

# Curl la Tourelle Head Architecture



## Housing





## Wayne Head

“I grew up on a council estate in Kent, a small one in the middle of a wealthy area. It was a social short-circuit: we were always conscious of being ‘around the back’. The house itself was of poor quality—it had single-glazed windows and little insulation, which meant in the winter the condensation would form into ice on the glass. Despite that, there were some small touches that made a big difference. We had big pushchairs then, and there was a special place to store these under the stairs, and a zone for bins to be kept so they weren’t left on the street. There were also different kinds of outdoor space—a small garden that was ours only, and shared common ground where we used to play with our friends. My mum once met the architect behind the estate, who said she’d had young families in mind when she designed it. Despite the poor construction, she did have some understanding of what it might be like to actually live there, and the social details she’d built into the design made all the difference to us.

As I grew up, living in many different kinds of accommodation when I moved to London, and spending time in both European and Asian cities, I began to see not only the huge discrepancies in housing design but also in how cities functioned: Copenhagen was a wonderful place to explore on foot with my young family, but Delhi was anything but a walkable city. I also began to see how good housing responded to big ideas about society and culture, environment and economy, how well-designed homes and communities could avoid monoculture in favour of a distinct yet diverse neighbourhood identity.

It is exactly this kind of responsible, thoughtful design that we aim to achieve at Curl la Tourelle Head. The best homes are a place of retreat from the city, but also reflect the urban context. By designing from both micro and macro perspectives, and giving our clients the information they need to make the right decisions and keep the project momentum, we can make a huge difference to the life and health of a citizen.

## Eleanor Hill

“Well-designed housing has an enduring effect on the occupant—the home is the backdrop to human experience. Access to good housing should be a fundamental right but too often our homes define what course our life takes, or how we value ourselves in society. My own background was very rural, so I had the privilege of having access to nature in both domestic and public settings. As a result, I’ve always recognised the value of green space to our personal wellbeing, and want to bring this connection to nature into every project.

My MA thesis looked at housing estate regeneration and the discrepancies between private and social housing in the UK, exploring the compartmentalisation of housing elements, and how these have evolved in social housing contexts. This academic experience has influenced my egalitarian values and approach to design now I'm working in practice. The main issue we have to tackle is a lack of high quality, affordable homes, but we also need to break down the barriers to small-scale development which have always discouraged individuals from building for themselves."

#### **Will Henley**

"I'm interested in the difference between designing a house and designing housing. Those three little letters make a huge difference, which picks up on our practice interest in designing at both micro and macro levels. Housing needs an idea about the city, and an intuition about what a place might be. There are some quite clear design principles that we always follow—natural light, views, efficiency, and so on—but putting those all together to respond to that bigger urban idea is much harder. Maybe because of that, I approach the discipline from a public realm perspective. I'm active as a researcher and have recently completed a study on public realm design in South Korea which looks at how outside spaces contribute to citizen wellbeing.

My first job was a placement in the regeneration and planning team at Lambeth Council, but I decided to go back to architecture because I realised I loved design and its practical aspects—drawing in particular—too much to become totally strategic. It's interesting that contemporary definitions of architects suggest that we're public servants when so few of us work directly for the public sector. The affinity I still feel for that world has been invaluable in our collaborations with Sutton and Brent."

#### **Brahim Kanoute**

"When I was a teenager, the estate I grew up on, to the north of Paris, was regenerated. They began to get rid of the old, unsanitary buildings, and we were given a new apartment. It wasn't common at the time, but the architects designing the new blocks really pushed the quality of the space. Not only did we have more of it, it was also better configured. For the first time we had lots of light, there were balconies to almost every room, and for me there was plenty of room to study. It really increased the wellbeing of our family. I'm very conscious of this experience when I work on residential projects, because I know

at first hand the impact our design will have on the people that will eventually live in them."

#### **Marianne Christiansen**

"I grew up in the outskirts of Odense, Denmark's third largest city. Most of the people I know there have a nice place to live regardless of their social or financial standing. And their homes have many features I've come to appreciate since living in the UK. They have good insulation and double- or triple-glazed windows. They have integrated storage, and built-in bin cupboards. They're designed with a strong awareness of light. The quality of these homes became more apparent as I grew older and much more obvious as I moved abroad.

Good design makes housing much more than just the sum of the bricks and mortar it's made from. Well-designed housing inspires people to take ownership and care better for it: it lasts longer and so people stay longer and their sense of belonging increases. Although we just don't spend enough on housing in the UK, I believe in an economy of means, where good design can help the money available to be spent where it matters the most.

I'm particularly fond of the Danish Taet-Lav (Dense-Low) housing movement, a social housing model that provides the same qualities and benefits as bigger houses. The design of the communal areas—indoor and outdoor—is very important, and that's something we should bring to social housing here. Homes are the places where we all begin and end our day, so they should create a sense of wellbeing and belonging."

# Morland Gardens

## Live and learn

Morland Gardens is a large, mixed-use development in Stonebridge, close to Harlesden town centre in north-west London. Along with the general need for social and affordable housing, our clients, Brent's regeneration team, had identified a specific need for homes that would provide a safe haven for those recently arrived in the borough. Their ambition was not only to deliver these homes, but to complement them with learning space and affordable work units that residents could access easily, enabling them to get the best possible start in their new lives.

We had been having conversations with Brent for some time, looking at different models for combining uses, but Morland Gardens presented a real opportunity to develop these further. We knew that the project would not just be about architecture; it would be about demonstrating empathy for the future residents and users of the scheme, and building a design out of the many conversations—formal and off-the-cuff—that we had with the council's education officers and regeneration specialists.

High-quality adult education is already offered on site at the Stonebridge Centre by Brent Start. We looked at a number of options to retain the locally-listed Victorian villa which is integrated with the centre buildings, but the council's preferred option was for a full regeneration to create more homes. The resulting scheme uses the sloping site to integrate the different functions of the Stonebridge Centre with the new housing and workspace. It takes the form of a perimeter block around a central courtyard, modelled to protect the inner space from the busy road alongside, but to also to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the significant street frontage.

The new 2,500sqm adult education centre sits at the base of the block. We placed the main entrance on the eastern elevation and slightly skewed the building line on either side to scoop visitors inside. Ala Uddin, Brent Start's senior manager, told us about the importance of offering semi-open learning space for informal study and networking, so we designed a double-height, top-lit central area for this purpose, wrapped with more formal classrooms. The ground floor also includes affordable workspace to support small local businesses during start-up.

Unusually for a social housing scheme, our brief for the residential element included apartments with up to five bedrooms, aimed at larger families newly arrived in the area. It also had a strong emphasis on amenity: this should be an enjoyable, sociable place to live. The apartments overlook a courtyard which sits above the atrium of the education centre, animated by large sloping rooflights which bring daylight into the space below.

In 2020 the project was shortlisted for the NLA Awards, an initiative promoting high quality design in the capital, and won a Planning Award for placemaking in the same year.





↑  
Aerial view of the site, showing the constraints and opportunities: busy roads, a suburban context and a series of existing buildings of varying ages.

↓  
The local area was dominated until the early 2000s by the Stonebridge Estate, now replaced by the complex of buildings at the bottom of the

aerial view. Our clients at the London Borough of Brent saw the Morland Gardens project as a way of correcting the mistakes made in the construction of the earlier estate, setting a new benchmark for social housing with exemplary design and a rigorous approach to quality and materials.



## Morland Gardens



↗  
The existing Victorian building on site—now occupied by the adult education centre—is briefly noted by Pevsner as a 'capacious and rustic Italianate villa with a belvedere tower', but has been 'much altered' and is now marooned among the 1960s housing around the busy junction. Its arches are referenced in the façade detailing of our design as a memory of the site's history.

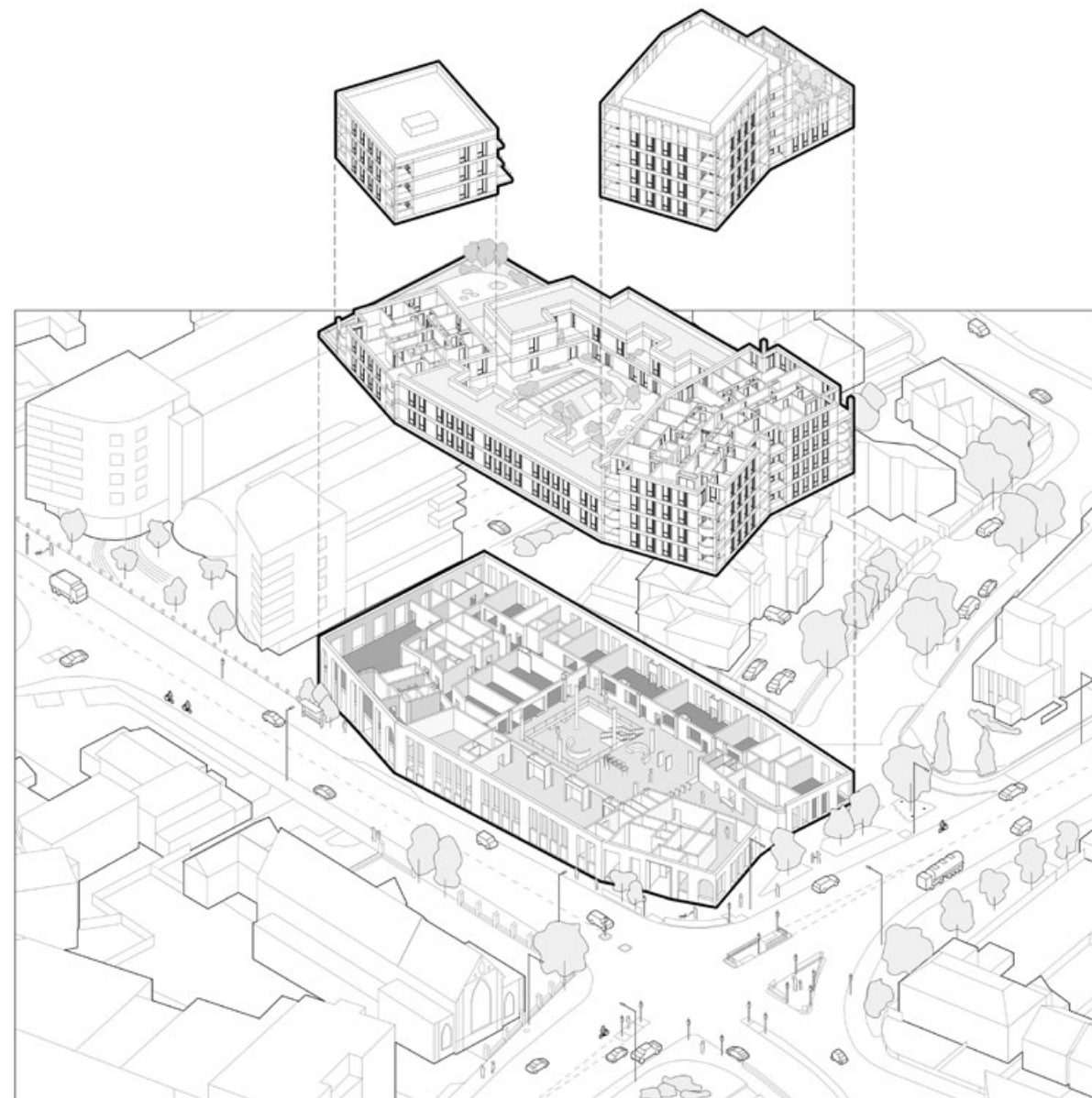
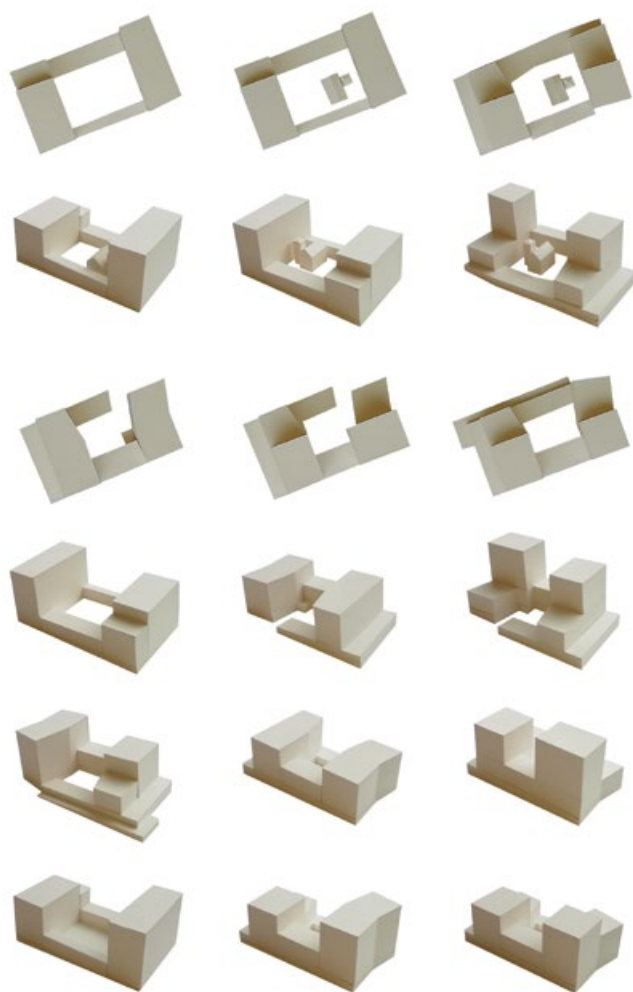
## Live and learn



↑  
Street elevation showing the sloping topography and the visual separation—achieved in scale and material—between the different uses integrated together on this

site. We took advantage of the slope to create a double-height atrium which brings together the different functions of the ground-floor education centre.





Abstract painting of an early, more rational iteration of the scheme.

Model studies showing the development of the overall form.

A major challenge was the complexity of combining three different functions on a fairly

constrained urban site. Acoustics were also an important factor, with the overall form arranged to mitigate noise from the surrounding roads. This exploded axonometric shows the public base of the scheme with residential volumes and green courtyard above.



↑  
The site model, with the upper residential levels being lowered onto the street-level plinth, where the education centre is located.



↑  
Study model exploring the facade detailing. The arched café window has an integrated stone bench, located to capture the sun at morning coffee break.

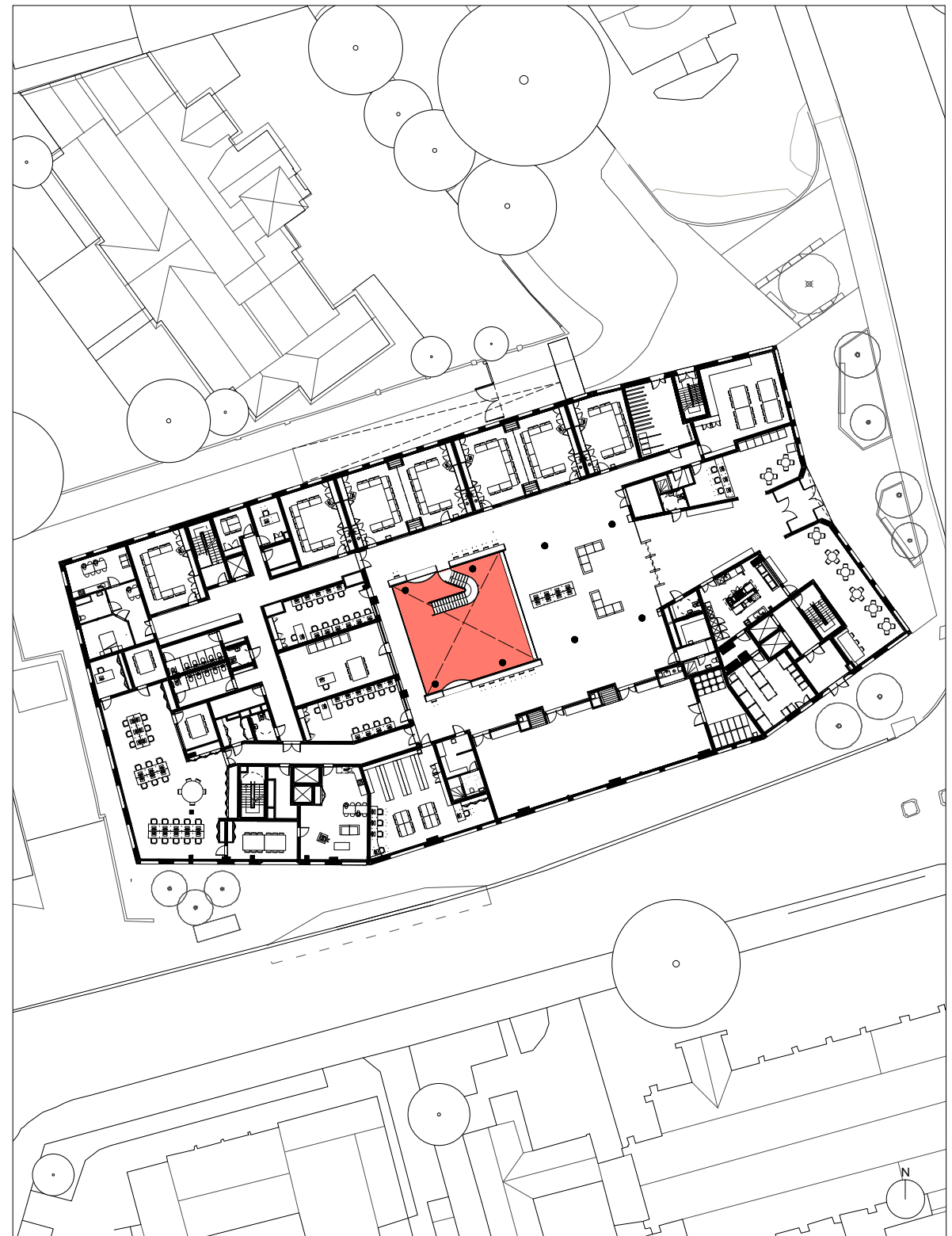


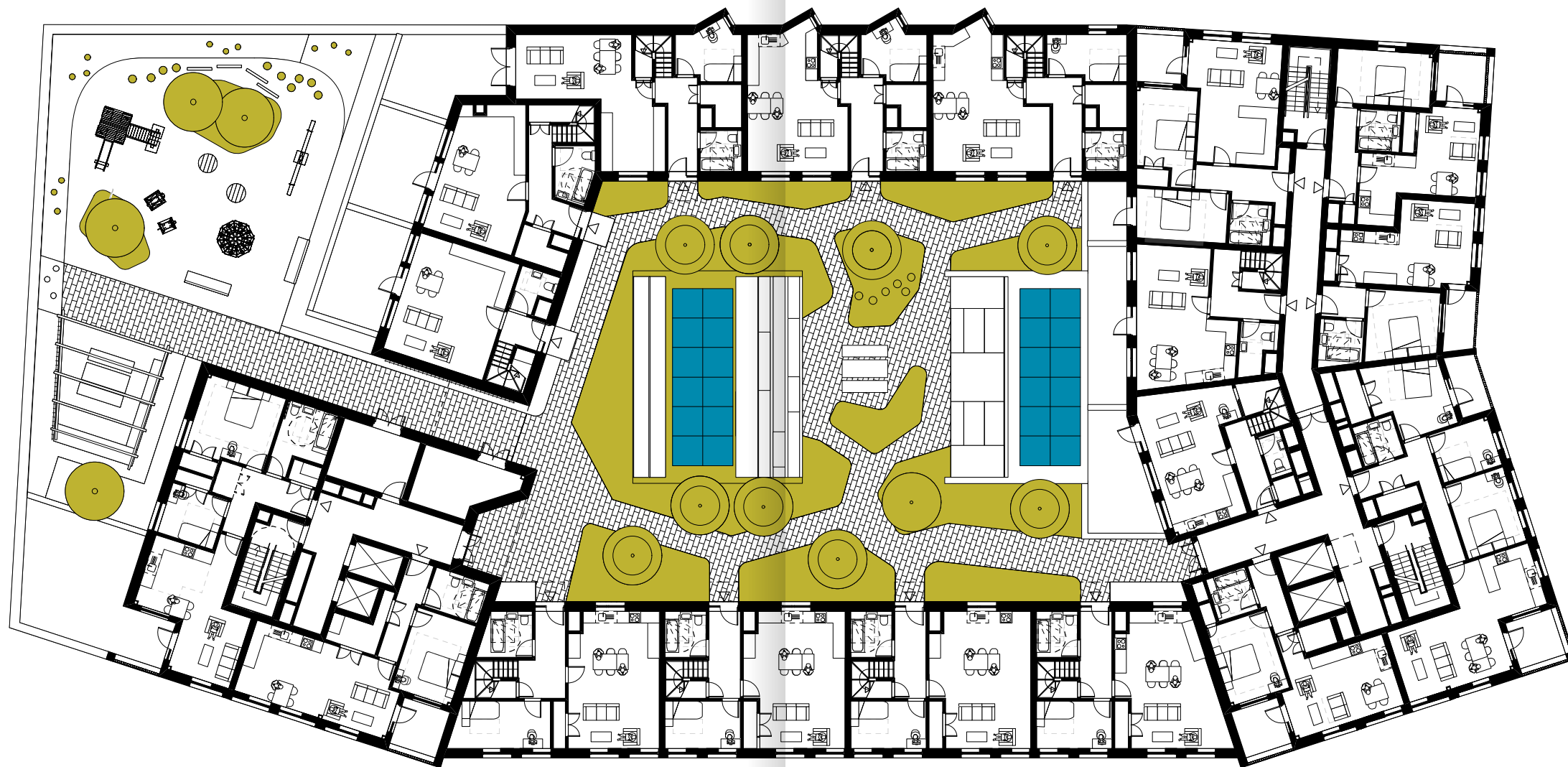


↑  
The 4.5-metre-high central space of the new education centre connects a range of different functions, including affordable workspace and formal and informal learning areas. It is

illuminated and animated by rooflights which appear as play structures in the residents' courtyard above.

→  
Ground floor plan.





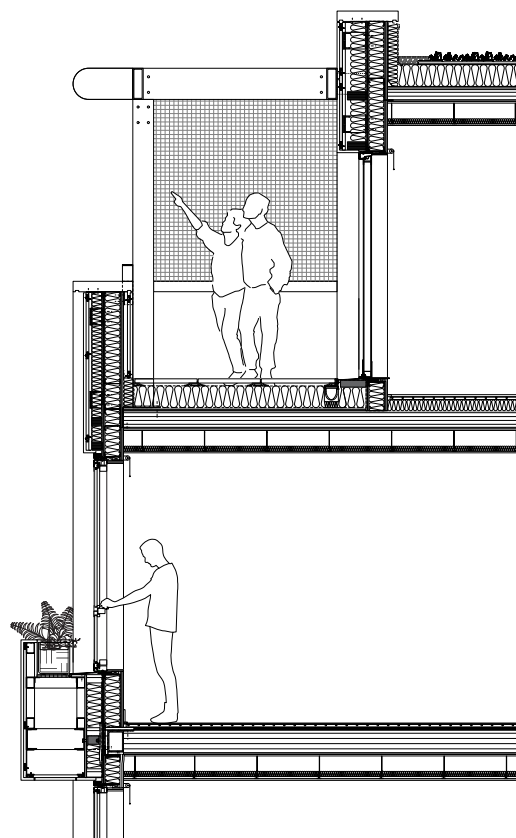
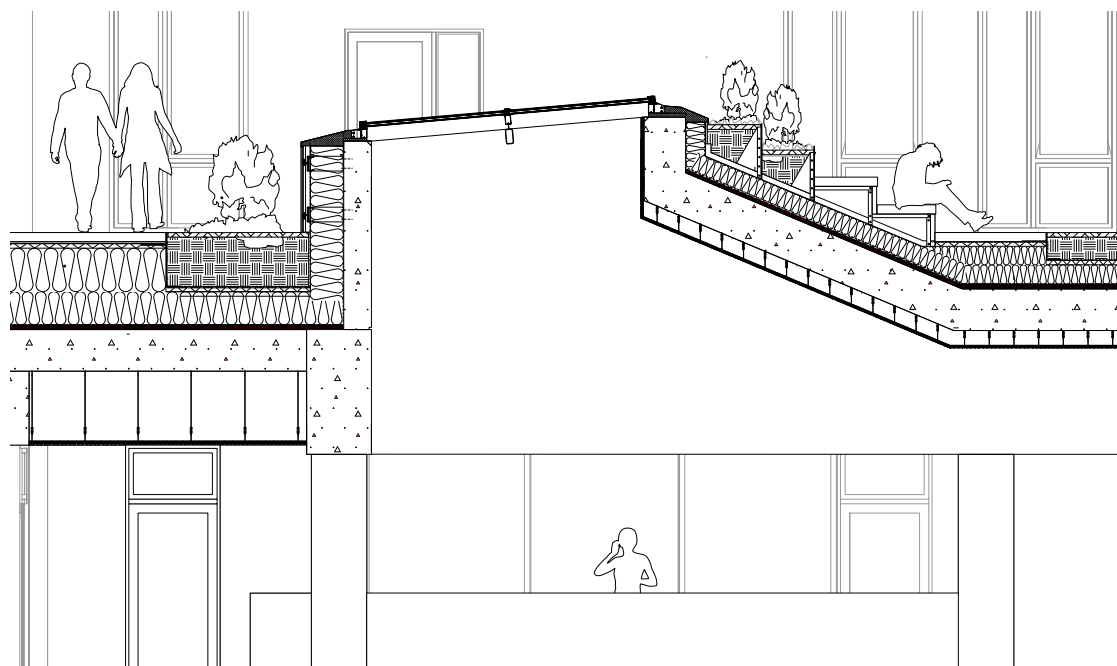
↑  
As well as the generous soft landscaping to the main courtyard, there is a smaller, more intimate outside space for the sheltered housing element of the scheme.

Rooflights into the learning centre below are incorporated into the landscape above as play structures.

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↑  
Details showing the wall and roof build-up. Units are integrated into the fabric to bring fresh air into the building via air source heat pumps.



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Generous residents' balconies, large enough to sit out on, overlook the central courtyard, while the upper maisonettes have trellised gardens.

↘  
The blocks are arranged so that the central courtyard captures as much light as possible, giving the younger residents a safe, sunny place to play and let their hair down.

# Sutton Social Housing Back to front

This project was born out of a relationship with the London Borough of Sutton that has lasted several decades, and includes our design for the Sutton Life Centre (a multi-purpose community building), primary schools and refurbishments. Looking to use their land more effectively to meet an increased need for housing, and responding to Policy H2 in the London Plan recommending the use of small brownfield sites to reduce the impact on greenfield ones, Sutton had identified a number of opportunities for infill development. Often occupied by rundown garages, many of the sites were hidden in inhospitable places, but had a variety of interesting contextual conditions. Our brief—following a short competition—was to carry out a study to explore the potential of these ‘blind spots’ for development.

We visited nine very different sites during our research. Some were tucked behind high street shops or occupied an unbuilt gap in a residential row; others were interstitial areas on the edges of estates or unused plots backing onto neighbouring gardens. Rather than working remotely, we spent time at all of them, making sketches, talking to dog walkers and other passers-by, and looking in particular at the green amenities available.

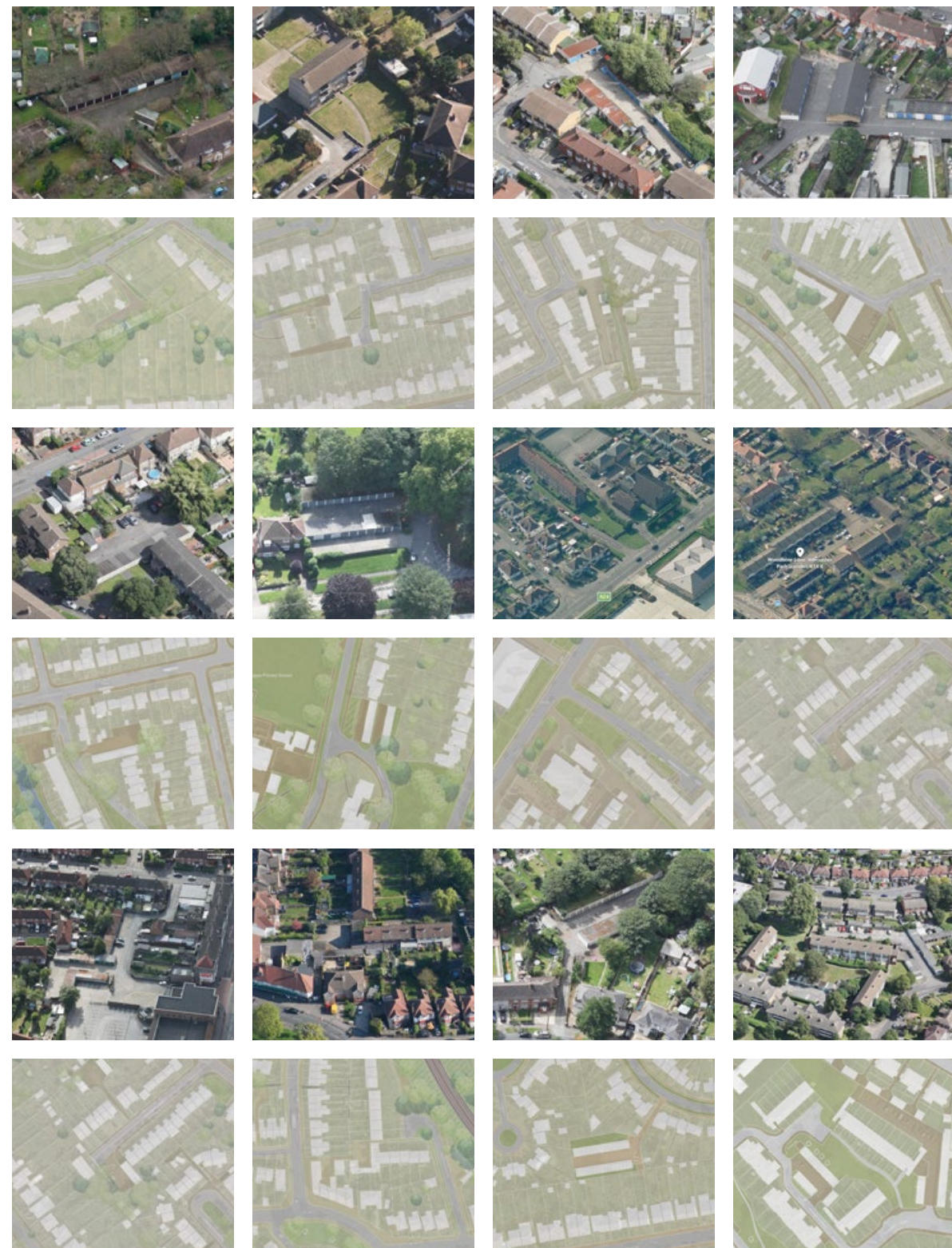
Our study set out ideas for 44 new homes across the nine locations. We treated the projects as a family, developing a standardised palette of layouts and materials, and offered the potential for them to be constructed as a modular or panellised kit of parts offsite. The design principles were informed by the ‘Good Quality Homes for All Londoners’ supplementary planning guidance which sits alongside the London Plan. Most have the character of a traditional two-up, two-down and are built in high quality handmade brick, with pitched roofs and recognisable chimneys. Throughout, we tried to hold on to the general amenity, the smallest moves that make the biggest difference to everyday lives. Stair cores have natural light, the large windows in the main living rooms are oriented for the best aspect at certain times of day, balconies are generous and hallways wide enough to bring the buggy in.





↑  
Early sections exploring the contextual conditions of specific sites. Some were small and only offered the opportunity to construct a couple of new homes; others had space for larger-scale housing with multiple units.

↑  
Aerial views and figure ground plans of sites within the study, showing a range of contextual conditions.





→  
This environmental section shows our early intent to build with a cross-laminated timber (CLT) frame, giving a natural, almost Scandinavian, quality to the inside spaces. The distinctive chimneys respond to the suburban location and also assist with the passive ventilation of the homes.







↑  
Some aspects of the design and detailing are common across all the sites. These elevations show how a familiar pitched-roof form is applied on both single-family and multiple-unit housing.



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The homes on this site are cranked away from one another to look out onto an existing tree, taking full advantage of the local landscape.

↘  
This site had a tough urban setting behind some garages, so we gave the homes walled gardens to offer sanctuary and safety.



↑  
Guided by the idea of home  
as a refuge, we took particular  
care in detailing the arrival  
sequence whatever the scale,  
giving residents shelter as they  
approach their front door.





If there's one thing we've learned makes better buildings, it's empathy. Architecture never happens in isolation—and simply by being interested and engaged, we've found it's possible to open up the conversations that connect a scheme to its clients and community.

**Empathise and engage**

## **We ♥ constraints**

We believe that the more constraints there are, the better the architecture. If there aren't any constraints, we create them. Challenging sites, existing buildings and complex briefs almost always present incredible opportunities for great design.



## Social detail

If a site's constraints guide the bigger design decisions, then it's empathy that informs the smaller, social details. These details frame the human narratives that aren't included in the brief, anticipating specific moments in the users' lives.

## **Passive future**

To limit our environmental impact, we start with what is already there. By manipulating the form and fabric of a building—whether new or existing—we can work with the existing conditions of topography, light and orientation, and harness the natural energy sources offered by air, ground and water.



## **Concrete on our boots**

Good architecture is as much about what happens on the building site as it is about what's on the drawing board. By working alongside contractors as well as clients we can ring-fence the ideas and details that matter, championing the quality of the building throughout its construction.

# Wolverhampton Public Sector Hub Healthy high street

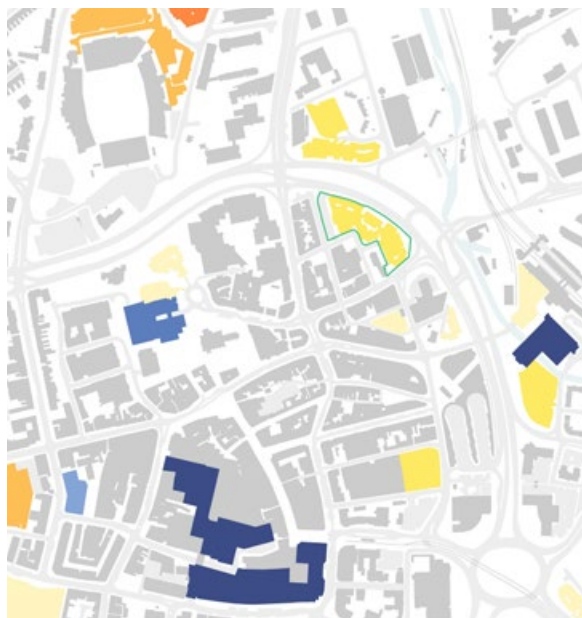
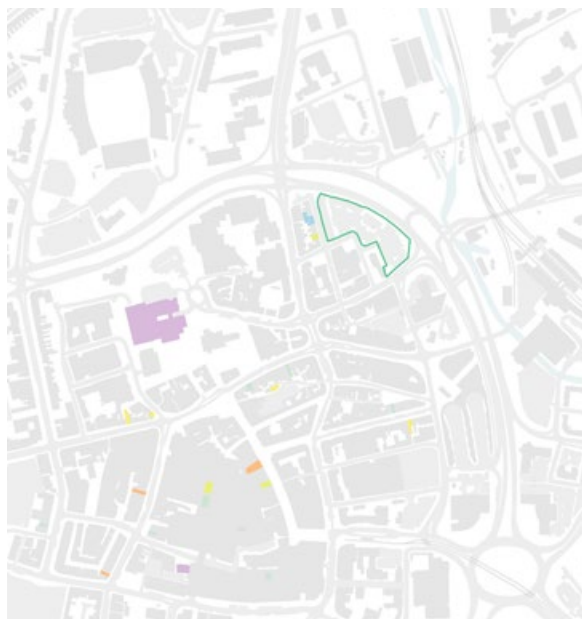
The brief for this project brought together two very different aspirations: the first to improve and rationalise the healthcare provision in the centre of Wolverhampton, and the second to bring new life to one of the city's main shopping streets. Like many across the UK, Wolverhampton's independent shops and high-street chains have struggled with competition from online retailers, leaving large gaps in activity at street level, a situation brought into even sharper focus with the recent health crisis.

To address this gradual decline, the local authority wanted to bring a new mix of uses back to anchor the far end of Broad Street, one of the main shopping thoroughfares running through the city centre. Rather than reinventing the retail offer, they instead decided to combine social housing with a cluster of community services, guaranteeing footfall by bringing residents back to the centre of town and consolidating a number of existing healthcare facilities.

Like many Midlands cities, Wolverhampton was 'repaired' postwar with a new focus on the car, and the city is circled by an inner ring road that cuts off the old centre from the surrounding neighbourhoods. The site for the new hub sits next to this ring road and is currently occupied by a rather windswept car park. However, it is also in close proximity to The Chubb Building, a listed Victorian lock factory now home to a cinema and several media companies. The robust redbrick factory, with its mill-like quality, provided inspiration for the form and materials we chose for our proposals.

We developed our study in collaboration with a complex client group, ranging from healthcare professionals through to the police, the university and the local council. We wanted to send a powerful message to those struggling that care was available, encouraging people to freely access the services offered by the centre. But it also had to be a good place to live, so rather than a solid block on the corner, we created a series of small, courtyarded gardens, protected from the ring road by the taller residential volumes. These quiet, sun-filled spaces give a centre a green setting and offer the residents a high quality of life, despite the inner city location.





↑  
Our study involved an appraisal of the urban condition citywide, considering (top line, left to right) healthcare uses, green space, landmark buildings and building use, as well as (bottom line, left to right) parking provision, building

height, cycling routes and public transport infrastructure. The findings from this review were synthesised in our proposals, which bring together complementary briefs for urban renewal, new housing and improved healthcare facilities.

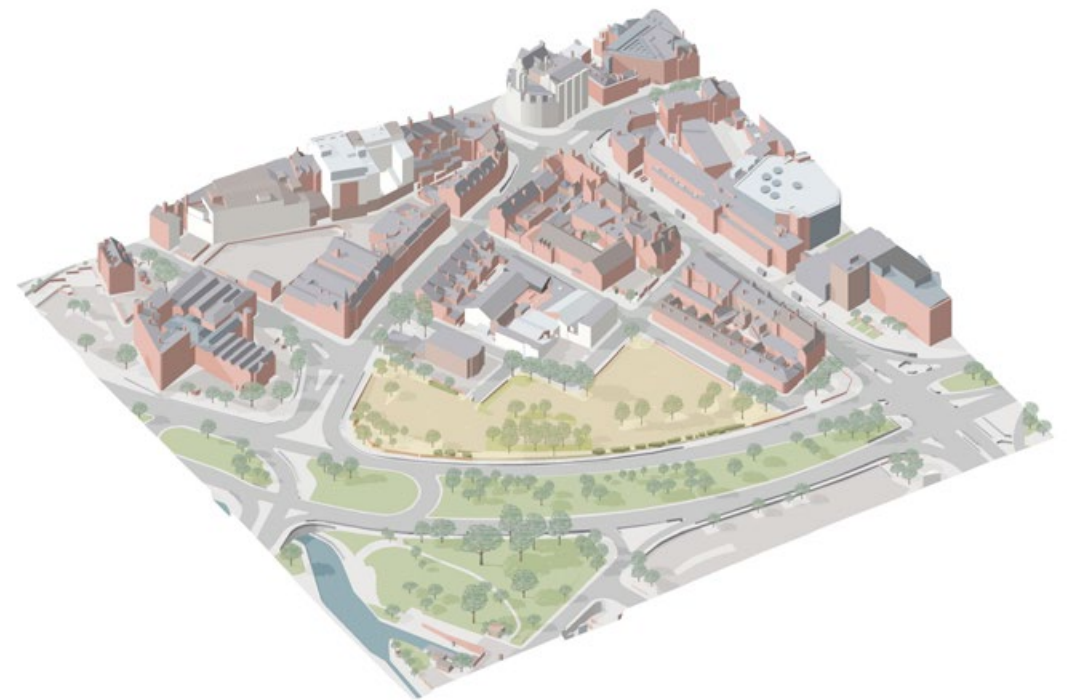




↑  
 Drawn as part of our urban appraisal, this figure ground plan examines the conservation areas and heritage buildings in Wolverhampton's city centre. Our site offered great potential due to its proximity to the re-inhabited Chubb Building.

↑  
 The scheme forms an anchor at bottom of one of the main processional routes through the city centre.  
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 Although currently occupied by a car park, the site (shown as a beige area) sits close to many of

Wolverhampton's distinctive red brick buildings, and the materials chosen for our proposed scheme draw from this palette.





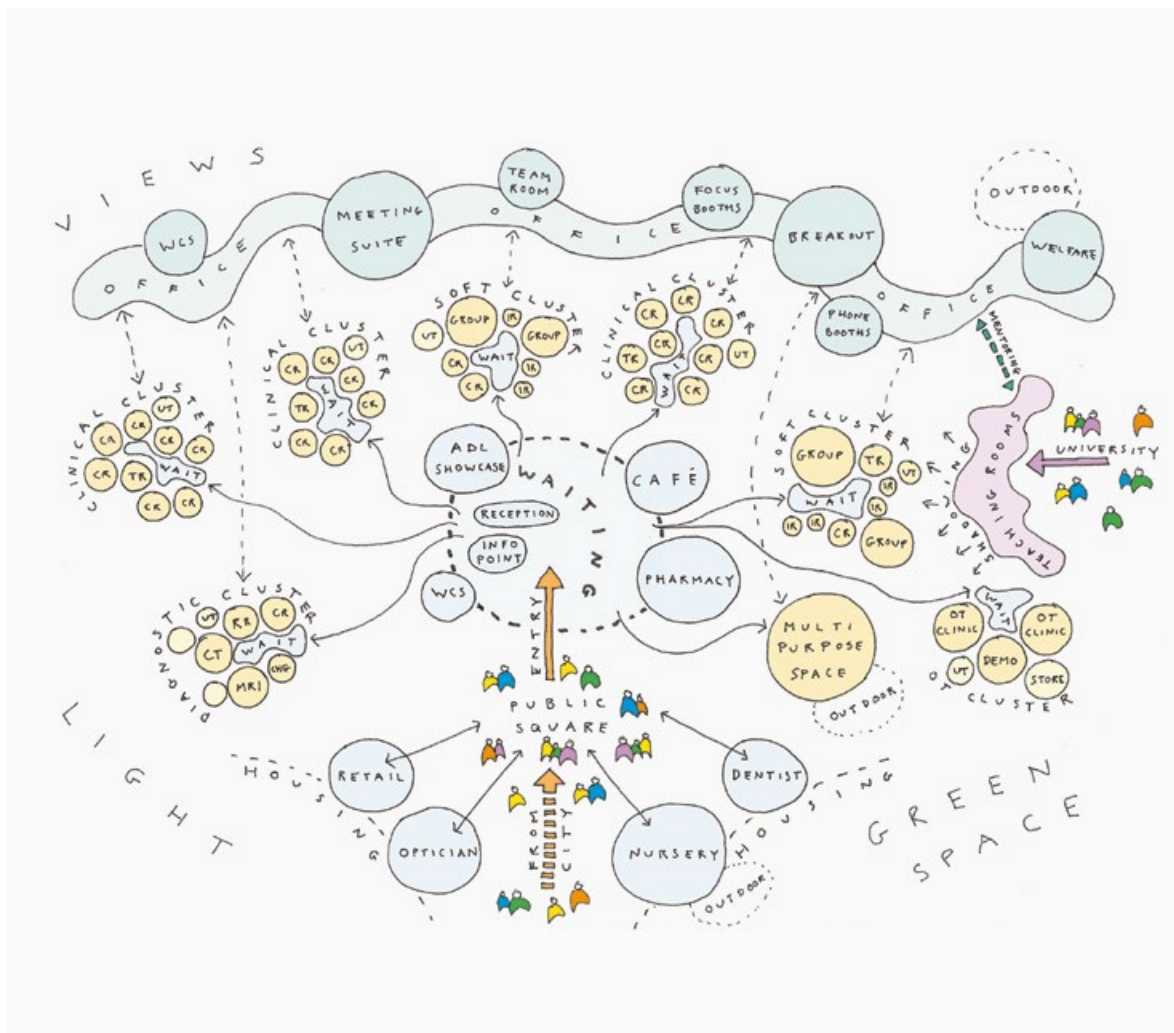
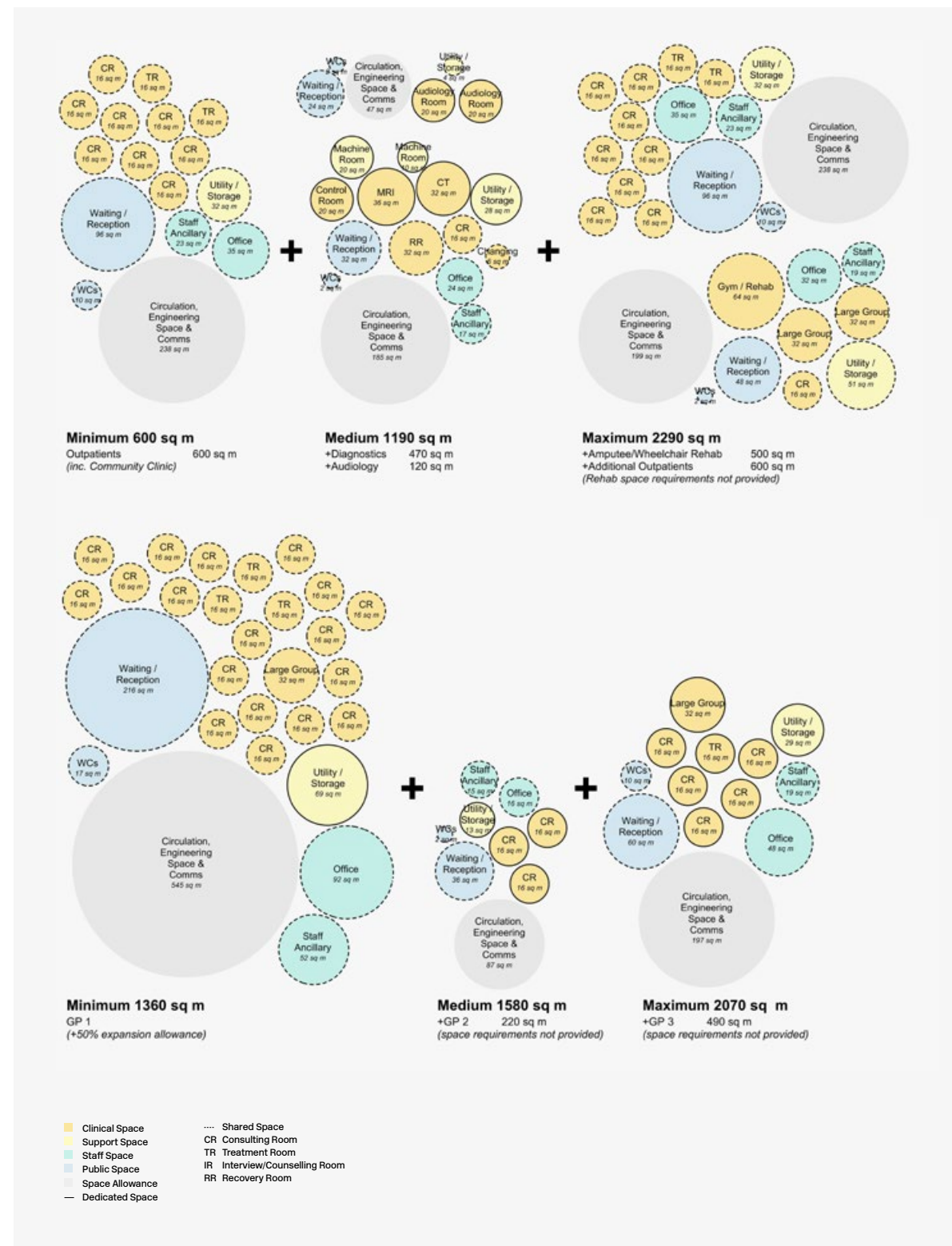
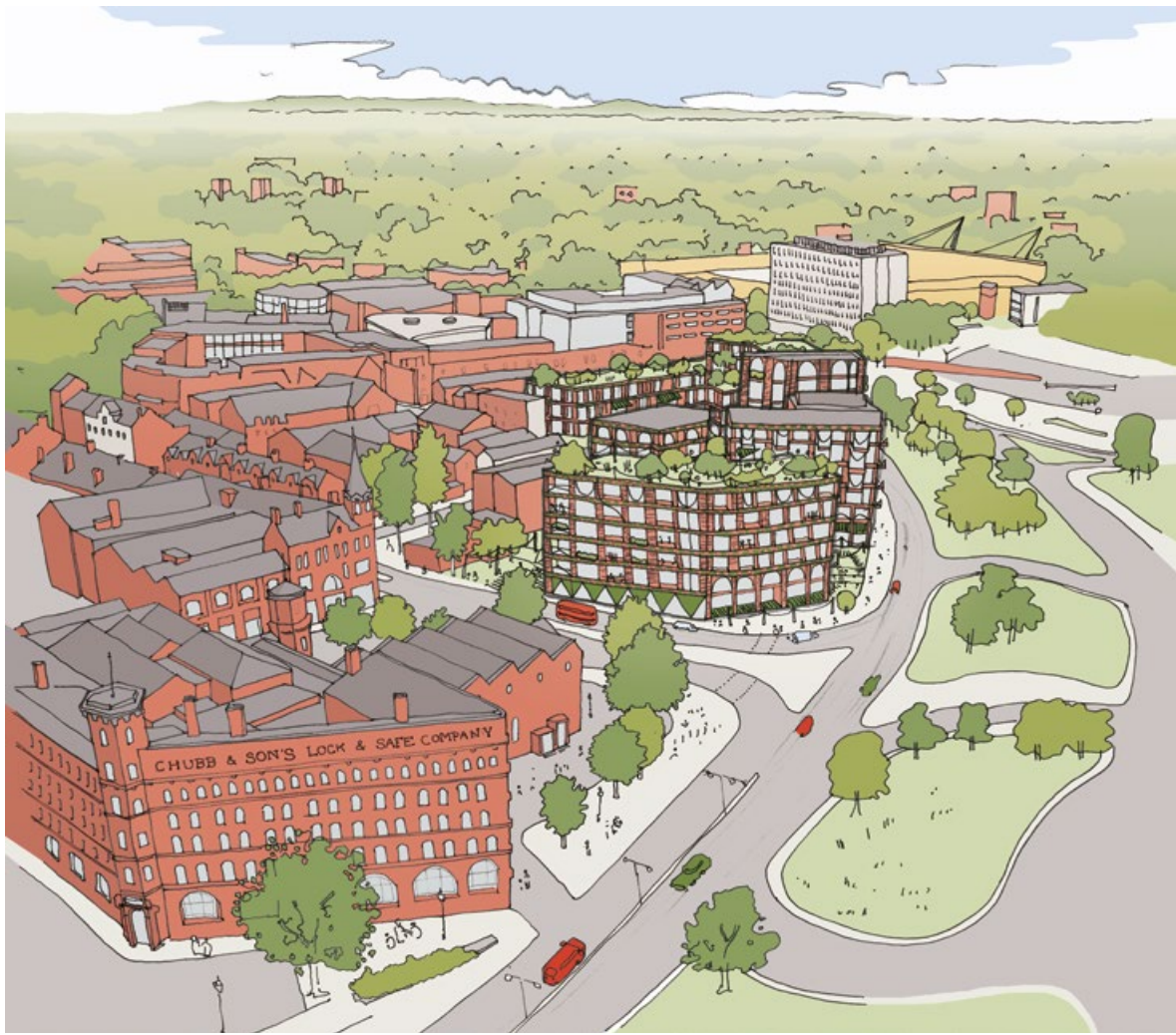


Diagram developed during our briefing sessions with the various stakeholders involved in the project, illustrating their collected services coming together in clusters under a single roof.

→ Diagrams exploring the accommodation needs for the different stakeholder groups, and investigating how much space can be shared between clusters. Our original brief was for a medical research centre as well as housing, offices and community healthcare hub.







↑  
Sketch showing the new hub in relation to surrounding factory, warehouse and civic buildings, and picking up on the mill-like quality of some of these earlier red brick structures.



↗  
Vignette showing the view from one of the residential apartments. The scheme is intended to stem the flow of people moving to the suburbs, bringing residential use back to the inner city.

↘  
Sketch showing the new development at the end of Broad Street, a key route out of the city centre.

# Estate Regeneration

## Highway code

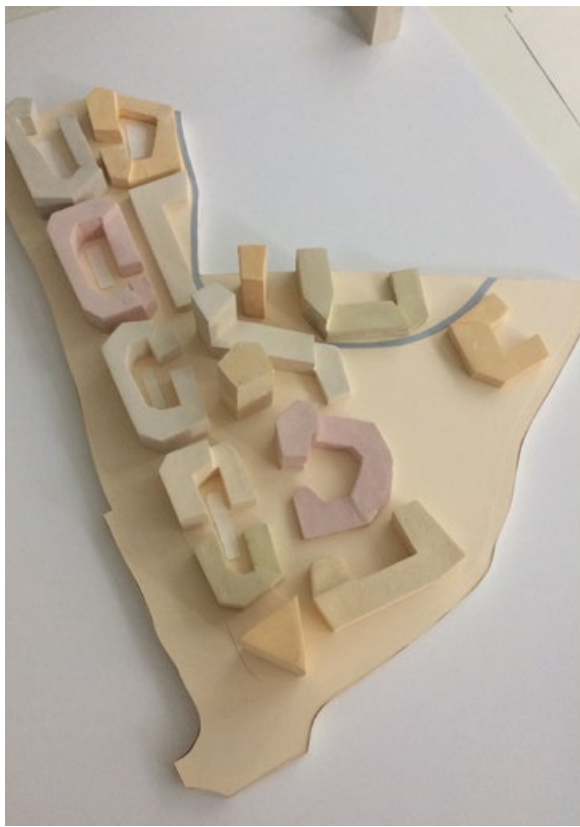
Working with a long-standing local authority client, we developed strategic proposals for this large and unusual site in early 2020. The 16-hectare area is defined by its uncomfortably close proximity to an eight-lane highway and around 250 semi-detached or semi-terraced 1930s houses. Constructed from pre-fabricated concrete panels, much of the housing is now in a bad condition, sitting in various states of extension and dilapidation.

For the local authority, the neighbourhood had become something of a blind spot and so, with an ever-increasing need for social housing, they asked us to carry out a study into how it could be redeveloped. Despite our hopes that pollution and noise from the busy road will lessen in the future as we adopt greener modes of transport, the central move in our proposal was to set the housing back so that it was cushioned from the traffic by a 30-40 metre-wide linear park. This 'bio bund' would act as a highway for walkers, cyclists and skateboarders, linking to a bridge over the North Circular into the Brent River Park.

The new park acts as a breathing wall for the housing. We arranged this in higher-density, courtyarded blocks which are more urban in character than the existing semis, and could potentially provide up to 2,000 new homes. They would climb in height from four to eight storeys in places, according to the immediate context, with the taller structures bordering the linear park and lower-rise blocks facing south. There is a varied mix of accommodation, from sheltered accommodation through to one- to five-bedroom apartments of varying tenures.

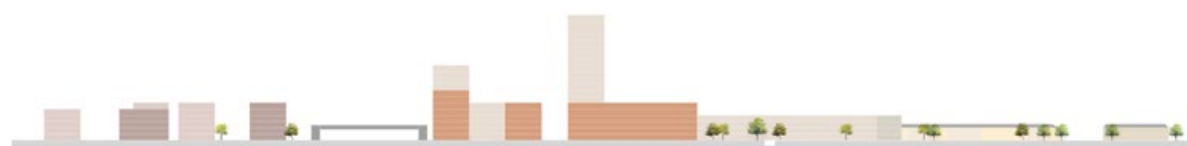
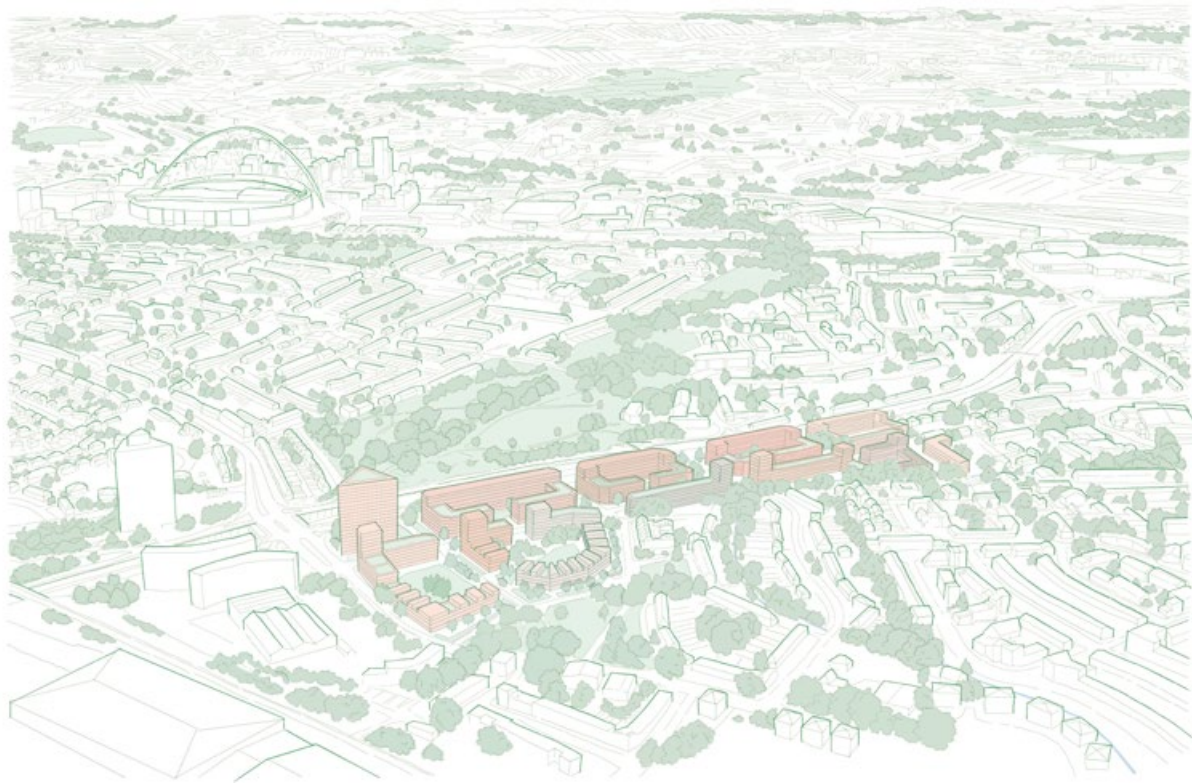
In the design coding we have prioritised amenity for the residents, arranging the blocks to bring as much light as possible into the apartments and the central courtyards. They also anticipate the likely scenario post-COVID in which more people will work from home, providing a more pleasant living and working environment with better connections to outside space, and also ensuring residents felt ownership of this space. Recognising that the ground plane needs to be active, the masterplan sets out areas for small shops and affordable workspaces, and we also looked at integrating a vertical school onto the back of one of the descending blocks.



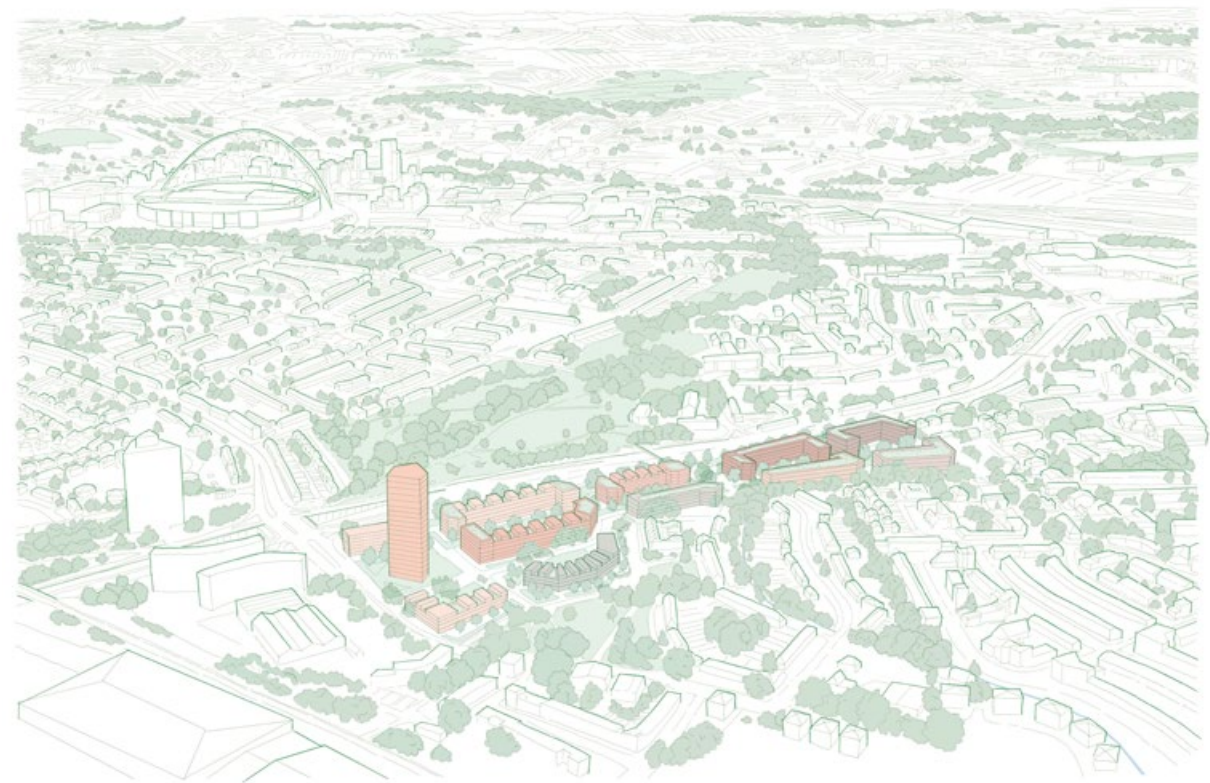


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Options for the scheme, the first (left) placing the urban blocks closer to the main road, and the second (right) setting these back behind a linear park. Our client preferred the second proposal, which offers less housing but a far higher quality of life.





↑  
The two options as a bird's eye view. The preferred version, with a linear park along the main highway, is once again shown on the right.







↑  
The form of the blocks slopes towards the south to invite in the sun. They wrap around extensively planted, sheltered outside courtyards for growing, relaxing and playing.



↑  
The courtyards are surprisingly large, offering space for greenhouses and vegetable plots.





↑  
The new linear landscape to the north of the urban blocks is part of a green network linking residents to a large park on the other side of the busy road. To this side of the block, outside space is limited to small

balconies to mitigate against traffic noise. Our study also proposed that an underground river be uncovered, marking the southern edge of the regeneration area and giving further screening to the new homes.



# Brent Urban Farm and Liveable Space

## Home grown

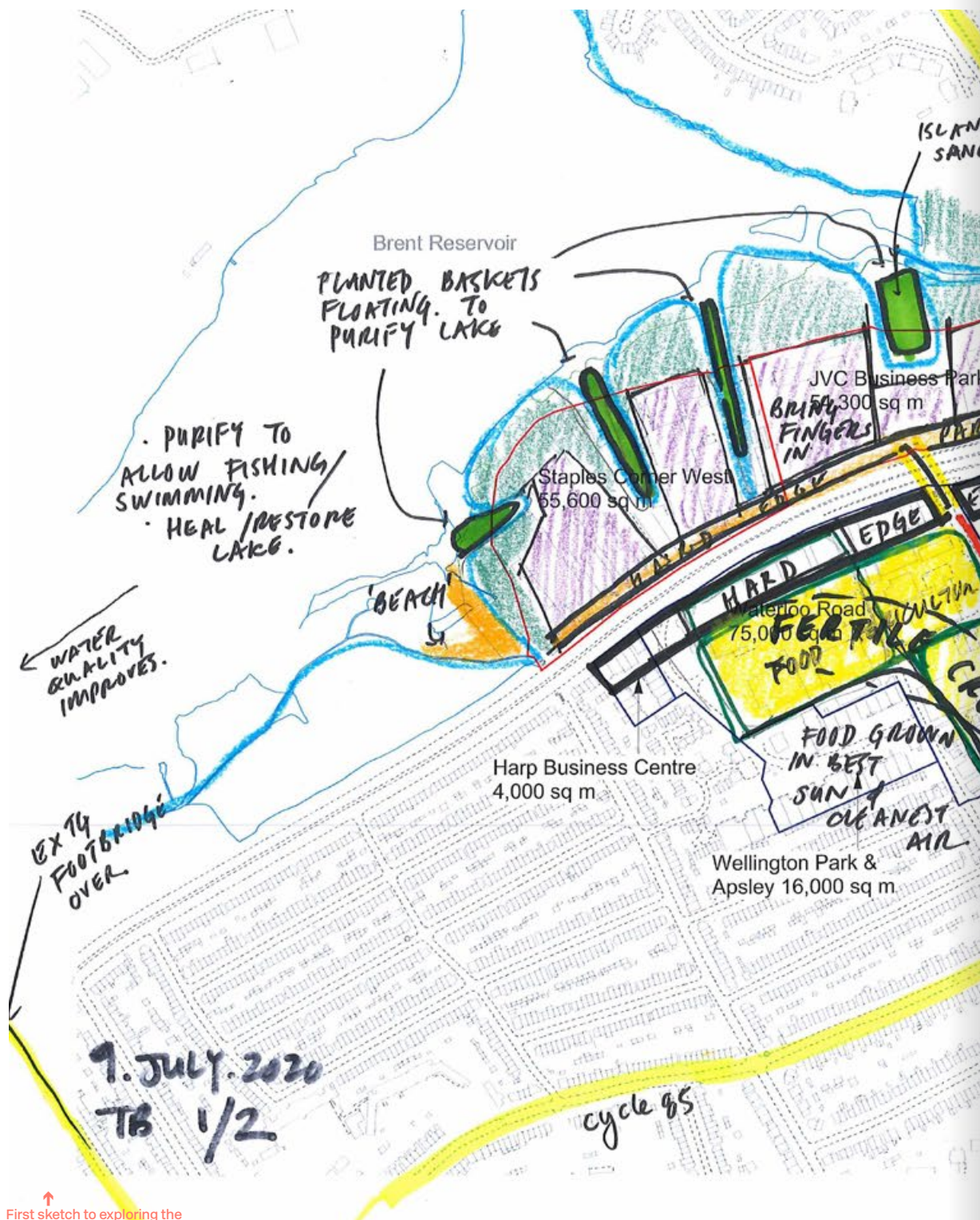
The area around Staples Corner in north-west London, where the North Circular meets the M1 motorway, is a particularly Bollardian landscape of flyovers and industrial sheds. Straddling the main road, the cluster of sheds—many of them now redundant—blocks access to the Welsh Harp (or Brent) Reservoir from a large grid of interwar suburbs to the south. We were approached by the London Borough of Brent to produce a study into how the area could be redeveloped. As Strategic Industrial Land (SIL), the industrial base had to be retained, but their aim was to reinvigorate it in a more sustainable way, as well as introducing new housing and improved connections across the neighbourhood.

We began by looking at the economic activity that had historically taken place in the area. Much of this was food production, increasingly targeted towards the aviation industry at nearby Heathrow. In an attempt to decarbonise the site and reallocate it to green industry, we worked with The Ecoponics Group, experts in aquaponics, to look at how more environmentally friendly food growing businesses could be located here. As a result, our masterplan proposes an urban farm that could become the UK's first major centre for hydroponic and aquaponic farming, our projections showing that potentially all of Brent's residents could be fed each day with fresh vegetables grown within the borough. Hydroponics would colonise the site on a large scale, the buildings taking an industrial greenhouse aesthetic, accompanied by a centre for agricultural training.

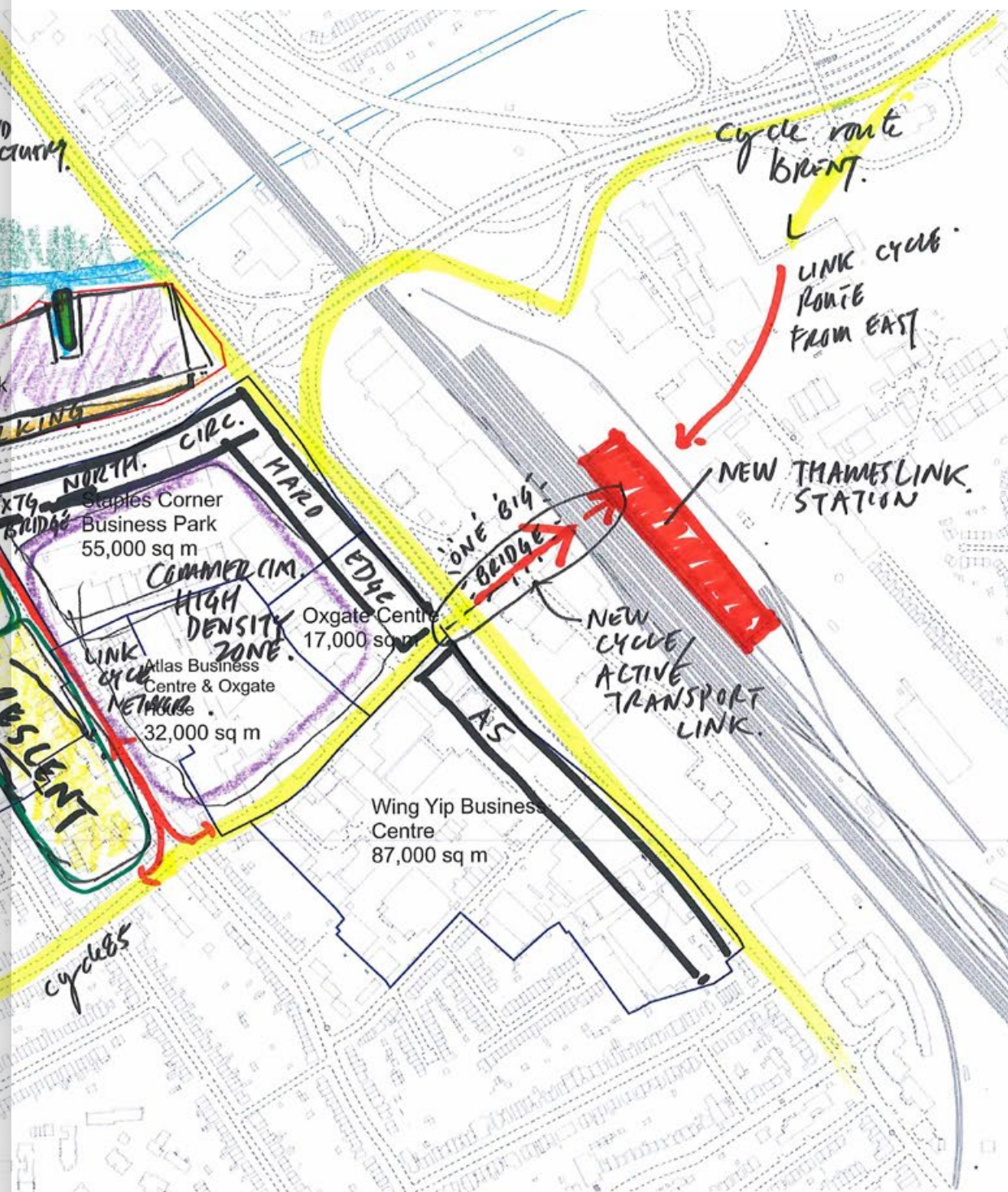
The residential elements of the scheme take full advantage of the benefits offered by waterside living on the fringe of the reservoir, new bridge connections removing the focus from the busy roads that currently fragment the neighbourhood. Our design code suggests the residential blocks would be clad with brick to give a more domestic feel, and—in line with the scheme's environmental ambition—have a cross-laminated timber structure. They would have passive environmental systems, sharing an energy recovery system with the greenhouses and aquaponics facilities.

The scheme shows how civic values—of wellness, sustainability, education and work—can be applied to urban development, all criteria in the project's successful shortlisting for the NLA Awards in 2020. It marks a shift away from automotive priority to a better pedestrian experience, with the restoration and improvement of public realm central to the masterplan.

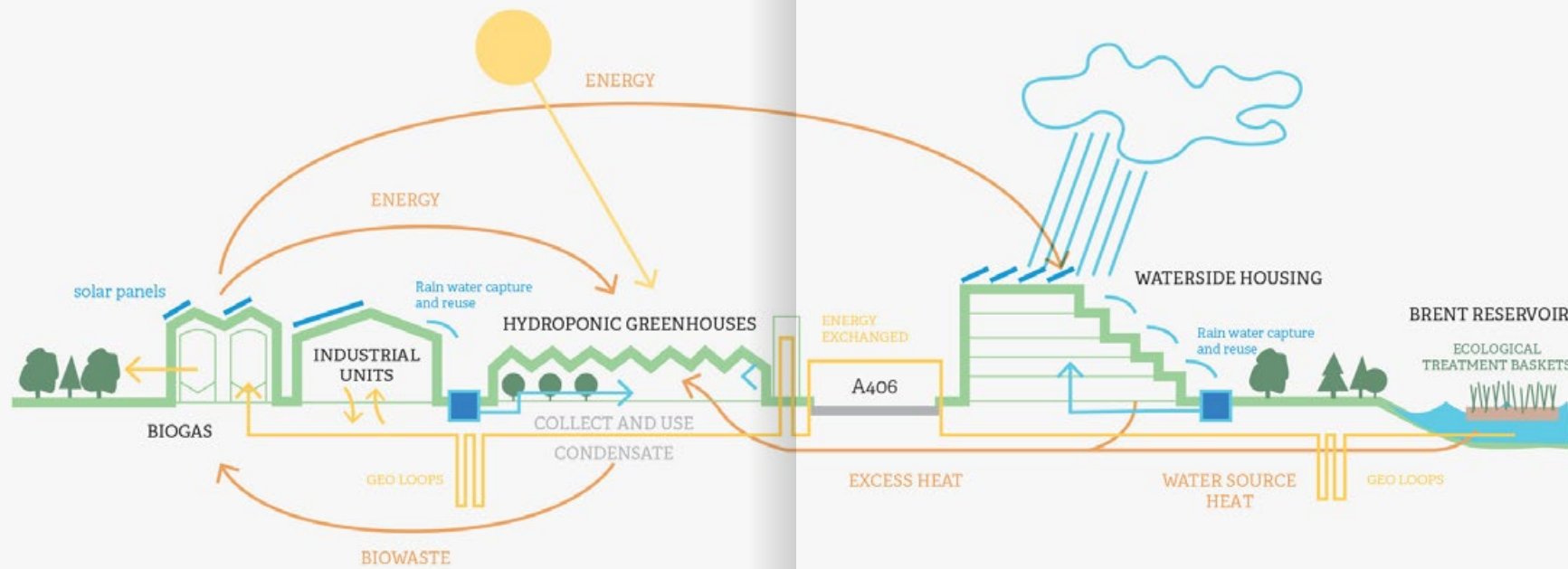




First sketch to exploring the contextual opportunities and constraints offered by the site.



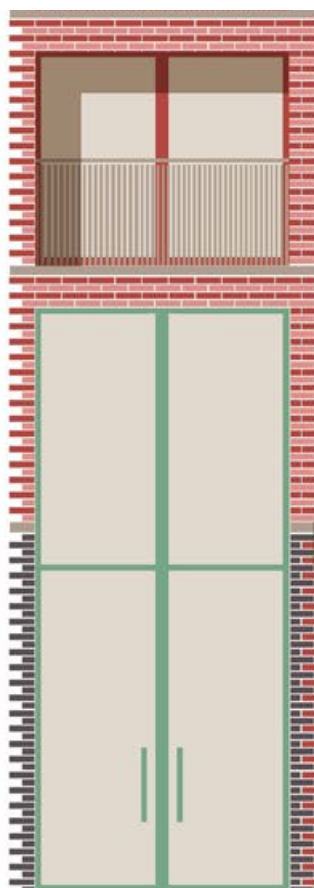
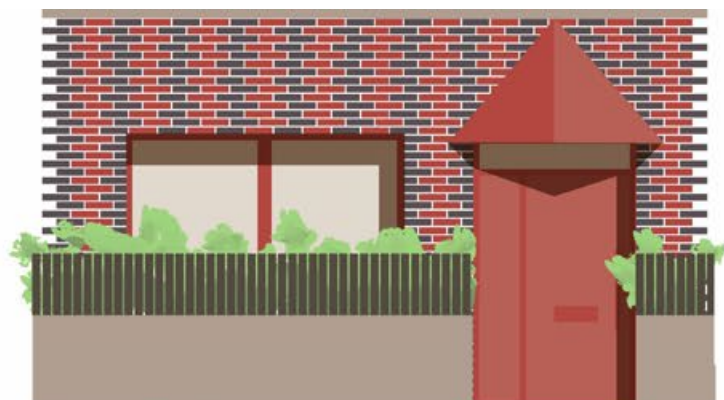
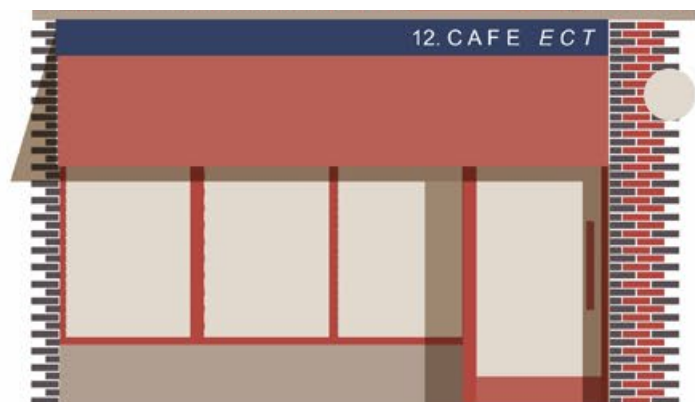




↑  
Environmental section developed in collaboration with Professor Trevor Butler, a specialist in sustainability, water systems and hydro-ponics. Industrial units,

hydroponic greenhouses, waterside housing and natural resources are harnessed into an energy and food system with minimal waste and optimum efficiency.





↑  
Entrances to the various residential and agricultural spaces alternate with small shops and food outlets at street level. Also see elevation overleaf.



↑  
Elevation overlooking lock, showing greenhouses placed on the rooftops of the lower-rise residential blocks to mix in different uses and materials.





Brent Urban Farm and Liveable Space



Home grown





↑  
Birds eye view, showing the  
interface of residential blocks  
with the reservoir.



↑  
Water is pulled from the reservoir  
into new basins between the  
residential buildings, draining  
and cleaning the water naturally  
through a mixture of unpaved  
surfaces.





**Elmview Court**  
London Borough of Ealing

A block of 18 flats for shared ownership overlooking Norwood Green, completed in 1999 and sitting in a large landscaped garden.

The architecture, in the style of Voysey and the arts and crafts movement, helps to mediate between two listed Georgian houses adjacent to the site, and the many 1930s semi-detached homes surrounding it.

Due to the quality of the scheme, the apartments sold quickly in a tough market, and it became a flagship development for the housing association client.



**Elmgrove Road**  
London Borough of Harrow

A high-density development of 49 homes, all affordable, on a former industrial site close to good transport links and a local shopping centre.

As a 100% 'no car' scheme, residents are offered an integrated travel package linked to car club membership.



**Leconfield Road Housing**  
London Borough of Islington

A terrace of 25 new-build townhouses, each of around 80 square metres, built in 1994 and reflecting the practice's long-term commitment to designing high quality social housing.

The scheme demonstrates how, with thoughtful design, well-detailed architecture can be built on a small budget.

The design takes a familiar London condition—the Victorian terrace, with its repeating module of homes—and reconstructs it as social housing.



**Isleden House**  
London Borough of Islington

Study to add three apartments to a courtyarded postwar estate of retirement and sheltered accommodation, built as alms-style cottages and larger blocks with external walkways.

A careful, strategic approach was needed to minimise disruption to the residents, who—despite the need for more flats—valued the quietness of the estate.

The new units were designed to comply with London Housing Design Guide standards, and high energy efficiency targets.

The existing buildings were loaded with sociable details, such as places to sit in the sun, rose gardens, and cottage-style environments, and our architecture aimed to reflect these thoughtful conditions.



**Windsor Estate**  
London Borough of Hackney

Feasibility study for the redevelopment of a postwar housing estate, removing existing buildings in disrepair and adding new-build accommodation in a complex series of phases.

The study tackled a series of challenging constraints: the site was very tight, sitting next to a Conservation Area and a local park, and the project had to be delivered within strict budgetary guidelines.

Our design recognised the park setting, adding balconies and bays which helped extend the park into the new buildings.



**Stratford High Street**  
London Borough of Newham

Proposals for a development of up to 100 homes in a Flatiron-inspired tower and a terrace of townhouses, including apartments of up to five bedrooms.

This is a super-urban site of just 0.25 hectares, so the scheme is configured to mitigate the effects of traffic noise and pollution.

A lower-rise street of family homes sits to the rear of the development away from the harsher, High Street environment, while the tower anchors the site on a prominent corner.

Written and edited by Emma Keyte  
Designed by BOB Design  
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Curl la Tourelle Head

**Curl la Tourelle Head**

Unit 8, 16–24 Underwood Street

London N1 7JQ

+44 (0)20 7267 0055

mail@clth.co.uk

Instagram: cltharchitecture

Twitter: @CLTHArchitects