Somer Valley Design Code

Draft Supplementary Planning Document

Consultation Draft October 2025

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Contents

The Somer Valley Design Code serves as the pilot initiative within Bath and North East Somerset, focusing on the design quality of new residential development. If successful, this coding approach will be extended to other areas across the district, with its scope broadened to encompass a wider range of uses, including non-residential development and property extensions.

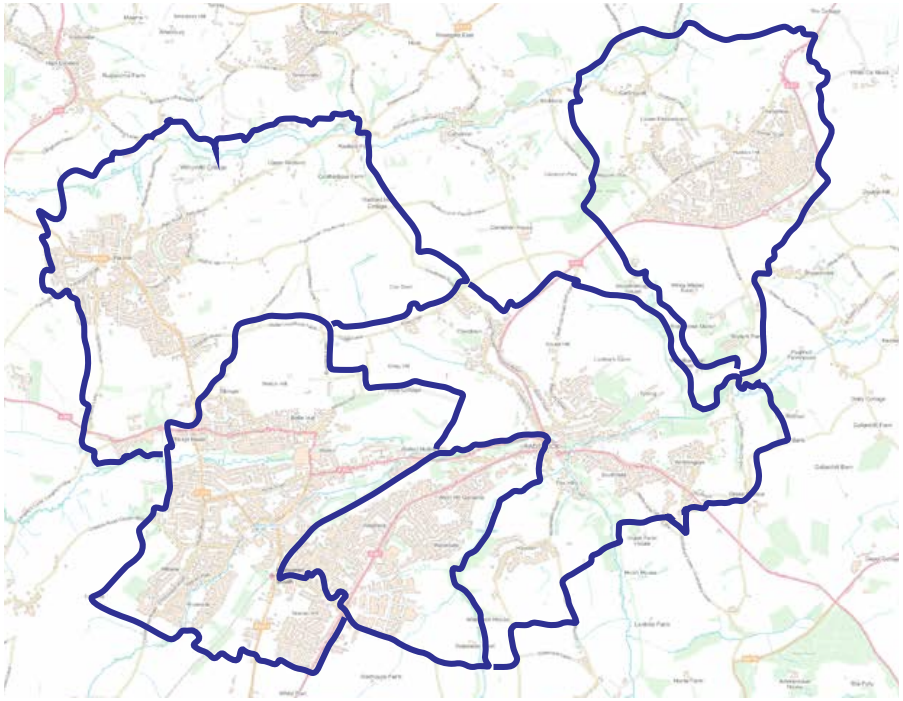
Set within a distinctive landscape of green hillsides, the Somer Valley is shaped by its rich mining heritage, evident in the visible batches that punctuate the surrounding townscape. This history is further reflected in the built environment, where traditional terraced housing remains a defining feature of the former mining communities.

The primary objective of the Design Code is to ensure that future housing development achieves a high standard of design, reflects the local vernacular architecture and fosters well-integrated, sustainable communities for both current and future residents of the Somer Valley.

Grounded in established urban design principles, the code outlines clear expectations for development within the area. All relevant planning applications must demonstrate adherence to the Design Code through the submission of a checklist.

Background evidence

- District Wide Plan Strategy and Policies (design policies D1-D10) 2023
- Somer Valley Local Plan chapter 2023
- Peasedown St John Village Design Statement 1999
- Landscape Character Assessment Review 2021
- Westfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016
- Midsomer Norton and Welton Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan 2018
- Paulton Conservation Area Character Appraisal 2003
- Radstock Conservation Area Assessment 1999 (in the process of being updated)
- Somer Valley Character Appraisal 2025
- Draft Radstock Design Code



The Design Code applies to the wards of Peasedown, Radstock, Westfield, Midsomer Norton Norton North, Midsomer Norton Redfield and Paulton. It provides supplementary policy to the Local Plan. Applicants are also encouraged to review the National Model Design Code (NMDC).


PHARMACY


MUSEUM

National Model Design Code

This guide is focused on the principles from the National Model Design Code which outlines the ten characteristics of a well designed place.

Design Quality and Place-making

The following pages details the process of a morphology assessment. The morphological assessment serves as a valuable analytical tool for understanding the characteristics and structure of a local area. The combined morphological layers form the urban tissue, offering insights into spatial patterns of development. The design code promotes the use of these layers to evaluate the context of a development site, ensuring that the analysis directly informs and supports the proposed design approach.

Consideration must be given not only to the visual appearance of a development but also to its functionality and how it will be experienced by future residents. Following the morphology assessment, specific requirements have been identified in relation to the morphological layers, which must be addressed through design.

Extract from the National Model Design Code

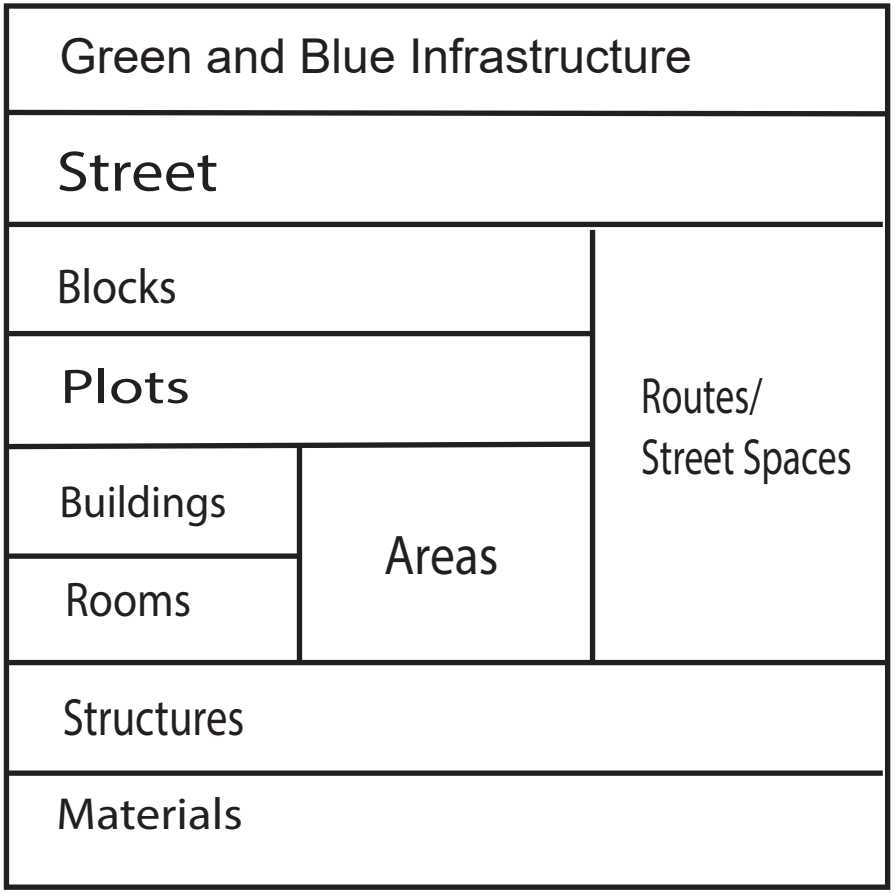
Morphology Analysis - Townscape

Individual buildings might be replaced over time but building footprints and surrounding street patterns can last for centuries. Urban form shapes our human habitat and good form helps make for efficient towns, healthier lives and a better environment.

Urban Morphology is key to understanding the design quality and function of an area. In order to create places with high quality design the urban fabric must be understood. The following pages set out the analytical framework for understanding urban morphology.

The mophological layers can be used as an analytical tool to understand why a particular design does or does not work. By reviewing each element of urban tissue, using urban design qualities, positive and negative aspects can be identified and positive aspects can be taken forward into new design. All aspects of design quality such as block structure and street layout can be understood through this process.

All morphological layers are connected and applicants are encouraged to use the methodology below in their site analysis. Applicants are expected to provide explanation as to how their analysis has informed their design.

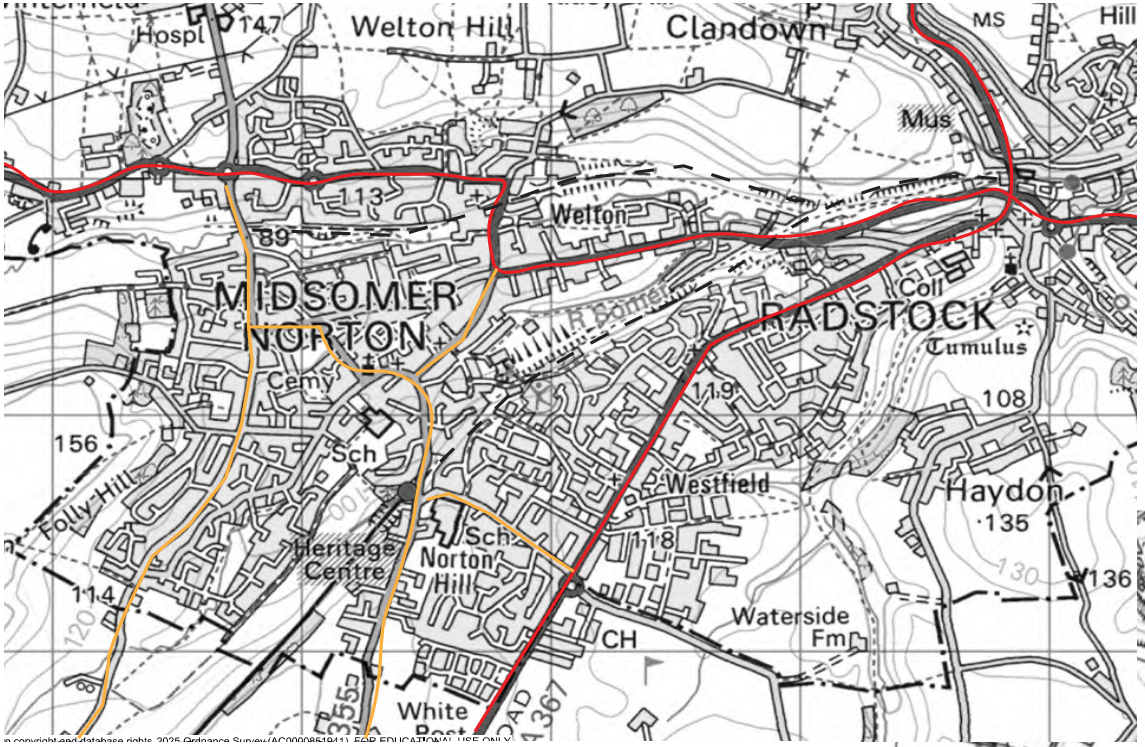


Urban Tisssue Graphic created by Karl Kropf Oxford Brookes University

The Somer Valley is an undulating landscape of steep sided valleys alternating with high ridge tops. These characteristics lead to important skylines and extensive views. The landscape has been modified by the former coal mining industry affecting community, development and connectivity, and creating landmark coal spoil heaps.

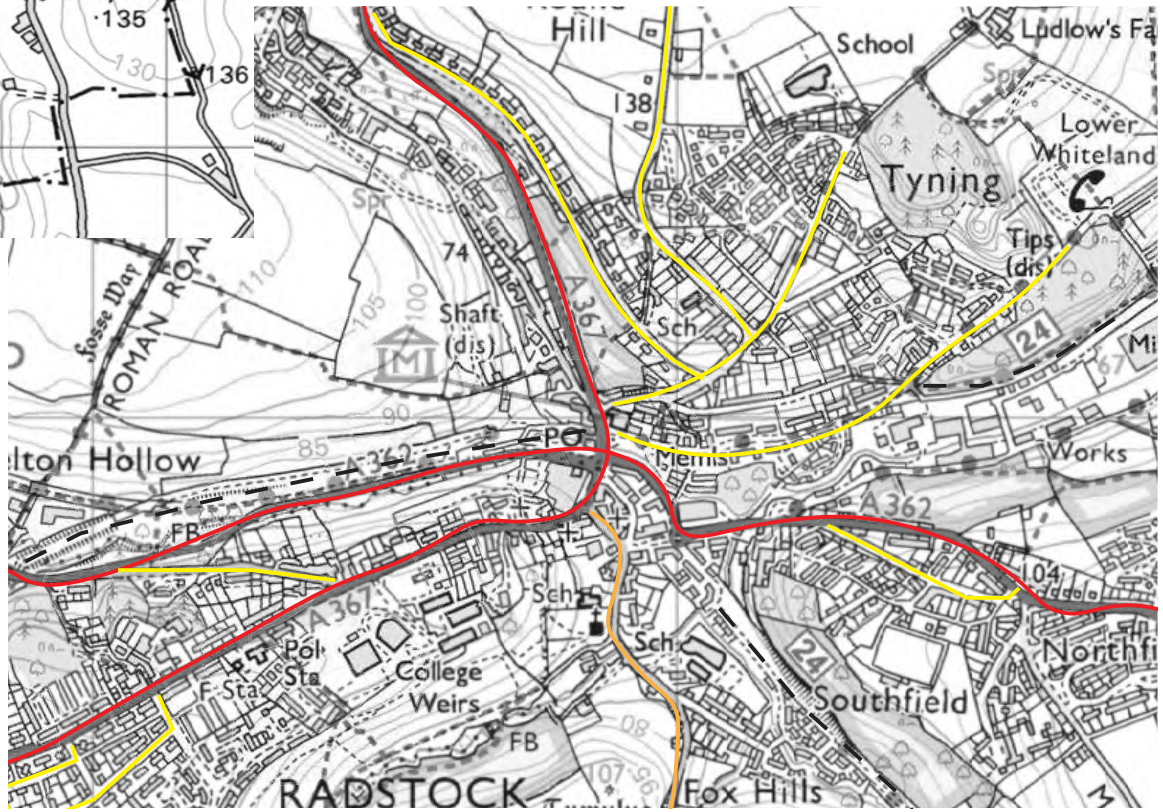
Any assessment should begin by identifying important hillsides and the landscape setting of the settlement.

The connections of the proposed development site and wider townscape must be assessed. In particular to understand the sustainability of a proposed site.



Key

- Primary Route
- Secondary Route
- Tiertiary Route
- Access points
- Cycle Path



Identify local services and understand where people want to go.

New site connections should allow for direct routes to shops, services and places of employment.

Morphology Analysis - Site

Below is an example of how the morphology of the local area can be analysed. The example is based on existing miners terraces which are characteristic of the Somer Valley

Identify Green and Blue Infrastructure

Identify Route Hierarchy

Key

- Primary Route
- Secondary Route
- Tiertiary Route
- Access points
- Cycle Path

Review land use

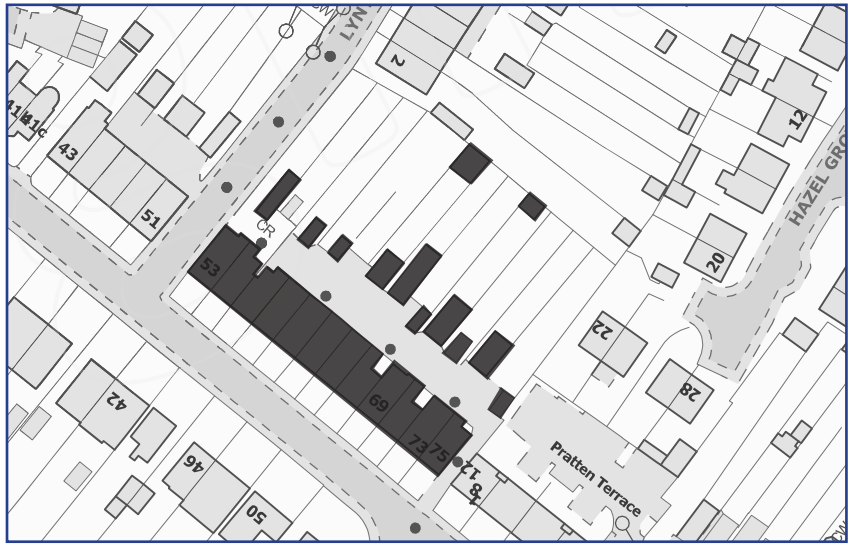
Key

Residential	
Green open space	
Industrial	
Education	

Identify frontages and relationship to the streetscene

Blocks

Plots



Buildings

Designs for new homes will be required to demonstrate an understanding of local urban morphology. The aim of the design code is not necessarily to replicate existing development but to allow for the existing positive elements of the local (and sometimes historic) character of the area to inform new design. The following pages outline policy requirements which relate to each morphological layer.

Local Development Patterns

Understand and Interpret Local Development Patterns

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- How local spatial typologies have been interpreted and applied.
- How local landscape features (including but not limited to field patterns, tree species or hedgerows) has been interpreted and applied.
- A positive response to local character as outlined in the character assessment and Conservation Area appraisals.
- Sensitive design in terms of scale and massing.
- A positive response to the existing landscape, topography and settlement pattern.

Additional Guidance:
- Somer Valley Character Appraisal
- Radstock Conservation Area Appraisal
- Midsomer Norton Conservation Area Appraisal
- Paulton Conservation Area Appraisal
- Rural Landscapes Character Assessment

The Somer Valley has evolved over time with additional housing having a variety of morphologies. However, terraced streets reflect the mining hertiage of the area and therefore are considered to be a postive reflection of historic character. Traditionally these morphologies included long gardens but it is recognised that is garden length is shortened then a higher building density can be achieved. Through the use of morhpological analysis, it is possible to gain an understanding of the local development character, the positive elements of which can then be refected within modern developments.

Examples of terraced properties chracteristic of the Somer Valley taken from google streetview

Natural Environment

The Somer Valley is an undulating landscape of steep sided valleys alternating with high ridge tops. These characteristics lead to important skylines and extensive views. The landscape has been shaped by the former coal mining industry which has inflenced development and created landmark coal spoil heaps, locally known as batches. As a legacy of coal mining, the area has a scattered settlement pattern and communites have grown organically within the landscape and well intregrated into the countryside. Any new development would need to respect the existing landscape and settlement pattern and respond to its distinctive character.

Work with the landscape and natural features

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- That they have considered and respect the unique ridge and valley landscape of the Somer Valley, designing to respond harmoniuosly to landform and to avoid negative visual impacts. Undeveloped green hillsides and skylines are key characteristics of the Somer Valley settlements.

- That landscape infrastructure both hard and soft should be an integral and functional part of the design of site layouts enabling the development to respond positively to both surrounding and on-site landscape characteristics such as topography, orientation, landform, geology, drainage and field boundaries

- That proposed layouts include features that respond to green infrastructure such as existing vegetation and areas of natural habitat.

- That tree planting is an important functional aspect of climate resiliance, such as planting for shade and shelter.

Connection to Nature

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Safe, direct and attractive walking and cycling routes to nearby open spaces and landscapes, conveniently located for all residents and visitors.

- A connected network of green and blue infrastructure to bring nature into the urban realm in an accessible way so that it is integrated seamlessly into residents everyday journeys and activities.

Street Trees and planting

Development should use street trees to provide shade and reduce heat in summer, improve environmental quality, slow or capture surface water run off, provide visual variety and interest, and to reinforce green infrastructure networks and to connect green spaces.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- A planting strategy which optimises the use of locally distinctive tree and plant species. The strategy should optimise the use of locally distinctive tree and plant species where these are known to be climate change resiliant. Strategies must include a maintainance plan

- The use of trees appropriately sized for the scale of new development, including semi-mature trees where necessary taking account of space for roots to grow.

- That the base of the tree planting area can be utilised for planting with appropriate flora species
-
- The retention of existing mature trees

Design of Built Form in Relation to Retained Hedgerow and Trees

Design Aim: To ensure that retained hedgerows, specimin trees, tree belts and woodland contribute to Green Infrastructure and can be retained in the future

Designs are required demonstrate:

- Any retained vegetation must be positively designed into the overall layout of development.
- Hedgerows, woodland edge and specimen retained trees must have a sufficient buffer from above ground built structures and below ground infrastructure to enable continued growth in the long term and for them to function as habitats
- Retained hedgerows should not form garden boundaries

Example of a retained hedgerow taken from google streetview

Open Space

Open Space

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Open space is positively integrated into the overall design and function of the development.
- Open space should have a clear purpose and meet the accessibility needs of all users.
- Utilisation of the natural features within the site and integration as part of the natural landscape.
- Overlooking by buildings allowing for natural surveillance.
- Inclusion of local food growing such as the provision of allotments or community garden projects.
- Safe and comfortable frequent places to stop and rest in the public realm

Example of well desgined open space at Somerdale, Keynsham, taken from google streetview

Connections and Permeability

Connectivity and Permeability

New development should connect to the existing street network and be permeable, offering a choice of routes.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

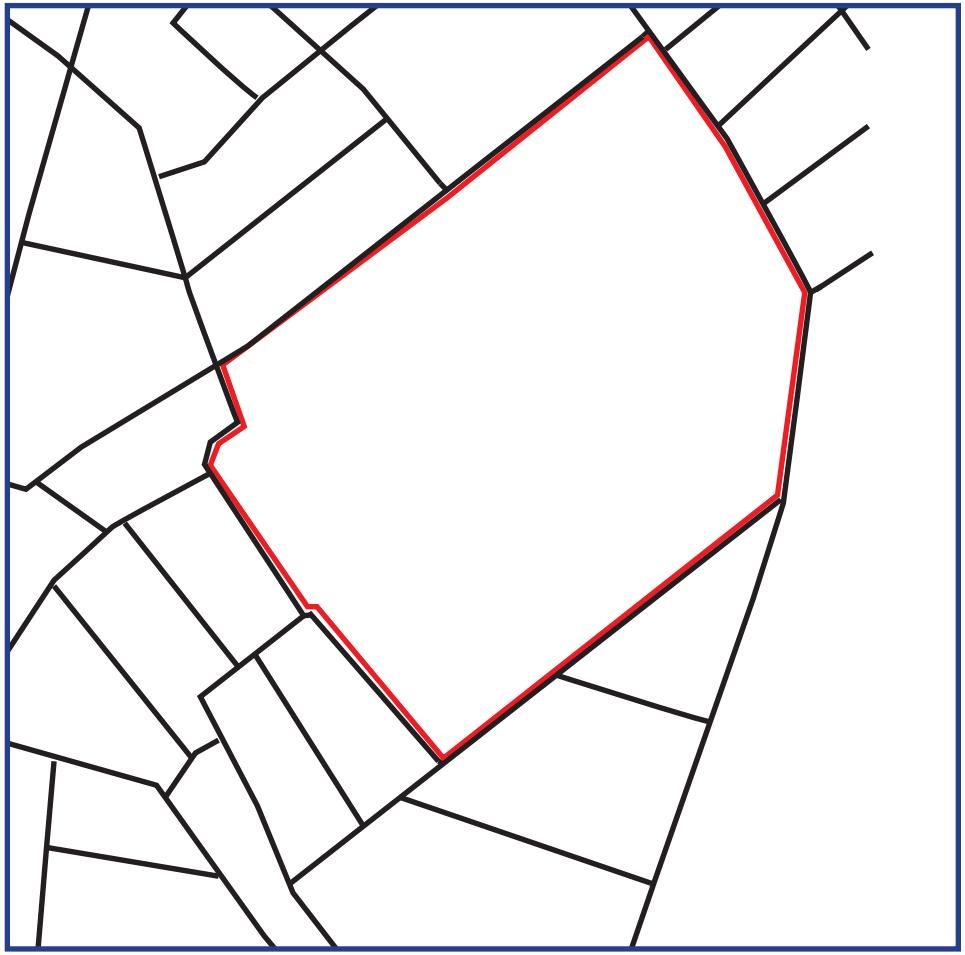
- A network of streets or paths that connect with each other creating an attractive choice of routes for all users.

- A clear logical order of streets that uses a range of street types that can be identified by their differing features including width, enclosure, parking arrangements, landscape and materials

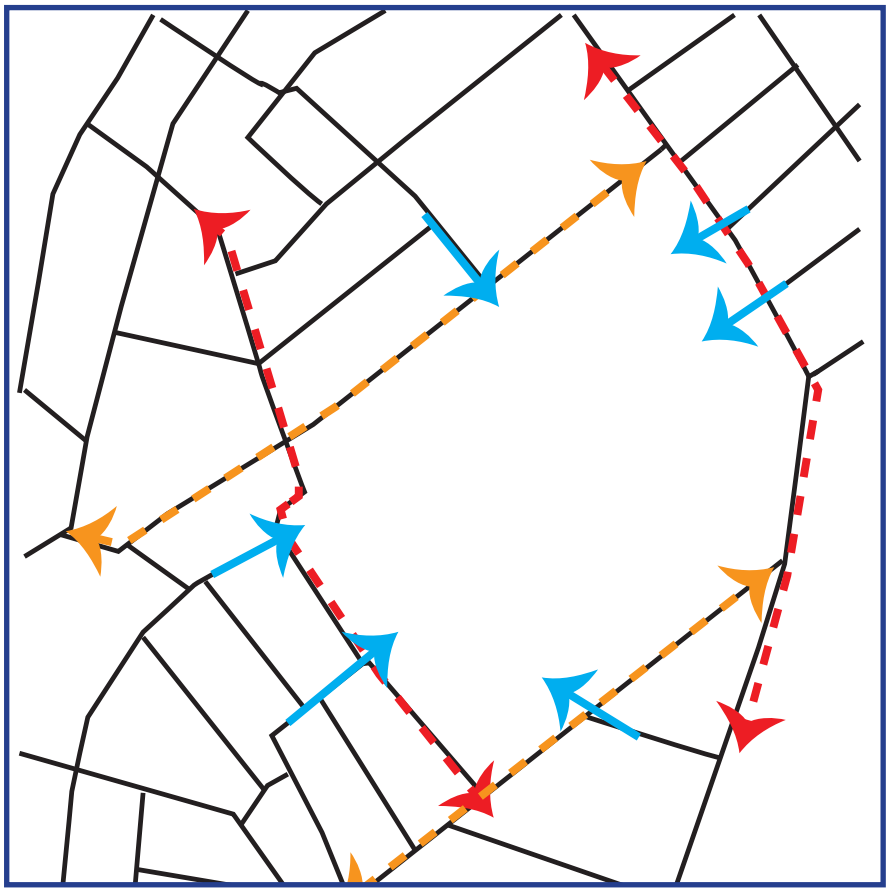
- Connection to existing streets, cycle and walking paths creating direct and safe links for all users and avoiding cul-de-sac layouts.

- A link to neighbouring land.

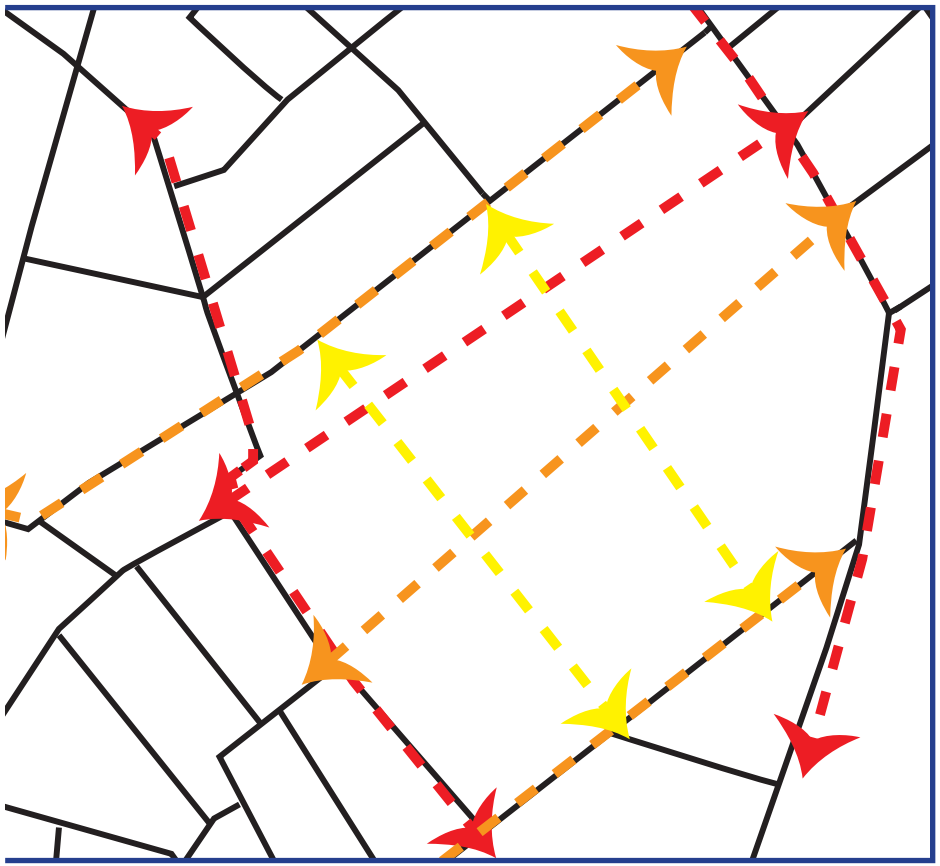
- A built form that addresses the existing streetscene, facing outwards to the street. Side and rear fences should not be situated next to the open countryside or streetscene.



Locate Site



Identify Street Patterns and primary, secondary and tertiary-routes. Locate site access points.



Design street patterns to connect to the existing street pattern and provide a choice of routes.

Key

Primary Route

Secondary Route

Tiertiary Route

Access points

Space and Layout

Visual Connection

Design Aim: To visually connect places in order to improve legibility and enhance local character and distinctiveness.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- A carefully considered approach to the location and alignment of views and vistas to achieve visual links between places and spaces and to the surrounding landscape.

- Deliberate placement of townscape markers, and the careful integration of any landscape and historic features, at key nodes within the movement network.

- A roof-scape and silhouette which responds to the topography and is based on local spatial typologies.

- Any mitigation measures aimed at reducing the visual impacts of new development on sensitive receptors (such as listed buildings).

Movement and Connectivity

Ensure All Places are Accessible to Everyone

Designs are requried to demonstrate:

- A public realm that is accessible for those with mobility impairments, with clear and direct routes between places and step free alternatives where local topography or level changes may present impediments to movement.
- Tactile surfaces to delineate space for those with visual impairments.
- Regular street crossings with clear sight lines on busier streets.
- Safe and comfortable frequent places to stop and rest in the public realm
- Clear wayfinding
- Accessible and step free buildings and public spaces throughout.

Streets

Development must make it easy for all users to find their way around a place to encourage walking and wheeling. To ensure the structure and function of a place is reflected through a hierarchy of streets and spaces, from primary streets and down to quiet residential streets.

Designs are required to demonstrate

- A connected route which respects desire lines and minimises the use of cul-de-sacs and counter-intuitive changes in direction
- Carriageways with the minimum width possible and with clear pedestrian access.

Street Hierarchy

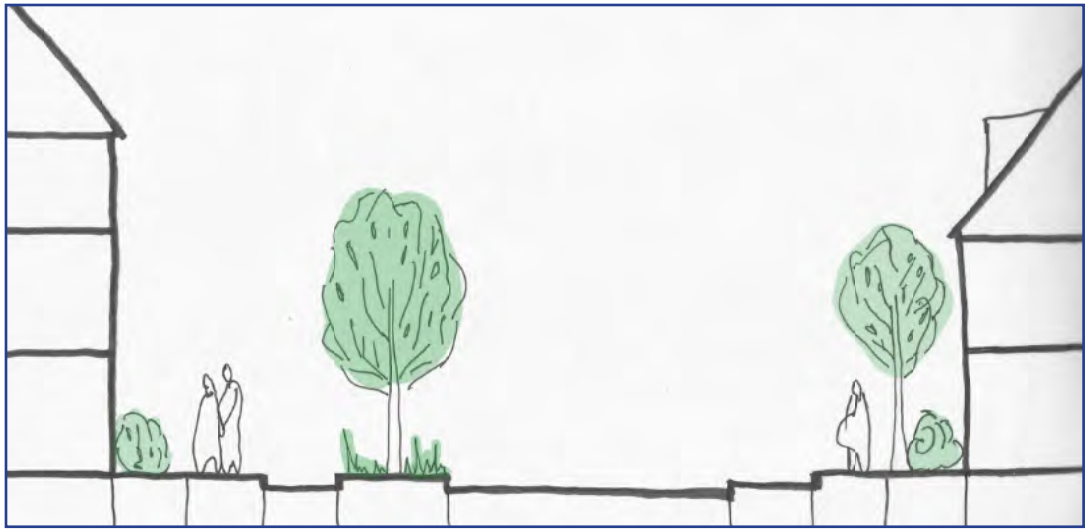
Streets should create a hierarchy of routes and create places between the buildings. Streets should proritise walking, cycling and wheeling. All street designs for homes must aim to slow traffic speeds.

Not all developments will need a full hierachy of streets. For example smaller developments may not need a primary street.

- Primary streets that connect neighbourhoods, promote and encourage sustainable and active travel.
- Secondary streets that permeate neighbourhoods, with footpaths on each side and a variety of formal and informal street planting.
- Tertiary streets to provide access to homes which can include lanes, mews and shared surfaces.

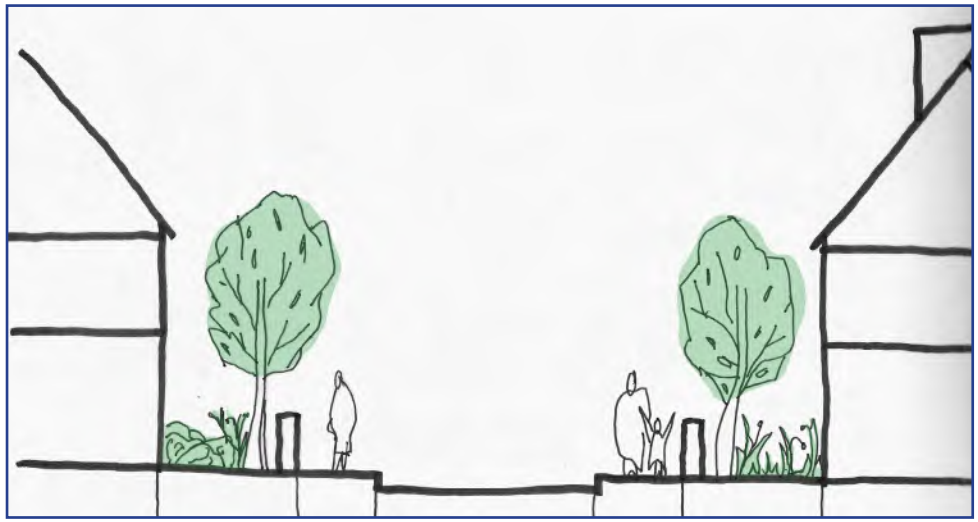
Primary streets

- Connect neighbourhoods and promote and encourage sustainable and active travel.
- Include bike lanes
- Allow for walking, cycling and wheeling
- Pavements should be a minimum width of 2m as outlined in Manual for Streets
- Deliver good quality hard and soft landscape solutions to create a pleasant pedestrian environment
- Include active frontages.
- Connect to existing developments
- Enhance permeability by including safe crossing points.



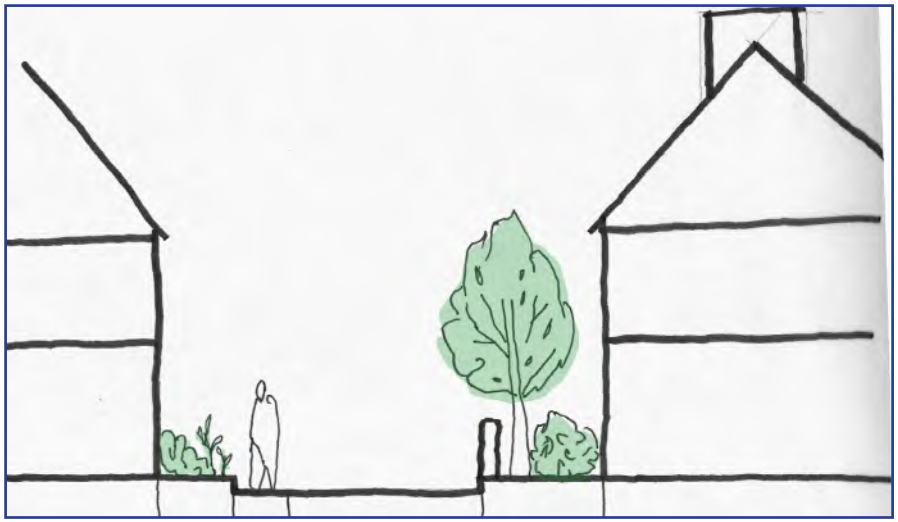
Secondary streets

- Permeate neighbourhoods and provide the most direct route around a development
- Include footpaths on each side
- A variety of formal and informal street planting.
- Their design should require slow traffic speeds.
- Accommodate walking, cycling and wheeling



Tertiary streets

- Provide access to homes which can include lanes, mews and shared surfaces.
- Include pavements
- Accommodate, walking, cycling and wheeling
- Can include homes zones



Street Design

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Minimal conflict between pedestrians, cyclist and vehicles creating spaces that are safe, secure and attractive

- Buildings and landscape that is visually dominant

- The prioritisation of the needs of walking, cycling and wheeling over the needs of cars

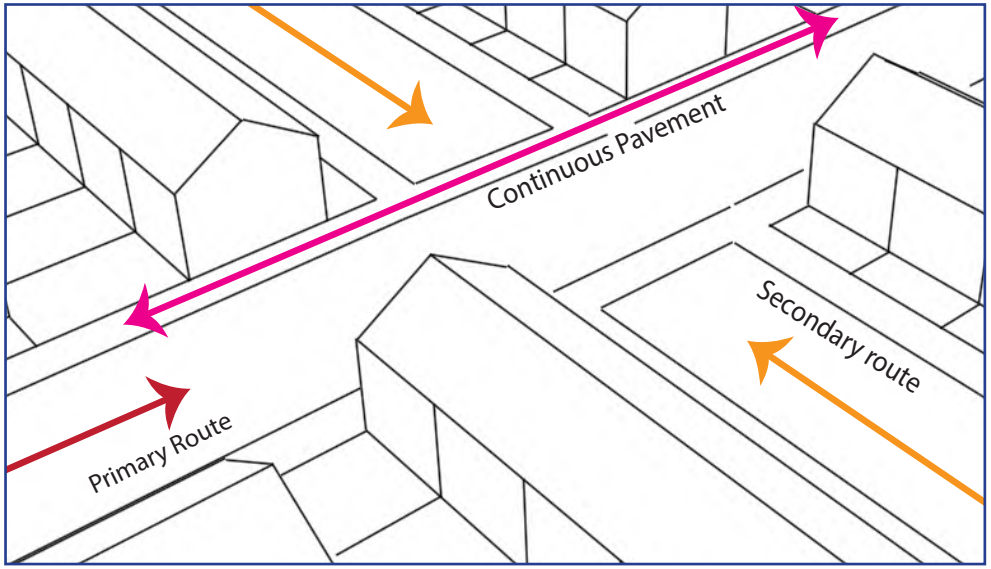
- The inclusion of trees and soft landscaping. Streets should have pavements wide enough for trees not to be obsticles to pedestrians.

- Residential streets that are designed to encouraged speeds of a maximum of 20mph with natural methods of traffic calming incorporated into the design.

- Clear, frequent and direct links between new and existing places, achieved where possible by extending existing routes to achieve seamless integration.

- Continuous pavements and safe crossing points

- The use of home zones, where people and vehicles share the street safely on equal terms, should be considered when designing shared surfaces, incorporate permeable paving.



Example of a continuous pavement taken from google streetview

Blocks and Plots

Efficient Use of Land

Designs should use all land efficiently and effectively and ensure no ambiguous spaces (spaces without a use) are created.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Street layouts which lead to efficient development parcels.

- No unused or undefined areas of land without a clear purpose or ownership.

Block Structure

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- The use of perimeter blocks that respond to the grain of the existing settlement.

- A sense of enclosure appropriate to the street hierarchy and human scale.

Future neighbourhoods will frequently need to be built at higher densities than has recently been constructed. Terraced miners cottages are characteristic of the Somer Valleys history and provide a higher density and more efficient form of development.

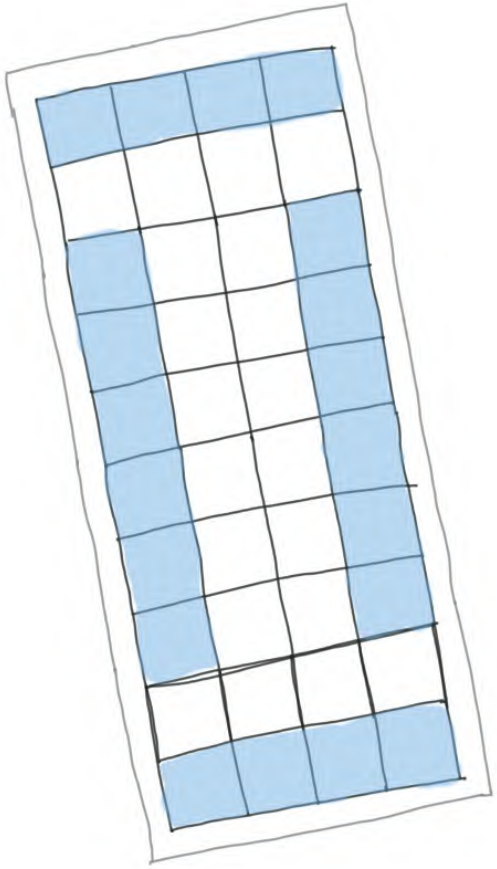
New development does not need to copy the historic appearance but should respect historic built form. Some of the miners terraces are very small internally and occupants have had to extend their homes which is often difficult. Therefore new homes should have sufficient internal space standards to meet modern living needs.

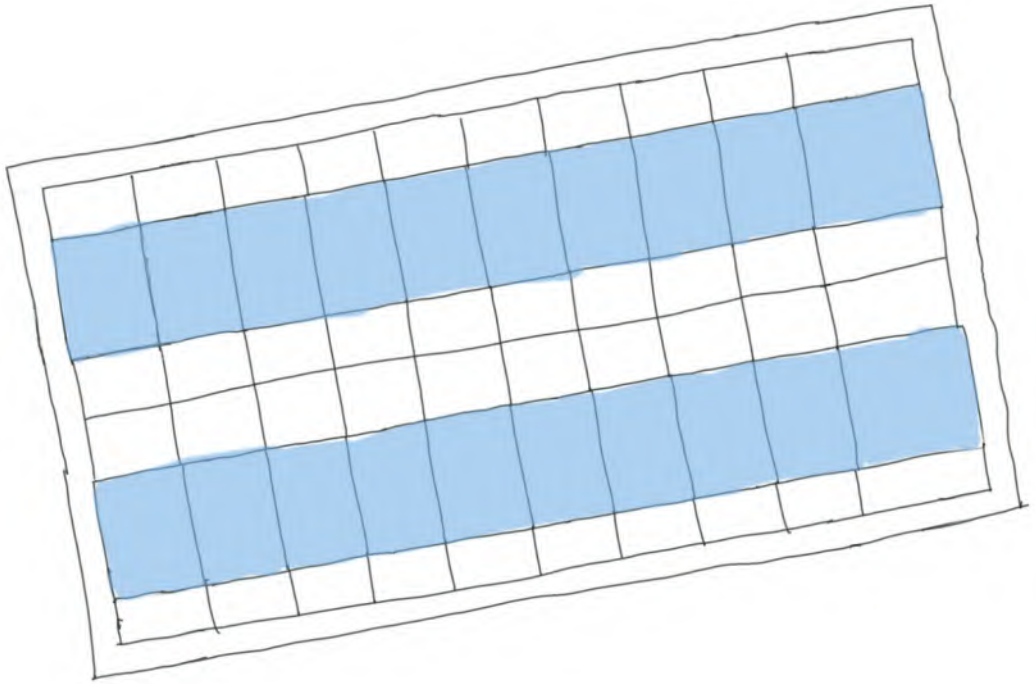
Example of a new development fronting onto the exisitng highway and is part of the streetscene. Taken from google streetview

Example Block and Plot Structures

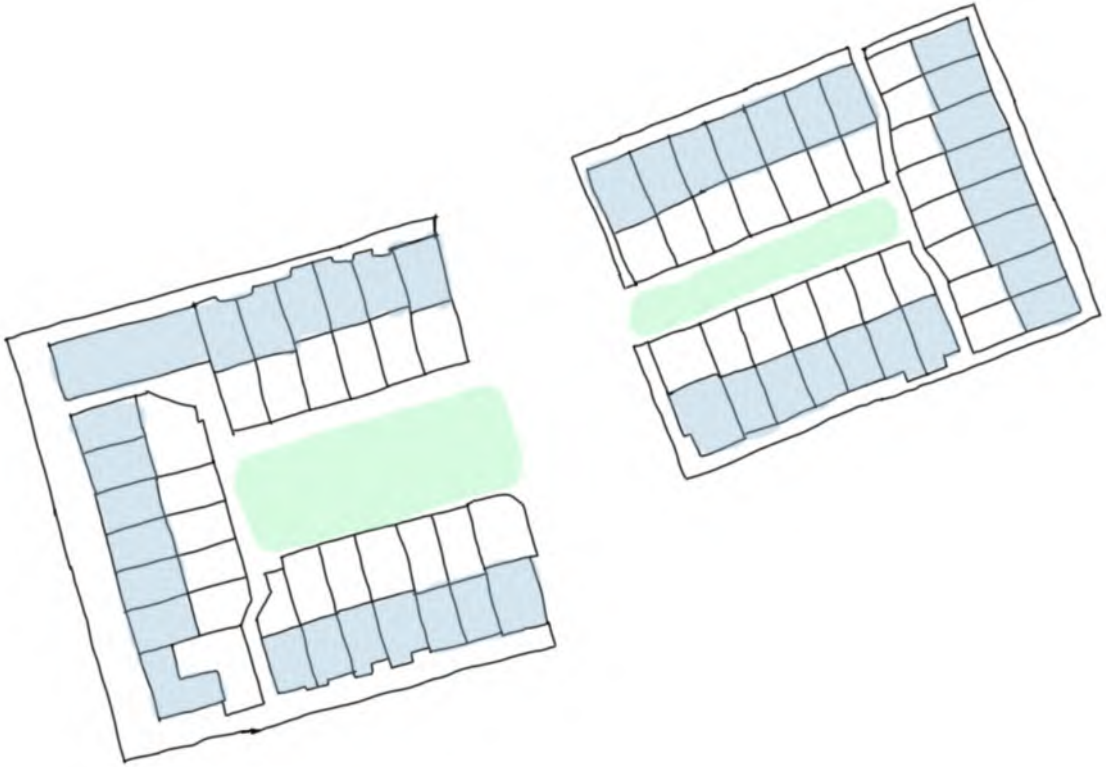
Development should follow the principles of front elevation facing the streetscene and rear elevations facing the rear elevaiton of another property. Below are a series of example block structures that can be used to accommodate development.

These are examples of block structures and new development would not be expected to follow this exact structure. For example street patterns may not be linear.

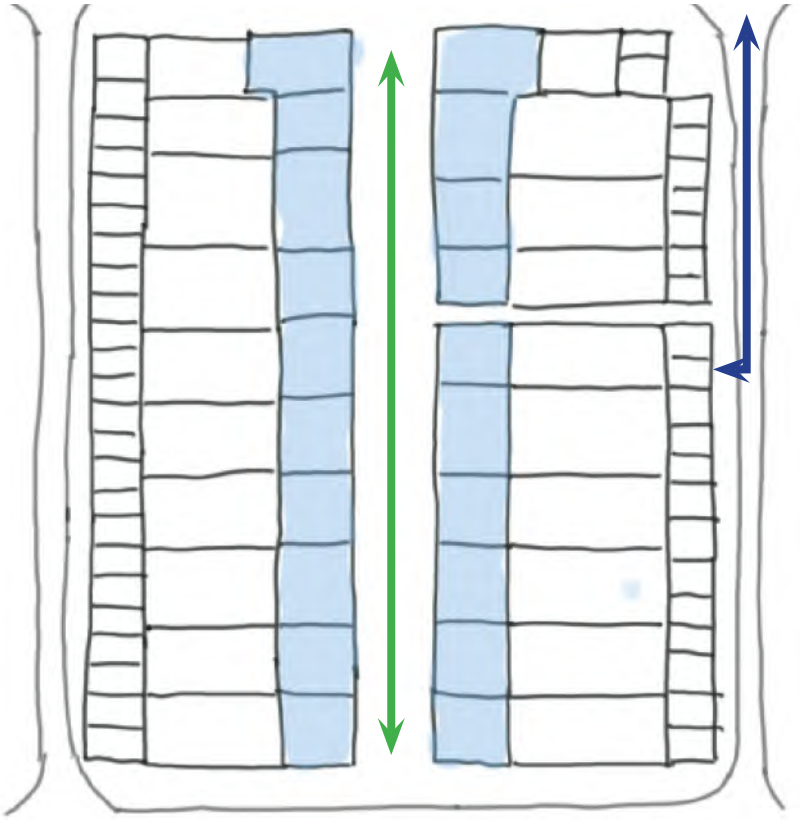




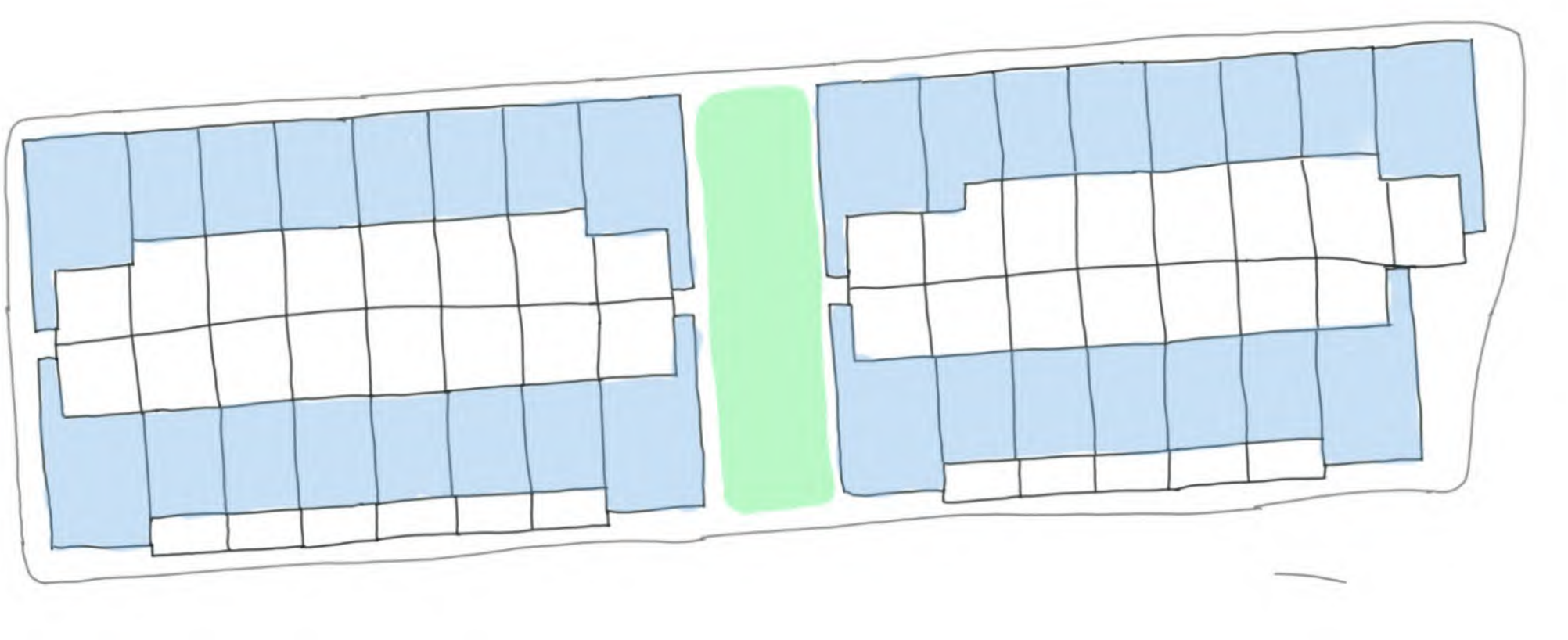
Perimeter blocks with terrace properties



Perimeter block with central shared private courtyard



Front elevations of properties face a pedestrian access. Parking and car access are provide to the rear



Terraced properties with shared green spaces at the side elevations.

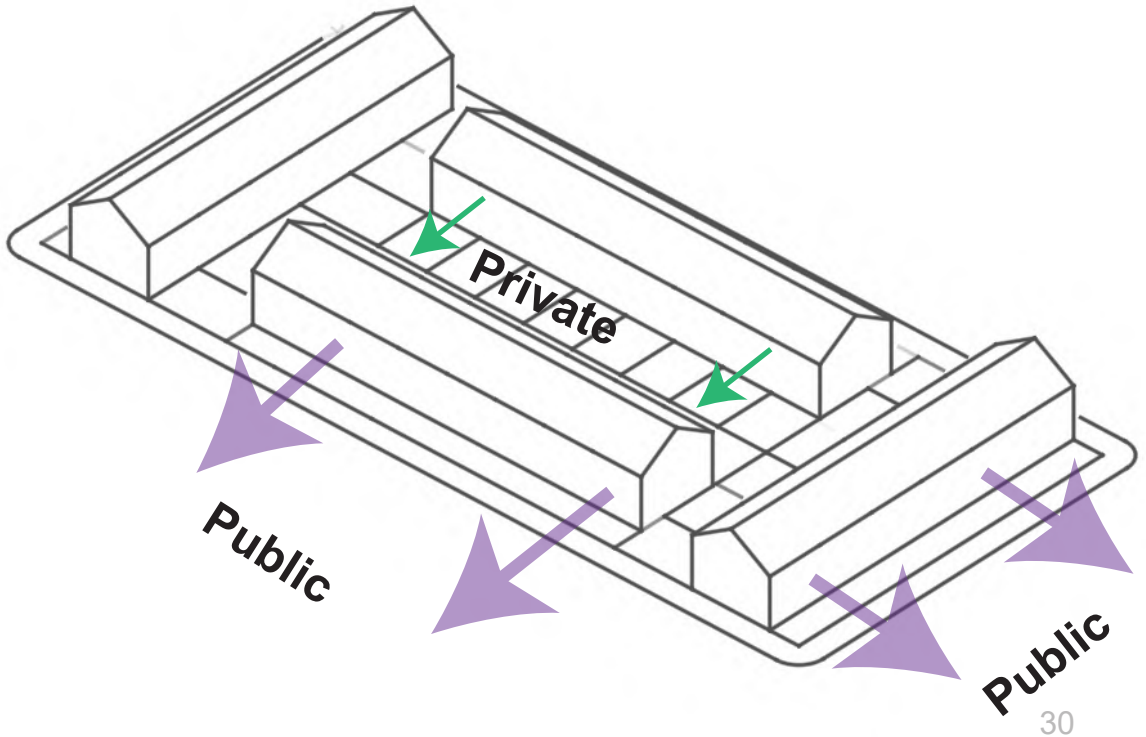
Examples of new development within the Somer Valley that has used terraced properties reflective of existing characteristic morphology

Buildings

Buildings and the streetscene

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Front doors and main entrances front onto the street, following the principle of fronts to fronts and backs to backs.
- Inclusion of natural surveillance by positioning ground floor habitable windows overlooking the street.
- Clear definition between public and private spaces.
- Sufficient space between the public realm and adjoining buildings.

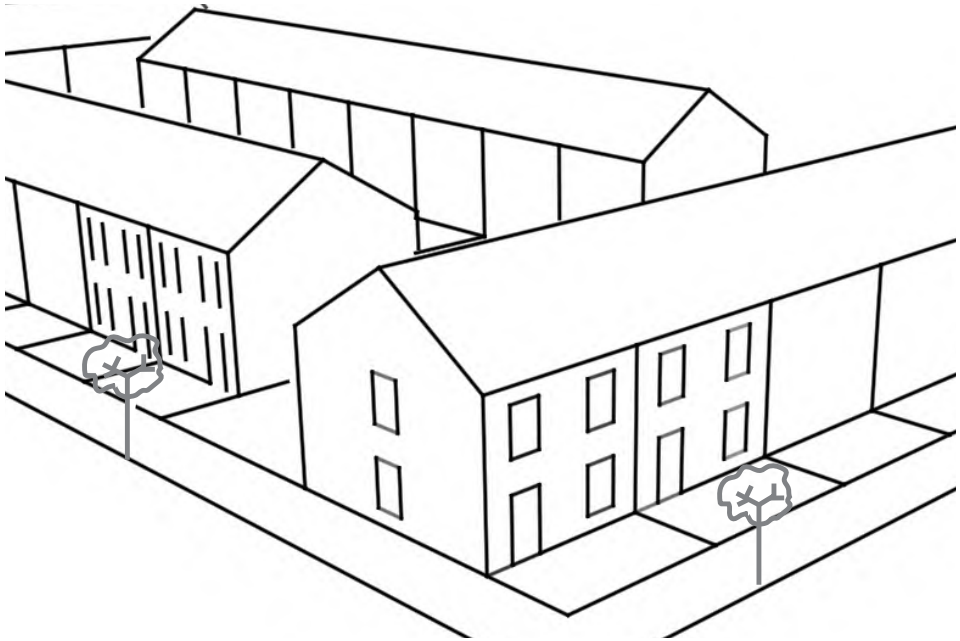


Terrace Properties Parameters

In order to reflect the character of the Somer Valley the provision of the terraced property is the preferred built form

Designs are required to demonstrate

- The provision of two storey and where appropriate three storey terraces
- Be reflective of the local materials
- Include private outdoor amenity space to the front and back of the dwelling
- Boundary treatments between private and open space should reflect the character of the area.

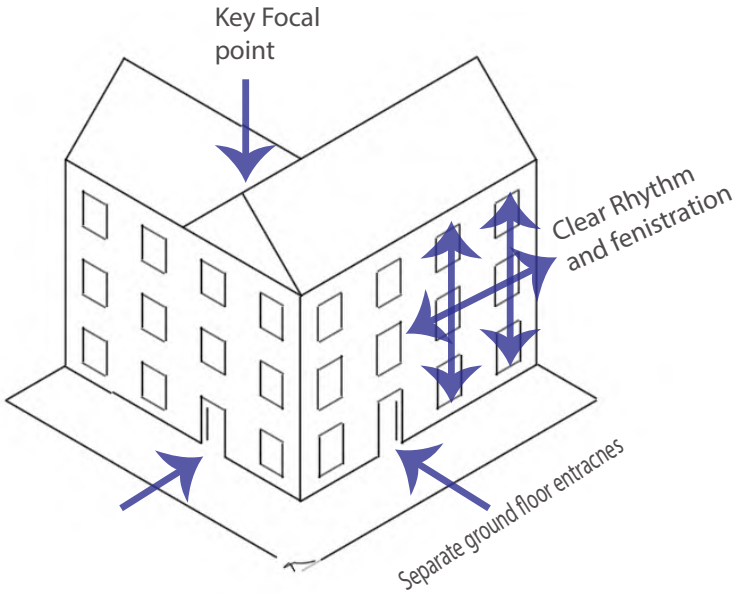


Examples of successful modern terraced developments taken from google streetview

Flats/Apartments

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- A respect for the surrounding context in terms of scale and height.
- That buildings are broken down into a series of components to reduce their perceived bulk and massing
- Entrances that are located facing the streetscene and be visible to the public realm and the number of dwellings accessed from a single core should be kept to a minimum.
- Access to private outdoor amenity space.
- Parking bays should be overlooked and integrated into the landscape strategy.
- Secure cycle storage.



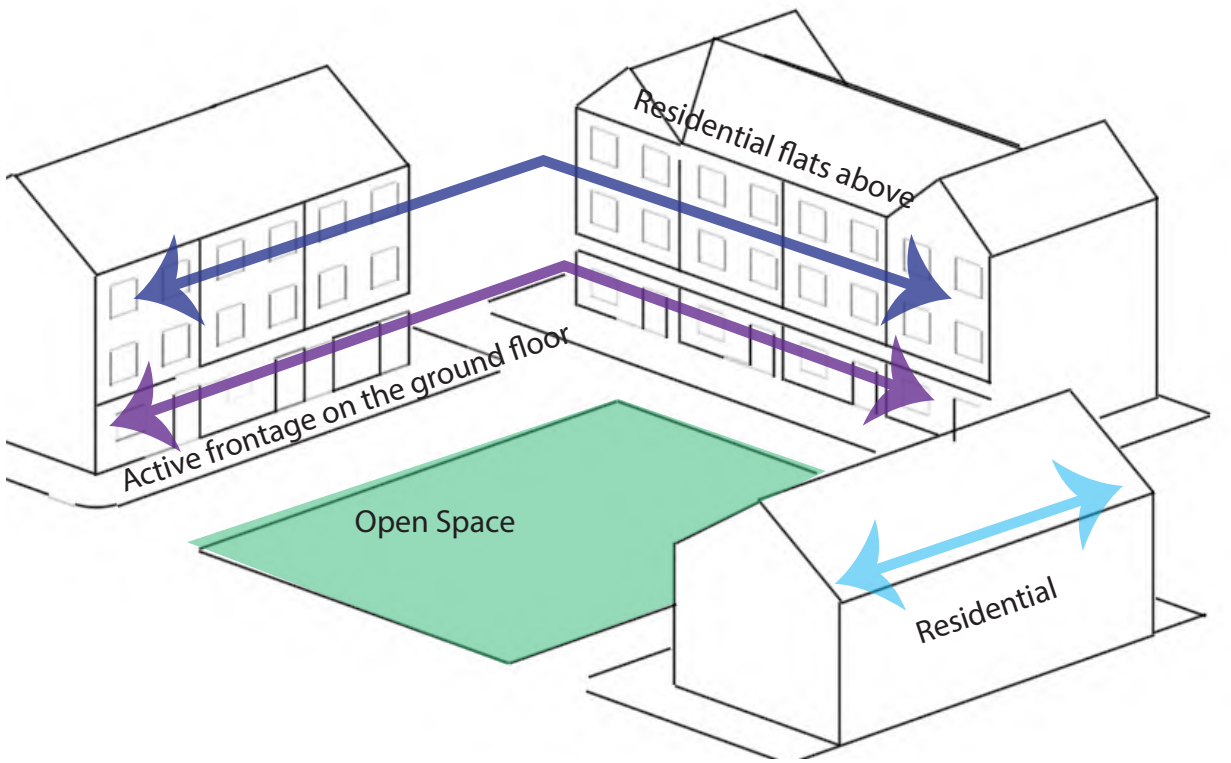
Example of a flatted development with a duel frontage and separate ground floor entrances taken from google streetview

Mixed Use Development

In the case of development that requires a local centre mixed use development may be appropriate. Local centres should be a hub for the community and include high quality public realm.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- Mixed use development is located at intersections of a well connected road network.
- Centres and community hubs are designed around clustered facilities fronting onto the public realm.
- Residential development is included.
- Active frontages are located on the ground floor.



Materials Pallette

Design Aim: To respect the local context and ensure high quality design
The choice of materials should be reflective of the local vernacular.

The materials pallette should be reflective of the Somer Valley character

Common materials in the Somer Valley include;

- Lias Stone
- Render
- Bath Stone
- Brick
- Slate
- Clay Roof Tiles

Development should respect and complement the existing materials of the context of the area surrounding the site.

Additional Guidance:

- Somer Valley Character Appraisal
- Radstock Conservation Area Appraisal
- Midsomer Norton Conservation Area Appraisal
- Paulton Conservation Area Appraisal

Parking

Parking standards are set out in the Transport and Development SPD or relevant Neighbourhood Plans, but the way parking is accommodated will vary. Developments will be expected to provide a variety of parking choices in line with the parameters set out below.

Parking overview

Parking must be integrated in order to minimise its impact on public spaces, creating a visually attractive and functional environment for people.

Designs are required to demonstrate:

- The use of layout, materials and planting to integrate parking into the fabric of a neighbourhood with minimal visual and functional impact.
- That the public realm isn't dominated by cars parked on footways.
- That the public realm isn't visually dominated by cars.
- The use of landscaping and planting to soften the appearance of parking spaces
- A range of parking solutions is used within a development.

Parking Categories

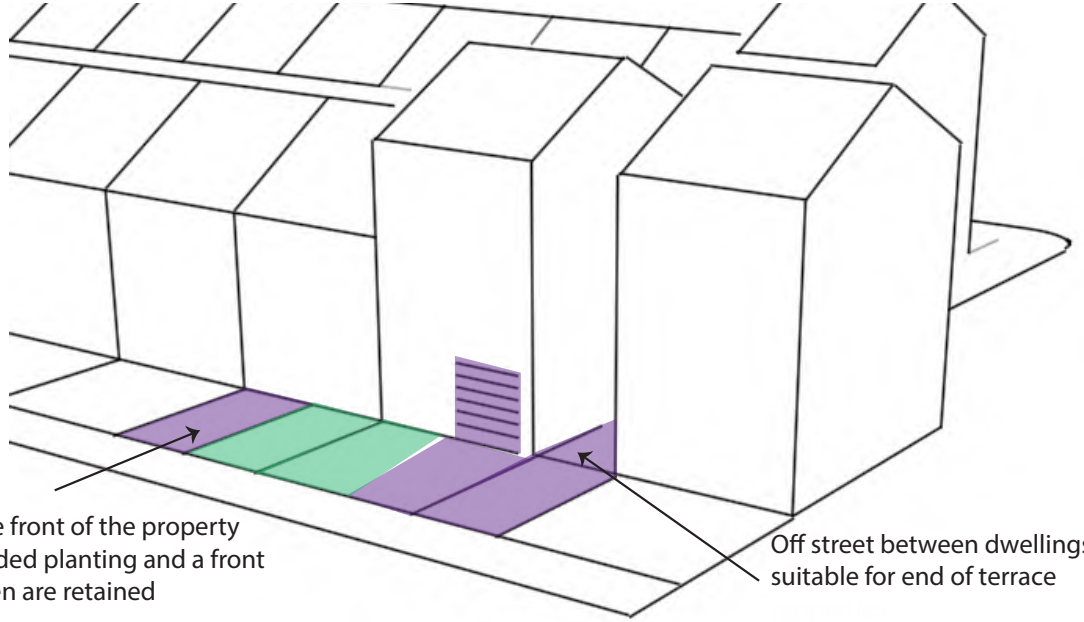
On street - On-street parking can be defined with limited runs interspersed with pavement buildouts, planting and street trees.

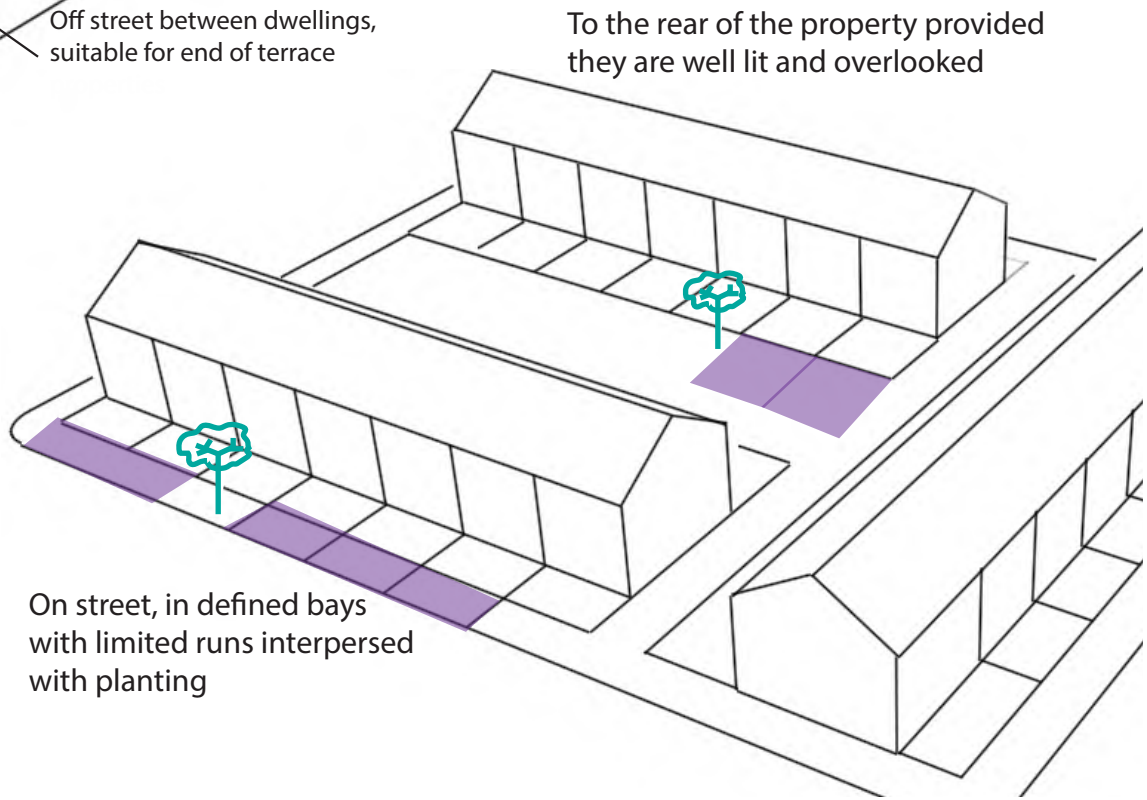
On plot in front garden - Its impact must be screened by planting and land retained for garden space.

Between homes - For end of terrace homes, the cars may be accommodated to the side of the property, with one or more spaces tucked between buildings with overlooking for natural surveillance.

Rear parking - In some circumstances rear parking spaces may be appropriate providing they are secure, well-lit and overlooked and not detrimental to quality of life.

Parking courts are discouraged but may be needed in the case of flatted development. Rear parking courts must be secure, well lit and overlooked. The use of vegetation to soften the appearance of a parking court is required.


At the front of the property provided planting and a front garden are retained
Off street between dwellings, suitable for end of terrace


To the rear of the property provided they are well lit and overlooked
On street, in defined bays with limited runs interpersed with planting

On street parking including planting and street trees

Parking to the rear of dwellings. The site is overlooked and includes planting

Off street parking situated between dwellings.

On plot parking with garden space retained

Checklist

The table below lists all aspects of the design code that should be included in a proposed housing development in the Somer Valley. The table must be used to explain how all aspects of the design code have been addressed in a proposed scheme and how the analysis has informed the design. If any aspects of the design cannot be addressed then a clear explaination should be provided. Not all aspects of the code will apply to all development.

Section	**Addressed in Design**
Morphology	
Natural Environment	
Open Space	
Connections and Permeability	
Space and Layout	
Movement and Connectivity	
Blocks and Plots	
Buildings	
Parking	

Bath & North East Somerset Council

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