



# CHARACTER AND CONTEXT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

JUNE 2014

LONDON PLAN 2011  
IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

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# CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

JUNE 2014

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## FOREWORD



Planning for neighbourhoods in a city as dynamic and diverse as London is a tricky business. The planner must steer a careful course between the whirlpool of total change and the shoals of complete preservation: on the one hand, the hazard of so changing the character of an area that it loses its much loved distinctiveness; and on the other, the risk of being so constrained by what is there at the moment that innovation is stifled. We have much worthy of being preserved, but equally have places where the existing character badly needs overhauling.

I am bringing out this guidance to try to help those facing these challenges, and to provide advice on how to navigate them. It explains the fundamental importance of getting an understanding of a place before taking decisions on its development – how it has come to be the way it is; the things about it that people who live, work, visit or just travel through value or want to see changed; the economic, social and other forces driving change. This understanding can then provide a springboard for development that makes a real contribution to a place and its people. A development that shows a clear understanding of, and relationship with, the context of an area is one that is more likely to be

successful economically as well as aesthetically. As the guidance points out, this is not about preserving neighbourhoods in aspic, rather its about an approach to encouraging development that changes what needs changing and makes a contribution to London's overall success – but which also protects the things that are essential to an area's individual character and perhaps makes the best of previously hidden strengths.

This document seeks to help those concerned with development capture these issues, setting out approaches and processes that can be used to build the necessary understanding of place and draw on that to inform the design of development and planning decision-making. It emphasises the importance of engaging with communities and others with an interest or something to contribute from the earliest stages. Following this structure approach should help ensure quicker and better-informed planning decisions and the kind of high quality buildings and urban realm that will be valued by local residents and users alike. We have been helped in putting this document together by a steering group with representatives from boroughs, civic and amenity groups and developers. Their knowledge and insights have been essential to its preparation, and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for their contribution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson'.

Boris Johnson  
Mayor of London



Clerdale Street (Tower Hamlets)

Karakusevic Carson Architects

A striking contemporary scheme that responds to intact Victorian terraces and Denys Lasdun's Keeling house both of which surround the site. A restored street pattern helps to integrate a variety of different units and tenures around public and private spaces. The materials pallet complements the varied surroundings.



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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

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### INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 “If you wish to have a just notion of the magnitude of this city, you must not be satisfied with seeing its great streets and squares, but must survey the innumerable little lanes and courts. It is not in the showy evolutions of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists.” Samuel Johnson
- 1.2 London is a dynamic place and has many functions and values. It is a neighbourhood and home for residents, a national capital, an international centre for finance, a tourist destination and a seat of culture to name just a few. It is this diversity and multiplicity of roles that defines London. Understanding how the existing character and context of individual places in London contributes to this diversity is essential to an appreciation of how these different places may develop in the future. The process and use of the tools outlined in this SPG should speed up the planning process, improve the quality of decision making and bring about better quality developments.
- 1.3 The London Plan 2011 includes a number of policies for facilitating high quality design, building on the positive elements of places to help inform the future enhancement and development of an area, in particular Policy 7.4 Local Character states that new development should help people understand where a place has come from, where it is now and where it is going.
- 1.4 Places are always in a process of ‘becoming’ and it is always important to understand the forces that are driving change,

such as climate change, in light of an informed overview of the present. This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) sets out an approach to understanding character and context so that this evidence can help to guide change in the planning and design process in a way which is responsive to individual places and locations. It is key to the implementation of many of the policies in Chapter 7 of the London Plan, particularly Policies 7.4 and 7.1.

- 1.5 The objectives of this SPG are to provide:
  - specific guidance on the attributes of character and context in London (physical, cultural, social, economic, perceptions and experience);
  - information on resources that inform an understanding of character and context in London;
  - an analysis of the interrelationships between different aspects of character, and how it can be articulated and presented to others;
  - examples of good practice in how an understanding of character and context can be used to help manage change in a way that sustains and enhances the positive attributes of a place.

#### **The audience for this guidance**

- 1.6 The SPG has been prepared with the help of a steering group that included borough, developer and voluntary sector representatives. It is aimed at providing guidance for:
    - Boroughs in preparing information about places as part of their evidence base for Local Plans and in assessing planning applications;
    - Developers and their consultants in
-

preparing planning applications, so that an understanding of character and context can help achieve the right development in the right place;

- Neighbourhood Forums / Communities in understanding and preparing Neighbourhood Plans for their areas.
-



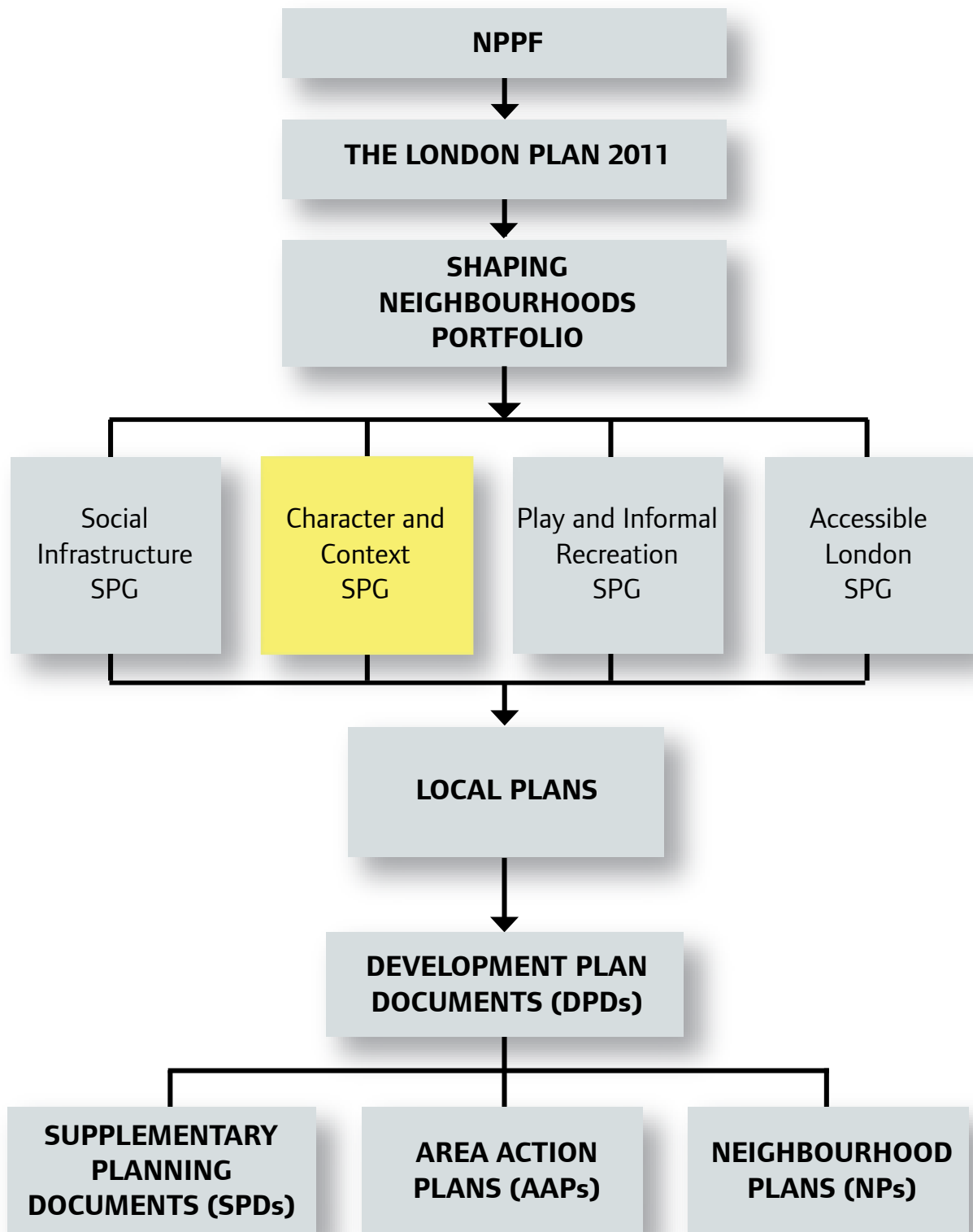
Leyton Town Centre Project  
Jan Kattein Architects ©Morley von Sternberg  
The high street is subject to rapid change with new frontages, owners and business models succeeding each other and accreting over time. Leyton town centre improvement scheme helps to reunite the streetscape through improvements to both individual shops and their host buildings. Creative use of colour is a particular characteristic of this scheme.

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## CHAPTER 2

# POLICY CONTEXT

FIGURE 2.1 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTER AND CONTEXT SPG



## POLICY CONTEXT

The policy context for this SPG is set out in Figure 2.1.

### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.1 The NPPF contains emphasises the importance of good design and recognising intrinsic character (para. 17); This Includes the need to;

- always seek high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants
- take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

2.2 Requirements for planning policies (para.58) seek to ensure that development:

- will function well over its lifetime and add to the overall quality of the area
- establishes a strong sense of place, using buildings and streetscape to create
- attractive and comfortable places;
- optimises the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain a mix of uses including green and other public space as part of developments;
- responds to local character and history, reflecting local identity in terms of materials, whilst incorporating innovative design where appropriate;
- creates safe and accessible environments;
- is visually attractive by virtue of good architecture and landscape design.

2.3 The NPPF also makes reference to the social aspects of a place and to the connections between people and places. It seeks to ensure that development is properly integrated with its environment and context, whether built, historic or natural (para. 61).

Section 12 of the NPPF discusses in particular opportunities to draw upon the sense of place that can be generated by the historic environment. The significance of key local features is an essential part of understanding the character of places and how they developed over time.

2.4 The NPPF also it references the value and role of social, economic and environmental assessments in understanding the sensitivity of places and their capacity for change.

### London Plan Policies

2.5 The London Plan includes a number of policies for facilitating high quality design, drawing from the positive elements of places to help inform the future enhancement and development of an area.

2.6 The overarching policy for this SPG is Policy 7.4 Local Character which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

2.7 There are a number of other policies that contribute to creating well-designed places which particularly relate to local character and context:

- Policy 7.1 Building London's Neighbourhoods and Communities
- Policy 7.2 An Inclusive Environment
- Policy 7.3 Designing out Crime
- Policy 7.5 Public Realm

- Policy 7.6 Architecture
- Policy 7.7 Location and design of Tall and Large Buildings
- Policy 7.8 Heritage Assets and Archaeology
- Policy 7.9 Heritage-led Regeneration
- Policy 7.10 World Heritage Sites
- Policy 7.21 Trees and Woodlands
- Policy 7.28 Restoration of the Blue Ribbon Network
- Policy 7.29 The River Thames
- Policy 7.30 London's Canals, and Other Rivers and Waterspaces
- Policy 2.10 Central Activities Zone – Strategic priorities
- Policy 2.13 Opportunity Areas and Areas for Intensification
- Policy 2.15 Town Centres
- Policy 2.18 Green Infrastructure
- Policy 3.5 Quality and Design of Housing Developments
- Policy 3.7 Large Residential Developments
- Policy 6.1 Strategic Approach (Integrating Transport and Development)
- Policy 6.10 Walking

### Supplementary Planning Guidance

#### Shaping Neighbourhoods Portfolio of SPGs

- A This Character and Context SPG is part of a series of SPGs which sit within the Shaping Neighbourhoods portfolio including the Lifetime Neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning SPG, Play and Informal Recreation SPG and the Accessible London SPG;
- B Character and Context SPG – The subject of this SPG;
- C Social Infrastructure SPG - This draft SPG draws together information on all the major forms of social infrastructure

(principally health and education, but also sports facilities, faith and burial space) from published guidance, legislation, and in-house GLA evidence;

#### D Play and Informal Recreation SPG

2012 - This SPG provides guidance on innovative approaches to play provision in terms of facilities, locations, design and management based on the Lifetime Neighbourhoods principles;

#### E Accessible London SPG – This

forthcoming SPG will update guidance and advice from the 2004 Accessible London SPG, providing clear guidance on promoting and achieving the highest standards of accessible and inclusive design.

#### Green Infrastructure and Open Environments SPG

- 2.8 The Green Infrastructure and Open Environments portfolio is also relevant to understanding character and context. In particular the All London Green Grid SPG states that green infrastructure should be designed and managed as an integral network. Green infrastructure should create a sense of place and opportunities for greater appreciation of the landscape, cultural heritage and geodiversity.

#### London View Management Framework

- 2.9 The London View Management Framework SPG identifies four classifications of views, London Panoramas, Linear Views, River Prospects and Townscape Prospects, and sets out the specific characteristics of each that contribute to the appreciation of London at the strategic level.



## Housing SPG

- 2.10 The Housing SPG identifies the different sources of housing capacity that have to be explored if the London Plan's targets are to be achieved, explaining the balance which has to be struck between numbers, creating attractive places to live and respecting the character of surrounding areas.

## Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks

- 2.11 Through the London Plan, the Mayor designates a number of Opportunity Areas. These are areas with significant capacity to accommodate new housing, commercial and other development much of which has the potential to affect existing places and neighbourhoods. In reviewing, preparing or implementing OAPFs, account should be taken of the character and context provided by existing places and neighbourhoods and their contribution to the sense of place in relation to future visions for a locality.

## Local Plans

- 2.12 Ensuring there are robust local planning policy frameworks in place which have regard to the character and context of existing neighbourhoods and the sense of place that they provide will be key to creating places which people are proud to identify with. Any area has to be seen in its wider context, whether London-wide, across borough boundaries, or within local areas.

## Neighbourhood planning

- 2.13 Under the Localism Act 2011, neighbourhood planning can have a

significant impact on the future of a local area and a community's sense of place. Ensuring there is a shared understanding of local character and context by all the players involved in shaping places in London is therefore essential.

## BENEFITS

- 2.14 A sense of place and identity form the setting to the lives of people and communities, through experience, association, and use or activity. Places which develop in a manner that responds to the local character and context of that place are likely to be more sustainable, contribute to a good quality of life and attract investment - economically, culturally and/or intellectually.
- 2.15 An understanding of the character and context of a place can help to:
- Ensure high quality responsive design and a good fit between place and site design, and help develop local design frameworks;
  - Contribute to the development of policies and objectives for an area based on its intrinsic character;
  - Inform change by providing evidence for capacity studies, sensitivity assessments, regeneration strategies, etc. to help determine the right development in the right place;
  - Improve visual and physical connections with natural features or elements such as green infrastructure – the All London Green Grid and Blue Ribbon Network;
  - Integrate sustainable design with its context, including urban greening/ green infrastructure, climate change adaptation;
  - Recognise local historic character and

- contribute to conservation management - understanding sites and assets in context, including identification, conservation and management of heritage assets, significance and setting;
  - Achieve or maintain suitable densities, and intensification where appropriate, in a way that responds to, creates or reinforces the local character of a place;
  - Identify, conserve and manage key views, including the consideration of the siting of tall buildings;
  - Contribute to a sense of safety and security by creating well-designed legible places with opportunities for casual/natural surveillance and activity;
  - Reinforce a sense of meaning, civility, belonging and distinctiveness;
  - Integrate inclusive design principles to ensure that the area can be used safely, easily and with dignity by all.
-





Dalston Eastern Curve Garden  
J & L Gibbons / muf architecture / Design for London ©  
Sarah Blee

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## CHAPTER 3

# UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

### UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

3.1 This chapter defines character and context as they relate to the London Plan and sets out some of their principal components.

3.2 Character and context are both terms that have specific meanings in respect of this document and also in the broader planning framework described by the London Plan. Definitions are set out below.

3.3 London is defined by constant change and evolution from a port and imperial capital, the seat of government, a centre of international trade and commerce to 'a world city', it has grown to incorporate numerous towns and villages within its boundaries and has extended far beyond the 'square mile' of the original Roman and Medieval City. Juxtaposition of different settlements and communities is one of the strands that contribute to the rich sense of place and identity in London, as does the imprint left by various cultural, political, economic, social and ethnic influences. It is a multi-layered city of organic evolution, with numerous fragments from its different periods of development, none completely erased, some still very redolent of the era in which they were developed and others often not fully cohesive or uniform.

3.4 In London, character and context studies are likely to be of three main types;

- Borough-wide surveys that give an overview of the range and shape of character influences across a range of localities;
- Neighbourhood or area-based studies that focus in greater detail on the elements of character important to a particular place;

- Major site masterplans that apply the principles of local and London Plan policies on character where there is no higher level study available.

3.5 Whatever their scale and form, completed character studies are evidence of the condition of local character that can help to inform the development of plans and that is weighted in decisions according to the policies that these plans contain.

3.6 In many cases, given the diversity of London's people and places there may not be a single 'community' entity that will have a single view about the character of an area. In practice there may need to be a process of understanding between a range of viewpoints and a need for the decision makers to strike a balance between them.

### SOME DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

**Character** is created by the interplay of different elements, including the physical or built elements that make up the place, the cultural, social and economic factors which have combined to create identity, and the people associated with it through memories, association and activity.

**Context** can be defined as the way in which places, sites and spaces inter relate with one another whether physically, functionally or visually, or the way in which they are experienced sequentially and understood.

## POLICY 7.4: LOCAL CHARACTER

### Strategic

A Development should have regard to the form, function, and structure of an area, place or street and the scale, mass and orientation of surrounding buildings. It should improve an area's visual or physical connection with natural features. In areas of poor or ill-defined character, development should build on the positive elements that can contribute to establishing an enhanced character for the future function of the area.

### Planning decisions

- B Buildings, streets and open spaces should provide a high quality design response that:
- a has regard to the pattern and grain of the existing spaces and streets in orientation, scale, proportion and mass;
  - b contributes to a positive relationship between the urban structure and natural landscape features, including the underlying landform and topography of an area;
  - c is human in scale, ensuring buildings create a positive relationship with street level activity and people feel comfortable with their surroundings;
  - d allows existing buildings and structures that make a positive contribution to the character of a place to influence the future character of the area;
  - e is informed by the surrounding historic environment.

## LDF preparation

C Boroughs should consider the different characters of their areas to identify landscapes, buildings and places, including on the Blue Ribbon Network, where that character should be sustained, protected and enhanced through managed change. Characterisation studies can help in this process.

## Guiding Principles for Understanding Character and Context

3.7 This section sets out some guiding principles to consider in understanding the character and context of places. The four overarching principles aim to define a consistent approach whatever the scale or type of place and are relevant to all people who might be embarking on this work.

### BOX 3.1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN CONSIDERING LOCAL CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

#### FOUR PRINCIPLES

- i Character is all around us and everywhere has a distinctive character;
- ii Character is about people and communities as well as the physical components;
- iii Places are connected and overlap – boundaries, edges and transitions are important;
- iv Character is a dynamic concept – evolution and change are a fundamental characteristics of London.

3.8 The four key principles are detailed below:

**1 Place is all around us and everywhere has a distinctive character**

3.9 Character exists at all scales from the site and neighbourhood level to city-wide. Character forms the setting of all processes and activities for people and communities and can contribute immensely to the quality of life of those communities.

3.10 This SPG recommends a **consistent approach** to understanding the character and context of a place across the whole of Greater London that can be applied at any scale and in any location. The elements of character will be broadly common. What will differ is the **combination and juxtaposition of elements which make up a place and the respective importance or sensitivities these have to a given type of change.**

**2 Character is about people and communities**

3.11 People create places. How places have evolved, their function and the activities they support (both past and present) are pivotal to any understanding of the character of a place. This involves having an understanding of the activity, use and movement within and through a place and its connections and linkages to its surroundings. The experience of any place changes over time and may be very different between night and day – vibrant, lively, quiet, empty. How it is used and experienced by all sections of the community including residents, visitors, businesses, young, older and disabled people and, different ethnic groups, etc may also vary significantly.

3.12 It is important to understand **how places** are perceived, experienced and valued. Places are not just experienced visually but also through memory and association as well as through all the senses. People may value places for different reasons, often reflecting the services or benefits they provide for them. An awareness and appreciation of places in art, literature and music may also be valuable. All these values and experiences are essential to an understanding the character of a place.

3.13 Those involved in commissioning or undertaking studies should consider how they can involve the widest range of people appropriate depending on the scope and purpose of the work. True stakeholder engagement means participation, not just consultation. Stakeholder engagement should be seen as an investment, resulting in more informed outputs and greater ownership of the results and its applications. An assessment of place can help empower people to make decisions about how their local places are managed and changed. Assessments will also be more robust and carry greater weight in the decision-making process.

**3 Places are connected and overlap – boundaries and transitions are important**

3.14 Places do not exist in isolation but are connected to their wider environment. For any place, it is important to understand the wider contextual elements that may influence it – i.e., looking ‘outside – in’ and ‘inside – out’, considering proximity and what is on or beyond the boundary, etc. This may include:

- the functional and visual relationships
-



between different elements; how places and spaces interrelate;

- how places are experienced sequentially or by different users;
- the connections and movement through and between places.

3.15 The boundaries and transitions between different places are often important and need to be considered in their own right and not just as edges of a place. Boundaries between areas of different character are rarely clear on the ground and do not necessarily stop at administrative boundaries. Any assessment of understanding the character and context of a place should therefore be aware and relate to studies on either side of such boundaries, where appropriate.

3.16 This SPG contains further information on defining the extent of a place and dealing with boundaries and edges in chapters 5 and 6.

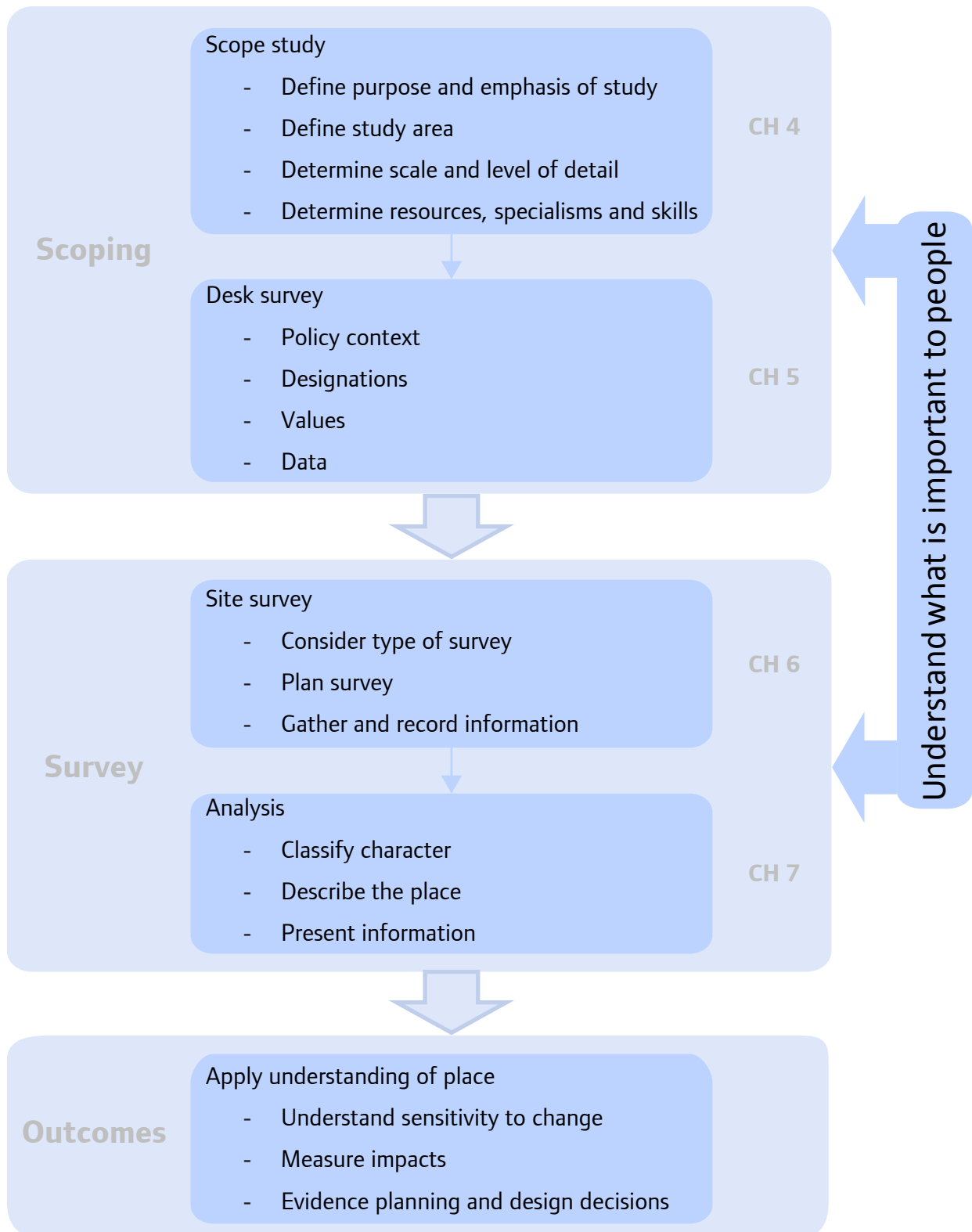
#### **4 The character of a place is a dynamic concept**

3.17 London is the product of a complex set of inter-related processes and layering of different phases of cultural, social and economic evolution. As change is a fundamental characteristic of London, **respecting character and accommodating change should therefore not be seen as mutually exclusive**. Understanding of the character of a place should not seek to preserve things in a static way but should ensure an appropriate balance is struck between existing fabric and any proposed change. This will vary depending on the environment and what is proposed. It is therefore essential to gain an appreciation

of what defines the identity of a location, understand what is special or valued, and how different components may be sensitive or vulnerable, and using this information positively to guide and inform change. In some cases, this may include the creation of areas with a new or altered character. Overview of the process for understanding the character and context of a place

3.18 The **main steps** in understanding the character of a place are essentially similar to many evidence gathering tasks in spatial planning, design and policy formulation. This SPG addresses the scoping, survey and analysis stages of the process. It provides guidance on the development of a baseline study to assist in understanding the character and context of a place. This baseline understanding can then be used in a wide variety of applications, whether in developing spatial planning evidence bases, interpreting policy or informing design and development management decisions.

FIGURE 3.1 THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER OF A PLACE







Liverpool One Site 3  
Haworth Tompkins ©Paul Raftery

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## **CHAPTER 4**

# **SCOPING A CHARACTER AND CONTEXT STUDY**

### SCOPING THE STUDY

#### Scope study

- Define purpose and emphasis of study
- Define study area
- Determine scale and level of detail
- Determine resources, specialisms and skills

4.1 Any study or assessment of the character of a place needs to be tailored to its purpose. This will need to take account of what is the appropriate level of information needed to achieve the desired purpose. Working through the method presented in this chapter should help to ensure that the study is proportionate and appropriately focussed.

4.2 Scoping a character study is also closely related to the desk survey of existing information and designations

#### Defining the purpose and emphasis of the study

4.3 It is important to define the purpose and emphasis of the work from the outset and how it will be used, as well as the extent of the place or location of the study. This will determine the scale and detail of the study, the existing information and resources available and those that will need to be brought in, and stakeholders who may wish to be involved.

4.4 The emphasis given to different elements of character will vary depending on the purpose of the study or assessment. All of the elements of character - physical, cultural, socio-economic and perceptual/experiential are important to understand to some degree, although there will be variations according to emphasis of the

study or assessment. For example:

- A study which helps inform a density strategy at borough level or provides the evidence for intensification may look more at scale, massing, building heights and urban grain;
- Work which informs conservation management is likely to emphasise historic layers, evolution and cultural pattern;
- A character baseline for a design guide, design codes or a design and access statement may cover all themes, and may make particular reference to those which may be of use for considering sustainable design, for example urban biodiversity, landscape, microclimate;
- A study which informs capacity to guide growth and regeneration is likely to focus on issues such as condition, accessibility constraints and opportunities, quality or sensitivity of the environment/place, or issues such as scale and density.

#### Defining the study area

4.5 At the outset, it is necessary to define the extent of the area to be considered. This will relate directly to the content and purpose of the study.

4.6 Most studies that are designed to evidence policy, such borough character appraisals and tall buildings studies, will have a borough-wide extent.

4.7 In other cases, the area might be defined by architecture and built form, such as a square or street, or by its activity and patterns of movement such as a market. The area could also be defined by a different geographical approach or by the extent/nature of change proposed – proposals of significant scale which could

result in a step change in character may create wide ranging impacts upon their context. An understanding of historic evolution e.g. noting of patterns through map regression analysis can also be used to help define the study area.

- 4.8 Boundaries of places are not fixed and defined on the ground; the edges of places are often zones of transition and change. It is important not to be too inward looking in tightly defining a place but to look out and understand the wider context and setting, and how places relate including across administrative boundaries.
- 4.9 Baseline mapping or survey information, such as Ordnance Survey mapping, is a helpful starting point, as this can often indicate topographical, hydrological or settlement patterns or historic features associated with a place, to provide an idea of subject areas to explore and where to gather more information. Such mapping can also begin to indicate areas of similar character to help define study parameters.
- 4.10 For larger, more complex studies, a decision will need to be made whether to divide the area into a series of zones (e.g. character types or areas, described at chapter 6) based on distinctions such as density, building form/blocks, land use and activity, or views and visual relationships.
- 4.11 The likely scales for the three main types of study are set out in table 4.1
-

**TABLE 4.1: SETTING PARAMETERS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF STUDIES**

| TYPE OF STUDY  | PARAMETERS   | POSSIBLE STUDY AREA   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Borough-level study</p>   | <p>General character appraisal of a London Borough, or a thematic character element or combination of elements with borough-wide implications, such as a tall buildings study.</p>                                   | <p>Extent will normally be borough-wide except where the theme, such as tall buildings, has been defined by the building up of information layers such as topography, heritage assets etc. and this has already served to ‘sieve’ the potential areas that the study should cover.</p>  |
| <p>Neighbourhood plans</p>   | <p>Urban neighbourhoods within London are difficult to define. Definition will depend on how they are perceived and used.</p>  | <p>Involve wider community and businesses early in defining appropriate boundaries for a neighbourhood. Depending on location and type of change, greater consideration of factors providing strategic context or visual character may be needed. This could include taking account of settings or visual envelopes of designated assets and strategically or locally significant views, requiring parts of the study area to be drawn well beyond the neighbourhood. It is most likely that the boundary of a neighbourhood plan would be influenced by local planning issues or functional relationships. The concept of what is a neighbourhood can vary between individuals depending on their relationship to a physical area. Other factors that could have an influence include physical boundaries, both man-made and natural, health or educational catchment areas, places of work.</p> |
| <p>Site level studies (including for Design and Access Statements)</p> | <p>An understanding of the wider context is critical. Parameters will relate to the type and scale of the change proposed in relation to its context, and the sensitivity and value of the baseline environment.</p> | <p>Study boundaries should be wider than the site boundary and may be defined by a break in a building typology or density, or by visual barriers.</p>  |



### Determining level of detail

- 4.12 The guiding principle in the preparation of character studies, as in all evidence base is proportionality. The level of detail should be sufficient to evidence the observations being made and to provide clear guidance to practitioners and applicants.
- 4.13 Some more strategic studies only require a general description of the character of the place, allowing generic strategies or guidelines to be developed in response to that place, e.g. broad based guidance for development management.
- 4.14 Other uses of character information may require more specific detail. This could include, for example, work in central or inner London boroughs which may be defined by an intricate and varied streetscape network, proposals for the siting of clusters of tall buildings or for a comprehensive redevelopment of a neighbourhood or site. Conservation Area Appraisals, neighbourhood plans, development briefs or Design and Access Statements may all require this finer grain information. An even more detailed approach may be required where a study is to be used as a baseline for monitoring change, or is part of analysing development options through the extent, nature and distribution of individual elements.
- 4.15 A broad 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale map may be appropriate for a borough-wide study, a neighbourhood level study may be appropriate at 1:10,000, while a site level study will require a much finer grain.
- 4.16 The scale at which the work will be used will also have implications for the data that is used. Some examples of mapping of the

character of place at different scales are shown in Figures 4.1 to 4.3.

- 4.17 These show a strategic 'landscape scale' approach to defining area boundaries based on physical factors such as topography, geology and floodplains (London's Natural Signatures, a London-wide landscape character framework developed for Natural England<sup>i</sup>). The borough wide extract from the Croydon study shows a conceptual approach to defining boundaries based on broad zones of character, whilst the neighbourhood example for Croydon Opportunity Area shows an approach to defining boundaries based on the characteristics of the built form, predominant land uses and legible boundaries.

### Overall Scope

- 4.18 The purpose, study area, and level of detail will together determine the overall scope of the study. These factors will all interact with each other and be refined throughout the desk survey stage of the assessment process, but they should be largely decided by the time of any site surveys.

**FIGURE 4.1 LONDON WIDE MAPPING (LONDON'S NATURAL SIGNATURES – SOURCE: NATURAL ENGLAND)**

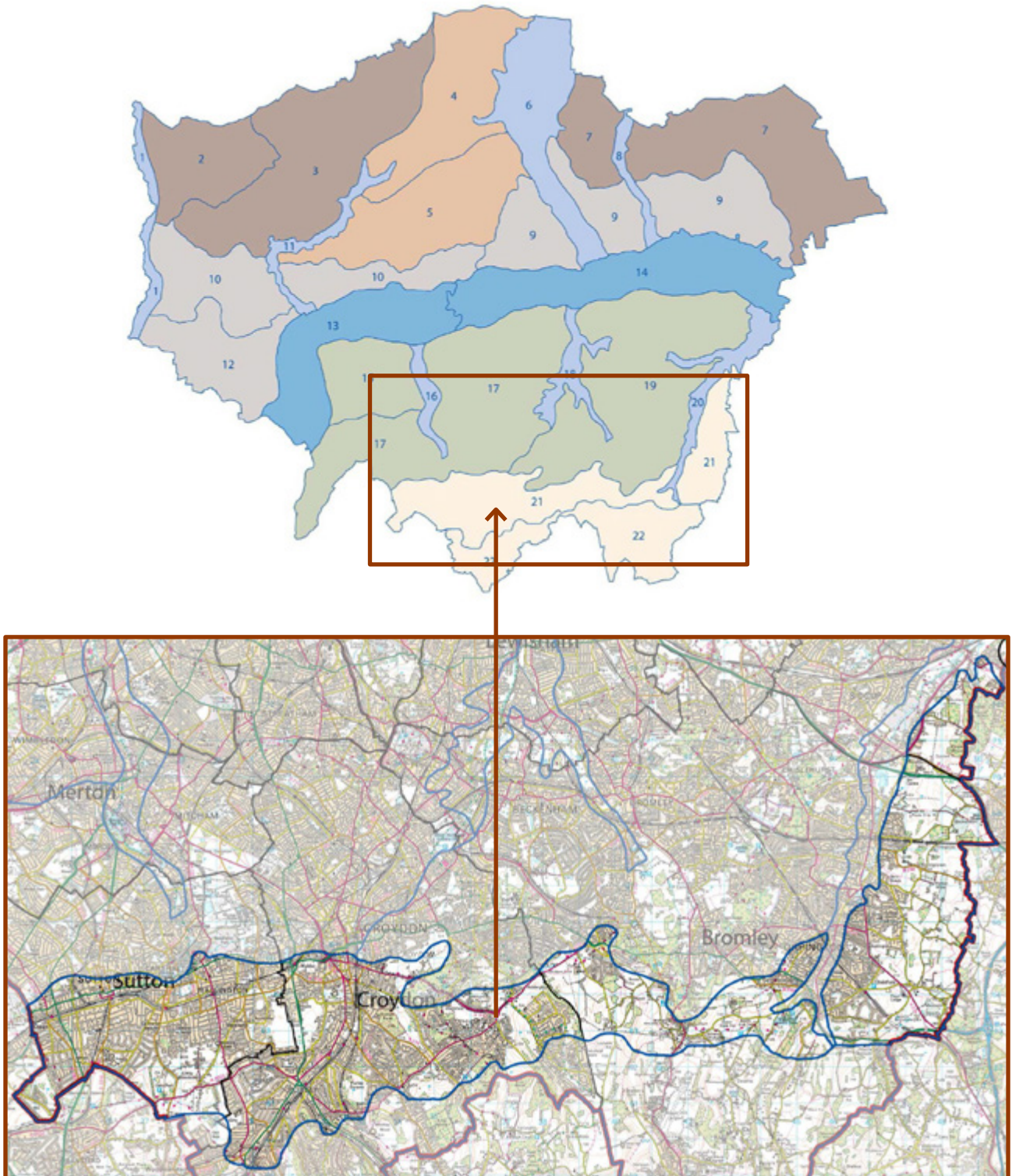


FIGURE 4.2 BOROUGH SCALE MAPPING (SOURCE: LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON)

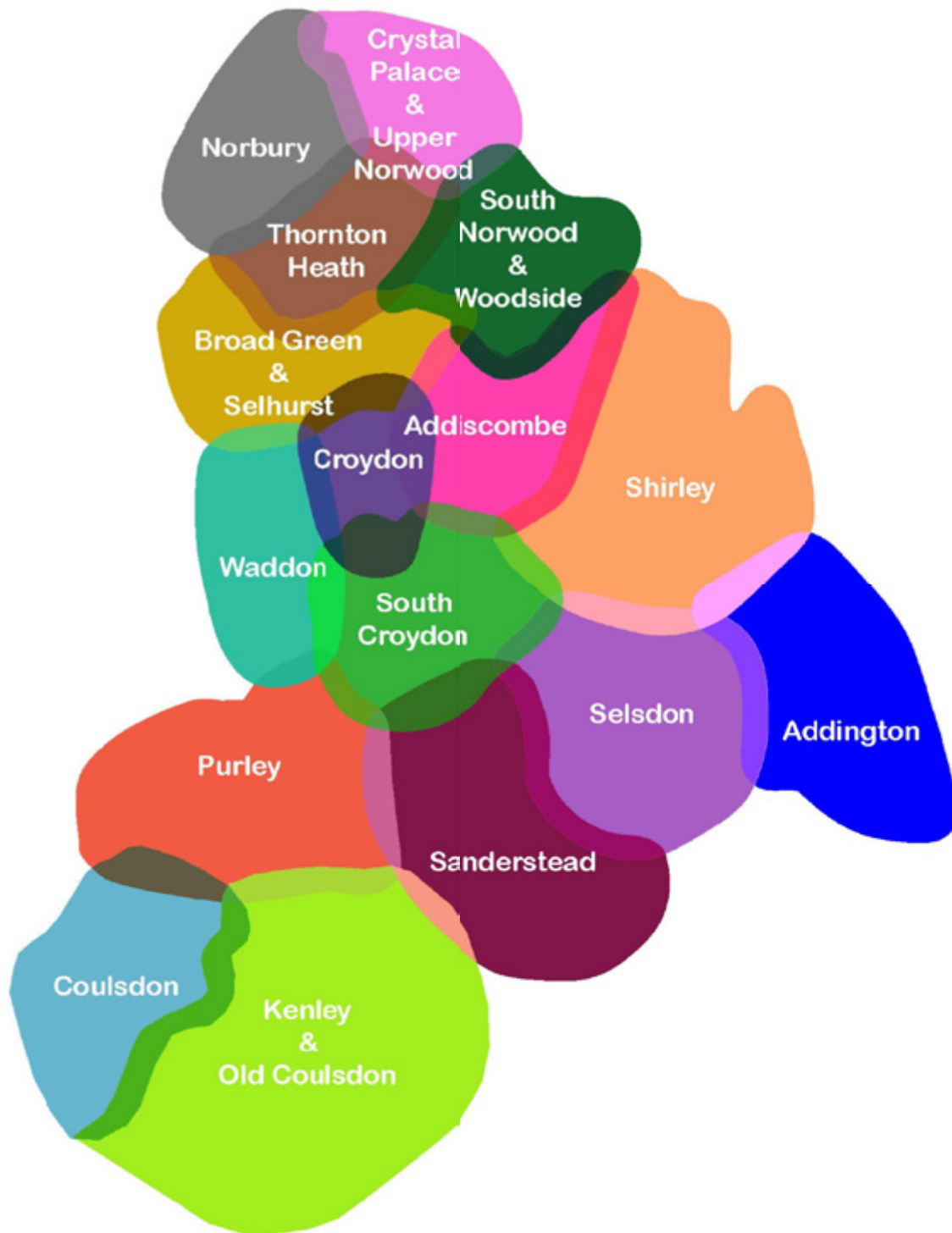


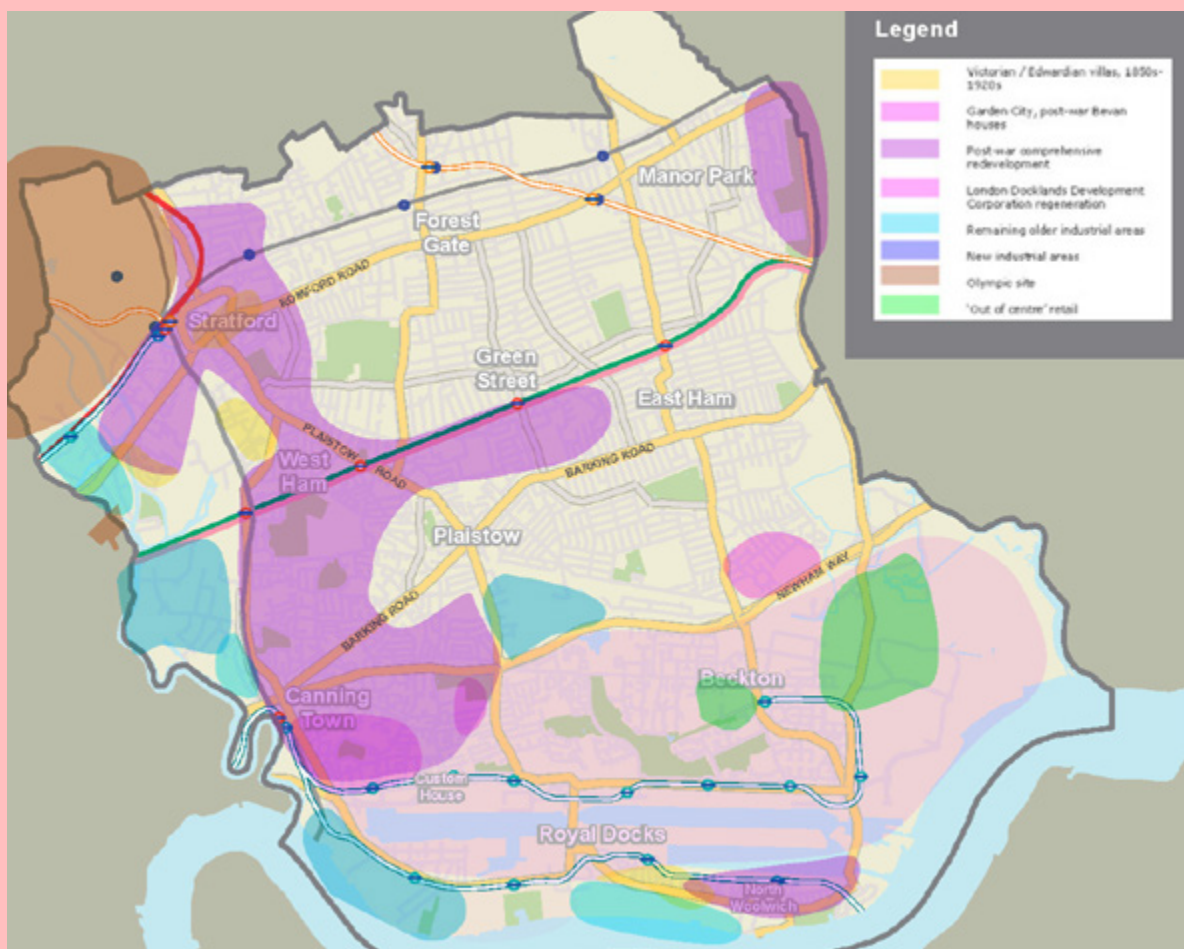
FIGURE 4.3 NEIGHBOURHOOD SCALE (CROYDON OAPF – SOURCE: GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY)



## Using an understanding of the character and context of a place to guide design in a Borough wide character study

### NEWHAM CHARACTER STUDY, LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM, 2007

This study developed a borough wide character typology, noting locally specific variations and aspects important to local sense of place. These were used to create a framework for a series of urban design cues and principles/priorities for different places within the borough. These principles included sensitivity and integration of the historic environment, visual unity and composition, permeability and legibility, character and local distinctiveness, diversity, adaptability and physical and visual integration with adjacent areas. The typologies were evaluated for their performance against these principles, forming the basis for a set of design cues and priorities for places in the borough.



### **Determining resources, specialisms and skills**

- 4.19 It is important to determine the people, skills and time required to complete a study. Skills and resources such as time together with the scale and level of detail of the work will determine the ultimate cost. It is useful to remember that even a relatively modest study or assessment involving input from a limited range of professionals and stakeholders can help
- 4.20 inform policy-making and interpretation in many situations. Community led studies can also provide a valuable input to decision-making at relatively low financial cost, although they require a commitment of time and enthusiasm. Here, the process and sharing of knowledge maybe a useful exercise in its own right although a final product in the form of written or graphical outputs is usually required for future reference.
- 4.21 Much of the work in understanding the character and context of a place can be undertaken by anyone with good local knowledge. Conversely undertaking a study may also call on a number of specialisms which may also be needed. For example, landscape architects, urban designers, architects/conservation architects, archaeologists and planners can add value if resources are available. At the outset a decision should be made about any specialist skills and expert knowledge required.
- 4.22 Particularly where resources are limited, it may be that use can be made of existing relevant studies as this can help avoid duplication of work. Relevant studies and appraisals may be available from the local borough (e.g. evidence base studies for
- Local Plans, area action plans, site planning briefs and master plans), local libraries or local history centres (e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals), or through community groups.
- 4.23 Consultation undertaken as part of such studies can help draw out recurring themes as well as enabling the opinions and views of local residents to be measured. It is important to consider the date that existing studies were produced as the baseline may have changed significantly. Other important considerations are the scale and level of detail to which they were developed and the purpose for which they were commissioned.
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The Mills Playspace - We made that



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# CHAPTER 5

# DESK SURVEY

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### DESK SURVEY

#### Desk survey

- Policy context
- Designations
- Values
- Data

This chapter sets out the key points to consider in undertaking a desk survey .

#### Understanding policy context

- 5.1 It is useful to understand the relevant policy context for any study of place, and the forces for change such as growth pressures or issues such as climate change which may affect the location. It is also important that the areas surrounding a place can have an influence on the values and identity of any locality. For example, the experience of gateways into a place or strategic views passing over a place need to be considered. The policy context set out in the London Plan provides a starting point for understanding the dynamic nature of the capital, change scenarios and forces acting on sense of place. Understanding the local policy context is also essential, particularly for smaller scale assessments such as for neighbourhood plans.

#### Understanding existing designations

- 5.2 A review of whether existing designations cover or adjoin the study area is essential. Whilst designations or their absence may not always be relevant to sense of place, they do provide an understanding of why a place or elements of a place may be valued for particular reasons. It is therefore important to be aware of the reasons for designation and any special qualities which are reflected in the location and which

may be sensitive to change. Important qualitative information will be available, often online, in relevant citations, management plans and designation information.

- 5.3 Designations may include those relating to the townscape, landscape, historic environment, estuarine environment, biodiversity and/or geology. A decision will need to be made on the appropriate level of information to source depending on the scope and scale of the study. Clearly for local scale studies a more detailed grain of information will be required, for example, on individual listed or locally listed buildings or particular distinctive habitats or species, while at a borough scale information on broadly characteristic patterns or themes may be more appropriate.
- 5.4 Information on designations is available via a variety of web-based resources that are referenced on the GLA webpage for this SPG.
- 5.5 It is important also to understand values associated with non-designated features such as non-designated heritage assets and their significance as a basis for managing change. As described in English Heritage's Conservation Principles<sup>ii</sup>, assessing significance involves gaining an understanding of a place and evolution, identification of who values the place and why, and relating these identified heritage values to the place's fabric. This can be equally applicable to gaining a wider understanding of the character of a place as to heritage assets specifically.

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### **Understanding values: what is important to people**

- 5.6 In addition to gaining an understanding of designated values, an appreciation of what local people value in a place and why can be invaluable in properly understanding and reflecting sense of place and its character. Engagement with relevant people, organisations and groups should ideally occur as early as possible and at as many stages of the process as is practical to feed this information in, although constraints imposed by resources and project timescales should be recognised.
- 5.7 Some effective techniques, mechanisms and references for involving local people in studies of place are referenced on the GLA webpage for this SPG.

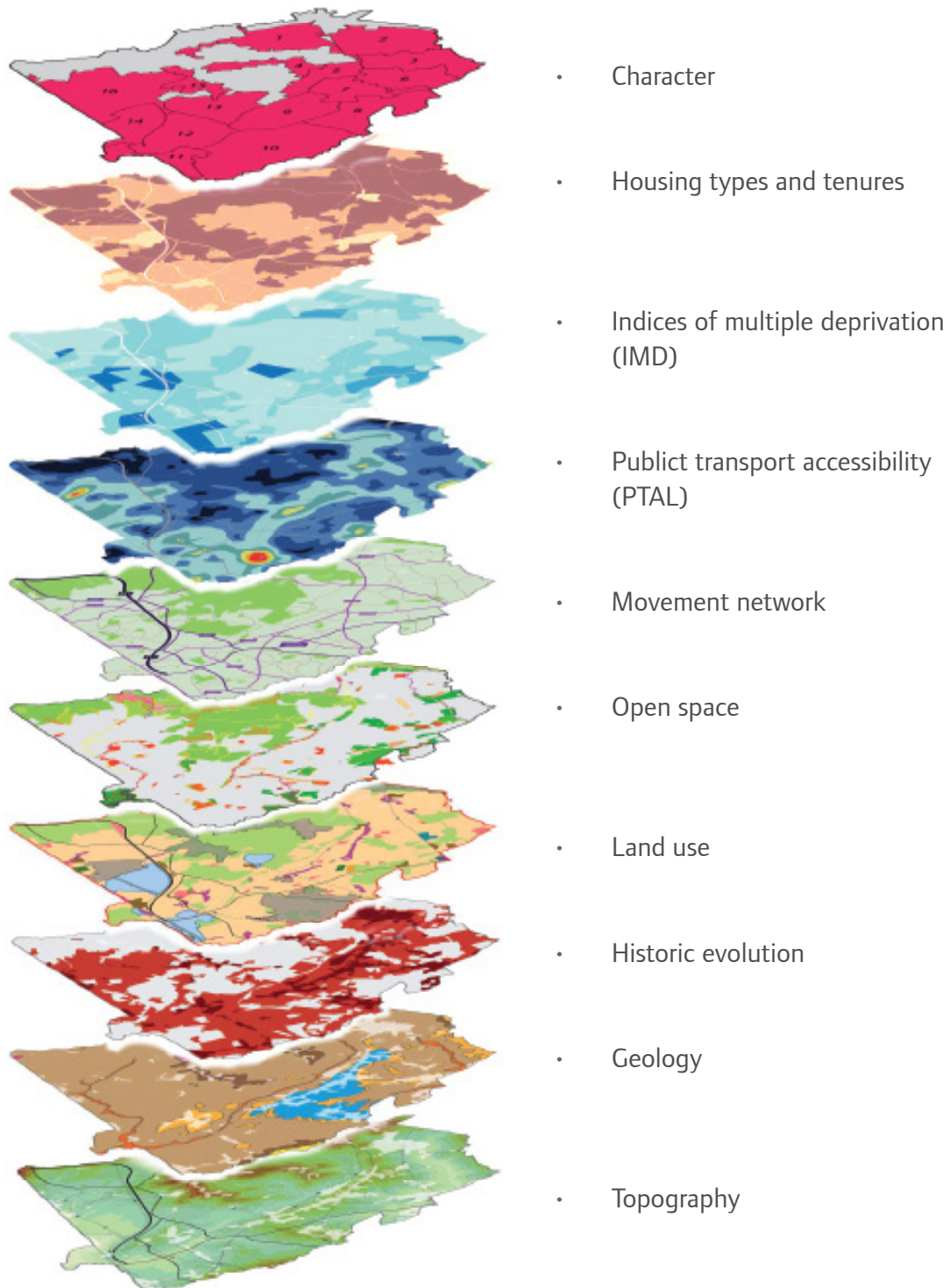
### **Collating and using baseline data**

- 5.8 Figure 5.1 shows some of the main elements of character and supporting sub elements which can be explored in developing an understanding of the character of a place. Extensive publically available resources are indexed on the GLA page for this SPG.
- 5.9 Information on relevant data sources and their use is set out in the tables according to the main headings on Figure 5.1. Not all of the sources of information will necessarily be available or relevant to every type of study. Data will depend on study scale and purpose and what data are most useful for intended applications rather than 'using data for its own sake'.
- 5.10 There are often lead-in times and resource implications with obtaining large amounts of data, particularly for more complex studies. Publication of any mapped data derived from Ordnance Survey (OS)

material requires a data licence from Ordnance Survey, which governs how data is used, displayed and reproduced. More information on this is available from [www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk).

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**FIGURE 5.1 LAYERING OF INFORMATION (DERIVED FROM MAPPING IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET CHARACTERISATION STUDY)**



**ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER**

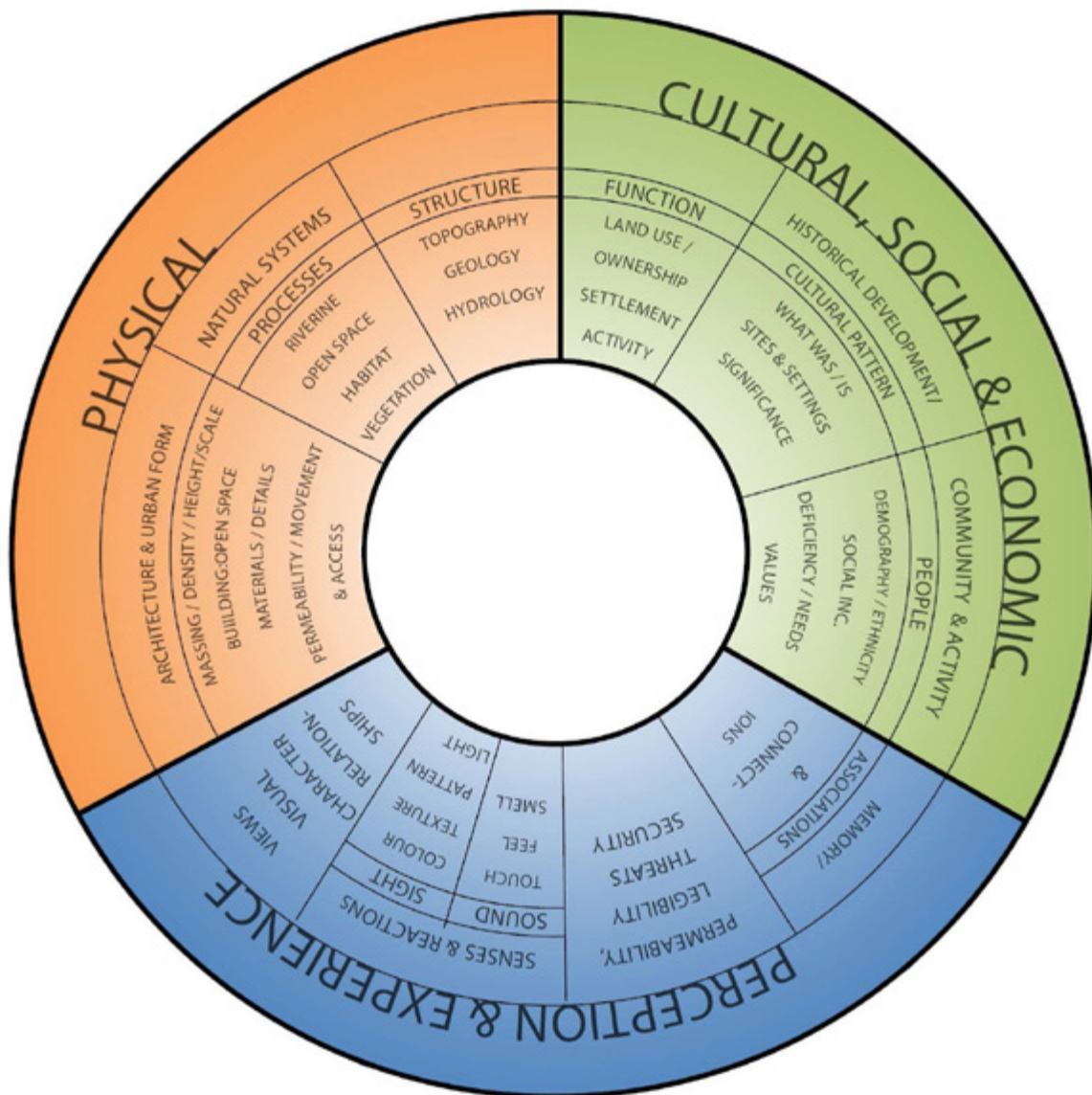
**The elements of character**

5.1 All places are made up of combinations of the following elements, as summarised on Figure 5.2:

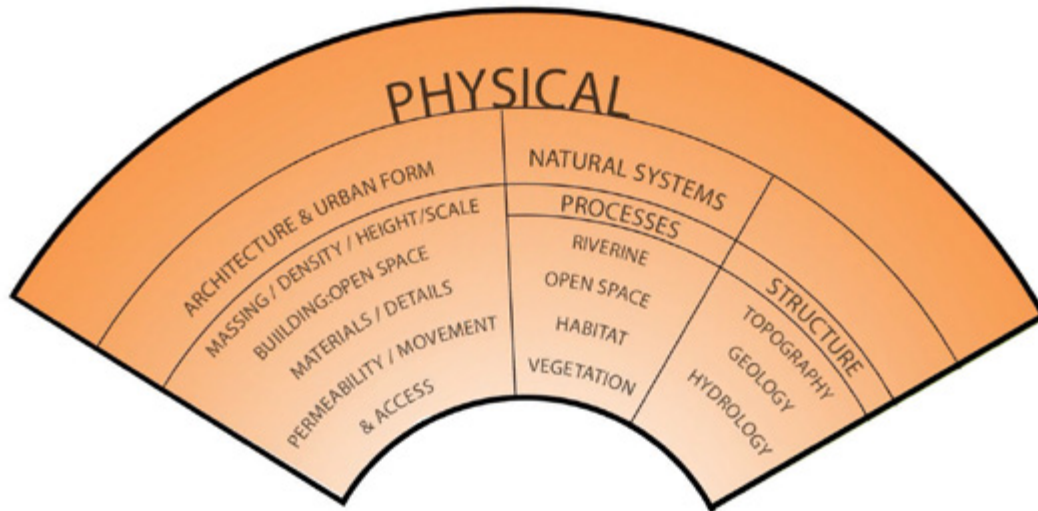
- **Physical:** including underlying structure such as geology and landform, landscape, architecture, urban and built form and settlement.

- **Cultural:** the evolution of places over time, often also linked to social, environmental and economic factors and the ways in which places function and the activities which define them.
- **Perceptual and experiential:** the sensory aspects of a place – how places are used and experienced. Also covering memories and associations which people or communities have with their place.

**FIGURE 5.2 THE ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER**



**Physical elements of character**



5.2 Understanding the physical elements and the way these are combined and juxtaposed is fundamental to the understanding of a place. Physical elements include the 'natural' environment, such as geology, topography, vegetation, water and floodplains, as well as the built environment. The built environment includes architecture and urban form, public realm and streetscapes and associated factors such as building heights, massing, density, relationship of buildings to spaces, movement, accessibility and permeability.

5.3 The diagrams overleaf give an idea of the type of information that could be collected in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented, and the interrelationship between these elements.



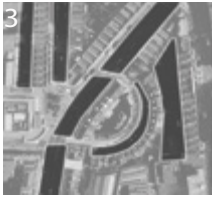
1. Topography and views: Use of contour mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Building heights/massing, landmarks, permeability

Visual permeability: Plotting of simple 'Isovist' maps from identified points on site. Related subjects: Legibility, perception of safety



2. Adjoining land uses/activity: Use of National Land Use (NLUD) data and site survey. Related subjects: Vitality/vibrancy, perception.

Access and circulation: Use of Green Grid, PROW/Sustrans Route data/Transport Plans and studies, site survey. Related subjects: Permeability



4 and 5. Aspects, shading and microclimate: Use of site survey. Related subjects: Building height/massing, perception, sensory aspects



Approaches and landmarks: Use of heritage /local heritage studies, appraisals and management plans, site survey. Related subjects: Legibility

Figure ground mapping: OS Mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Permeability and legibility



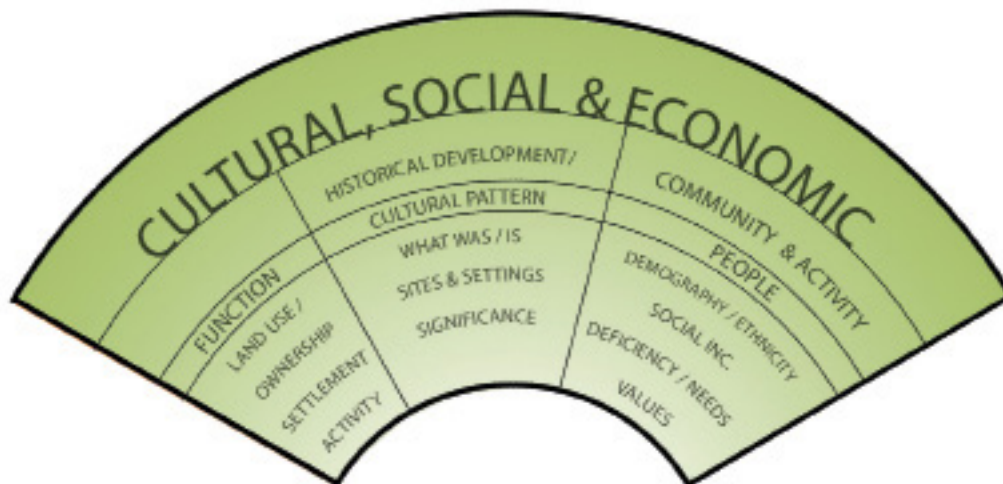
Building heights and massing/density: Site survey. Related subjects: Aspects, shading and microclimate, perception, land use/activity



6. Soft landscape/greenspace: Open space studies, site survey, Conservation Area Appraisals. Related subjects: Biodiversity, green and social infrastructure, perception, activity

Public and private realm: Land use data, open space studies, site survey. Related subjects: Activity, perception

**Cultural, social and economic elements of character**



5.4 Appreciation of a place’s cultural evolution and the way in which past and present communities, uses and activities have shaped it is a vital part of the process of understanding the character of a place and helps to frame proposed change so that it is responsive and appropriate to the context. The cultural aspect considers not just designated assets and resources, but also non designated assets values and associations. The principal cultural, social and economic elements of character are identified in the diagram above and potential data sources explored in Appendix 3.

5.5 An understanding of relevant aspects of social and economic character can be gained from datasets such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and component datasets such as health deprivation, unemployment and crime. Other mapped data such as accessible natural greenspace deficiency assessment (ANG) data, open space deficiency mapping produced for borough open space audits/studies and Londonwide resource held by GiGL), public

transport accessibility levels (PTAL) and travel to work data may help build a picture of social character of an area when allied to other datasets such as land use data such as the National Land Use dataset (NLUD). Other documentary sources may also help to build a picture such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Reports/Strategies, retail needs assessments, JSNAs etc.

5.6 These sources only tell part of the story. Much will also be revealed through appropriate community engagement. There is also no substitute for site survey as a means of gathering information on cultural, social and economic aspects of the place, which will be particularly important at the neighbourhood and site level. Site surveys will provide a more detailed picture of elements of character such as access, circulation, use and misuse, and the way people and communities behave and interact with their places and spaces. Management issues, barriers and areas of opportunity or need also influence the character of a place.



5.7 The diagrams below give an idea of the type of information that could be collected in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented and of the interrelationship between these elements.



1. Interplay of hard and soft landscape elements, and microclimate: Site survey. Related subjects: Aspect, seasonality, urban heat islands

Also: Vitality and vibrancy; active frontages: Land use data, site survey (considering different times of day, night and year), community engagement. Related subjects: Land uses, visual permeability and perceived permeability/safety



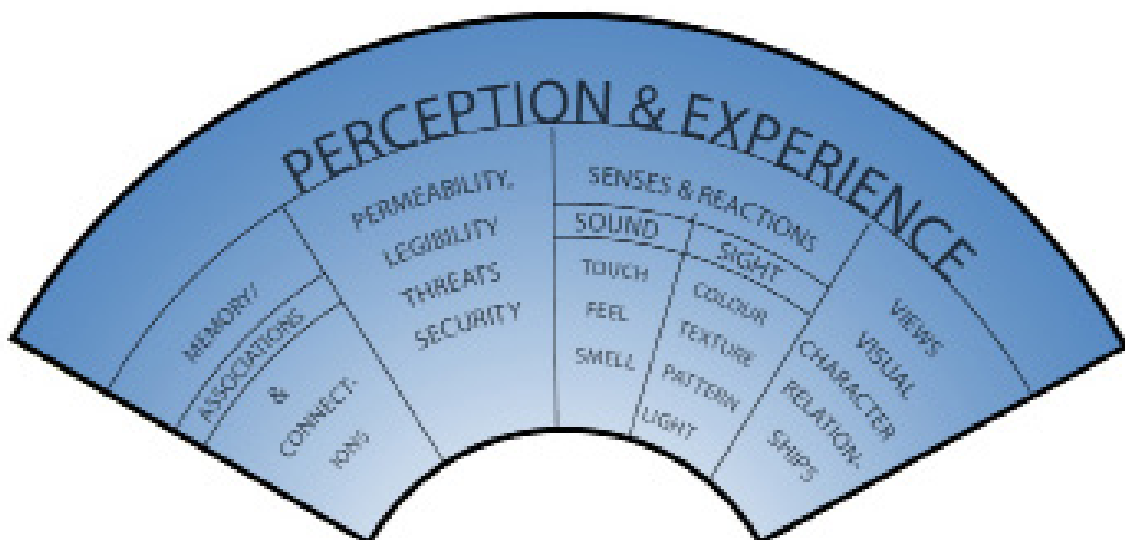
Perception of permeability and safety: Community engagement/community site survey/place check. Related subjects: Views, legibility, accessibility, building heights, aspect and microclimate (light and shade), use and misuse issues.



2. Perception of scale and enclosure: Site survey (mapping of heights, massing and building treatments). Related subjects: Building heights, massing

3. Perception of intimacy: Site survey. Related subjects: Figure ground mapping, permeability and perception of safety, activity and vitality

### Perceptual elements of character

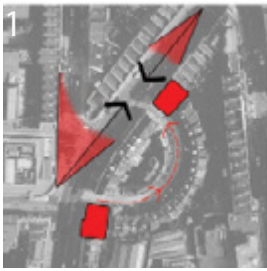


5.8 Whilst the physical, cultural, social and economic elements are important building blocks in the make-up and understanding of the character of a place, the way in which these elements and their interaction is perceived and experienced by their community is equally significant. The perceptual elements of character may also link with many of the cultural elements of character, for example ways in which the place may have been recorded in art, music or literature. This may be particularly important at the neighbourhood or local level and will help inform an understanding of significance and associations, or issues of local resonance to help guide any future change. The principal perceptual elements of character are identified in the diagram above and potential data sources explored in Appendix 3.

5.9 Some suggested points to consider and look for in site surveys in relation to perceptual and experiential character are set out below. Many of these elements will need to be understood through site survey as it is essential that such information comes from being in and experiencing the place rather than only from desktop studies.

5.10 The diagrams opposite give an idea of the type of information that could be collected on site in relation to some of the above attributes and the supporting data sources which could be used. They also show how information could be represented and the relationship between these elements.

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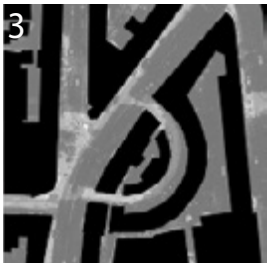
1. Strategic/locally important views: LVMF, local studies e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals, site survey. Related subjects: Landmarks, permeability

Visual experience of historic built fabric: LVMF, heritage management plans, local studies, site survey. Related subjects: Important views, figure ground, legibility/permeability



2. Locally valued elements: Local studies and community engagement/ community site survey/place check. Related subjects: Landmarks

Civic spaces and foci: Local studies and community engagement, site survey/ Place check. Related subjects: Public and private realm, land use



3 & 4 Approaches and landmarks: Use of heritage /local heritage studies, appraisals and management plans, site survey. Related subject areas: Legibility, locally valued elements

Figure ground/urban grain (understanding how the fabric of a place has evolved). OS mapping and site survey. Related subjects: Permeability and legibility, visual experience of the historic fabric

Also: Designed spaces and settings: Heritage studies and designations, local studies and community engagement. Related subjects: Open space, microclimate



Barking Town Centre Project ©GLA  
Barking town centre project brings together a range of public space, housing, economic development and, transport and open space projects to comprehensively regenerate the town centre. Together these schemes are designed to restate the character of the place in a new and improved built form.

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# CHAPTER 6

# SITE SURVEY

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### SITE SURVEY

#### Site survey

- Consider type of survey
- Plan survey
- Gather and record information

This chapter sets out the key points to consider in undertaking a site survey.

6.1 The site survey involves the consideration of the physical, cultural and social/economic characteristics which come together in a place and the way people experience and interact with that place. This follows on from the desk survey stage which frames the extent of the work, sets out its physical and policy context and begins the process of understanding how a place is used and valued. Engagement with local communities is essential to this understanding, this will include residents, workers as well as visitors, particularly if places are used differently in the day and night as well as throughout the week or seasons.

#### Consider type of survey

6.2 The type of site survey that is needed will be closely dependent on the type of character study that it is to support. Of the three main types of study, an in depth site survey will most useful for a neighbourhood or area-based document or for a major site masterplan. At borough or strategic scale, sense checks of desk survey data may be most productive.

### Planning a site survey

6.3 Desk survey data should give a very good idea in many areas of the type

6.4 Key factors to consider include:

- Scale of working - local/neighbourhood and site level studies may require more detailed survey work than strategic level studies.
- The focus of the assessment which may require the site survey to analyse some aspects of the place in greater detail than others.
- Baseline for recording information such as OS bases or air photos and survey sheets.
- The required outputs from the assessment, such as descriptions, sketches and photographs.
- The collation of survey records and their inclusion within the project outputs.
- The specialist skills which may be needed.
- Particularly for larger or more 'strategic' studies, an outline survey route, potential survey points, accessibility from public transport, any requirement for access on foot, cycle or onto private land, and the implications for time inputs.

6.5 Planning a site survey will help ensure all participants follow a consistent approach, albeit they may record different aspects, perceptions and values about a place. It is also useful to consider the need to cover ground efficiently, timings to capture the place at different times of day and night, or different times of year and the availability of existing evidence.

6.6 The resources and time allowed for work 'on site' should be considered and realistic since this is one of the most important

steps in the process.

### **Gathering and recording information**

- 6.7 Information that might be gathered on a site survey includes site notes recorded on a survey form, annotated sketches and maps. Examples of the type of information which could be captured for a local level study of character and context are provided in the box overleaf. Transparency, robustness and good information capture are vital. Therefore it is good to record and document as much on site information as possible, which will enable cross referencing to the description of the place at a later date.
- 6.8 For community groups in particular, mobile phone photographs can provide a quick, cheap and geo-tagged method for noting site detail and augmenting written and mapped data.

### **Incorporating an understanding of experience and perception in surveys**

- 6.9 For many studies of place, the involvement of the people who know the place best, the communities that live and work in and use the area will be essential. Examples of ways to incorporate local views and values are provided on the GLA webpage for this SPG.
- 6.10 Surveys can deal relatively easily with recording the hard data of the different elements and characteristics that make up sense of place, identifying their relative significance. They can be incorporated into checklists or woven into factual, objective, written descriptions. However, it is also important to give equal attention to the perceptual and experiential dimensions of

places in undertaking site survey.

- 6.11 Some aesthetic aspects of place can still be recorded in a rigorous and systematic way on site. Such information can be recorded, using a checklist, by incorporating suitable adjectives into written descriptions and by ensuring that appropriate annotations are added to sketches or photographs.
- 6.12 Aesthetic factors will be particularly important if the work is to be used to influence design decisions, such as the siting and design of tall buildings, proposals affecting the historic environment, or higher density or contemporary residential development.
- 6.13 If more detail is required about aesthetic factors, perhaps to help inform detailed design, then notes can be made on site about matters such as balance, scale, colour, diversity and so on. It is essential to indicate how specific elements of character contribute to these aesthetic characteristics. For example, containment may result from localised topographic variation, street trees and tree canopy or the relationship of buildings to the street and the proportion of built elements to open space/public realm. While unity may come from the consistent use of a material, detailing or articulation created by reveals for doors and windows.
- 6.14 Other aspects of spatial perception may be more subjective and responses to them might be more personal and coloured by the experience of the individual and how they relate to a particular area such as a resident, a visitor or worker. This is where it is important to get a balanced, measured view, informed by the capture of information on local values.

- 6.15 Such factors may include a sense of safety security, access and inclusion the quality of light, vibrancy, microclimate and perceptions of quality or architectural merit. Perceptual and experiential aspects can be perceived by all senses, not just visually. Spending some time on site is essential for understanding and recording such perceptual information and it should be incorporated in a transparent way, acknowledging that this may be subjective and should be attributed accordingly as a place may hold different values for different people.
- 6.16 Mood mapping can be an effective way of translating the essence of a place, as an output of site survey. Examples of hand drawn mapping showing peoples' perceptions and experiences of London were exhibited at the Museum of London and the Building Centre in London in 2011.
- 6.17 A balance will need to be struck between the objective data and more subjective information gathered. In order to serve a useful purpose, the end result will need to be defensible in formal decision making and justifiable in formal proceedings such as a committee meeting or appeal hearing. Therefore judgements will need to be made on the subjective elements using objective evidence as a basis for the judgements taken.
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### BOX 10.1 EXAMPLE RECORDING OF INFORMATION ON SITE SURVEY

Example site survey map showing analysis area boundaries and photo location points and directions:



Example survey sketch, showing capture of information relating to physical characteristics of place:





CML St Andrews

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# CHAPTER 7

# ANALYSIS

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### ANALYSIS

#### Analysis

- Classify character
- Describe the place
- Present information

7.1 This chapter describes how to use, apply and present the elements of character that inform the understanding of a place by following the survey process.)

#### Classifying character

- 7.2 The analysis and presentation stage is the point at which all of the observations and data that have been built up at the desk survey and site survey stage should be brought together in a meaningful way. This will require interpretation to understand what really influences the character of the place and to present this in a comprehensible way. When the information on physical, cultural, social and perceptual aspects of character have been identified and analysed, common themes and patterns will usually emerge. Care needs to be taken to concentrate on the elements of character that inform or create a sense of place rather than simply describing all the data for its own sake. It is also important to recognise that character crosses site and administrative boundaries, and that there is a need to take account of and reflect the context of adjoining areas of character.
- 7.3 In London it may appear that the underlying physical patterns, such as those identified in the desk survey, are less evident or relevant with buildings and streetscape being dominant determinants of the character of a place. However, it is useful

to understand the whole picture, such as geology and soils influencing vegetation, and landform/hydrology dictating patterns of drainage and flooding – all of which influence character of the townscape as well as future management decisions. Any perception and experiential data / survey work collected can also be added if suitable for translation into maps or graphics.

#### Defining areas of distinct character – terminology

- 7.4 Many studies use the terminology character types or character areas in the process for classifying areas of distinct or similar character – terminology that is widely used in landscape character assessment. The size of the current study and the background available from previous work may help to suggest whether character types or character areas are most helpful in analysing and presenting survey data.

#### Character types








- 7.5 Sometimes known as ‘typologies’, these are distinct types of relatively homogenous character. Generic in nature, in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of a borough, they share broadly similar combinations of factors such as topography, land use and development, building types, densities, etc. Not every area within a particular type will be identical. Rather, there is a common pattern which can be discerned both in maps and in site survey. Types may either occur repeatedly in a study area or in just one place. A character type or typology in London, for example, might be Victorian terraces or 1930’s suburbs. An example of the typology developed for the characterisation study for the London


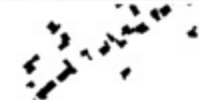
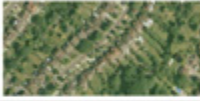

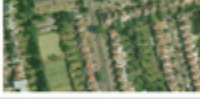

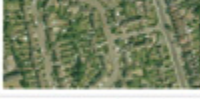

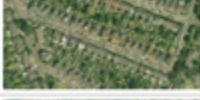



Borough of Barnet is shown in Figure 7.1.

### **Character areas**

- 7.6 These are unique individual geographical areas which occur within a type. They share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own identity. They are the locally specific occurrences of a character type, bespoke to a given locality, neighbourhood or geographic entity. Often, there will be more character areas than character types, as types may occur in more than one area. If studies dealt only with character areas, they would clearly convey a real sense of identity. However, descriptions could potentially become repetitive, as characteristics shared by each similar area would be repeated every time. The advantage of identifying both types and areas is that shared generic characteristics can be described for types, leaving the areas to draw out the description of individual characteristics features, therefore avoiding repetition.

**FIGURE 7.1 EXTRACTS FROM THE TYPOLOGY DEVELOPED FOR THE BARNET CHARACTERISATION STUDY (SOURCE: LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET)**

|                        | Photograph   | Aerial   | Scale and Grain  | Land Use  | Network Characteristics  |
|------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| Big Box                |   |   | Large single building units (sheds) typically coarse grained and without an over-arching urban structure. Often surrounded in parking. | Industrial, retail, and leisure   | Non permeable, typically unsuited for pedestrian movement.   |
| Campus                 |   |   | Large building units set in landscaped open space  | Education (universities and secondary schools), civic, business, office, hospitals and leisure. | Non permeable with limited pedestrian connectivity.  |
| Cores and Town Centres |   |   | Medium-to-large building units arranged along streets forming strong terraces and coherent forms.                                      | Mixed land use including retail, civic, residential, and office.                                | Permeable grid, based around strong street frontages and high levels of activity. Very well suited to pedestrian movement. |
| Residential Estates    |   |   | Variable building scales, set in landscape and/or parking  | Residential   | Fine grain network of pedestrian routes, with a distinct lack of clear structure, hierarchy and legibility.                |
| Residential Streets    |  |  | Small-to-medium building units arranged along streets. Urban blocks tend to be large.  | Residential   | Permeable grid, although the scale of urban blocks limits the pedestrian connectivity.                                     |

|                    | Density (Dwellings per hectare)   | Density (Dwellings per hectare)   | Density (Dwellings per hectare) | Building Types       | Heights (Storeys) |
|--------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Linear Rural       |  |  | 2 - 10                          | Detached houses      | 1 - 3             |
| Suburban Periphery |  |  | 10 - 15                         | Detached houses      | 2 - 3             |
| Suburban           |  |  | 20 - 30                         | Semi-detached houses | 2 - 3             |
| Suburban Terrace   |  |  | 20 - 30                         | Terraced houses      | 2 - 3             |
| Urban Terrace      |  |  | 37 - 50                         | Terraced houses      | 2 - 3             |
| Flats              |  |  | 80 - 150                        | Street facing flats  | 3 - 6             |

### Using character types and areas – factors that may influence choice

- Character types provide a good framework for analysing change since many influences and pressures affect areas with similar character in similar ways. Analysis of character types can provide a foundation to develop planning or management strategies.
- Character areas provide a good framework to draw out local patterns and factors influencing sense of place.
- Character areas can be used to develop more tailored policies or strategies, or to guide design reflecting elements which make a particular place different or special.
- Character areas may also be more recognisable and identifiable for community groups or others.
- Whilst studies may identify both character types and character areas, in some cases it may be decided that the distinctiveness of individual areas is such that the use of types is not helpful, using character areas instead as the basis for assessment.
- If resources are limited, an assessment may deal only with character types and not continue as far as dealing with individual character areas, though this will limit subsequent use of the work.

7.7 The approach may also be simplified according to the purpose of the study, or by noting variations in character in a less formal way for smaller scale, site specific work.

7.8 Information from the desktop research and site survey can be used to identify common patterns. This can be undertaken using GIS for more complex studies or more intuitively for smaller areas and local/site

studies. The process should be transparent and auditable so that any subsequent decisions made in relation to area boundaries or application in planning and design can be understood and justified.

7.9 The level of detail achieved at this stage will depend on the purpose and scale of the study as well as the nature of baseline information and the character of the place itself. It may be a detailed classification of character types or areas or a simple representation of areas with a distinct sense of place.

7.10 A classification of the character of a place can also be obtained directly using people's perception of character, use and activity; however it is useful to back this up with other data and evidence.

### Defining boundaries

7.11 Whatever the scale of working, it can be useful to identify variations in character. When working at a neighbourhood or borough level, it is useful to define boundaries for areas of distinct character, whether character areas or types, since an appropriate strategy or course of action will differ in response to variations in character and context. The precision of these boundaries will vary with the scale and level of detail of working. Broader scale (borough) assessments may define more conceptual, less precise boundaries, whilst detailed assessments (site level) may link boundaries to specific features in the townscape e.g. specific street blocks or building groups or clusters.

**7.12** **Figure 7.2** shows an example of boundaries at broad and finer grain scales through sub division of units or types into smaller areas of local character fitting within a 'strategic' typology. However, even at the finer grain scale, the boundaries are rarely precise (unless in a site specific situation) and still represent zones of transition.

7.13 Definition of boundaries can suggest that there is a sharp change from one area of townscape or landscape to another. In reality, townscapes and landscapes are often a continuum or transition, and of mixed character, which does not always change abruptly.

7.14 More commonly, places will change gradually rather than suddenly. While the character of a place may be clearly defined, distinctive and cohesive in the centre of a site, type, settlement, typology or area, there may be transitions at the edges, due perhaps to backland or infill development and redevelopment, where the character of sense of place may be less consistent. The character of a place in these transition areas is no less important but may be more difficult to tie down precisely, and in these cases drawing a firm line as a boundary on a map may suggest a much more obvious change than is really apparent on the ground.

7.15 This can create problems, for example, in relation to development management decisions and intervisibility of schemes between core and peripheral areas. It may be appropriate to draw more blurred lines in relation to character zones, as shown in Figure 6.4. This looser, more amorphous means of representing areas can also be used to show transition between areas with

different sense of place, or as a more open ended, flexible way of showing areas of different character.

7.16 If drawing boundaries, it is important to incorporate a statement about the status and meaning of boundary lines and their limitations. An alternative may be to define character areas which overlap around their edges or by the use of broader 'character zones' on maps to indicate areas of transition. Whatever solution is adopted, it is important that any judgements based on the work recognise the nature of such transitions.

7.17 It is important to keep a record, justifying where boundaries have been defined and including this as part of the outputs of the work. This record can be updated as boundaries are refined. Such records can also be helpful in justifying decisions to a wider audience, for example at Inquiry or Examination in Public, or if the work needs updating in future.

### **Describing the place**

7.18 When the character of a place is properly understood and mapped, it needs to be described in a concise, effective way, capturing the essence of that place, whether in terms of a character type or area, or a specific site.

7.19 The balance of descriptive text and summary information should reflect the purpose of the study. For example:

- Where the assessment has a practical application, such as considering the opportunities within an area for the intensification of development in a way which respects the character of



- the area, the description will be shorter and focused around an analysis of the key characteristics of the townscape, particularly those relating to its ability to absorb or guide the type and design of development proposed.
- Where the assessment is intended to provide a robust evidence base on which a range of future policy or design initiatives will be based, there is likely to be a need for a more rounded description of the place and a comprehensive analysis of its key characteristics.

7.20 It is also often appropriate to use other media such as photography and illustration and to combine these with text. Approaches to graphic presentation are identified later in this chapter.

7.21 London is a dynamic, ever changing environment and the way that the layers of history are manifested physically as well as through memory and association is important in understanding the character of the place. It is helpful for descriptions to include an historical perspective on the way in which the sense of place apparent today has evolved and the human and social influences which shape it over time. Where there has been an Intensive Urban Survey or recording of oral histories, these

7.22 findings can help to provide a 'time-depth' dimension to a description and greatly enrich it. A study will also have added local resonance if descriptions incorporate the views and opinions of local stakeholders. These should be clearly identified and attributed within the text.

7.23 A good description of the character of a place should draw on the information gained in the survey and highlight valued

elements irrespective of designation.

The aim should be to describe the overall character of the place, with reference to factors such as:

- Landform
- Land use
- Demographics
- Activity and image
- Architectural style and vernacular
- Scale, mass and density
- Public realm
- Access and permeability
- Connections and circulation
- Views and visual interest

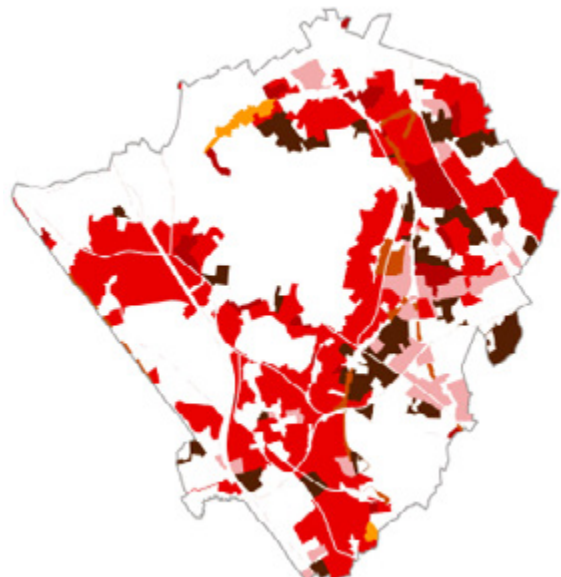
7.24 Descriptions should draw out the way these factors interact and are perceived. The level and type of description should be proportional to the scope and purpose of the study. It often needs to strike a balance between factual statements about the components of the place, and more evocative statements about its character. This balance may vary according to the purpose of the work. For example, an appreciation of a place or site which sets out to demonstrate what is special about it should be more evocative, seeking to capture qualities, making more reference to aesthetic qualities, views and perception. In contrast, if an assessment is to inform planning policy or development management decisions, a more factual description may be required.

**FIGURE 7.2 EXTRACTS FROM THE BARNET CHARACTERISATION STUDY, SHOWING BROAD BRUSH CHARACTER TYPOLOGY (TOWNSCAPE TYPES) BROKEN DOWN INTO FINER GRAIN CHARACTER AREAS BY RESIDENTIAL STREET PATTERN.**

Identification of primary typologies



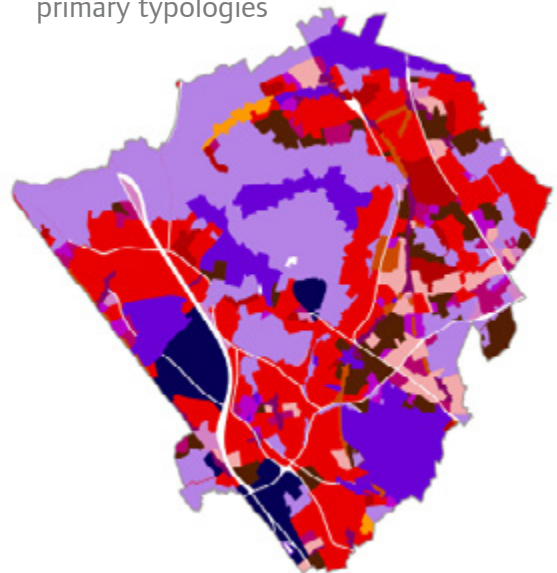
Identification of secondary typologies



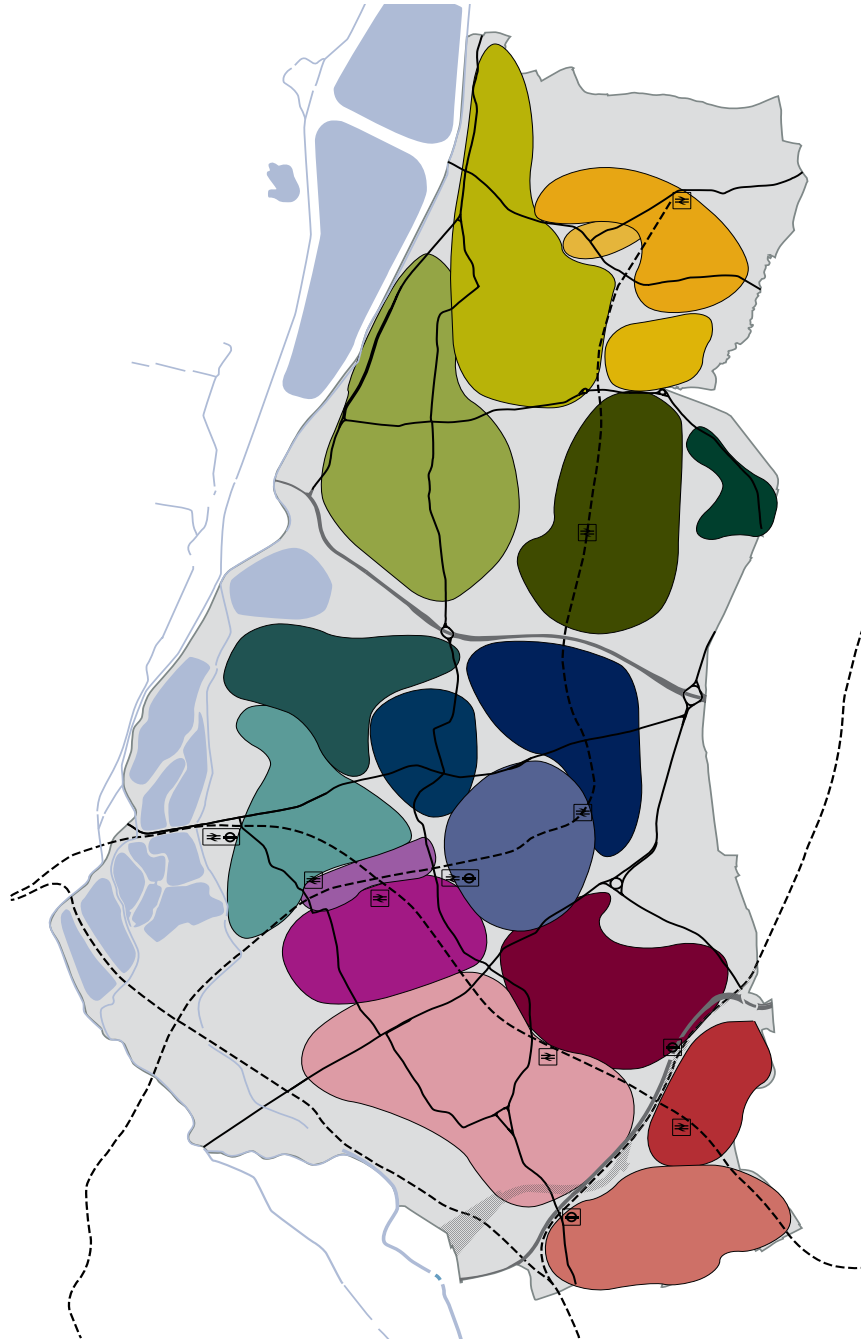
Further breakdown of residential streets



Secondary typologies combined with primary typologies



**FIGURE 7.3 REPRESENTATION OF AREAS IN THE WALTHAM FOREST CHARACTERISATION STUDY.**



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7.25 Care should be taken in preparing descriptions of places. Subjective value judgements should be avoided and a distinction drawn between adjectives which convey the aesthetic qualities of a place and those which deal with personal perceptions or values. Local engagement will corroborate and clarify perception and values. Any place may hold multiple values for the people who experience the place; these are not necessary contradictory as all have value and should be recorded and attributed accordingly.

### **Defining key characteristics**

7.26 Key characteristics are short statements encapsulating main aspects of the place or area (see example in box 7.1). Sometimes a simple summary description of the essential or key characteristics of a place will be enough on its own, or a list of essential characteristics can be generated in addition to a fuller description. The key or essential characteristics of a place provide an important reference point against which change can be assessed or as a 'hook' for site planning and design. They can also be used as indicators to judge whether the place is changing and whether particular policies are sympathetic to or are having the desired effect on sense of place and can be used to monitor change or guide future planning or design.

7.27 Key characteristics are those combinations of elements which create a sense of place and make an area distinctive. If they change or are lost, there would be significant consequences for the current character of the place. Elements of character may be both positive or negative, and changes which affect these characteristics need not always be seen

in a negative light as the change could ultimately be beneficial for the character of the place, either through improving existing negative elements or through the creation of a completely new character.

7.28 Key characteristics should therefore be identified and described carefully as they may become a major reference point in making decisions about the future of a place and assessing design proposals and development management decisions. It is important that they are appropriate to the scale and nature of the work. In a borough scale study, they should be genuinely characteristic of a whole character type or area rather than being strictly local in occurrence. The smaller the scale and the greater the level of detail in the study, the more detailed and specific the key characteristics are likely to be.

7.29 An example of how physical, cultural and social factors derived from desk study and site survey, may be brought together to describe the key characteristics of a place or location is shown in box 7.1.

### BOX 7.1 GEORGIAN TOWNHOUSE SUBURBS, KINGS CROSS

The information below has been generated for a sample townscape type, although it could apply at any scale down to neighbourhood and site specific.



- Intact residential streets of a coherent and unified character, typically constructed between 1830-1850
- Typically two and three storey terraced town houses arranged along narrow streets or in crescent formation, usually with narrow, deep building plots. Some remain as houses, others have been sub divided as flats in the 20th century.
- Close street frontages create an intimate and small scale character.
- Boundaries are defined by wrought iron railings, behind which lie short front gardens or the lower/basement storey, partially sunken below street level.
- Buildings are built of London stock, with slate roof tiles, and characterised by their symmetry and regularity of detail in a plain, understated style.
- Sash windows with glazing bars create rhythm and articulation along the street, as do panelled front doors with fanlights above.
- Buildings present elegant frontages to the street contributing positively to the public realm. Chimneys and dormer windows contribute to a visually interesting roofscape.
- Occasional glimpses of tall high rise modern buildings, which rise above the rooftops.
- Pavements include riven York stone with granite kerbs, and granite setts form the road surface. Black heritage lamps and bollards contribute to the sense of historic character.
- Views are focussed and contained along streets, framed by elegant facades. Slightly taller buildings mark the end of the street, forming a visual focal point or local landmark.
- A quiet, private residential suburb, in marked contrast to the adjacent vibrant and busy commercial streets of Caledonian Road and Pentonville Road. The greatly mixed character of such areas contrasts with the unified quality of this area.

### **Understanding what is important and valued**

7.30 Key characteristics can be used to draw out key positive features or attributes as well as negative features to articulate what is important and why. This can help inform a strategy for a place/area, and draw from appropriate local stakeholder or community input and judgements. This understanding of what is valued and the reasons why can be used to help guide future change in an area. It can also be used to help articulate and evaluate the area's sensitivity and capacity for change which can then be used to inform mitigation and design outcomes.

7.31 An understanding of what is important and valued can also be used as part of a 'sieving approach' to analyse the elements which contribute to a place's character, such as the approach used to identify opportunities and constraints in tall building studies. Use of values and value judgements which are corroborated professionally and by the community helps avoid any undue subjectivity or perception of this.

7.32 Any place will have multiple inherent values; different people or groups will value different places and their individual elements for different reasons. Such values or reasons may not always be obvious and may hinge on local associations which have not otherwise been formally documented. In some cases a place may be valued in spite of rather than because of its character, perhaps because of its associations with a particular culture, activity or what it represents or means to a local community. Such distinctions are particularly important to draw out in neighbourhood and local level studies,

and can be identified through a range of consultative processes (Appendix 2).

7.33 It can be helpful to distinguish different types of values inherent in any place, for example:

- Those values that might be widely recognised within the professional community such as through protection by designation or policy protection of buildings or spaces, or through cultural references (commemoration) or traditions.
- Those values that may appeal to people on a more 'fundamental' level and linked to sense and perceptions (such as access, comfort, security, safety, beauty, inspiration).

7.34 For any study of the character of places it is important to record and communicate all values, not just the values applied by professionals. In making decisions about future management and change for an area, these multiple values will need to be balanced together, relative to each other and spatially.

7.35 English Heritage publishes its Conservation Principles which provide additional detailed guidance on identifying and understanding historic significance through considering places and sites against a range of heritage values.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Presenting information**

7.36 There are many ways of translating messages effectively and visually to a wide range of audiences. Some, such as artists' impressions, accurate visual representations or computer generated imagery are specialised and relatively resource

intensive<sup>iv</sup>, whilst others are comparatively simple to generate.

7.37 Effective visual means of communication can include at the simplest level, diagrams or flow charts to synthesise large amounts of information. Annotated photography or sketches, or a combination of photography with mapping to give some form of spatial and visual representation can also be very effective and relatively straightforward to produce, as shown in the some of the examples overleaf. The examples are presented under the following headings:

- Mapping and describing typologies.
- Graphic descriptions - using words and images effectively.
- Using drawings and sketch information to describe a place. Mapping and describing typologies

#### **Mapping and describing typologies**

7.38 Figure 7.4 shows a simple, effective way of colour coding typologies to photographic and visual representation, providing a clear snapshot of their character.

7.39 Sketches, as in Figure 7.6, can be a quick and useful way of translating information on key characteristics or, as in the example below, to identify points for a strategy to manage and guide change in an area. They can either be done freehand or by tracing over photographs as a base.

#### **Using words and images effectively**

7.40 Figure 7.5 shows good use of thumbnail site elevations and annotated panoramic photographs to convey key characteristics. This is an efficient way of conveying large amounts of information concisely and in an accessible manner.

#### **Using drawings and sketch information**

7.41 Figure 7.6 shows an alternative means of representing information for a block/part of a neighbourhood, using simple site plans and cross sections. Again, this is an accessible, low cost approach, which can be developed by someone with access to and an understanding of maps, plans, scale and cross sections and sketching skills<sup>vi</sup>, whether by hand and/or by use of proprietary image editing and illustration software<sup>v</sup>.

#### **OUTCOMES: Applying an understanding of place**

7.42 A key outcome of understanding the character of a place is its use to inform the making of judgements and planning decisions to guide change. As set out above, understanding of values and important aspects of character can be used as part of a 'sieving' approach to guide change so that it takes appropriate account of its context. Character assessments should be used as evidence of local character in the application of planning policy. This will help to ensure that development proposals complement or respond in a creative way to enhance and sustain the positive aspects of this character.

7.43 Some examples of how an understanding of the character of a place can positively influence planning, design and change outcomes are set out in the case studies in the rest of this chapter. The case studies include strategic, local and site specific examples. The examples are:

- Using an understanding of character to guide regeneration in an inner London Borough;

- Using an understanding of character to guide change in an Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF);
- Using an understanding of character effectively in a Design and Access Statement;
- Using an understanding of character to help apply and interpret the London Density Matrix in the London Plan;
- Using an understanding of character to guide institutional and commercial development in a Central London location.



**FIGURE 7.4: TYPOLOGY AND ILLUSTRATIONS DEVELOPED FOR LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST'S CHARACTERISATION STUDY (SOURCE: URBAN PRACTITIONERS/LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST).**



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**FIGURE 7.5: EXAMPLE STREETScape ELEVATIONS (SOURCE: URBAN PRACTITIONERS/LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST)**



The street elevation above illustrates a typical Victorian terraced street.

This terrace, taken from the Bushwood area, illustrates the consistent rhythm of the Victorian form.

The street is comprised of a series of twin porches with a double height bay either side which are repeated through the length of the street. Chimney positions support this rhythm throughout.

FIGURE 7.6: EXAMPLE PLANS AND SECTIONS FROM THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET CHARACTERISATION STUDY (SOURCE: URBAN PRACTITIONERS/LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET)

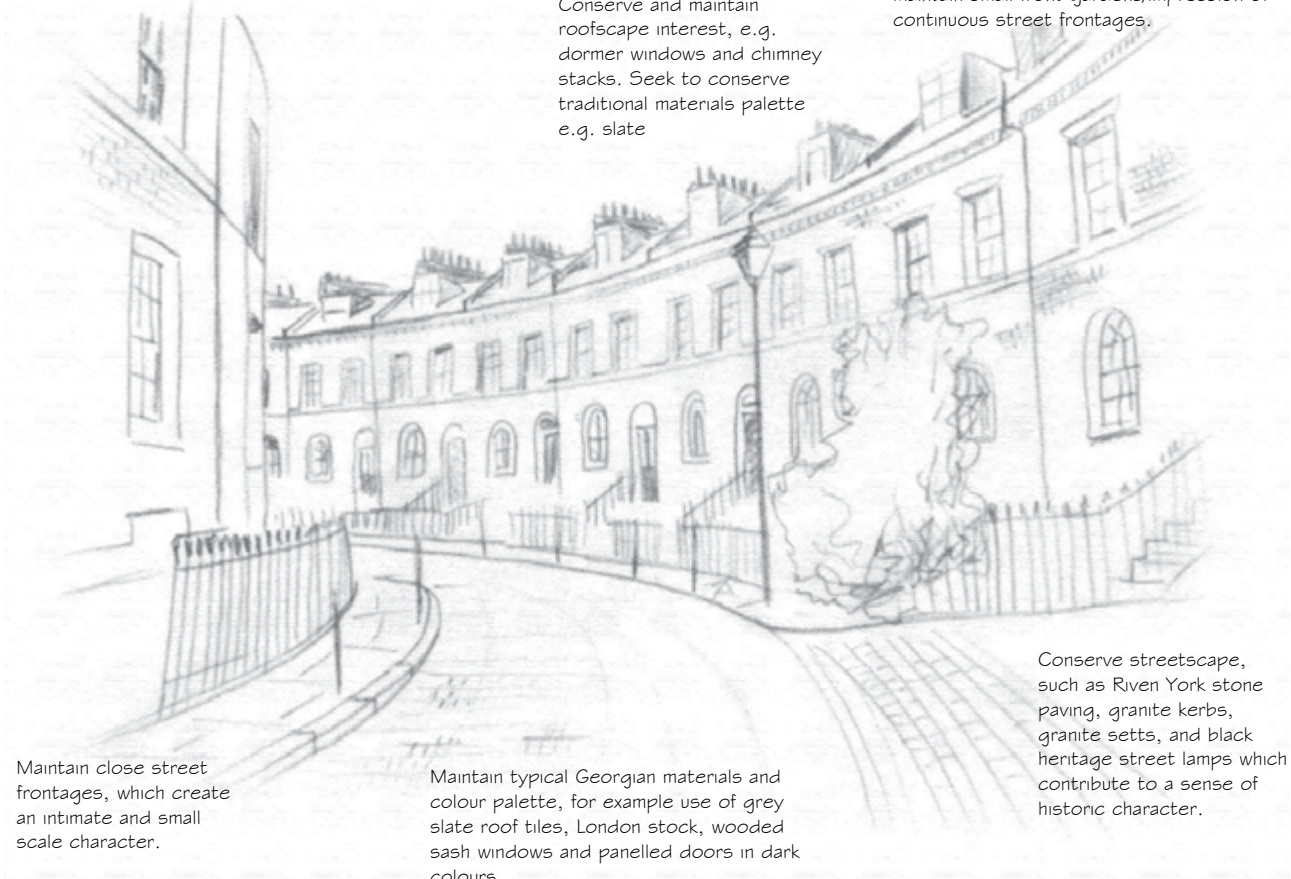


**FIGURE 7.7 EXAMPLE SKETCH INFORMATION TO ILLUSTRATE PRINCIPLES OF A STRATEGY**

Conserve rhythm and articulation of building facades, created by repetition of features, such as sash windows with glazing bars recessed windows and arched door ways.

Maintain continuous plot frontages, with wrought iron railings. Subtly integrate and accommodate off street parking and maintain small front gardens/impression of continuous street frontages.

Conserve and maintain roofscape interest, e.g. dormer windows and chimney stacks. Seek to conserve traditional materials palette e.g. slate



Maintain close street frontages, which create an intimate and small scale character.

Maintain typical Georgian materials and colour palette, for example use of grey slate roof tiles, London stock, wooded sash windows and panelled doors in dark colours.

Conserve streetscape, such as Riven York stone paving, granite kerbs, granite setts, and black heritage street lamps which contribute to a sense of historic character.

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## CASE STUDY 1: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE REGENERATION IN AN INNER LONDON BOROUGH



Site as existing (Image: Jerry Tate Architects)

### THE PLACE

- A large housing estate in an inner London Borough, situated in a disadvantaged economic area.
- Existing buildings were completed in the 1930s and are handsome examples of brick construction providing strong building lines and a rich materials palette.
- Accommodation is generally five storeys high, brick-built residential apartments with deck access to individual units.
- Estate is in a reasonably good state of repair, building fabric is well-built and there is gated access to housing blocks, although public space between buildings is sparse.
- The area surrounding the estate varies from private residential accommodation in mainly Victorian houses to a major retail high street. There is also a local park adjacent.
- The estate has a mixed social history, with excellent results from the local secondary school, but recent civil disturbances and vandalism.

### THE PROPOSAL

- Improvement of public realm on the site to provide additional green space and play areas.
- The construction of new estate facilities for community, youth and education uses.
- A general improvement of the sustainability and energy strategy for the estate, including renewable microgeneration, new heating systems for residential units and improvement of the existing building fabric.

### HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE HELPED GUIDE THE CHANGE

- A context appraisal was developed for the site, mapping key features/assets and opportunities and constraints. As part of this, working with the community to discuss and understand their needs and aspirations assisted with developing a brief for the site,
  - which aligned with local needs. For example, many residents were proud of the distinctive architecture of the estate and consultation with the community ensured that the upgrading of the building fabric respected and emphasized this strong character and materials palette.
  - Community consultation also enabled improvements to the public space which were complementary to the nearby park and helped address deficiencies in the area. Discussing the proposals with local community groups and assessing their needs enabled the new community space to be tailored to fit the most useful range of functions and ensured that it was embraced by the local area.
-

## CASE STUDY 2: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE CHANGE IN AN OPPORTUNITY AREA PLANNING FRAMEWORK (OAPF)



*Artist impression of retail and residential use in the Westfield site and the Imperial College site from the Westway*

### THE PLACE

- A brownfield former industrial and commercial location adjacent to Grade II listed BBC TV Centre and 'Westfield London', in inner West London.
- The site comprised a number of vacant and derelict plots in close proximity to Central Line and London Overground and Hammersmith and City Line tube stations.
- Surrounded predominantly by residential and retail development and the existing town centre and residential quarter around Shepherd's Bush and a network of residential streets and squares to the west in RBKC but isolated from them by the A40 and the 'West Cross Route'.
- Existing development is primarily industrial sheds of a utilitarian character. Residential development predominantly comprises 3-4 storey townhouses, although there are many significantly taller buildings in the vicinity e.g. BBC East Tower and Latimer Estates, and many later and modern office buildings.
- The area immediately around the site had a deficiency in terms of useable public realm due to its past industrial use.

### THE PROPOSAL

- A comprehensive redevelopment of the area for mixed use including offices, residential apartments, cafes/bars/restaurants and retail outlets, including some 16-30 storey tall buildings in key locations.
- Creation of new park north of the Hammersmith and City Line Viaduct and new bridges and underpasses over the road and railway infrastructure to improve permeability.
- Provision of an integrated green infrastructure network to address deficiencies including a new park, SUDS water features and green roofs to a number of principal buildings.

### **HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE HELPED TO GUIDE THE CHANGE**

- The framework plan for white city developed from the understanding of the areas historic development and how that layering of history, the Anglo French exhibition, the 1908 Olympics, the building of the BBC and of the inner ring road motorway, the development of shepherds bush as a centre for entertainment and shopping culminating in the construction of Westfield produced a series of opportunities and challenges and defined the character of white city.
- An analysis was undertaken of the heritage assets within the area, including scale and character and also of the social community and leisure infrastructure.
- An urban design analysis was completed of the challenges the area faced.
- A masterplan was then developed that built on this analysis and sought to integrate new development with its context. As part of this process the opportunity to locate tall buildings within the plan was explored and key views were modelled from neighbouring conservation areas and public spaces.
- The integration of tall buildings within the public realm was a key consideration including the contribution they could make to the setting and legibility of the new open space and street network.
- Consideration was also given to the skyline composition of tall buildings within their wider city context and their more immediate setting including relationship to listed buildings such as BBC TV centre.



- 1: Olympic stadium (1908)
- 2: Franco-British Exhibition buildings (1908)
- 3: Japanese garden
- 4: Shepherd's Bush Entertainment Venues



White City Opportunity Area: 1916 (LB H&F)

- White City estate
- BBC TV Centre
- Westfield
- Railway
- Motorway
- Major barrier
- Westway / A40
- Central Line cutting
- West Cross Route / A320
- Westfield
- BBC Media Village
- Hammersmith and City and Circle Line viaduct
- BBC TV Centre



(Cities Revealed® copyright by The GeoInformation® Group, 2001)

- Listed Building
  - Buildings of merit
  - Conservation Area
- Conservation Areas:
- 1: Oxford Gardens
  - 5: Ingersoll and Arminger
  - 9: Coningham and Lime Grove
  - 2: Old Oak and Wormholt
  - 6: Norland
  - 10: Hammersmith Grove
  - 3: Wood Lane
  - 7: Shepherd's Bush
  - 11: Melrose
  - 4: Avondale Park Gardens
  - 8: Holland Park
  - 12: Lakeside / Sinclair / Blythe Road



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- parks
- swimming
- running
- playing fields
- cycling
- equestrian facilities
- shopping
- soccer
- tennis
- entertainment
- basketball
- climbing



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# CHARACTER AND CONTEXT SPG

- 3 - 6 storeys
- 7 - 8 storeys
- 9 - 10 storeys
- 11-15 storeys
- 16 - 20 storeys
- 21 - 30 storeys



Building heights in the indicative masterplan (White City Opportunity Area Planning Framework)  
Source: 3D model:Z Mapp

### CASE STUDY 3: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER EFFECTIVELY IN A DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT



Site proposal (Image: Jerry Tate Architects)

#### THE PLACE

- Owned by a London Borough Private Sector Housing Group, the site is an empty prominent corner plot which accommodated a three storey Public House before it was demolished.
- The site is located adjacent to a London Regeneration area. This significant regeneration initiative aims to transform the local area physically, socially, environmentally and economically.
- The area has excellent transport links into Central London and is close to the proposed Crossrail development. London City Airport provides direct connections to most European business destinations.

#### THE PROPOSAL

- Four new-build 3 bed houses and three 2 bed apartments, one of which was fully accessible.
- The proposal will be an exemplar project to provide affordable housing options for rent and ownership, which will achieve level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and Lifetime Home Standard.

### **HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE HELPED GUIDE THE CHANGE**

- Local characteristics of the site were specifically recorded and illustrated within the baseline part of the Design and Access Statement for the scheme in order to demonstrate the influence of the surrounding context and provide design cues for the scheme.
  - Historic evolution of the site and its surrounding characteristics were established to understand how the site evolved.
  - Extensive analysis of the site was undertaken to recognise the immediate environmental context. Shadow studies, massing models, environmental conditions, site aspect, site access, and pedestrian/vehicle rights of way, were investigated to gain an understanding of the site characteristics.
  - A photographic survey of local building vernacular formed a strong visual aid for the proposed building form, height and materials.
-

## CASE STUDY 4: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO HELP APPLY AND INTERPRET THE LONDON DENSITY MATRIX

### THE PLACE

- A 1950s local authority housing estate within an outer London residential suburb.
- Low density residential layout defined by large leafy gardens with dwellings set well back from the street and gaps between them enabling views to the wooded backdrop of relatively large rear gardens.
- Development is defined by a mix of two storey semi-detached dwellings and short blocks of two storey terraced houses and a three storey blocks of flats.
- A quiet, private residential suburb approximately 1km from the nearest local centre with block orientation arranged to maximise and respect amenity of residents.

### THE PROPOSAL

- Demolition and replacement of the dilapidated flatted development within the housing estate (removal of the single central block of flats) to optimise site capacity for new local authority housing provision and increase habitable rooms per hectare within the site.
- Existing block to be replaced by a mix of eighteen 2 and 3 bedroom two storey houses plus gardens, private parking and community greenspace.
- Development proposed seeks at least 25% increase in density/utilisation of the plot.
- Two options were developed, as shown in the plans below.



(Images: Maccreanor Lavington Architects)

### HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE HELPED GUIDE THE CHANGE

- Both layouts have made reference to the existing building plot line and therefore maintain the appearance of a low density, green and leafy idiom to plot frontages. They also maintain gaps between dwellings as per the existing layout, enabling intervisibility with the vegetation to rear gardens.
- The layouts both concentrate taller buildings (3/4 storey flats) to the central part of the site, enabling development to 'step down' to 2 storeys to the edge to mirror existing surrounding development.
- Option 1, whilst having a slightly lower increase in net density, better reflects existing

building orientation, privacy and amenity of surrounding residents. It also enables slightly larger rear gardens which fit with the existing structure, allowing for incorporation of more vegetation to reinforce the leafy character of the housing estate.

## CASE STUDY 5: USING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER TO GUIDE INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN A CENTRAL LONDON LOCATION



Site as existing (Image: Jerry Tate Architects)

### THE PLACE

- The existing building was constructed in the 1970's, set back from the street by a lightwell with composite cladding and metal framed single glazing.
- Located on a central London street covered by a 'shared surface' with mixed pedestrians and vehicular use in the middle of a very public and busy tourist area.
- The site is in a Conservation Area with a number of significant Listed Buildings, some of which are of national importance. Surrounding buildings range in size from six to eleven storeys and are in a variety of styles depending on the era in which they were built from 1860 to 2002.
- The site is in a prominent corner position. It is owned by a respected higher education establishment and denotes the outer extent of their west London campus.
- Surrounding uses vary from museums / tourist attractions, research establishments, performance venues and private residential accommodation.

### THE PROPOSAL

- Demolition of existing three storey building on site frontage.
- Replacement with a new building to provide space for teaching and research of between seven to ten storeys high increasing the development density on the site.
- As well as the new-build element, a major refurbishment and re-cladding of the existing

rear eight storey building was proposed to improve building facilities and the elevation aesthetic.

- There was also a proposed new gated frontage to the college campus as part of the development to improve security on the site.

### **HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHARACTER OF THE PLACE HELPED GUIDE THE CHANGE**

- An assessment of the surrounding building's massing and relationship to the street (context appraisal) guided the form of development to provide an improved urban environment. For example the existing building has a basement lightwell on the front façade, the proposal removed this element to give the building a public 'shopfront'/active frontage reflecting many of the more public buildings on the street.
  - An understanding of the materials and architectural style of the area aided appropriate expression of the new building. Many buildings on the street are exemplars of their particular architectural era and understanding this historical context helped develop an appropriate proposal that avoided pastiche.
  - An understanding of the social context, particularly the mix of tourist and education uses, assisted development of the public space strategy for the proposal, especially in suggesting ways to improve the public/private relationship within the proposal to promote public interaction without compromising security.
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# ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Alan Baxter/Sheils Flynn, London's Natural Signatures: The London Landscape Framework. Prepared for Natural England, January 2011

<sup>ii</sup> English Heritage, 2008, Conservation Principles –Policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment

<sup>iii</sup> Guidance on preparing technically accurate and robust visualisations, such as for Public Inquiry, is provided in Landscape Institute/ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2002, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition). Also Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11: Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, available on line at <http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/publications/downloads.php>

<sup>iv</sup> Publications which advise on graphic techniques include Reid, G, Landscape Graphics and Wang, T.C, Plan and Section Drawing

<sup>v</sup> Examples include the package of graphics programmes developed by Adobe, such as Photoshop or Illustrator. Cheaper alternatives include Paintshop Pro or CorelDraw. Google Sketch Up is an effective digital means of generating rapid three dimensional illustration.




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# APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| TERM                                  | DEFINITION   |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Accessibility                         | <p>This term is used in two distinct ways, its definition depending on the accompanying text (see Accessibility of London and Accessibility of the Transport System below).</p> <p>Accessibility of London: This refers to the extent to which employment, goods and services are made available to people, either through close proximity, or through providing the required physical links to enable people to be transported to locations where they are available.</p> <p>Accessibility of the Transport: System This refers to the extent of barriers to movement for users who may experience problems getting from one place to another, including disabled people.</p> |
| Community                             | <p>For the purposes of this guidance and studies of character, the definition of community covers not just residents but also workers, the business community, tourists and transient users as appropriate.</p>  |
| Context                               | <p>The way in which places, sites and spaces inter relate with one another whether physically, functionally or visually, or the way in which they are experienced sequentially and understood.</p>   |
| Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) | <p>A recognised process for understanding the environmental implications of certain proposals (above set thresholds) upon the environment. It is guided by the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (1999) as amended.</p>  |
| Figure: Ground mapping                | <p>A device by which the relationship of the built form to open space and hence urban grain and permeability can be clearly shown by reversed out/silhouette mapping. Also known as Nolli Mapping after Giambattista Nolli who devised the technique.</p>  <p>Above: example of Figure : Ground mapping.</p>  |

| TERM                                  | DEFINITION  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Geodiversity                          | A term incorporating all rocks, minerals, landforms and the processes which have shaped them over geological time.  |
| Geographic Information Systems or GIS | Spatial database software based on geo referenced map and map based data, for presentation and analysis of information.   |
| Green Grid                            | A strategic green infrastructure network  |
| Green infrastructure (GI)             | A network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing as well as both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities  |
| Hydrology                             | The study of movement, distribution and quality of water and water resources.   |
| Isovist mapping                       | <p>A mapping technique devised by Hillier et al as part of the Space Syntax methodology (see Space Syntax entry below) to demonstrate permeability and legibility. Isovisists are generated by plotting the maximum extent of a space and its context visible from a specific point.</p>  <p>Above: Façade isovist<br/>(hatched tone) plotted from within urban open space</p> |
| Intervisibility                       | The property of visibility between one site or feature and another.   |
| Map regression analysis               | Using historic map sequences to map historic eras or epochs of growth and evolution to understand the evolution of a place.   |
| Node                                  | A junction or intersection e.g. by a market cross or milestone or a place where people congregate such as a market or square.   |

| TERM                  | DEFINITION  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Nolli Mapping         | See Figure : Ground Mapping entry above.  |
| Peri urban            | Urban edge or settlement fringe.  |
| Place                 | The result of a complex interplay of different elements, e.g. the cultural and social factors which have combined to create identity, the physical or built elements that make up the place and the people associated with it through memories, association and activity.                       |
| Place-making          | Recognising the distinctiveness of individual locations in plans, policies and proposals, and responding accordingly.   |
| Settlement morphology | The form of a settlement, its process of formation and evolution.   |
| SUDS                  | Sustainable Drainage Systems e.g. swales, planted filter strips, permeable paving.  |
| Skyspace modelling    | A form of digital modelling used to understand impact of tall buildings on sites and their settings.  |
| Space Syntax          | A methodology encompassing a series of theories and techniques for understanding urban spatial configurations. It was developed by Bill Hillier, Julienne Hanson and other colleagues at the Bartlett in the 1970s as a tool for architects to understand social implications of their schemes. |
| Time-depth            | The imprint of the past on the contemporary place.  |
| Typography            | The design and layout of text.  |

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### Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn có văn bản tài liệu này bằng ngôn ngữ của mình, hãy liên hệ theo số điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ dưới đây.

### Greek

Αν θέλετε να αποκτήσετε αντίγραφο του παρόντος εγγράφου στη δική σας γλώσσα, παρακαλείστε να επικοινωνήσετε τηλεφωνικά στον αριθμό αυτό ή ταχυδρομικά στην παρακάτω διεύθυνση.

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinizde hazırlanmış bir nüshasını edinmek için, lütfen aşağıdaki telefon numarasını arayınız veya adrese başvurunuz.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਖਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

### Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये पते पर संपर्क करें

### Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি (কপি) চান, তা হলে নীচের ফোন নম্বরে বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

### Arabic

إذا أردت نسخة من هذه الوثيقة بلغتك، يرجى الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو مراسلة العنوان أدناه

### Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજની નકલ તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી આપેલ નંબર ઉપર ફોન કરો અથવા નીચેના સરનામે સંપર્ક સાધો.



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