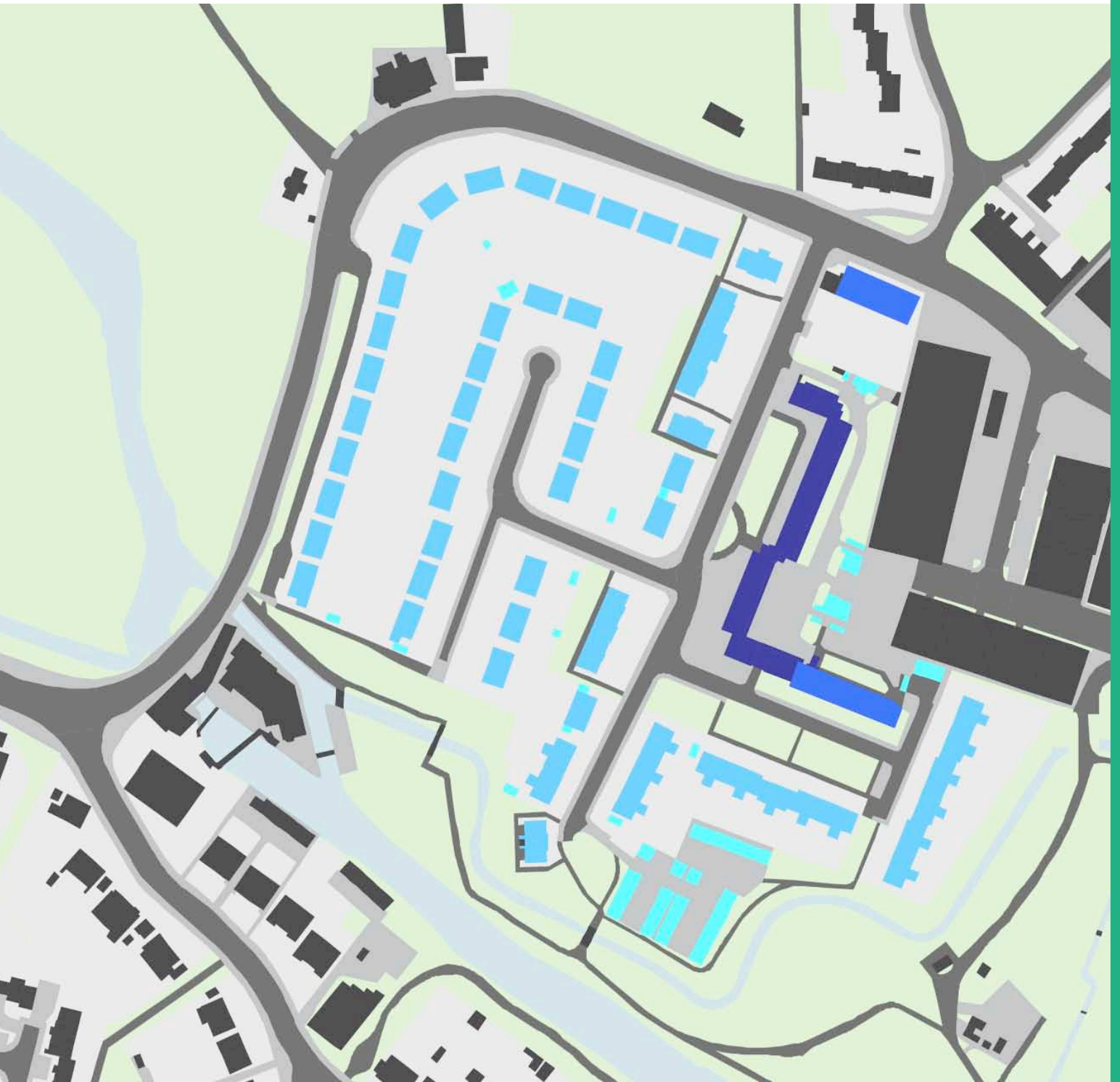
2-storey terraces of houses and flats

4-storey, L-shaped terrace of maisonettes

Apart from the concrete Orlit houses, a simple palette of brick and tile materials unifies the building types and groups.

Ravensbury currently has 192 homes in an area of 4.43 ha, giving a density of 43 dwellings per hectare (dph). This density is similar to the surrounding development of the same period but is low by modern standards, even in a suburban location. The homes are a mix of 1-bed flats, 2-bed maisonettes and 2- and 3-bed houses. Of the 192, 66 are in private ownership with the remaining 126 occupied by Circle Merton Priory tenants.

The development options are complex on this site, and will mainly be determined by ownership and building condition. However, there is clearly potential to increase density and building height through various permutations of retention and regeneration. For instance, the garage courts at the south-east corner of the site are little used yet they occupy the most valuable part of the site with river frontage. There is also potential to increase building height within the site and to create a stronger built edge to the section of Morden Road east of The Surrey Arms public house.



Key:



This sequence of images shows the range of building heights and types present on the estate. A simple palette of materials unifies the building types and groups within the estate.

1. Two-storey, semi-detached Orilt houses to the urban edge of Morden Road.
2. Orilts with slip-road to Morden Road. There is potential along both these frontages to increase building heights.
3. Four storey maisonettes. The building to building distance across Ravensbury Grove (pictured) and Henglo Gardens combined with landscape preserve the open feel of the estate.
4. Sub-areas within the estate defined by building height, type and landscape, as shown here in Henglo Gardens.
5. Short two-storey terraces of flats in Ravensbury Grove.
6. Two-storey terraced houses to Hengelo Gardens.





Streetscape: vehicular routes

- The road types are typical of this period of development, with standard widths and surface treatment of black-top carriageways and pavements with concrete kerbs. The exception is the narrower carriageway of Rutter Gardens.
- The simple, straight street layout provides an efficient edge for parking. This does not dominate the streetscape where carriageways are wide enough to park on street and where mature trees reduce visual impact, for instance on Ravensbury Grove and Hengelo Gardens.
- High levels of car ownership were apparent at the time of the survey – day time during a weekday. It is safe to assume that this gets more problematic in the evening and weekends. This is unsurprising in a suburban location with a PTAL rating of 2, 'poor'.
- At the moment a large proportion of the houses have on-plot parking with the rest being provided on street. The garage courts looked unused and are probably too small for modern cars.
- There is a significant amount of 'wheels up' parking in Hatfield Close and this is visually intrusive as well as blocking pavements for pedestrians. However, as the whole estate is in effect a cul-de-sac vehicle flows and speeds are generally low and it feels quite safe to walk in the carriageway. During the regeneration of the estate it would be positive to formalize this by introducing shared-surface streets.
- Should the regeneration option be taken and the number of dwellings increased significantly then car parking might become a serious problem. This will need careful design and management to prevent the streetscape of the new neighbourhood from being dominated by parked cars and also to prevent this becoming a source of friction between new and existing residents.



Key:

- Routes fully connected to the wider system
- Connected routes leading to dead ends
- Dead end routes



1. Morden Road is the only busy through route. Its standard highways design and treatment is softened by the mature trees on both sides of the road.
2. Ravensbury Grove is the main access for the estate. It has parking on both sides of the street.
3. Hatfield Close has on-plot parking in long front gardens but 'wheels-up' parking still happens.
4. Internal street behind Ravensbury Court.

Streetscape: pedestrian routes

Generally, pedestrians and drivers use the same street spaces to move around and these feel safe, legible and direct. There are very few pedestrian -only routes within the estate. The exceptions are the route that connects the southern end of Rutter Gardens with Morden Road and the paths at the south of Ravensbury Grove and Hengelo Gardens to the riverside. All of these routes could be improved.

- The long footpath from Rutter Gardens is narrow and unsurveilled and was the only place on the estate where litter was evident. This is the only existing pedestrian access from the west of the estate to Morden Road and the bus stop.
- Of the paths at the south of the estate, the route from Ravensbury Grove is the most important. This provides access not only to the stream edge but also across the stream onto the Wandle riverside pathway and to Ravensbury Park.
- The route from Hengelo Gardens is gated and evidently little used, giving access to an overgrown area by the stream and then passes behind the rear of the garage court.



Key:

---➔ Pedestrian routes



1. Footpath connecting Rutter Gardens to Morden Road.
2. Archway route connecting interior of Ravensbury Court to Ravensbury Grove.
3. Footbridge at the southern end of the estate giving access across the stream to the riverside walk.
4. Pedestrian routes giving access to entrances at the rear of flats.

Landscape

Ravensbury has a distinctive landscape and an open and green character. The whole estate is set within a significant area of high landscape value, with access to an extensive area of parkland and the green corridor of the River Wandle. Even its 'urban' northern and western boundaries with Morden Road face the woodland within Morden Hall Park.

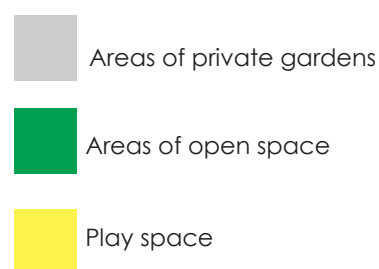
Internally, the estate maintains this green and open character. This is created by a combination of design features: wide building to building set backs; grassed communal spaces; mature trees; hedges on plot boundaries and other planting in large, private front gardens.

The height of the largest building on the estate, the 4-storey block of Ravensbury Court, is balanced by building to building set backs of approximately 30 metres, the communal open spaces and the tree-lined streets. The line of trees on Hengelo Gardens is particularly impressive and mirrors the height and enclosure of Ravensbury Court on the other side of the street.

All elements of the landscape are well-maintained, with the exception of the frontage to Morden Road between the junction with Ravensbury Grove and The Surrey Arms. Here the houses are set well back from the main road behind a row of mature pollarded trees that form an attractive feature along this stretch of busy road. However, the frontages to these properties are noticeably less well cared for than the rest of the estate. The Morden Road frontage facing Morden Hall Park is set behind a slip road that insulates houses from the main road. These homes are, by contrast, very well maintained. There is no obvious physical reason for this difference between the two Morden Road frontages and may reflect other social or economic factors.

The landscape setting, mature trees and other planting are the most significant features of the estate. Together they create a most attractive residential setting, offering quiet and secluded spaces within the estate as well as easy access to the network of green spaces that surround the estate.

As part of the green corridor of the River Wandle the trees have ecological value as well as their visual significance and role in well-being. No matter which option is selected for the future of Ravensbury, it will be important to protect mature trees and increase tree planting wherever possible.





Amenity and play spaces

The consultation process carried out at Ravensbury has indicated the value to residents of the open spaces, gardens and mature trees.

All the semi-detached houses have larger than average front and rear gardens. However, none of the maisonettes or flats have private amenity space but all are adjacent to communal open spaces. These communal spaces do not have any play equipment or seats and therefore appear to offer more of a visual amenity rather than being actively used. However, the survey was carried out in February and a very different picture of use might emerge in in summer.

The lack of play spaces within the estate would not appear to be a problem for residents. This is partly because of the number and size of private gardens but also because Ravensbury Park offers a very accessible, well-equipped play area. The parks and riverside paths also provide excellent opportunities for leisure and activity for all age groups.

The various open spaces within the estate are well-located in terms of intervisibility and surveillance, meaning that they are well overlooked from buildings and passers by even at distance. There is little or no evidence of graffiti, litter or antisocial behaviour within the estate and residents report a strong sense of community and communality. Physical evidence of this can be seen in the amount of personalisation of gardens and threshold spaces by doorways to the maisonettes and flats.



Quality of the external environment summary

The Ravensbury Estate has a distinctive identity, mainly by virtue of its secluded setting and landscape but also because of the formal arrangement and massing of building groups to define spaces within the estate. The development options are complex on this site, and will mainly be determined by ownership and building condition rather than urban design or landscape. However, there is clearly potential to increase density and building height through various permutations of retention and regeneration.

1. Ravensbury has three very different characters: The busy, urban edge to Morden Road; the green and 'rural' edge to the River Wandle; and the secluded communal and private spaces within the estate.
2. High levels car ownership were apparent at the time of the survey but this is unsurprising in a suburban location with a PTAL rating of 2, 'poor'.
3. Should the regeneration option be taken and the number of dwellings increased significantly then car parking might become a serious problem. This will need careful design and management to prevent the streetscape of the new neighbourhood from being dominated by parked cars and also to prevent this becoming a source of friction between new and existing residents.
4. Generally, pedestrians and drivers use the same street spaces to move around and routes feel safe, legible and direct. There are very few pedestrian -only routes within the estate but all could be improved.
5. Ravensbury Estate is set within a distinctive and significant area of high landscape value. Internally, the estate maintains this green and open character. This is created by a combination of design features: wide building to building set backs; grassed communal spaces; mature trees; hedges on plot boundaries and other planting in large, private front gardens.
6. The landscape setting, mature trees and other planting are the most significant features of the estate. Together they create a most attractive residential setting, offering quiet and secluded spaces within the estate as well as easy access to the network of green spaces that surround the estate.
7. The lack of formal play spaces within the estate would not appear to be a problem for residents. This is partly because of the number and size of private gardens but also because Ravensbury Park offers a very accessible, well-equipped play area. The parks and riverside paths also provide excellent opportunities for leisure and activity for all age groups.
8. There is little or no evidence of graffiti, litter or antisocial behaviour within the estate and residents report a strong sense of community and communality.



Review conclusions

Building for Life 12 | Review summary

Building for Life 12

Building for Life 12 is a tool kit that is aimed at assessing residential quality. It is a national initiative, endorsed by government for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods that local communities, local authorities and developers are encouraged to use to help stimulate conversations about creating good places to live.

It uses a series of 12 questions to interrogate a place and develop a picture of its likely performance against design best practice.

Each headline question is followed by a series of additional questions, and also provided are five recommendations in the form of 'design prompts'.

The 12 questions are broken into chapters, and there are four questions in each of the three chapters:

- Integrating into the neighbourhood
- Creating a place
- Street and home

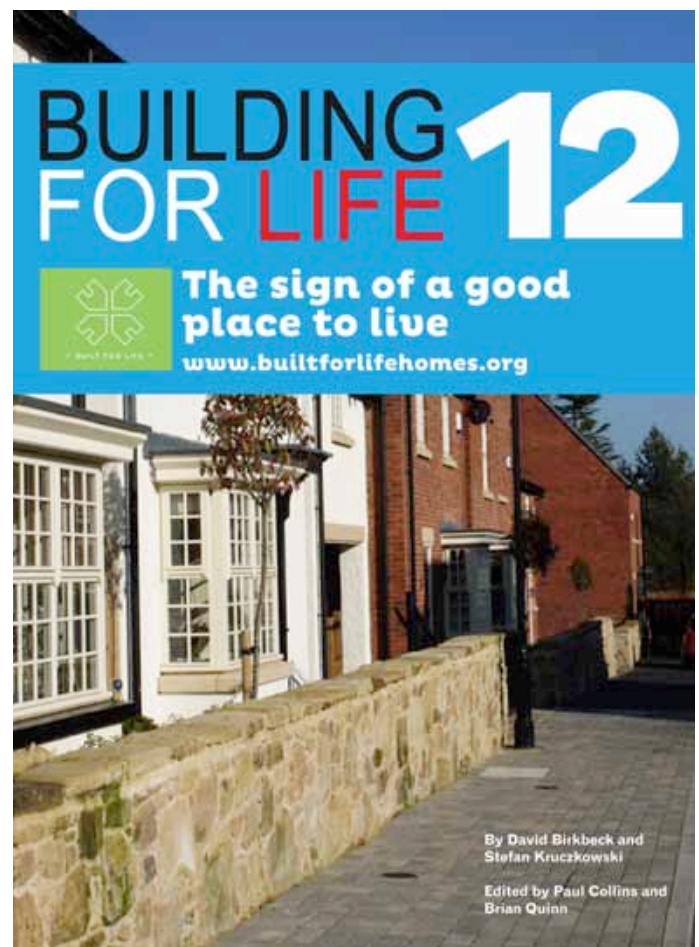
Based on a simple 'traffic light' system (red, amber and green) it is recommended that proposed new developments aim to:

- Secure as many 'greens' as possible,
- Minimise the number of 'ambers' and;
- Avoid 'reds'.

The more 'greens' that are achieved, the better a development will be.





A red light gives warning that a particular aspect of a proposed development needs to be reconsidered.

Here we use the BfL12 questions to compare existing Eastfields with current best practice to draw conclusions on how it performs.







Above: BfL12 (2015 edition)





Integrating into the neighbourhood

Question	Score	Commentary
<p>1 Connections</p> <p>Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones; whilst also respecting existing buildings and land uses along the boundaries of the development site?</p>		<p>The estate connects reasonably well to its surroundings given that it is surrounded by barriers to movement, with good connections to the water and to the shops along Morden Road.</p>
<p>2 Facilities and services</p> <p>Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?</p>		<p>Although the site is adjacent to a small parade of shops, it is relatively isolated from the wider district centre.</p>
<p>3 Public transport</p> <p>Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?</p>		<p>The site is well placed for access to train and bus connections.</p>
<p>4 Meeting local housing requirements</p> <p>Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?</p>		<p>The current estate offers a range of dwellings sizes and tenures.</p>

Creating a place

Question	Score	Commentary
<p>5 Character</p> <p>Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?</p>		<p>The estate has a distinctive character, aided by the mature vegetation and feelings of openness.</p>
<p>6 Working with the site and its context</p> <p>Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimates?</p>		<p>Internally, the estate uses mature planting to good effect, but more could be made of its river and park-side location.</p>
<p>7 Creating well defined streets and spaces</p> <p>Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces and are buildings designed to turn street corners well?</p>		<p>The streets are well-defined by buildings and boundaries.</p>
<p>8 Easy to find your way around</p> <p>Is the scheme designed to make it easy to find your way around?</p>		<p>The estate has a simple layout with good sight lines and this makes it easy to navigate.</p>

Street and home

Question	Score	Commentary
<p>9 Streets for all Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?</p>		Vehicle speeds on the streets are low, not necessarily by design, and the streets are well overlooked by adjacent properties.
<p>10 Car parking Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?</p>		There is a good range of parking solutions on offer, with most of it well-resolved. Lots of on-street wheels-up parking suggests an issue with overall levels of parking or car ownership.
<p>11 Public and private spaces Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?</p>		Much of the space on the estate is well-defined by clear boundaries, and is well overlooked by adjacent properties.
<p>12 External storage and amenity space Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?</p>		All of the dwellings have either dedicated bin storage or have access to front or rear gardens for bins and recycling etc. The bins stores for the flats could be more secure.

This summary shows that the Ravensbury estate performs quite well against the BfL12 questions, with eight 'greens' being awarded. This reflects the benefits of its location as well as the design solutions used on the estate.

In the areas where 'amber' scores are awarded, this should give pointers for any future design work on the estate, highlighting issues that could be compounded should they not be properly addressed.

