



SD35

HIGH PATH

Urban Design Review

Sue McGlynn Urban Design Ltd

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About the project

Background | About the site | Testing the case for regeneration

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 High Path estate in South Wimbledon.

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 600 home High Path estate.

Approximately 60% of those 600 homes are social housing, with the remainder in private hands (including a sizable private rented sector), so any regeneration options will need to engage directly with a very mixed tenure audience.

Circle Housing Merton Priory see two main options:

1. The continuation of the Merton Standard works as originally planned
2. The complete regeneration of High Path including the demolition of the 600 homes and their replacement with circa 1200 new homes (i.e. doubling the existing density)

About the site

The High Path estate is adjacent to South Wimbledon underground station in the London Borough of Merton.

It is well-located strategically; in addition to the tube, train stations and good bus services provide connections to central London as well as to the services and facilities in the Boroughs of Merton, Sutton, and Croydon.

The benefit of this location is reflected in the high property values in many areas surrounding the estate.

High Path was planned and built from the 1950s onwards, in a series of development phases that stretched over 40 years.

Both the site itself and its immediate surroundings have national historical significance, including Merton Abbey, Abbey Mills, and Admiral Lord Nelson's home that was located on the estate.

This earlier history is reflected in the street names used in and around the estate, but the national significance of the association is otherwise little celebrated or interpreted to a modern audience.



Above: The High Path Estate (outlined red) was developed from the 1950s onwards. The new form of the estate contrasts with the earlier 19th and 20th century patterns of housing in the Merton area.

Image: Google Earth.

Testing the case for regeneration

As part of their regeneration plans for High Path, Circle Housing Merton Priory are continuing to build up a 'layered' approach to the evidential case for comprehensive regeneration.

The key issue of building stock condition is being investigated by a detailed survey of the various building types and ages that make up High Path.

Another layer in the evidential case will be to examine the quality of the built environment within High Path with particular reference to permeability and access; usable public open space; densities; adjacencies and overlooking of spaces. This will require a comprehensive and impartial review of the existing High Path from an urban design perspective.

In September 2014 Circle Housing Merton Priory commissioned Sue McGlynn Urban Design Ltd to carry out the review.



About the Review

The process | Methods

The process

This study sets out to evaluate the High Path estate against the established principles of good design.

These can be found in a number of 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 High Path identified in Circle Housing Merton Priory's brief.

These are:

- Urban structure and access
- Building placement and alignment in relation to routes
- Façades and their interfaces with public spaces
- Density and mix
- Height and massing
- Building 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 and 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 building, 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. These are density and mix, height and massing.

The commission took place over 4 weeks in September 2014. The surveys were carried out during weekdays and during working hours so no assessment has been made of the night-time experience of High Path, such as lighting levels or parking.

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

- Urban structure
- Buildings and interfaces
- 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 High Path is summarized against the Building for Life 12 criteria, the Government and industry endorsed assessment method for residential development.



Review themes

Urban structure | Buildings and interfaces | Quality of the external environment

Urban structure

One of the defining characteristics of 20th century urban social housing is that 'the estate' is differentiated from its immediate surroundings in an attempt to create a defined and often bounded community.

This was in direct contrast to the open, connected, street-based neighbourhoods of previous centuries. In urban settings this was achieved through the use of buffers of open space to set an estate apart, and the rejection of older types of street and terraced houses.

This can be seen clearly in the layout of High Path throughout its phases of development from the 1950s onwards. Urban structure is an important measure of social inclusion or exclusion and therefore an important factor in deciding whether to refurbish or regenerate High Path.

This section evaluates two aspects of High Path's urban structure, integration and connectivity.

Integration: Assessing the 'depth' of High Path 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.



Above: A fully connected 'deformed grid' in east Oxford, similar to that seen in the older residential areas of Merton.



Above: A hierarchical movement system, an approach that has dominated housing design since the 1950s. These are difficult to navigate and often have a complex footpath system.

Space Syntax

We have used Space Syntax theory and its techniques of analysis to measure High Path's level of integration and connectivity. The study area was defined by bounding features such as railways and rivers.

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 the 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 routes. These are the quieter streets that carry less movement but are still connected to the wider movement system.

In the hierarchical movement systems introduced from the 1950s onwards, the pedestrian is segregated from vehicular movement at the local level. The very ends of the movement system are the culs-de-sac so familiar in 20th century 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.

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's Space Syntax approach uses a number of geometric measures to represent the relative connectivity of the segments of public space, defined by drawing the longest possible sight 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 corridor 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; both in plan and through the vertical impact of topography. The longest segments tend 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 connectivity of any given area is usually measured at two resolutions: The first is the degree to which each line is connected to all other lines in the whole study area and describes the potential movement intensity by all modes (radius 'n'); and the second is a measure of local connectivity that better approximates to pedestrian movement (radius 3).

The geometry of a layout has a pronounced effect on actual and perceived connectivity and legibility.



Top: The wider Merton context in 'axial line' form, showing routes open to all modes of transport.
Bottom: The High Path Estate pedestrian-accessible routes.

Integration

High Path is adjacent to South Wimbledon underground station, with Colliers Wood Wimbledon train station within walking distance.

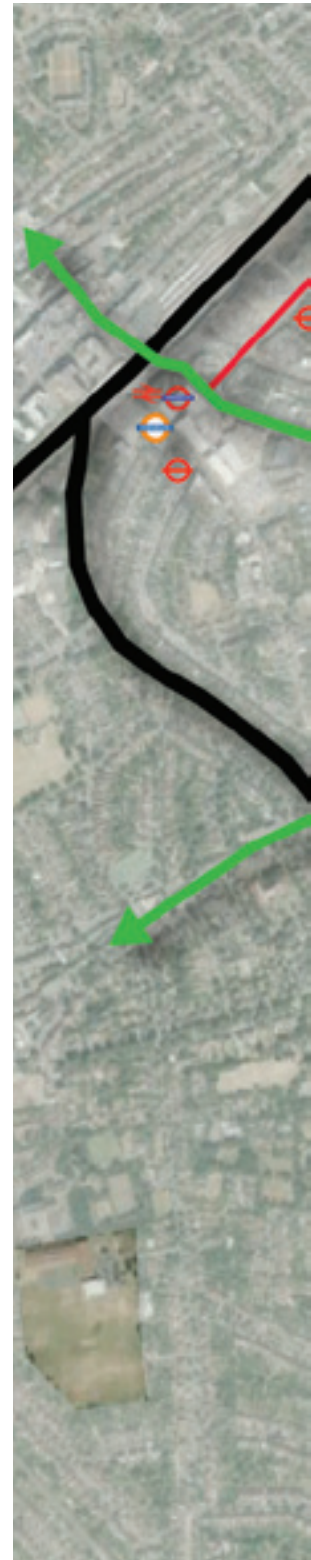
The estate is also well-served by bus services in the surrounding streets. It therefore falls within a highly accessible urban area, as defined by The London Plan, and has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 4.

This has implications for reduced levels of parking provision and increased residential density that would become significant should the decision to regenerate High Path be taken.

Key:

-  National rail
-  Underground
-  Overground
-  Bus stop
-  Railway line
-  Strategic route
-  Major local route

Right: Major access and movement infrastructure for High Path and surroundings.





Wider context - integration analysis

Using the Space Syntax 'Depthmap' software, here we perform graph analysis on an 'axial map' of the study area of wider Merton.

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. This depth, or 'radius' 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.

High Path shows 'warm' in the analysis, meaning it is well integrated into the wider movement system. This is likely to be because it is 'shallow' to streets with a strategic role; both Merton High Street and the A24 connect beyond the study area.

This contrasts to development to the south-east of High Path, which show much greater depth (coloured blue) to any strategic routes.





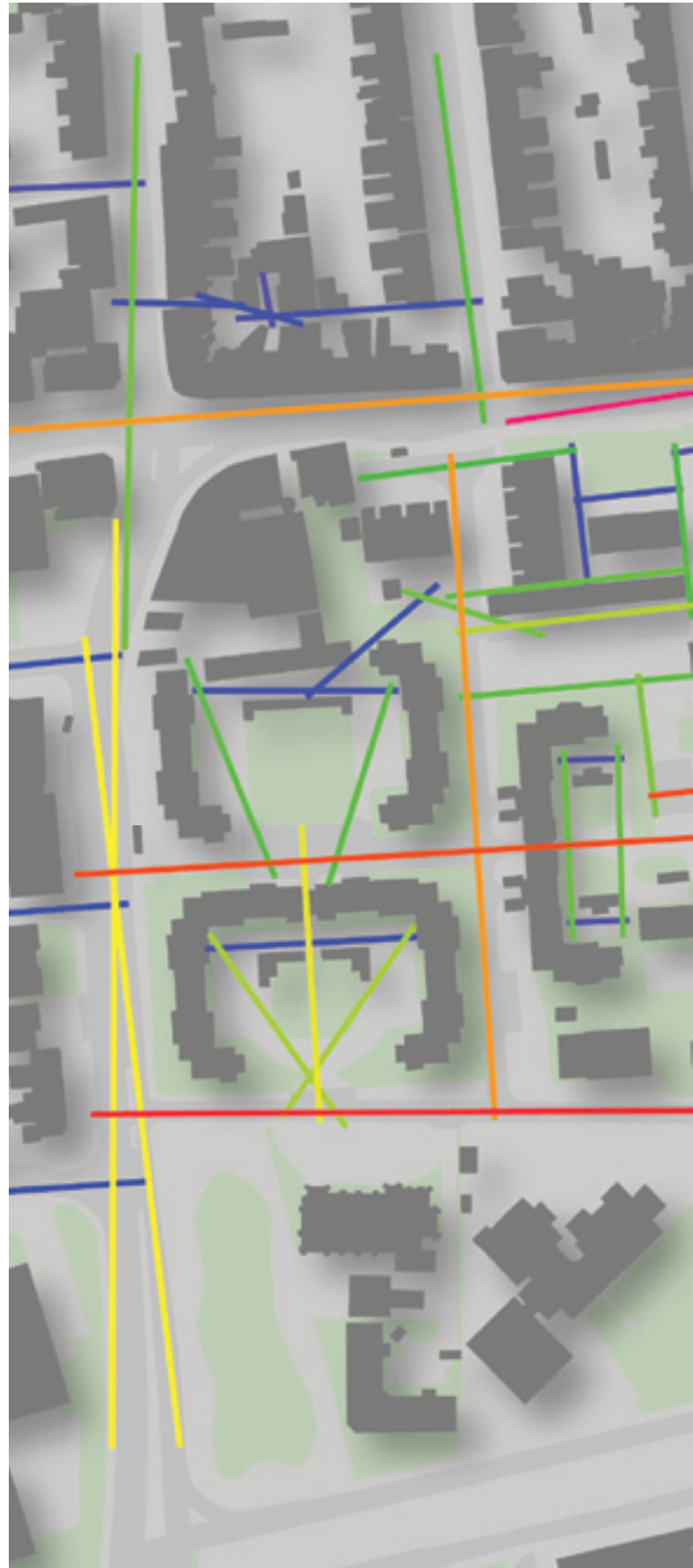
Local context - integration analysis

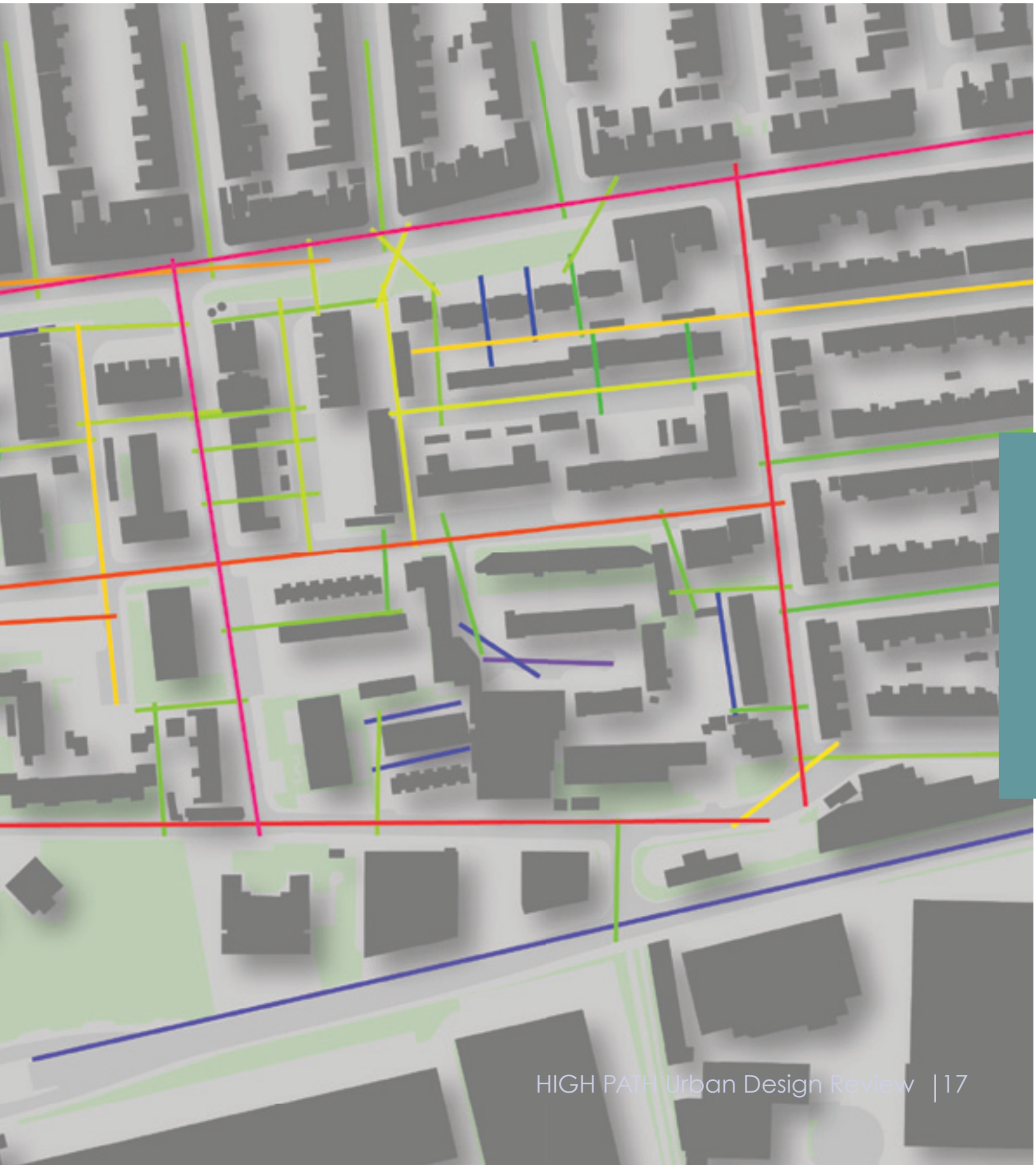
Moving to the site in more detail, what emerges is a very well integrated movement system surrounding the site (red).

Within the site, the 'cruciform' structure based on the historic street pattern of the site's former use shows high levels of integration, being directly connected to the strategic movement system that bounds it. This means that for vehicular movement, the site is well-integrated as it is 'shallow' to the strategic network.

This is in marked contrast to the pedestrian movement system of the site, which shows here in cooler colours. Whilst the footpath network within the site may initially appear to be well-integrated, the analysis demonstrates that it serves only estate-based movement with few connections to the wider strategic network.

This reflects the philosophy of separation of pedestrian and vehicular movement. The result is that the geometry of the layout is prejudicial to pedestrian movement, with routes that are maze-like when compared to the vehicular routes.





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 helping people develop a 'picture' of the overall system; poorly connected routes give little information about an overall structure and make navigation more difficult, whereas highly visibly connected routes allow users to gather a great deal of information about the place they are in.

The connectivity analysis shows the relative interconnectedness of routes around the estate and the surrounding area. Put simply, connectivity is a measure of the number of times a line in the model is connected onto other lines.

It is clear that High Path has a high number of lines, particularly by contrast to the area to the north. At first glance, this would appear to give a good choice of routes for pedestrians.

However, as we have already established, most of these lines are internal to the estate and, in practice, when walking the estate it is difficult to understand which routes take you further afield and which only lead to other parts of the estate.

It is only the 'cruciform' structure of the historic streets that makes the site intelligible at all, as shown by its high level of connectivity.





Local context - line length analysis

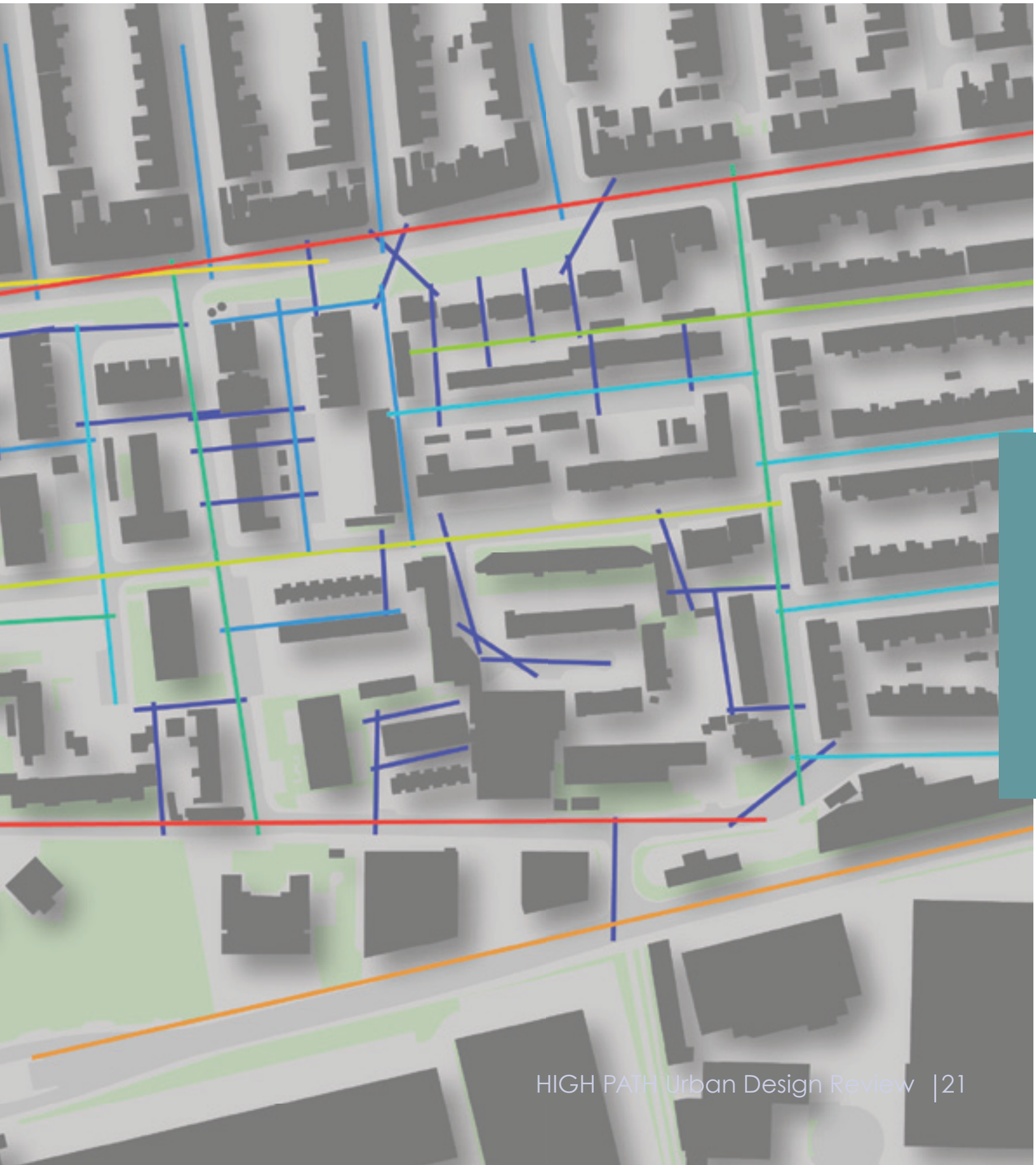
The final analysis undertaken looks at the length of the axial lines in the spaces in and around the estate.

Line length analysis is useful for understanding the morphology of the site and its surrounding area, allowing comparisons to be made between sight lines.

The analysis reveals that, even allowing for the 'edge effect' the estate features very short, interrupted views. This is not in keeping with the surrounding structure, where long views are common due to straighter streets and spaces.

Line lengths can also be used as a proxy for intelligibility; short lines necessarily mean it is difficult to understand at ground level how one route relates to another and whether the route you are on leads anywhere.





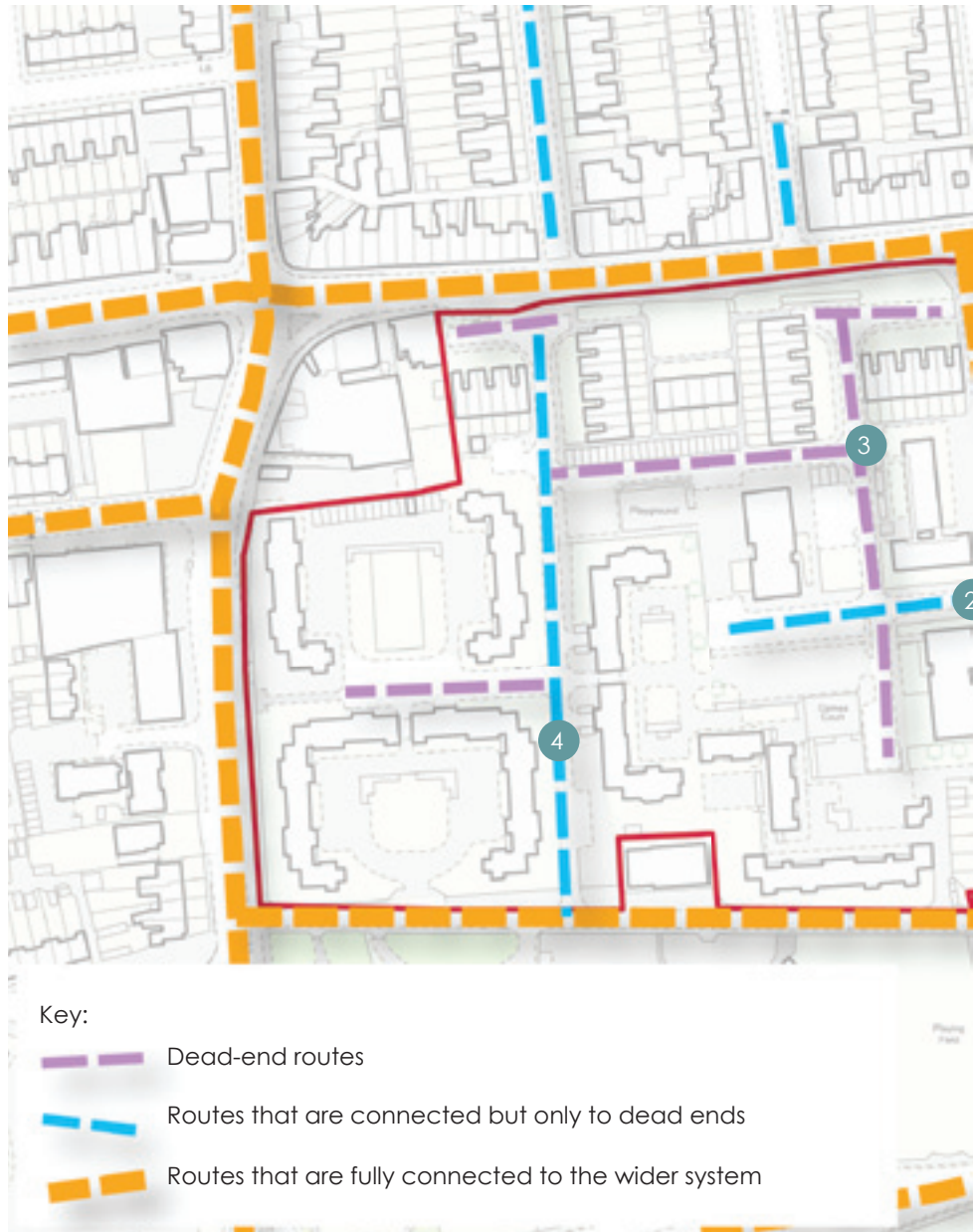
Streets



1. Older streets like Nelson Grove Road are straight and legible, but let down by the buildings at their edge and the treatment of the public realm.



2. Parking around Pincott Road and the local shops is an issue, with many cars blocking footways.





3. Many of the routes on site such as Stane Close lead only to parking areas and have poor edge conditions.



4. The mature trees on Hayward Close offer a huge boost to the quality of experience for pedestrians.

Footpaths and pedestrian routes

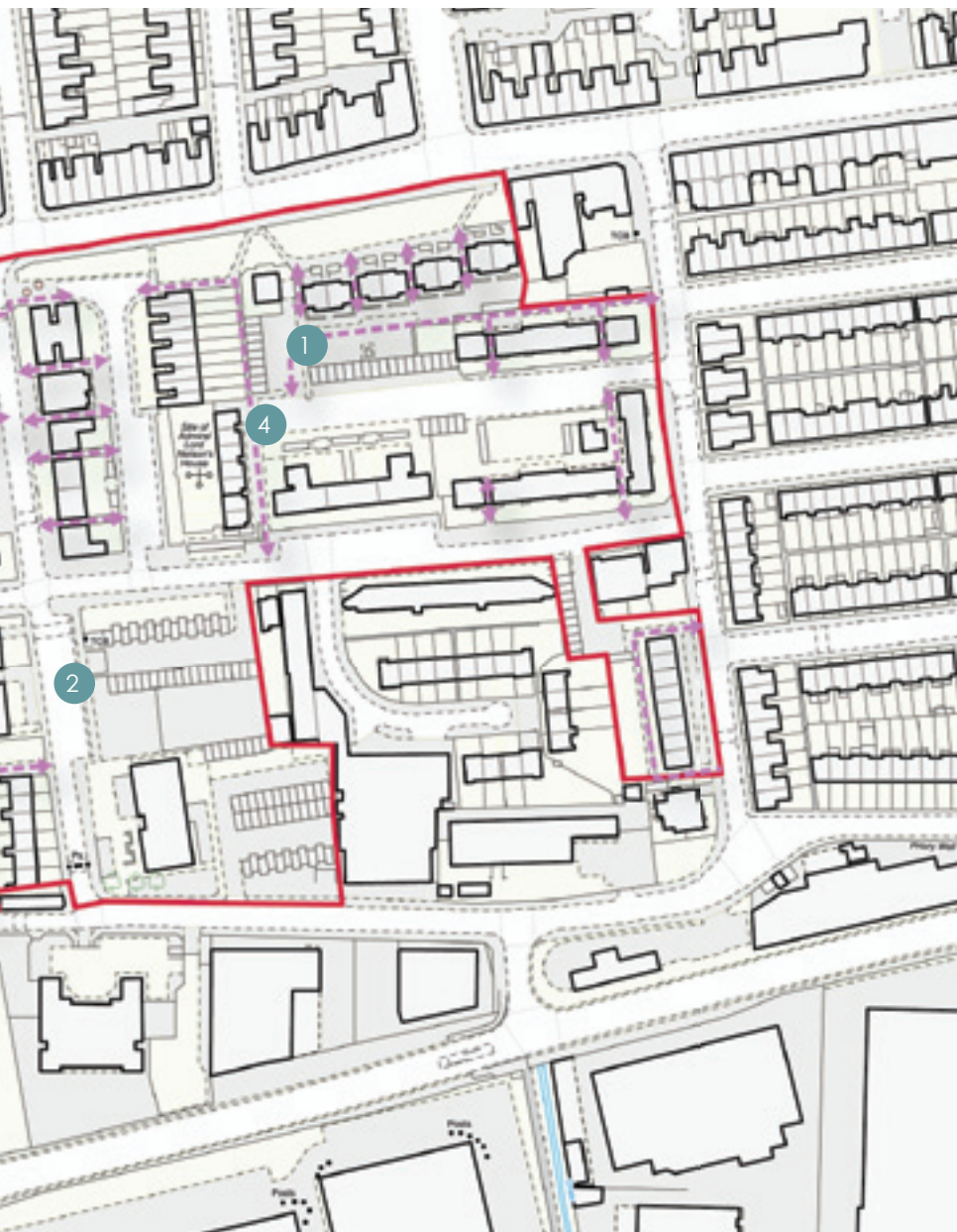


1. Short footpath to Merton High Street, with good sight lines but poor overlooking.



2. Over-provision of routes into ambiguous spaces like garage courts.





3. Older parts of the estate allow for longer sight lines and better-connected foot-paths.



4. Many of the footpaths are narrow and unwelcoming, with poor edges.

Buildings and interfaces

This section evaluates the extent to which High Path's internal streets, pedestrian routes and open spaces are defined by buildings and whether the building facades, heights and density reinforce and animate the street and route hierarchy.

Four aspects are considered:

- Building layout
- Building interfaces
- Density and mix
- Heights and massing

Building layout

The following sequence of 'figure ground' diagrams illustrates the ways in which buildings define both public and private space. They compare the pattern seen in High Path with that of the surrounding layouts. 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.

In vernacular layouts there is usually a strong and consistent correlation between building alignment and the line of the street. This is particularly uniform in the Victorian and Edwardian neighbourhood immediately to the north but is also apparent in the more curvilinear developments to the south west of High Path. Even though only the buildings are shown the street network is still clearly visible and well-defined.

The pattern of building placement and alignment within High Path has none of this consistency. Buildings are surrounded by open spaces and their positions and alignments do not reveal or define the movement network, with the exception of the historic streets of Pincott Road and Nelson Grove Road. Through movement is frequently discouraged in estate design and this is the case at High Path. Buildings are placed to block or deflect potential lines of movement set up by the surrounding historic street pattern.

Right: A 'figure ground' diagram of the wider Merton Area, with High Path outlined red. Note the uniformity of the Victorian and Edwardian neighbourhoods to the North.





The second figure ground plan maps only the open space ie the 'unbuilt' space in public or private ownership.

Again, there is a strong contrast between the pattern that emerges in High Path and the residential areas to the north, east and south-west. In the older neighbourhoods buildings are used to make very clear distinctions between the public space of the street or park and the private space of the home.

This is enclosed within the protective wall of buildings – the form of development know as perimeter block development.

At High Path the pattern is reversed with open space surrounding buildings. The distinction between what is public and what is private space is lost and the result is the unused and ambiguous spaces so typical of 20th century social housing estates.

This is an inefficient use of land with no benefit to residents of private gardens or well-defined communal and public spaces.

Right: Unbuilt space is revealed in this reverse of the normal 'figure ground' diagram. Public and private spaces are difficult to discern on High Path.





Building interfaces

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. This importance of this relationship for creating safe, lively and sociable places is recognised by both urban design guidance and policy as well as Safer Places, the replacement for Secured by 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. As was noted in the previous section, the complex arrangement of buildings at High Path results in confusing and poorly defined public and private spaces.

The following sequence of plans adds a further layer to that analysis by indicating where building entrances are located and mapping the 'transparency' of building facades at ground floor level.

Active frontage is defined as facades that having both doors and windows of inhabited rooms (ie not bathrooms, storerooms or corridors) at regular intervals along the street or route to provide surveillance as well as contact 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.

Each building was mapped at ground level where it is adjacent to publicly accessible space. Unlike the traditional residential areas where buildings consistently front the street, at High Path buildings are surrounded by public space so all facades have been mapped.

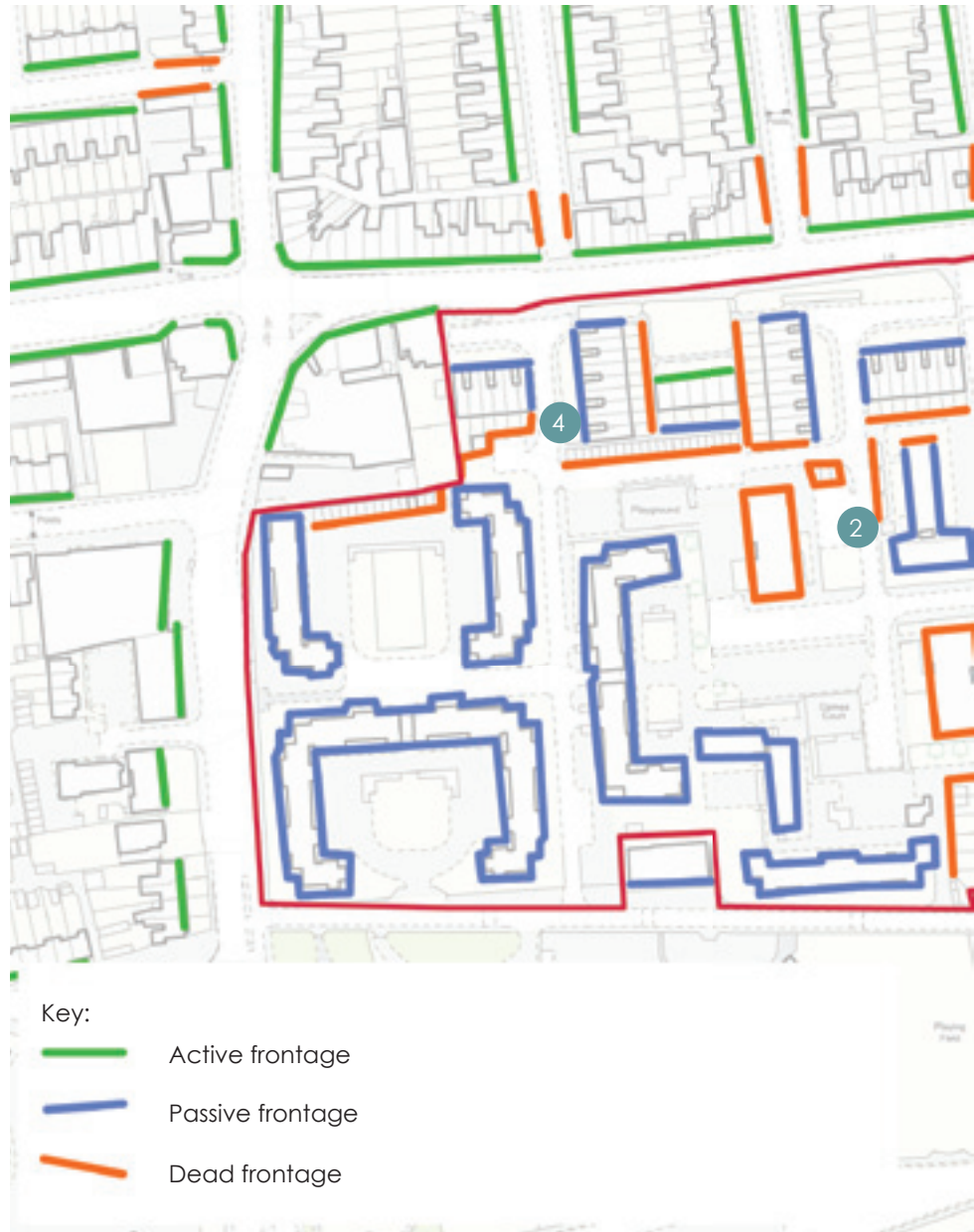
Active, passive and dead frontages



1. Some existing units offer an active edge to the street, such as these back-to-back houses.



2. Blank edges and exposed backs make even relatively major routes feel unsafe and unwelcoming.





3. Landscape buffering to ground-floor windows offers little amenity but increases maintenance budgets.



4. Conversions of garages to occupied rooms helps add activity to the street.

Doors and building entrances



1. Some ground-floor flats offer direct access, but these looked underused.



2. Highly recessed doors and projecting 'dead' frontage mean that these houses offer nothing to the street in terms of overlooking or activity,





3. The entrances to the main towerblocks are particularly poor, being neither private nor welcoming.



4. Ground floor flats with doors onto the outside, which is an improvement over most of the arrangements elsewhere on site.

Building interfaces conclusions

Many of the building interface problems at High Path are caused by a rejection of perimeter block development in accordance with the design ideology of the time.

This is compounded by the typology of many of the buildings. Communal entrances with internal access corridors leave many flats with bedrooms at ground floor and this usually results in curtains and blinds being drawn to maintain privacy.

This results in 'passive' facades with very little positive surveillance of the streets and public spaces. The only way to avoid this in multi-unit dwellings is to alter the plan at ground floor so that kitchens and living rooms with less need for privacy overlook the street.

Small front gardens would allow the space between the dwelling and the street to be claimed for greater privacy and personalisation.

1. The 1950s courtyard buildings and the three 12 storey blocks do not have distinguishable fronts or backs, having entrances on both sides of the blocks.
2. Of the other terraced building forms, fronts and backs have no consistent arrangement in relation to public routes.
3. The entrances to many of the buildings on the estate bear little relationship to the main movement structure of the estate.
4. Movement into and out of buildings is spread throughout an over-permeable layout rather than being intensified onto main movement routes.
5. At ground level building facades contribute little to the surveillance, liveliness or activity of the streets or other communal spaces, such as play spaces. Very few ground floor flats have independent entrances from the street or semi-private garden spaces accessible from inside the flats.
6. Should regeneration go ahead there is an opportunity to improve the interface of the whole site with the surrounding streets of Merton Road, Merton High Street, Abbey Road and High Path, each of which has a different character.

Density and mix

There are 600 homes on High Path and approximately 60% of those are social housing.

The remainder is in private ownership and includes a sizable private rented sector. The average density within the High Path estate is 86 habitable rooms per hectare.

This is low by comparison with the Victorian and Edwardian housing to the north. The regeneration option offers the potential to utilise the highly accessible location of High Path and increase the density considerably.

The increased number of dwellings will also give the opportunity to review the mix of dwelling units and balance of private, social, rented and intermediate tenures.

Heights and massing

In most pre-20th century development there is a clear economic relationship between building height/massing and the role of the street in the movement hierarchy. Integrated streets that carry a lot of movement tend to be lined by higher buildings.

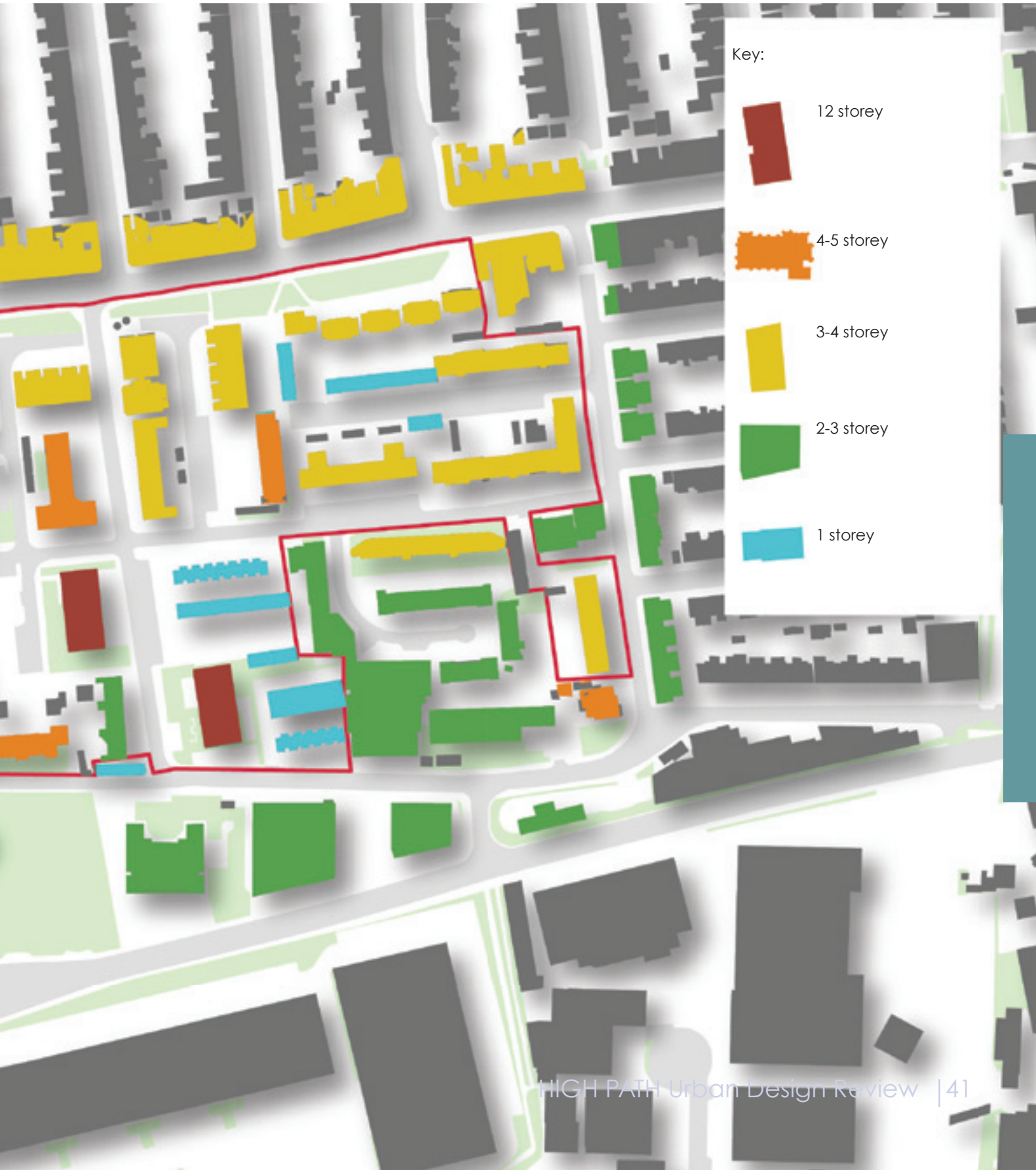
As the corner is turned from the main street into a side then a back street building heights tend to decrease. In the context of this area, main streets are lined with predominantly 3 and 4 storey buildings while those in the quieter residential streets behind are predominantly composed of 2 storeys.

This relationship has already been challenged by the redevelopment of High Path during the 1950s to the 1980s. The design of most early to mid-20th century social housing can be traced back to the twin influences of the health and sanitation origins of town planning and the modernist design philosophy of high buildings surrounded by open spaces. This is what we see at High Path.

Here building heights range from 1 storey (garage blocks) to 12 storeys but they bear no relationship to street hierarchy or the economics of primary frontages. Instead, they are composed according to an internalized logic, as objects in space creating a new context rather than arranged as buildings responding to an established context.

Any future redevelopment of High Path will have to establish a new rationale for building heights. The sustainable use of land, planning policy, orientation and the economics of development will all impact on this. However, as building heights increase it will be necessary to review their impact on light to building facades opposite and solar access to open spaces, private, communal and public.





Quality of the external environment

This final theme of the review assesses the quality of the external environment of the estate.

It does not include stock condition of buildings, nor does it include a survey of the internal condition of homes in High Path.

The elements reviewed are:

- Streetscape
- Buildings
- Public realm and play spaces
- Landscape

Streetscape

The images here show a sequence of the external and internal streets and their treatments, revealing their differing characters.

1. Merton High Street at junction with Pincott Road, showing a pedestrian-priority crossing and segregated cycle provision. Trees line the southern side of the street, planted when High Path was originally developed.
2. Simple features can control speeds on straight streets, like this chicane on Abbey Road.
3. High Path leading to Station Road, a quieter historic route that would benefit from a traffic-calming to improve linkages to the school and church.
4. Merton Road (A219), a wide and busy street with high traffic volumes and poor visual quality.
5. Pincott Road, one of High Path's historic streets now treated a vehicular access road.
6. Garage courts occupy a significant portion of the High Path estate, appearing to be poorly used and detracting from the streetscape.





2



3



5



6

Buildings

This sequence of images shows the range of building, arranged by phase of development from the 1950s onward.

1. Early-phase 1950s mansion blocks, up to 5 storeys in height. These buildings strongest identity within the site, but form enclosed spaces that relate poorly to the rest of the estate.
2. The high-rise elements from the 1960's run to 12 storeys, creating bleak environments at their base.
3. From the 1960s phase onwards, aside from the 3 high-rise buildings the rest of the estate is built out in 2, 3 and 4 storey terraces. Most are multi-dwelling buildings of a typology that restricts ground floor access to a single entrance.
4. Some individual houses from the 1970s and 1980s do exist, but they are designed in such a way as to offer a very poor edge the street, with front door recessed behind garages.
5. 1980s low-rise flatted development, with numerous front doors offering a good level of active frontage to the street on both sides.
6. New development to the south of Nelson Grove Road has a more positive architectural image. However, it employs similar building typologies to those seen on High Path, with similarly poor street-level interaction to old buildings on the estate.





Public realm and play spaces

Public realm and play spaces and evaluated here, using a sequence of images showing the various types of provision on site. Part of the character of High Path is its openness, however much of this is unused communal space that is undefined and relates poorly to buildings and streets.

1. Ambiguous green spaces that offer neither private amenity to residents or usable public space appear frequently on the estate.
2. Hard-surface thresholds to buildings are also of poor quality.
3. Levels across the site are not dealt with in a way that makes access easy for pushchairs and wheelchair users.
4. Recently refurbished play spaces are of good quality, but are let down by being poorly overlooked, tucked away against blank edges.
5. Some of the existing play spaces are particularly bleak, and clearly little-used for play.
6. An attempt to claim some semi-private space from the unused communal areas. There is little scope for personalisation at the threshold of dwellings because there is no access from inside to out.





Landscape



An attractive feature of High Path is the trees, now mature, from the earliest phases of development. These were planted along side the retained historic streets and have an important softening effect on the vehicular routes. Aside from this, most landscaping is either undifferentiated mown grass or hard-surface access ways.

1. Hayward Close, showing the avenue of trees.
2. Western end of Nelson Grove Road, where planting softens the street and parking areas.
3. Areas of grass with no obvious use, just a maintenance cost.





Review conclusions

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

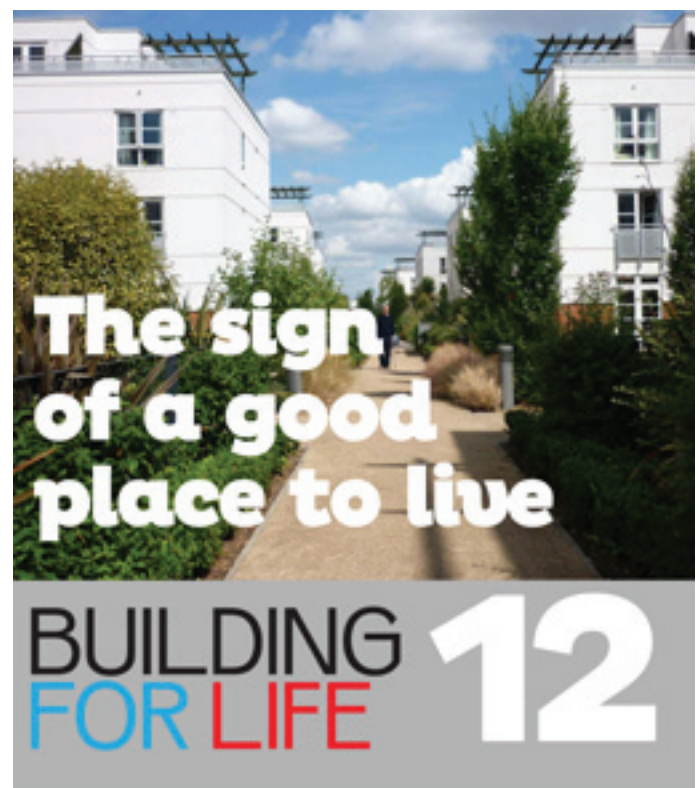
Based on a simple 'traffic light' system (red, amber and green) it is recommended that proposed new developments aim to:

- 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 High Path with current best practice to draw conclusions on how it performs.







Above: BfL12 (2014 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>	●	The scheme is integrate by virtue of the strucutre taken from the historic street patern.
<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>	●	The site is close to an existing local centre and has good range of facilities and amenities on its doorstep.
<p>3 Public transport</p> <p>Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?</p>	●	The site is excellently placed to access underground, busses and other rail stations.
<p>4 Meeting local housing requirements</p> <p>Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?</p>	?	The data to answer this question is not available.

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>Although some individual buildings are of some distinction, the overall estate lacks a coherent or unifying character.</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>The retention of the historic street pattern means the form of the estate shows some contextual as well as physical connection, but the site make little reference to its surrounds.</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>Poorly or undefined streets and spaces are a key feature of this estate, with building set in expanses of undefined open space.</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 site is easy to navigate on the main car routes, but away from these streets, the pedestrian paths are complex and illegible.</p>

Street and home

Question	Score	Commentary
<p>9 Streets for all</p> <p>Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?</p>		All the streets on site are of standard highways design, although in some places streets have low vehicle speeds due to either management or parked cars.
<p>10 Car parking</p> <p>Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?</p>		Although the site features a large number of garage courts, it is clear that they are poorly used, with people preferring to park alongside streets.
<p>11 Public and private spaces</p> <p>Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?</p>		There is a complete lack of distinction between public and private space. This ambiguity combined with the lack of surveillance of many spaces leads to many spaces feeling unwelcoming and unsafe.
<p>12 External storage and amenity space</p> <p>Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?</p>		Whilst there appears to be adequate bin storage, these are often provided in locations that are remote from dwellings. There was no evidence of dedicated cycle parking and storage.

This summary shows that the High Path estate scores only 3 'greens' when assessed against the Building for Life 12 criteria.

A poor score here should give rise to some concern over how the estate is supporting the quality of life for residents.

Whilst the estate was designed in an era according to principles that are now unsupported by best practice, the BfL12 criteria have been developed to assess the role of design in delivering a good quality of life.

