

NORTH

HERTS

DESIGN

CODE

V.01

2026

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INTRODUCTION

North Hertfordshire has a long tradition of planning innovation, shaped by its rich heritage of ancient and historic buildings, medieval market towns and the globally significant Garden City movement. This legacy provides both an inspiration and a responsibility to maintain high standards of design, especially at a time when the Government has set ambitious national housebuilding targets.

As the district grows and changes, we need to meet this challenge in a new way. This means questioning current approaches and moving away from formulaic and land-hungry development that risks consuming substantial areas of our countryside.¹

The North Herts Design Code, developed with residents, sets out a shared vision for the future of development in the district, ensuring that growth is shaped by strong place-making principles and consistent design standards. It seeks to deliver development that is walkable, green and locally distinctive, where people feel safe, connected and proud of the places they live.

Prioritising design quality has many proven benefits. Research demonstrates that good design is not simply an aesthetic consideration but a social one.²



Visioning Workshop, Residents Design Forum, June 2025.

Design quality is closely linked to mental health, well-being, community cohesion and perceptions of safety. Poorly designed housing disproportionately affects more vulnerable groups, reinforcing inequality and limiting opportunities for thriving and resilient communities.

The North Herts Design Code seeks to put place-making and people at the heart of the planning process, ensuring the places we deliver now leave a positive lasting legacy for future generations.

Councillor Donna Wright
Executive Member for Place

¹Why We Need Higher Housing Densities, Nottingham Design Quality Framework, Nottingham City Council (2019)

²Professor Matthew Carmona, Tackling Inequality in Housing Design Quality: Routes to Success (2021)

Scope and Purpose

A design code is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as a set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. It serves as a tool to ensure high-quality, consistent design, building upon a clear design vision.

With this in mind, the North Herts Design Code is made up of two main sections; the Place Objectives which form the underlying vision for the document, and the Code which covers the technical design requirements.

Together, these sections seek to:

- Set clear design expectations for applicants at the outset of the development process;
- Translate the strategic objectives and policy principles of the Local Plan and Council Plan into clear design requirements;
- Embed place-making as a core consideration in all residential-led development.

Status and Adoption

This Design Code was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in June 2026.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance defines SPDs as documents which support and supplement Local Plan and National Planning Policy, adding further detail to the high-level principles set out in these documents. As such, the main function of the North Herts Design Code is to set out design expectations in relation to policies in the North Herts Local Plan

(adopted November 2022) and both the current and anticipated versions of the National Planning Policy Framework. It particularly supports Local Plan Policies SP9 and D1 which set out overarching design expectations, but is also relevant to policies on matters such as transport and open space.

The North Herts Design Code has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012 and has undergone consultation with local groups and national organisations in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). It has also been subject to screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment.

The North Herts Design Code will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for residential-led development across the district and provide a platform for further design guidance which the Council will be required to provide as Government reforms are enacted.

Use and Application

This document is intended for use by anyone involved in the development process including landowners, developers, agents, designers, town and parish councils and other interested parties commenting on proposals such as local residents.

The North Herts Design Code applies to residential-led development of more than 2 homes. This ensures that place-making and design quality are given appropriate weight in decision-making at all scales of development. Codes will be applied proportionately on a case-by-case basis, informed by the types of development and application being considered.

This Design Code forms the overarching authority-wide framework for securing high quality design across the area and will be used by Decision Makers in assessing design quality and issuing of pre-application advice.

Significant schemes are being brought forward across the district. Large-scale development takes many years to be implemented and substantive design work may already have been undertaken.

The Design Code SPD will be applied having regard to the following guidelines:

- Where sites benefit from a masterplan and site-specific design code adopted or approved before June 2026, those documents will take precedence over the North Herts Design Code SPD in the determination of compliance and decision-making for the relevant site areas.

- Where a masterplan or other design material has been adopted or approved before June 2026 but detailed work remains ongoing, schemes must be consistent with the North Herts Design Code SPD where;

- this would complement principles established in earlier, approved phases of work;
- or design parameters or detail have not yet been established.

All other sites and schemes must be demonstrably consistent with the North Herts Design Code SPD.

To support the effective implementation and assessment of the Design Code, the Council will prepare and maintain a suite of supporting documents, including a compliance tracker to assist officers in the assessment of proposals against relevant coding requirements, and a practical guide for applicants, both of which will be developed following adoption of the Design Code.

ENGAGEMENT

The North Herts Design Code has been developed over a two-year period through extensive engagement with five key strands of stakeholders including local residents through a Residents Design Forum, Councillors, expert consultants and council officers through three key stages of work outlined below.

Stage 1 – Identifying Issues

The first stage of work focussed on assessing current development practices through a series of place reviews undertaken across the district. Development Management, Strategic Planning and Urban Design officers together with Councillors took part in a series of site visits that assessed a range of development sites against national good design criteria. This identified strengths and weaknesses in recently completed development and helped to establish a clear set of priorities for the Design Code, recognising that it could not address every issue in every location.

Stage 2 – Visioning

The second phase focussed on developing an ambitious vision for future development in North Herts through a series of collaborative workshops with Councillors and senior officers. A Residents Design Forum was also set up which brought together 22 North Herts residents,



Site visit day with Councillors, Fairfield Park, Stotfold.



Visioning Workshop, Residents Design Forum, June 2025.

specifically selected to represent a range of voices within the community, reflecting a diversity in background, age, gender, social circumstances and lived experience, including both urban and rural perspectives and those with and without disabilities. The workshops resulted in the seven North Herts Place Objectives which underpin the entire Design Code.

Stage 3 - Coding

The last phase of work brought together findings from the first two stages using the problems identified in Stage 1 and the Place Objectives developed in Stage 2, to shape a set of design codes covering a range of disciplines and specialisms. Three thematic Working Groups were set up during this stage, each bringing together a combination of external industry specialists from the private sector with North Herts officers and County Council colleagues. Held at critical stages in the code's development, these discussions provided an opportunity to critique ideas, refine technical details, and shape the overall content of the code. Acting as 'critical friends', participants helped ensure the code is usable, relevant and aligned with best practice nationally.

PLACE OBJECTIVES

The Place Objectives set out what all new development must achieve across North Hertfordshire. They have been shaped through a series of workshops with key stakeholders and reflect local priorities and shared ambitions for the future of the district.

There are seven Place Objectives, each describing an essential aspect of creating high-quality, well-designed places. These objectives are all equally important and should be considered together; no single objective should be prioritised over another.

The objectives align with the draft National Planning Policy Framework, the draft Place and Design Planning Practice Guidance, Building for a Healthy Life (2020), and the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011–2031). The symbols represent the seven objectives and are used throughout this document to show how different parts of the code relate to them.

The background images behind the Place Objectives as presented within the design code, are informed by the visioning collages developed by local residents during the first Residents Design Forum.

 **EXCEPTIONAL OPEN SPACE**

 **SOCIABLE STREETS**

 **WELL-INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT**

 **COHESIVE COMMUNITIES**

 **EFFICIENT USE OF LAND**

 **EQUITABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

 **CONTEXTUAL BUILDINGS**



SOCIABLE STREETS

Development must create streets that are enjoyable places to be, not just routes to travel through. Streets should support everyday social life, help people find their way intuitively and make walking and cycling the easiest, safest, and most attractive choice. Vehicles must be accommodated in a way that respects the needs of people first.

Streets should be designed as complete environments where buildings, planting, street trees, lighting and movement infrastructure work together to create characterful, comfortable and inclusive spaces. Parking should be sensitively integrated so it neither dominates nor undermines the quality and feel of these important shared spaces.

Car-dominated streets, where parking overwhelms the street scene, limits planting opportunities, or creates poor pedestrian experiences, will not be permitted.



WELL-INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

Development must be seamlessly integrated into its surroundings, responding positively to the site's edges and reinforcing clear, legible patterns of settlement. New places should feel like a natural extension of the district's towns and villages, not disconnected enclaves.

New neighbourhoods should maximise opportunities to connect with existing routes, facilities, landscapes and communities. Where development edges meet open land or areas identified for potential future growth, layouts must be designed to safeguard these edges and allow for logical, well-connected expansion over time.

Layouts that pull away from the site boundary to create isolated 'islands' of homes, cut off from their surroundings and offering limited future connection, will not be permitted.





COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

New development must foster a strong sense of community with places designed to support neighbourliness, everyday interaction and collective stewardship.

Communal solutions, such as shared bike stores, shared bin stores, shared courtyards, community gardens and informal meeting spaces should be prioritised wherever practical. These shared elements help bring people together in their daily routines and contribute to safer, more sociable and inclusive neighbourhoods.

Designs that isolate homes, disperse facilities unnecessarily, or remove opportunities for casual social interaction will not be permitted.

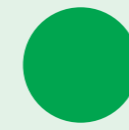
EFFICIENT USE OF LAND

New development should make the most of the land available, creating neighbourhoods that feel welcoming, well-designed and easy to get around. Good design and thoughtful building types can help create places that feel lively and connected without wasting space.

Neighbourhoods should be arranged so that everyday trips, getting to school, visiting friends, popping to the shops etc. can be done comfortably on foot, by bike, or by public transport. Walkable, compact places not only use land more efficiently but also help support a stronger sense of community and healthier lifestyles.

Layouts that put cars first, using too much land for wide roads, scattered parking, or disconnected cul-de-sacs, will not be permitted.





EQUITABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS

Development must create neighbourhoods that are fair, inclusive and welcoming to everyone, regardless of tenure or socio-economic background. All homes and public spaces should be designed to the same high standards, ensuring that every resident experiences a sense of pride and belonging.

Across a neighbourhood, affordable and market homes must be indistinguishable in their external appearance. This means providing equal access to well-designed public realm, consistent parking strategies, shared materials and architectural quality and the same proximity to amenities, play and green spaces.

Designs that reveal or segregate tenures, whether through lower-quality materials, separate entrances, poorer landscaping, or isolated clusters, will not be permitted.



CONTEXTUAL BUILDINGS

Development must deliver buildings with a strong sense of character and identity, shaped by a clear understanding of the site's setting and the distinctive qualities of the surrounding area. New buildings should feel rooted in their context while contributing positively to the future character of the neighbourhood.

Material choices, building form, height, and architectural detailing must all be guided by a thoughtful design rationale grounded in local character and landscape cues. This approach should create distinctive and memorable streets and neighbourhoods that support wayfinding and foster a sense of civic pride.

Poor-quality or poorly considered development, whether existing or nearby, must never be used as justification for repeating the same approach. Designs that fail to respond to their context, or that rely on generic forms, will not be permitted.



INTRODUCTION TO CODES

The North Herts Design Code is built around a set of 39 individual design codes that establish the requirements new development must meet across North Herts. These codes translate the seven Place Objectives into clear, practical and measurable expectations for applicants, decision-makers, and design teams.

For ease of use, the codes are grouped into chapters that reflect the key components of good place-making:

SS – Settlement Structure

OS – Open Space

ST – Streets

BF – Built Form

PA – Parking

Referencing

Each code is given a unique reference number (eg. OS02 Open Space Design), making it simple to navigate the document and assess compliance. Each code is then broken down further into a series of sub-codes which set out more detailed requirements.

The Comply or Justify Approach

The Design Code has been created to be both clear in its requirements and flexible enough to support innovative design. Each code must either be complied with or justified. Where an alternative design solution is proposed, the applicant must demonstrate that the proposal still meets the relevant Place Objectives. This approach ensures the Code does not stifle creativity, while still maintaining high and consistent standards for development across the district.

How the Codes Relate to the Place Objectives

To support clarity, each code includes symbols showing which Place Objectives it directly contributes to. These must be met in all cases of non-compliance. This ensures that even when flexibility is used, the development remains aligned with the district's core principles for great places. See p238 for the full list of codes and corresponding Place Objectives.

A Menu of Context-Responsive Solutions

Many codes are structured as a menu of permitted options, allowing applicants to select the most appropriate response for the site context. This approach encourages thoughtful design and avoids a one-size-fits-all model, while still ensuring consistency and quality across the district.

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RATIONAL STREET AND PLOT LAYOUTS

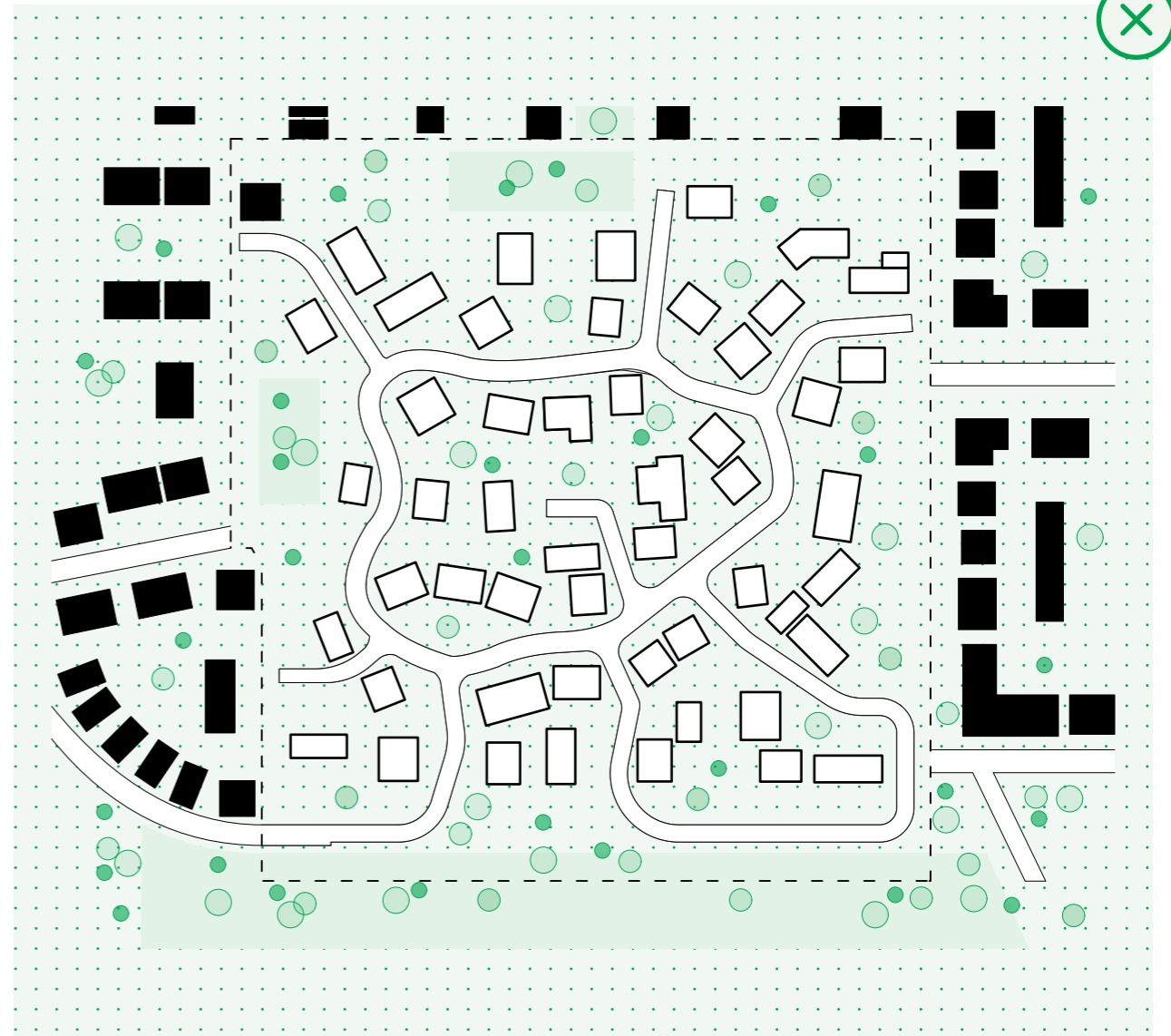
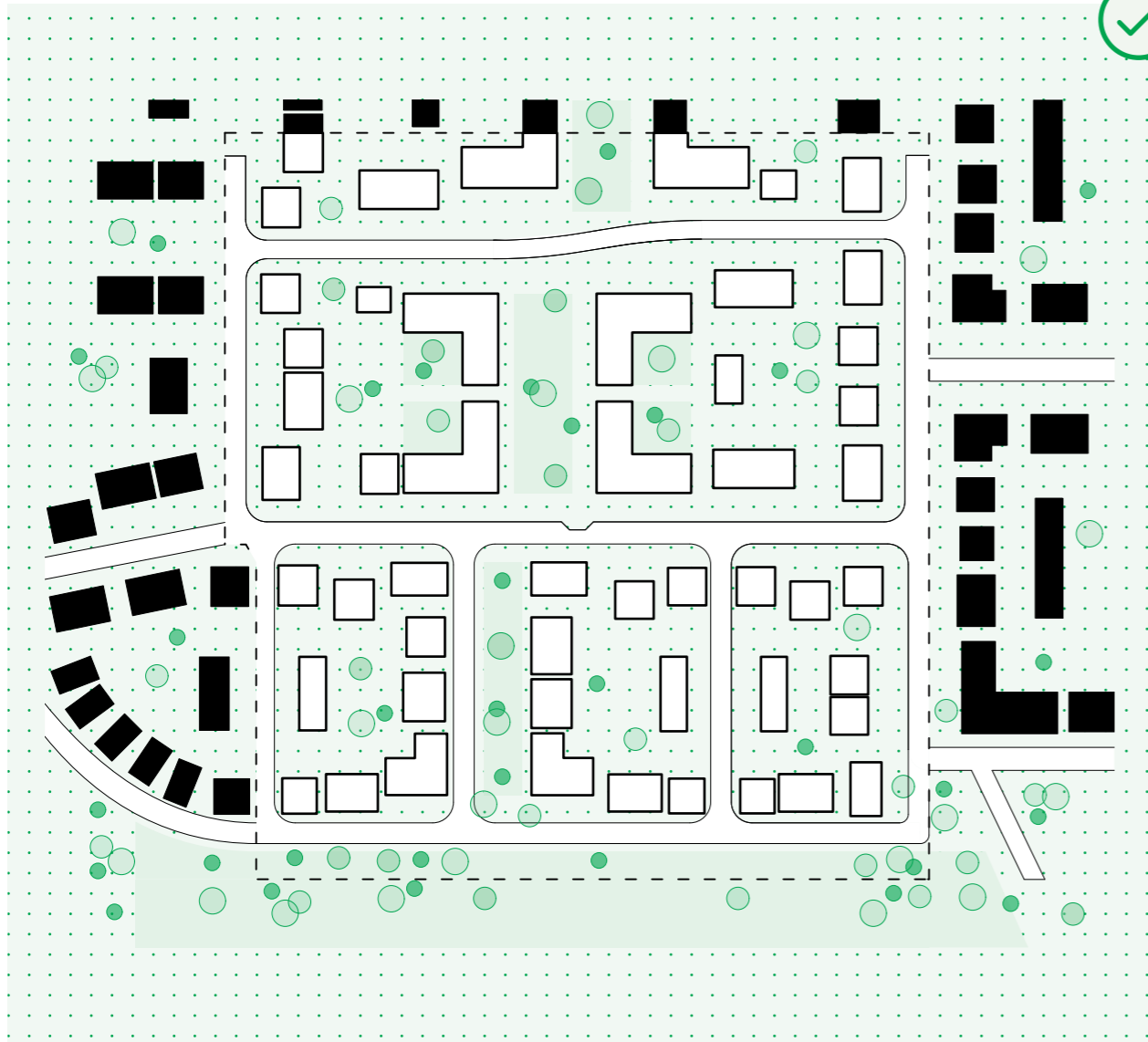
SS01.01

Plot, block and street geometries must be efficient and clearly distinguish public, private and communal realms. Layouts should start from simple, legible structures, such as grids or coherent connected networks, then adapt to site-specific conditions including topography, key views, landscape features and heritage assets. Irregular plot shapes are inefficient, often resulting in poorly defined residual green spaces with unclear ownership and maintenance, contributing to fragmented, less legible neighbourhoods.

SS01.02

Street alignments should be composed of simple, straight sections, with clear 'events' introduced at points of directional change to support legibility and placemaking. Continuous or arbitrary geometries that lack clear structuring will not be supported.

Events should act as focal moments within the layout, foregrounding place-making features such as landmark buildings, trees, seating, play elements, or active non-residential uses, thereby reinforcing orientation and spatial identity.



OPTIMISING LAND USE

Making efficient use of land is essential to support responsible growth, as set out in the ‘Efficient Use of Land’ Place Objective. The following requirements are informed by an analysis of Census 2021 data on housing types across the district’s rural and urban settlements, ensuring that development reflects the local context while optimising land use.

SSO2.01

In town and urban locations (including settlement extensions), the number of detached houses must be kept to under 30% of the total number of dwellings. This applies to development in and adjoining Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Hitchin, Royston, Stevenage and Luton.

In all other locations, the number of detached houses must be kept to under 50% of the total number of dwellings.



Bevan Road, Greenwich, Peter Barber Architects (2020) [Map Location](#) →

RESPONDING TO EDGES

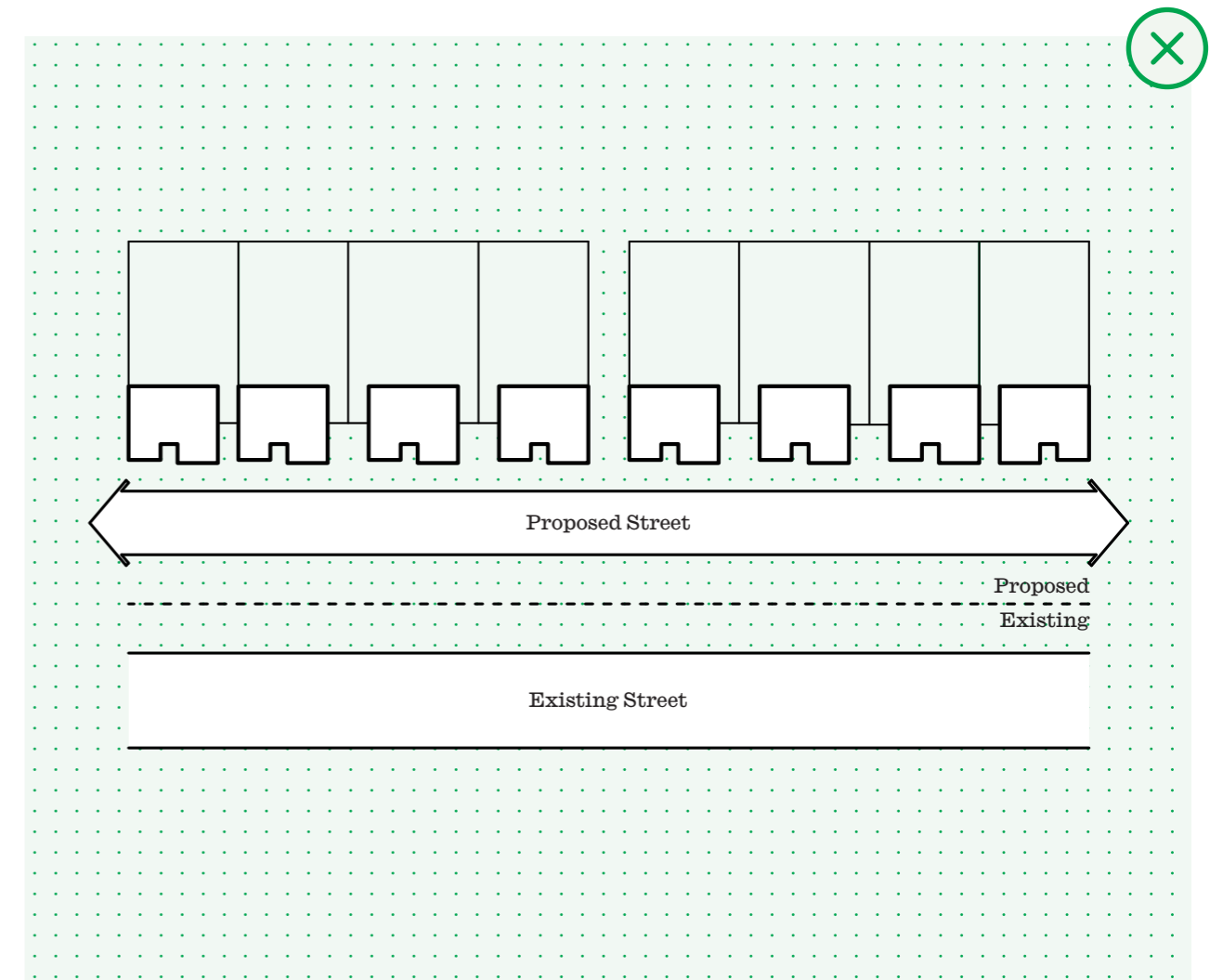
The way in which development addresses the site's edge conditions is integral in delivering legible settlement patterns and connected communities. 'Islands' of housing that pull back from site boundaries must be avoided in favour of developments that positively address the edges as a starting point for design.

SS03.01-03 set out high-level requirements that must be adhered to when developing proposals for edges.

SS03.04 -07 cover requirements when dealing with specific edge conditions including significant ecological assets, rear gardens, private drives or edge lanes and existing streets. Requirements are organised around public realm, ecology, built form, movement and parking.

SS03.01 – Movement

Movement corridors such as streets and routes must not be repeated over red line boundaries. For example, a new road that runs parallel to an existing road must be designed out through alternative vehicular access for dwellings fronting the existing road.

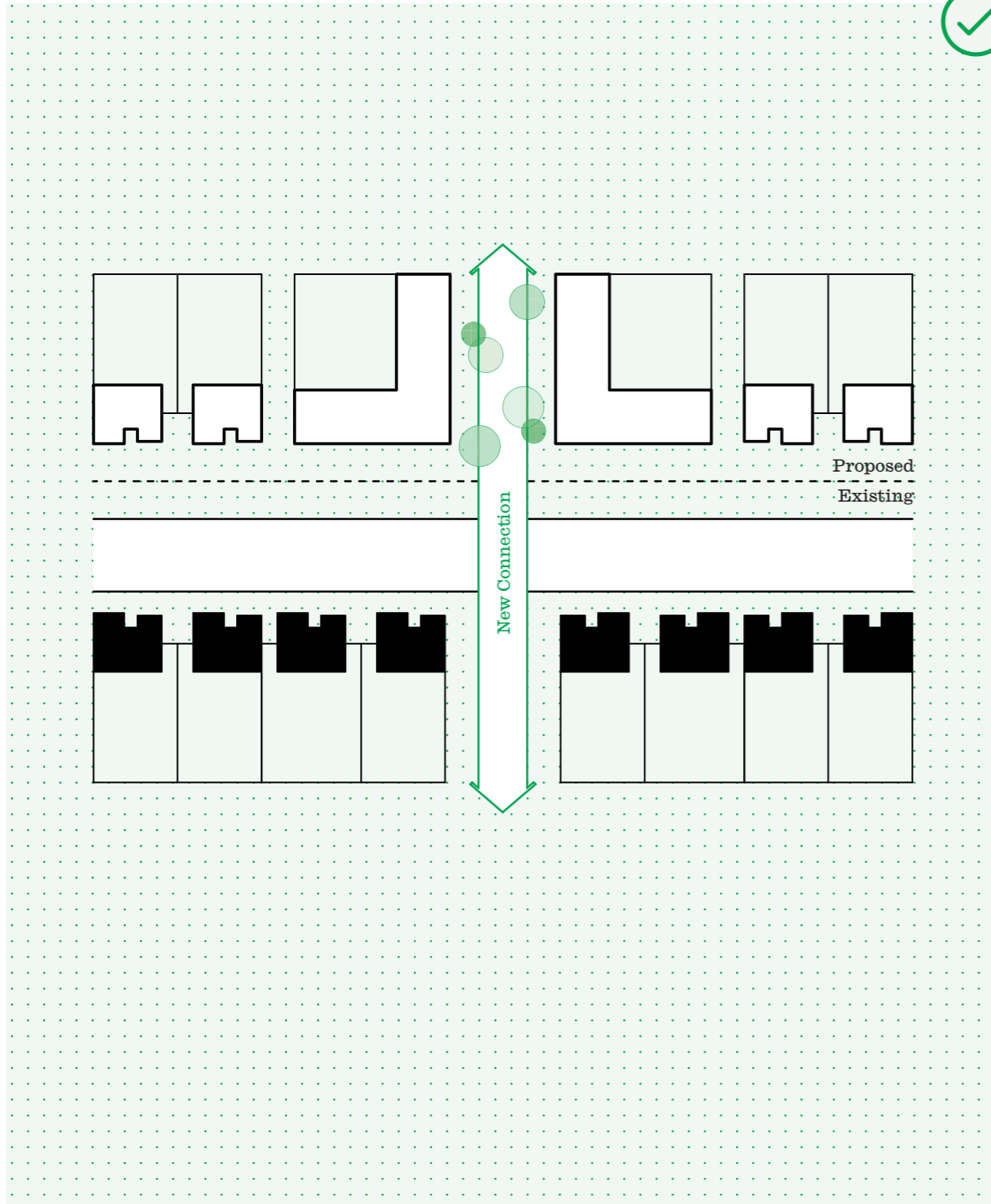


SS03.02 – Built Form

Built form conditions must be mirrored across red line boundaries to create legible settlement patterns. For example, backs must always face backs, whilst fronts must always face fronts. 'Back to front' built form conditions will not be permitted.

SS03.03 – Connections

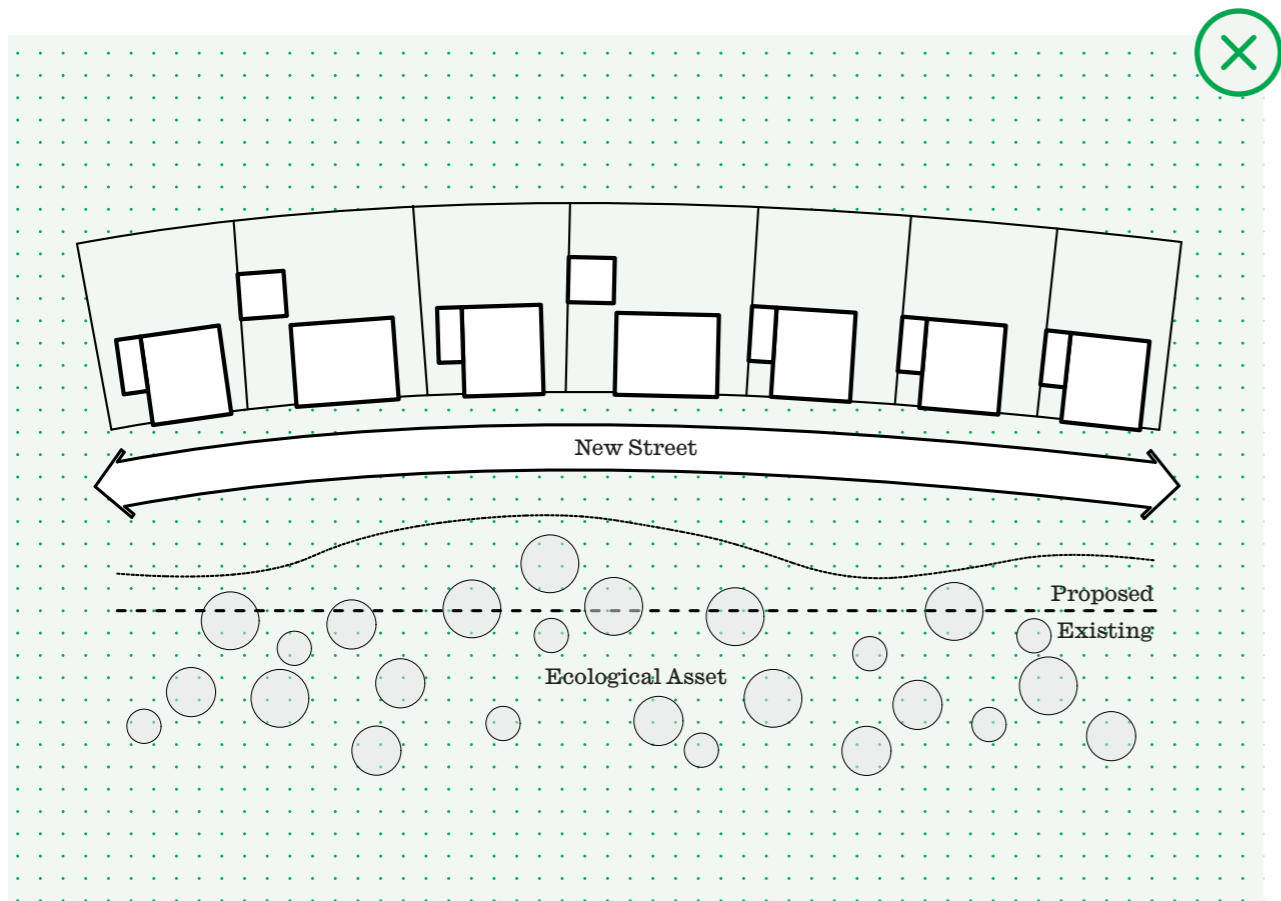
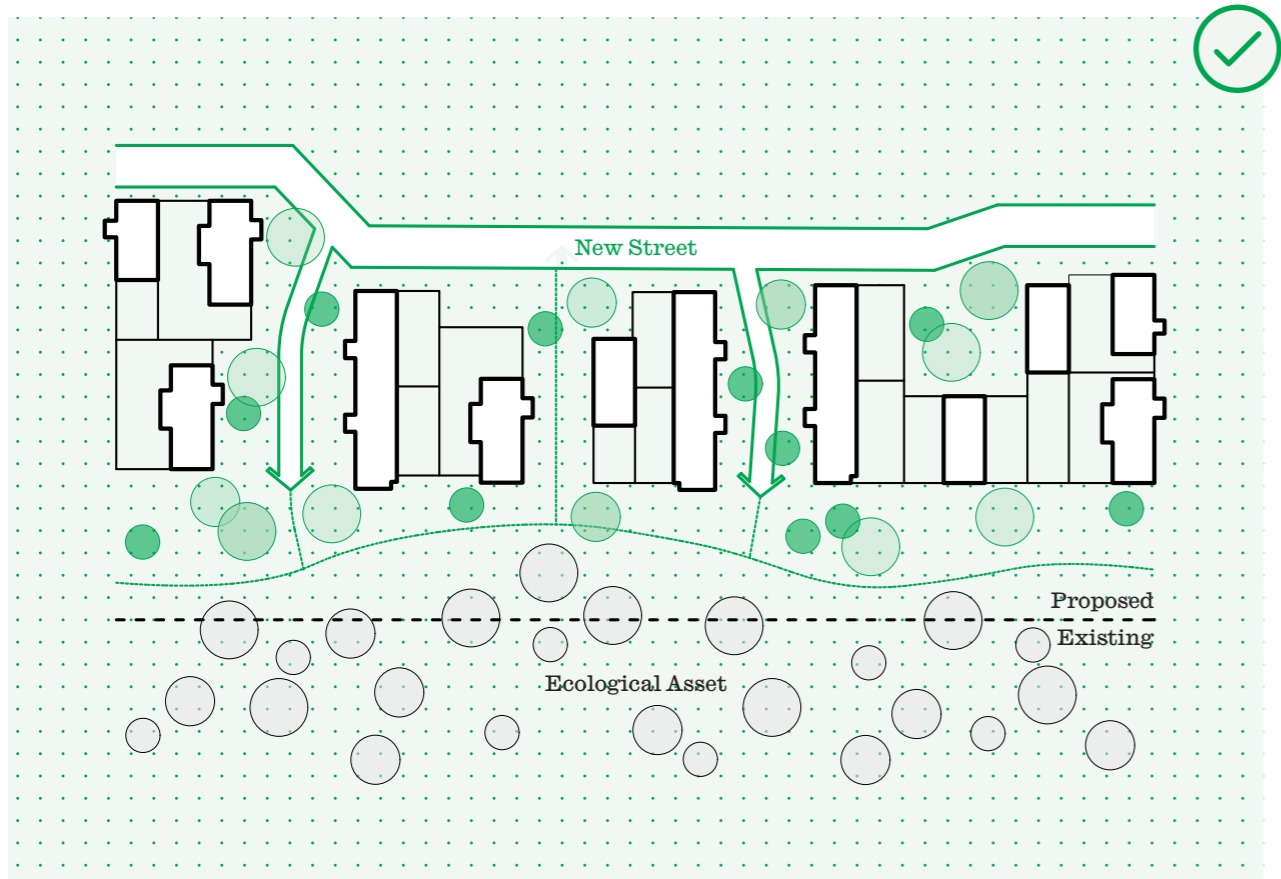
When a new development adjoins an existing neighbourhood, connections must align with existing desire lines.



SS03.04 – Significant Ecological Assets

When responding to significant ecological assets such as Important Hedgerows and ancient woodlands, proposals must be in accordance with the code below.

SS03.04A – Public Realm	Proposals must incorporate a linear open space with a wild and natural character to form a buffer between the edge of built form and significant ecological asset.
SS03.04B – Ecology	<p>The linear open space must incorporate complimentary planting to support the biodiversity of the significant ecological asset. Refer to OS12 for appropriate species.</p> <p>Boundary treatments must include hedgehog holes to ensure permeability for such species on natural edges.</p>
SS03.04C – Built Form Frontage	<p>Built form must be arranged to frame regular views out to the landscape from the development within connections to the linear open space every 25-50m.</p> <p>The linear open space must be defined primarily by sides of homes that must include fenestration to habitable rooms to achieve passive surveillance.</p> <p>Proposals must incorporate robust private amenity boundary treatments such as walls. Fencing is not permitted for any boundaries defining the linear open space.</p>
SS03.04D – Movement	<p>Vehicular movement must be limited to Spur Streets and a main access street set back by one plot to create a car-free edge to the significant ecological asset and supporting linear open space.</p> <p>A recreational route must be incorporated into the linear open space with regular connections every 25-50m to the street network.</p>
SS03.04E – Parking	Parking fronting the linear open space and significant ecological asset will not be permitted.

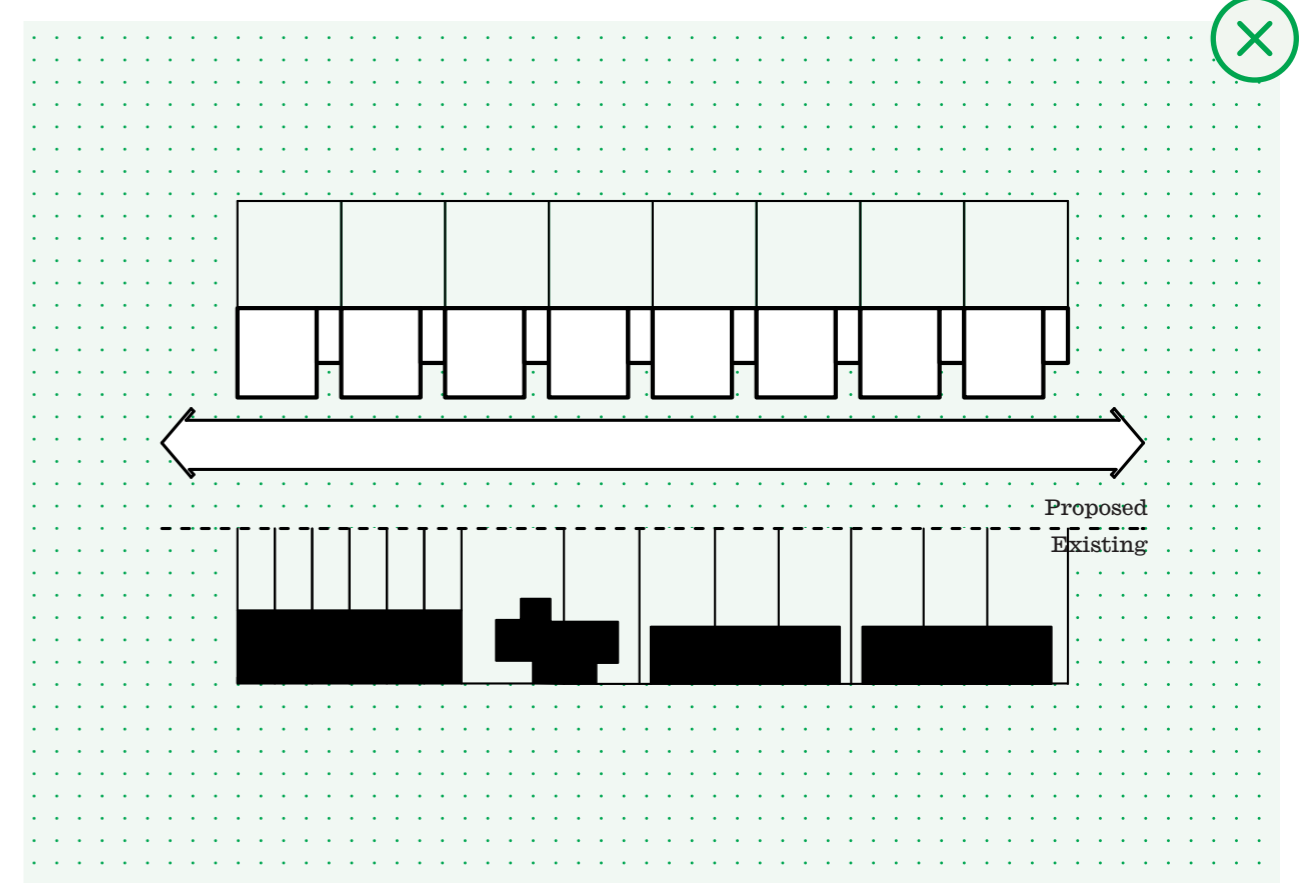
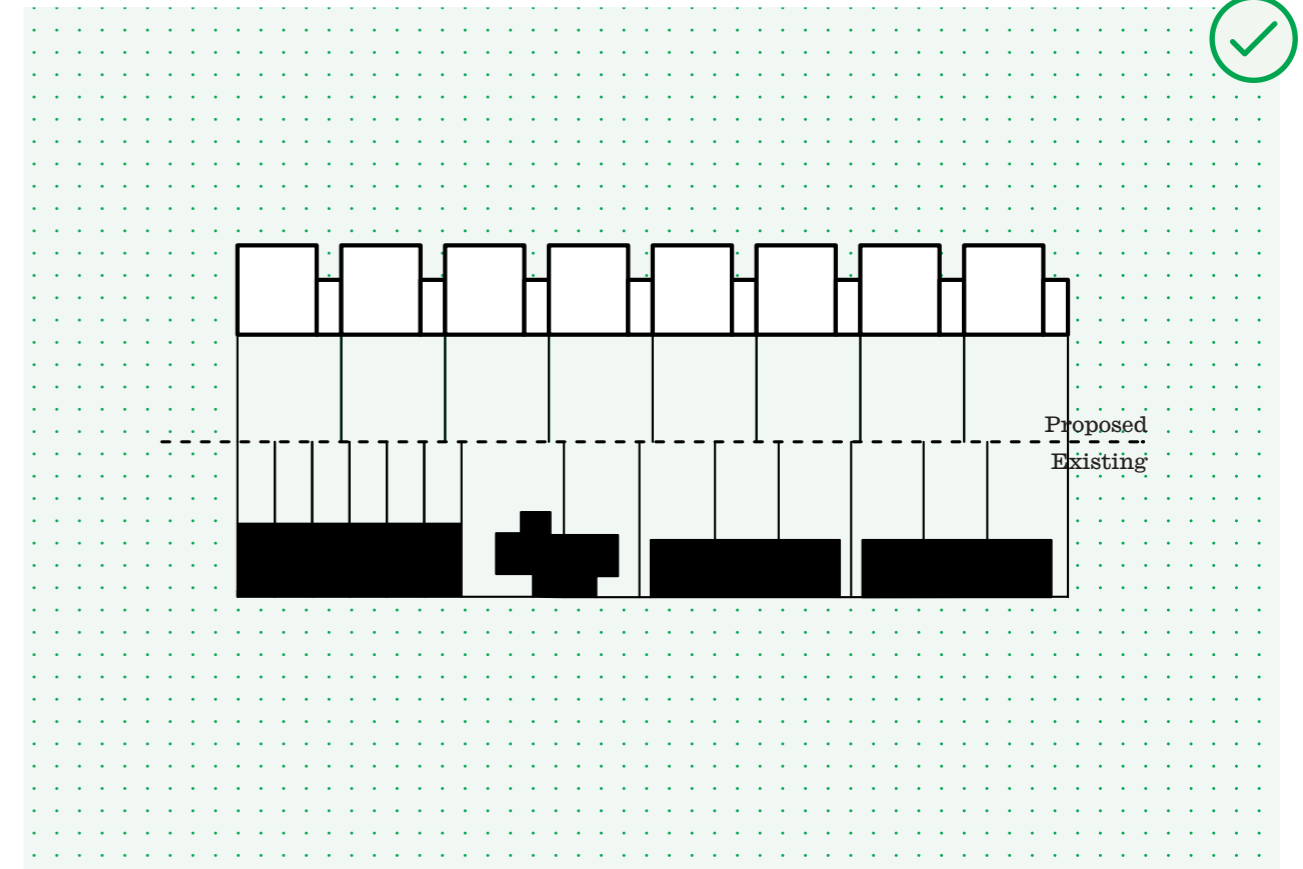


Abode, Great Kneighton, Proctor and Matthews Architects (2019) [Map Location](#) →

SS03.05 – Rear Gardens

When responding to existing rear fences or walls, such as rear gardens, proposals must be in accordance with the code below.

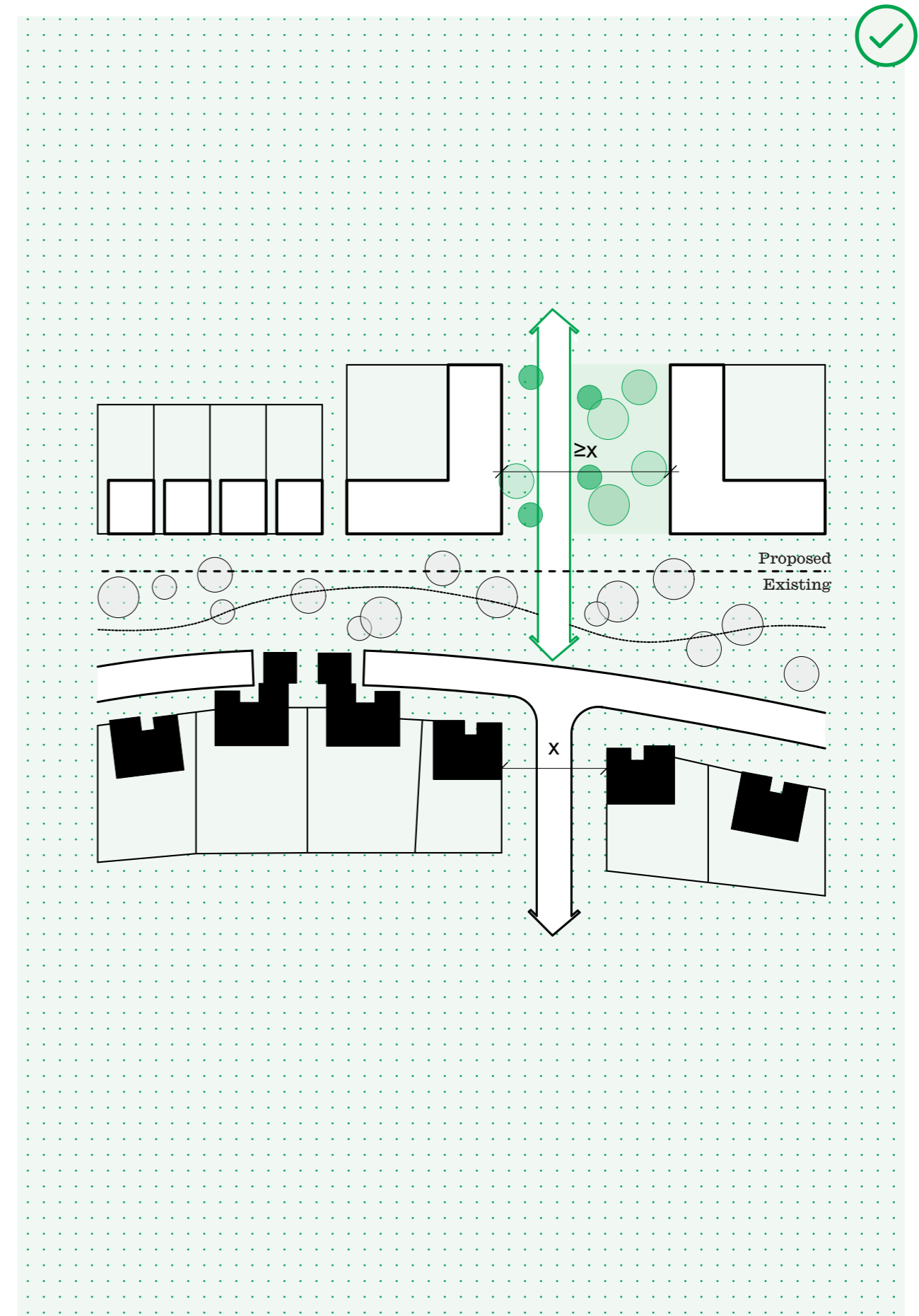
SS03.05A – Public Realm	Proposals must not incorporate public realm between rear gardens as such spaces will be poorly overlooked and difficult to maintain.
SS03.05B – Ecology	Existing trees to be retained must be integrated into proposed rear gardens to provide screening and privacy.
SS03.05C – Built Form Frontage	The existing rear garden condition must be mirrored across the site boundary to create a back to back condition.
SS03.05D – Movement	A rear servicing alley for the movement of bikes and bins may be incorporated to the back of rear gardens if required. Servicing alleys must be ‘for resident access only’.
SS03.05E – Parking	Terrace parking courts, farmstead parking courts, rear parking courts and rear parking drives are permitted along this edge.



SS03.06 – Private Drives and Edge Lanes

When responding to existing built form frontage arranged along private drives and/or edge lanes, proposals must be in accordance with the code below.

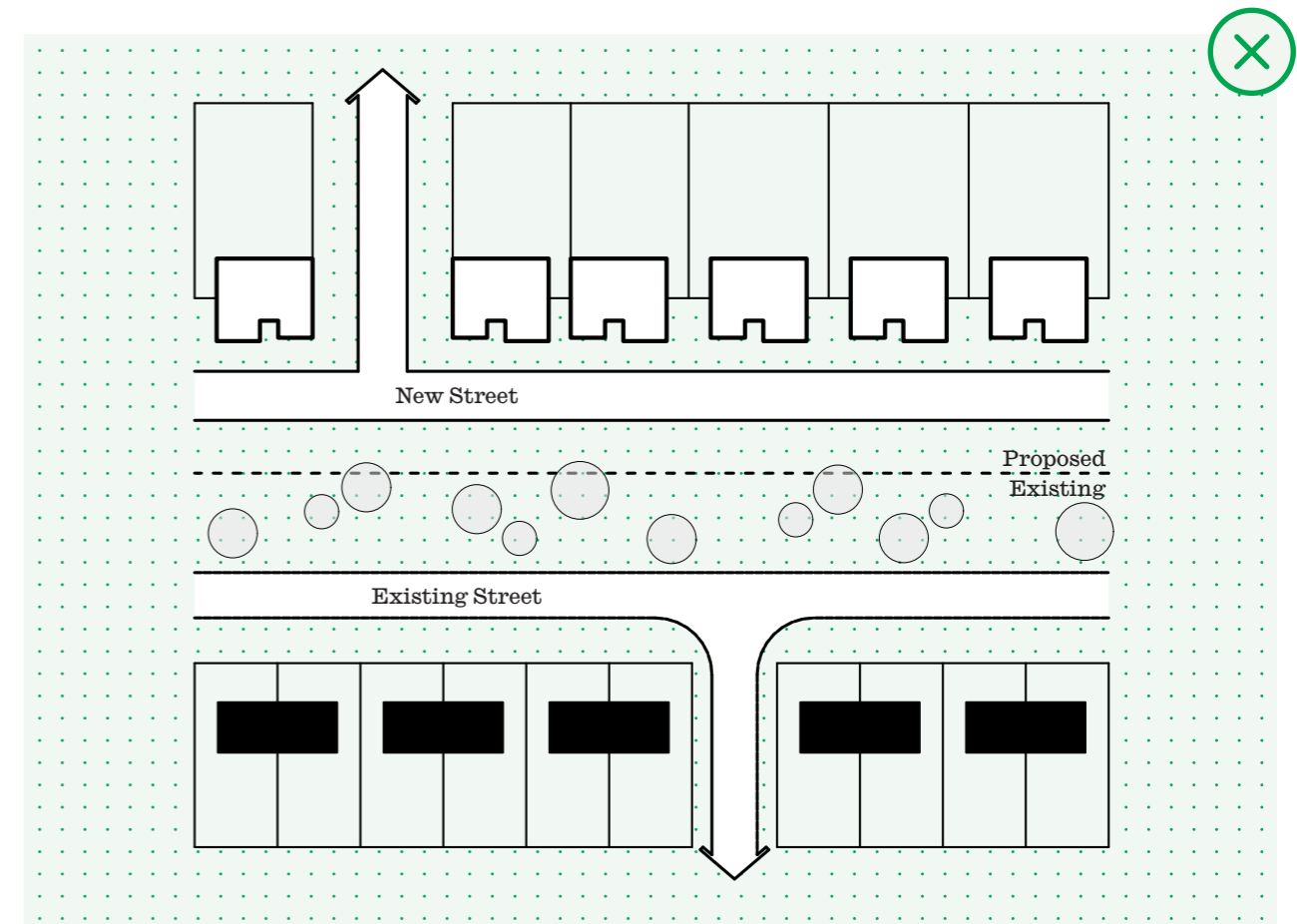
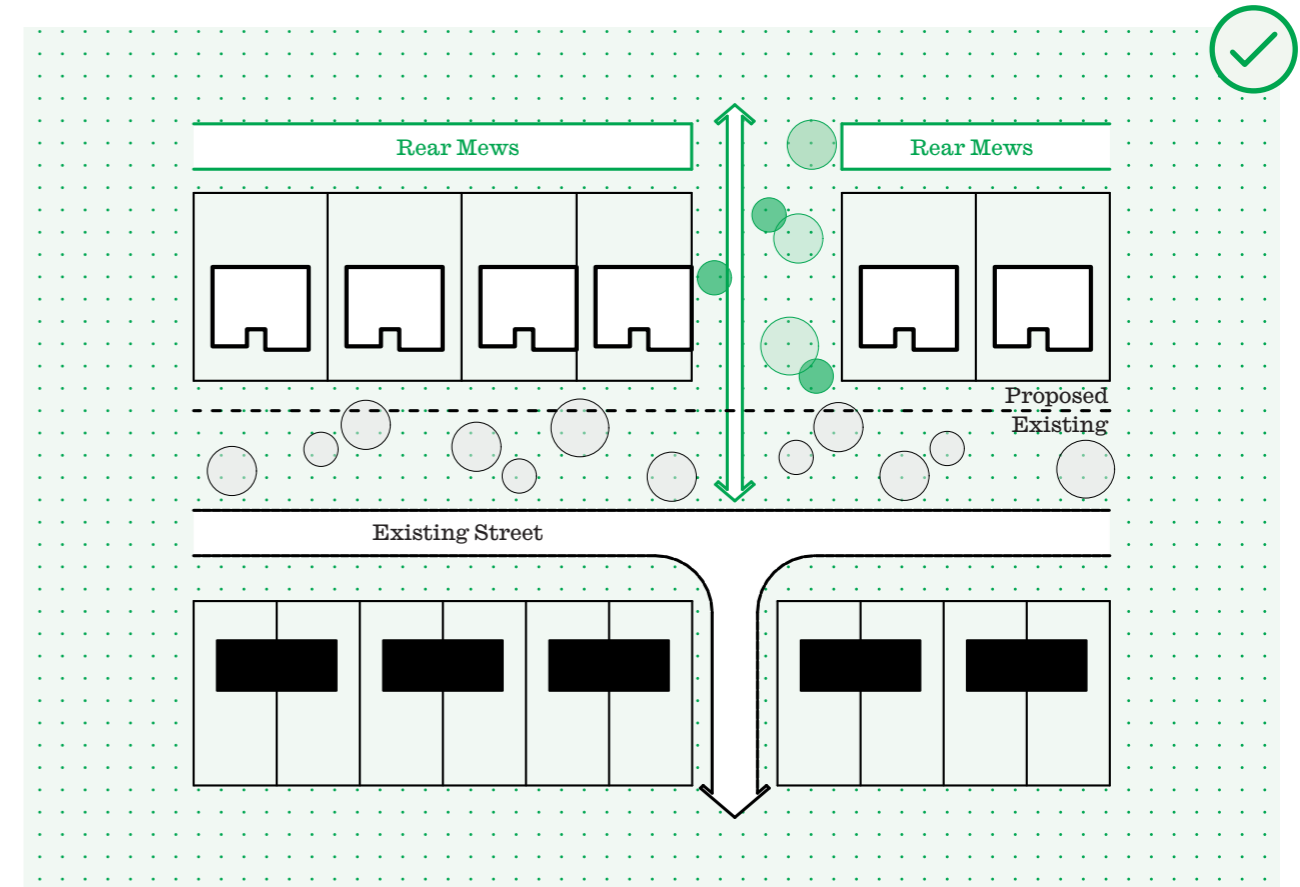
SS03.06A – Public Realm	Proposals must incorporate a public space at the connection point that is at least the width of the existing connection point to safeguard clear sight lines from existing to new neighbourhoods.
SS03.06B – Ecology	Where ecological assets are to be removed for connection points or to create clear sight lines and there is a requirement to retain connectivity for flying species, ‘hop overs’ must be incorporated.
SS03.06C – Built Form Frontage	Connection points must be emphasized through a change in built form typology, massing and/or materiality.
SS03.06D – Movement	<p>The connection point must be aligned to routes into the existing context to create direct and legible connections over the site boundary, with clear sight-lines.</p> <p>Edge Lanes are permitted if the distance between built form frontages between new and existing exceeds 25m.</p> <p>If the distance between built form frontages between new and existing is less than 25m, then the proposal must incorporate a car free frontage to the site boundary, with rear vehicular access.</p>
SS03.06E – Parking	Accommodated on the Edge Lane (if permitted).



SS03.07 – Existing Streets

When responding to existing streets, proposals must be in accordance with the code below. See ST04 Avenues where one half of the street is appropriate for these edge conditions.

SS03.07A – Public Realm	Public spaces must be provided at key connection points to emphasize important routes into the new development.
SS03.07B – Ecology	Ecological assets along this boundary must be retained where possible and incorporated into a planted verge or generous front gardens.
SS03.07C – Built Form Frontage	Proposed built form must mirror the existing condition in terms of frontage and front garden depth to create a balanced two-sided street.
SS03.07D – Movement	Provision of a new street running parallel to the existing will not be permitted. If frontage access from the existing street is not possible, then homes along this edge must be serviced from the rear.
SS03.07E – Parking	Accommodated to the interior of the plot through rear access streets or courts (if permitted).



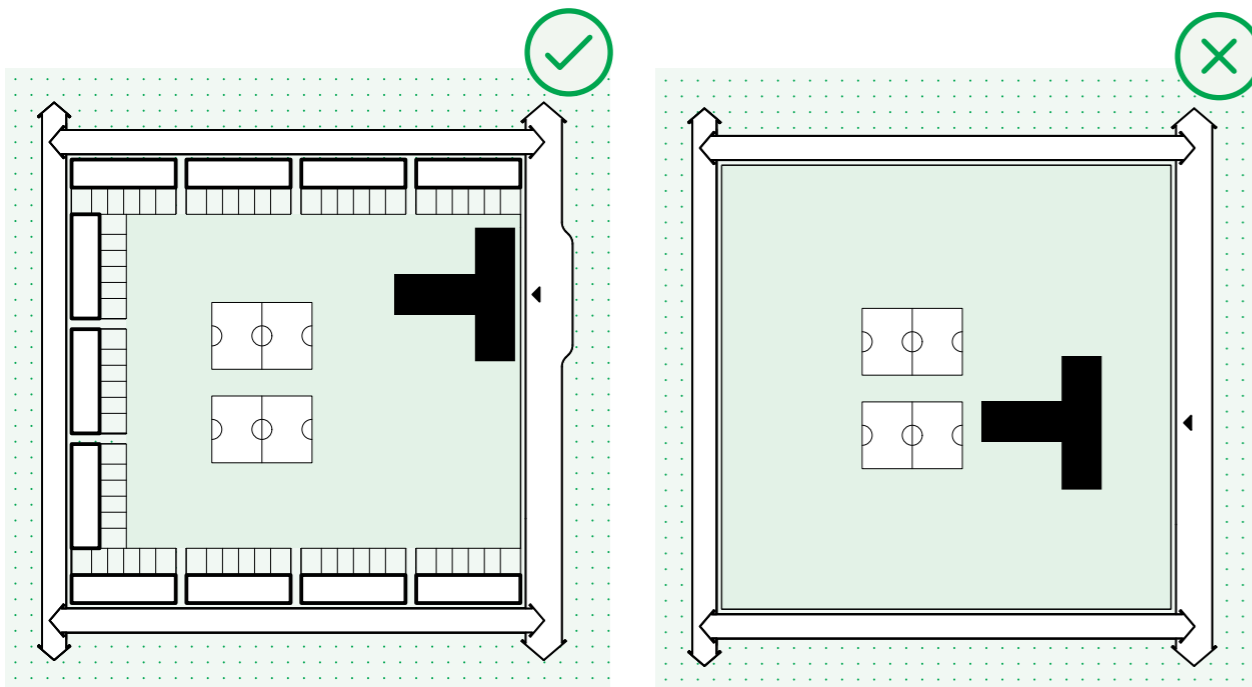
WELL-INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

SSO4.01

Schools must maximise active edges and contribute positively to street life by completing the urban block and addressing the building line.

SSO4.02

Fencing around schools must be minimised by placing school buildings at the edges of the plot and ‘wrapping’ remaining edges with residential properties as shown opposite. Schools placed at the centre of plots with fencing to the perimeter will not be permitted.



Storey's Field Centre and Eddington Nursery, Cambridge, McInnes Usher
McKnight Architects (2018) [Map Location](#) →

LEGIBLE FOCAL POINTS

SS05.01

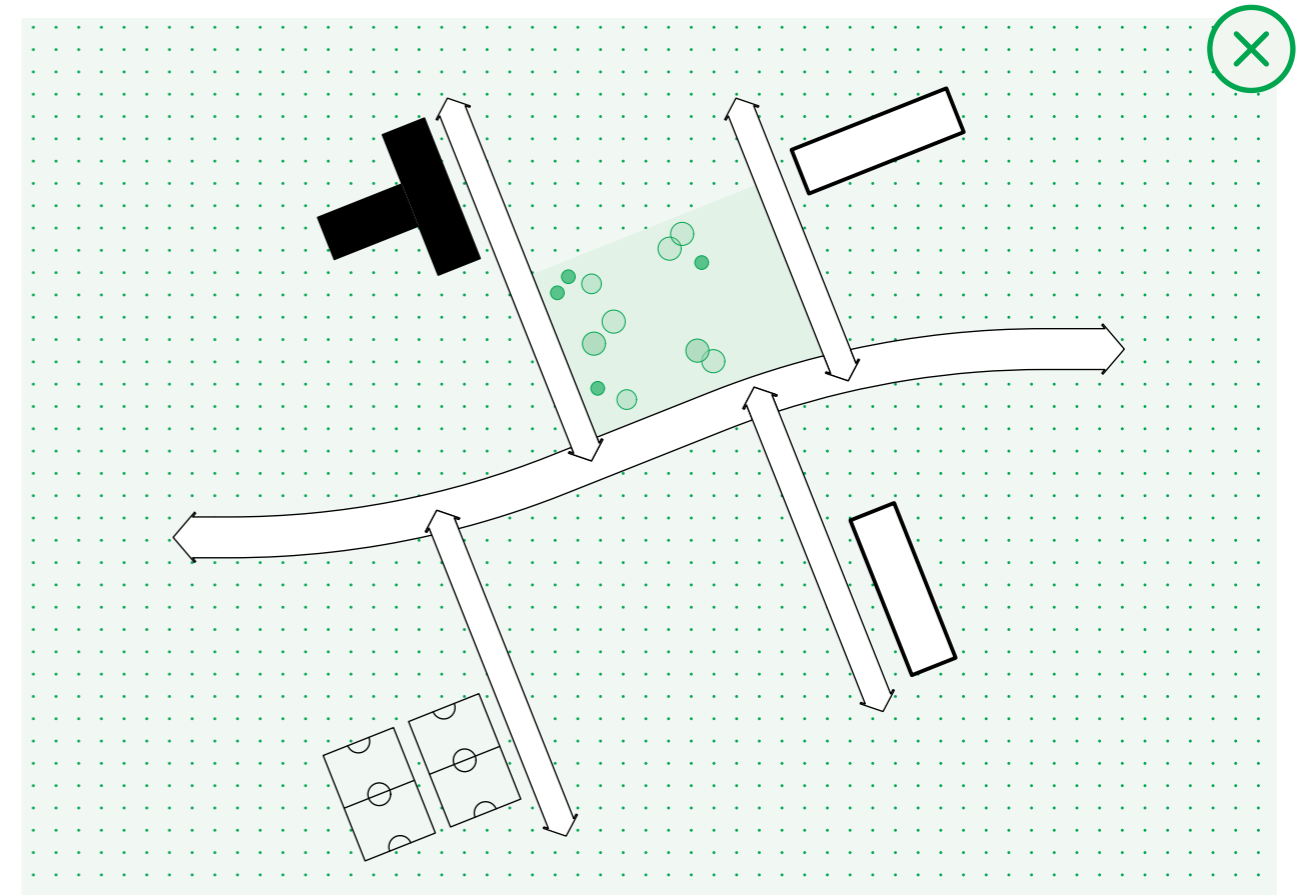
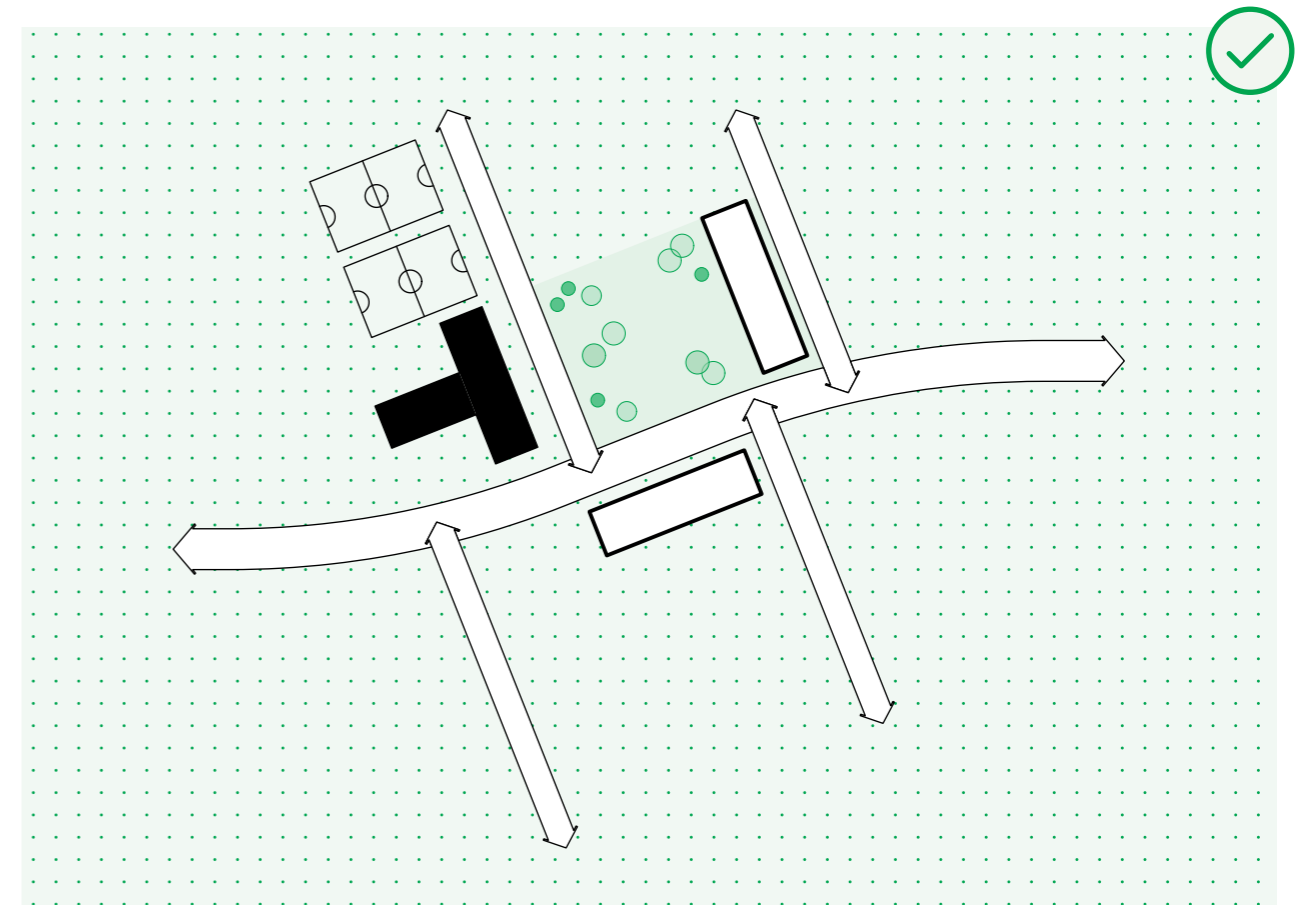
In large developments (100+ homes), proposals must be designed around focal points that co-locate key social infrastructure such as open spaces, play, schools, shops, pubs, community spaces and allotments to attract a range of users and foster community cohesion.

In smaller developments, proposals must be designed to encourage safe and sustainable routes to key destinations that are likely to be located outside the site boundary.

Dispersed social infrastructure that creates illegible neighbourhoods will not be permitted.

SS05.02

Schools must be co-located with at least one other element of social infrastructure, as illustrated opposite.



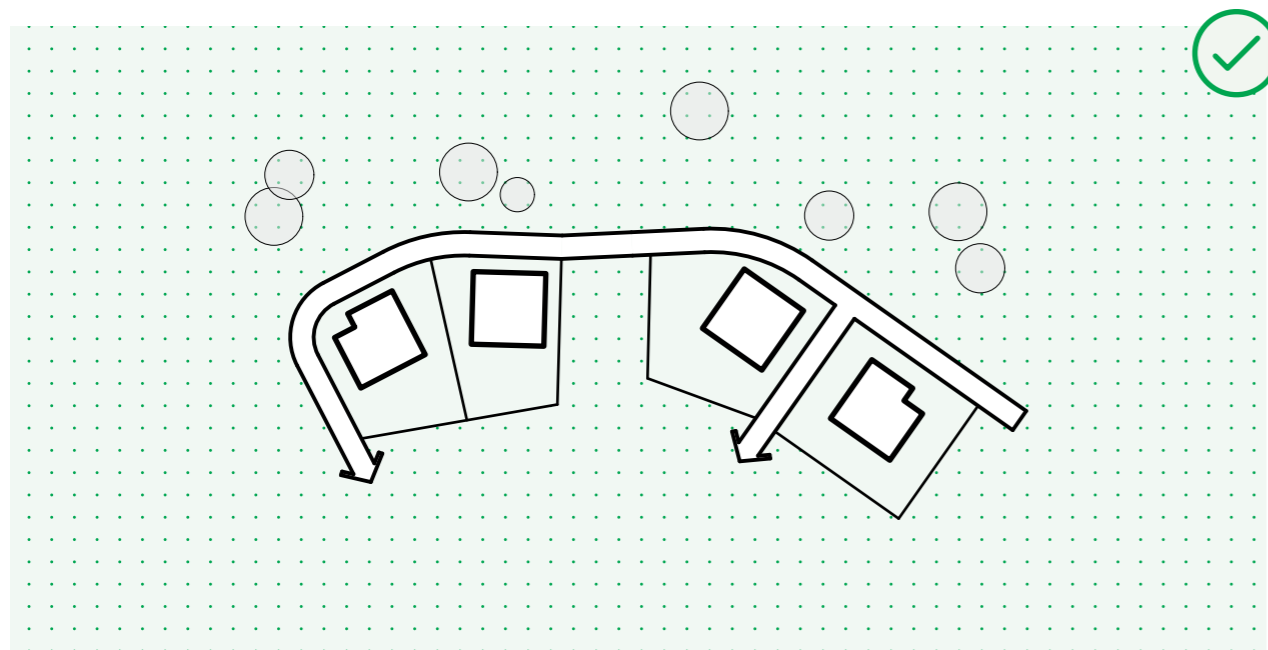
PRIVATE DRIVES AND CUL DE SACS

SSO6.01

Private drives and cul-de-sac based street patterns will not be permitted.

Private drives are defined as pedestrian ‘dead ends’ usually at the edges of development that frustrate pedestrian and active travel permeability. Private drives also do not support tenure neutral communities and create privatised areas within the public realm.

Cul-de-sacs with no pedestrian through-routes must be designed out through the use of Spur Lanes (see ST09) or Edge Lanes (see ST10).



Ashmere Garden Village, Ebbsfleet, PRP Architects (2024), [Map Location](#) →