

town centre design guidance



foreword

North Ayrshire Council and its partner, Irvine Bay Regeneration Company recognises the contribution that the good design of buildings and public spaces can make to the quality of life in our communities. It can be life enhancing both in terms of visual appearance and use. Good design can also play a major role in stimulating and promoting the social and economic development of our towns and villages.

North Ayrshire is fortunate to share one of the most spectacular coastlines in the world. We need to recognise and respect this when building near to the sea. Equally our historic towns and villages require sensitive development to reflect their location and character, and our rural areas should not be spoiled by ugly buildings.

For these reasons we have jointly commissioned this Guidance Document, one of a series of three, aimed at promoting quality design and providing practical guidance on standards for our built environment. The guides are aimed at a range of potential users:

- **developers and professionals** involved in creating all new buildings such as houses, offices, factories, shops.
- **our planners**, who are involved in taking the decisions on future development plans in North Ayrshire.
- **the general public**, who will look at, work in, visit and live beside all new development.

This Guidance draws on best practice not only from our local area, but from across the UK and internationally. Our aim is to ensure that North Ayrshire becomes a locality recognised by its residents and visitors as a place where our buildings and spaces are appreciated and admired.

We welcome your comments and will aim to reflect these and the experience and feedback from our initial users in producing our finalised guides.

Patrick Wiggins

Chief Executive

Irvine Bay Regeneration Company

Councillor John Reid

Chair

Local Development Plan Committee

Contents

Forward	page 01
Introduction	page 05
Context	
regeneration	page 08
vision	page 10
physical context	page 14
potential	page 16
a 'context driven' approach	page 18
Design principles	
Siting	
landscape and townscape setting	page 24
settlement pattern	page 26
Character	
infill	page 34
scale and massing	page 35
building line and street facades	page 36
shaping smaller places	page 37
materials and details	page 38
shopfronts	page 44
Public realm	
shaping shared spaces	page 48
links and routes	page 50
pedestrian priority areas	page 52
shaping spaces: parking	page 54
Summary	page 59



introduction

North Ayrshire Council has identified that well designed new development can help the regeneration and future sustainability of the region's urban areas. The right type and quality of new development is able to create convivial, busy, characterful places - backdrops for community and visitor activity, places which are inherently sustainable because they will attract and retain visitors and residents alike.

This Design Guidance is intended to define and explain in summary the character of some of the the places in the North Ayrshire and to help developers and designers understand its - and their - potential contribution to future place-making. In this way, it is hoped to guide the design of new development to ensure that it will enhance and build upon existing good quality local character and contribute to the area's regeneration rather than detract from it.

This document is part of a series of Guidance which focuses on the specific issues associated with the regeneration of North Ayrshire's urban areas.*

It is for **Town Centres**, and guides development that will help regenerate and improve business and retail activity and encourage investment in North Ayrshire's historic town centres. The other guidance includes:

- **Coastal:** which considers new development at the North Ayrshire seafront and coast which can improve and promote its potential as a place to live and as a destination for visitors.
- **Neighbourhood:** which considers new development between the centres of North Ayrshire's towns and the countryside that surrounds them.

In addition to providing guidance on the design principles associated with specific development types, this guidance also covers the important issues which are addressed by all successful developments –linkage, pedestrian movement and high quality public realm.

The guidance will apply to planning applications within areas allocated as 'town centre' in the Local Plan and areas which are extensions to town centres where applications have town centre characteristics. North Ayrshire has several Conservation Areas (most are within town centres) and the control of design in these areas is of particular importance; the principles of the guidance will apply to all conservation areas.

*(*Rural Design Guidance is covered within a separate document)*



context



regeneration

North Ayrshire Council works alongside its partners to deliver regeneration and stimulate economic activity throughout North Ayrshire. Good design is recognised as a key part of sustainable regeneration which improves both the image and functionality of places as well as creating better quality environments for local residents.

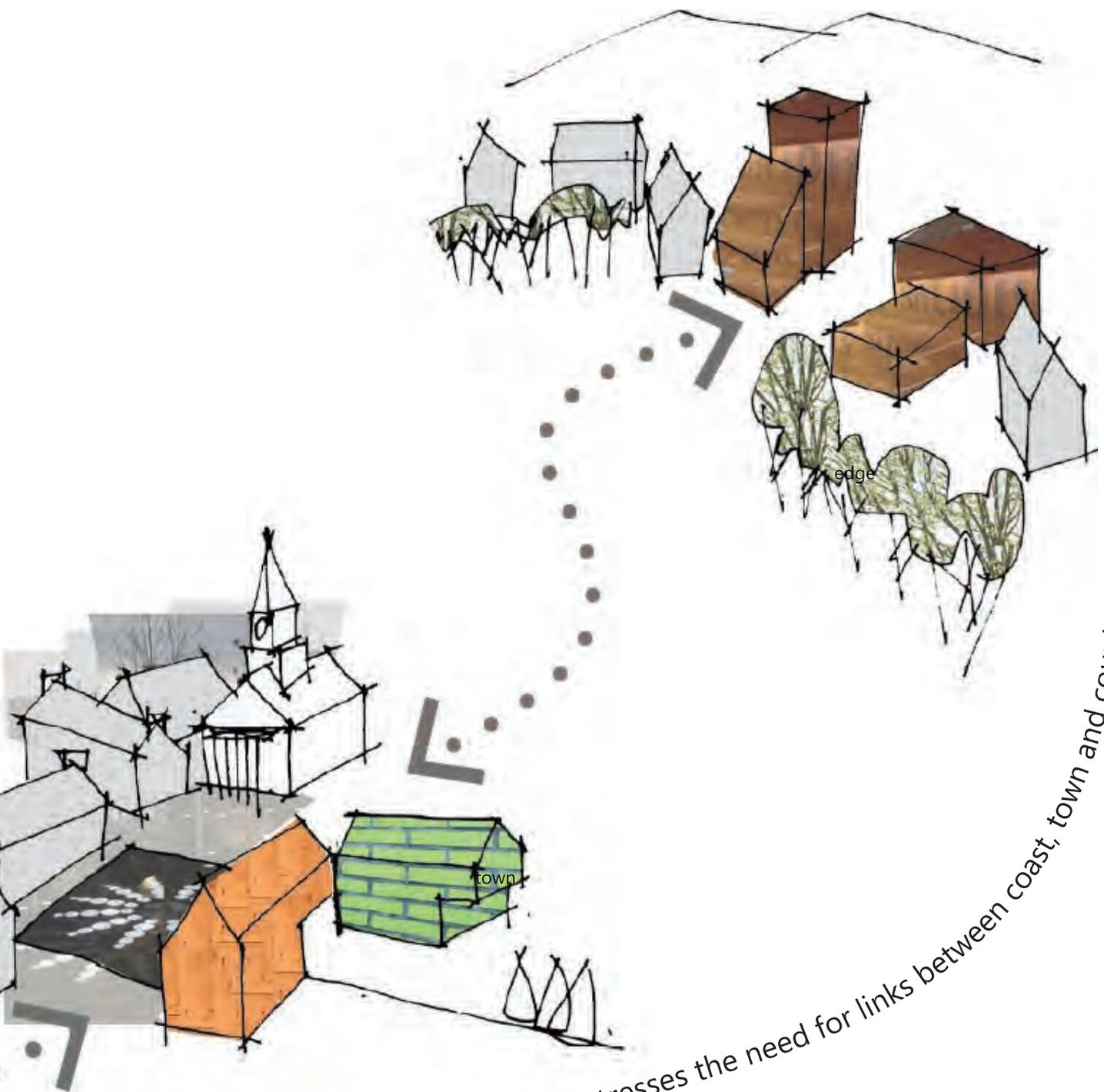
The Local Plan seeks to identify the role that land use should play in supporting the development of regeneration opportunities. Design Guidance assists in ensuring quality developments (suitable for their location) result from the interaction of the planning and development systems.

Irvine Bay - the Area's Regeneration Company established by North Ayrshire Council and Scottish Enterprise - have developed a vision for North Ayrshire's coastal towns and seafront where people will thrive, businesses will flourish and communities will grow. They are developing this vision through five key themes which look at:

- **i work** - creating and spreading wealth
- **i live** - a good place to live
- **i sea** - rediscovering the sea
- **i play** - a good place to spend time
- **i bay** - changing the image of the Irvine Bay area

Each of these themes connects with a series of proposed projects and with proposals for the urban regeneration of each of the towns. Proposals focus on opportunities around the Irvine Bay area itself - in the towns they concentrate on improving and developing business, retail and residential provision as a focus for investment.





.the regeneration strategy stresses the need for links between coast, town and country



vision

Today, changes in the way that North Ayrshire's towns are occupied and used has resulted in many town centres which are underfunded, fragmented and disconnected. Nevertheless North Ayrshire's Town Centres are important:

They are destinations - retail and commercial centres for local residents and visitors.

They have an important historic character - both experienced at close hand, and as an important component of long views across the countryside.

They have potential for regeneration- attractive and appropriate development can act as a catalyst for regeneration of the wider area, outwith the town centres themselves.

North Ayrshire's town centres are an opportunity to re-think how urban spaces can be used so that they can become vibrant places which bring a sense of pride, enjoyment and celebration.

This Guidance promotes design solutions which complement and improve their important town centre location. Unlike "good enough" standard solutions, high quality design solutions are able to:

- **lead the way for distinctive, characterful development** - which will act as a catalyst for regeneration in both the short and the long term
- **provide an opportunity for designers to knit together and repair what are often fragmented places** - there is a need for a legible urban framework of places and spaces, rather than one-off "landmark" buildings (which can provide high quality architecture without contributing to their setting)
- **retain and develop each town's unique character** - new developments should aim to match their successful existing neighbours, rather than adapting or reusing standard solutions from elsewhere.
- **provide an engaging and appealing setting for visitor's and residents** - characterful streets and spaces can link facilities for shopping, workplaces, cafes and entertainment. - all of which are destinations in their own right.
- **persuading visitors and locals to walk, rather than drive** -encouraging people to travel from town centres to the seafront and countryside

The following Case Studies illustrate what can be done. They describe town centres which have been rejuvenated and reinvented by creative and original contemporary design solutions.

case study: rostron brow

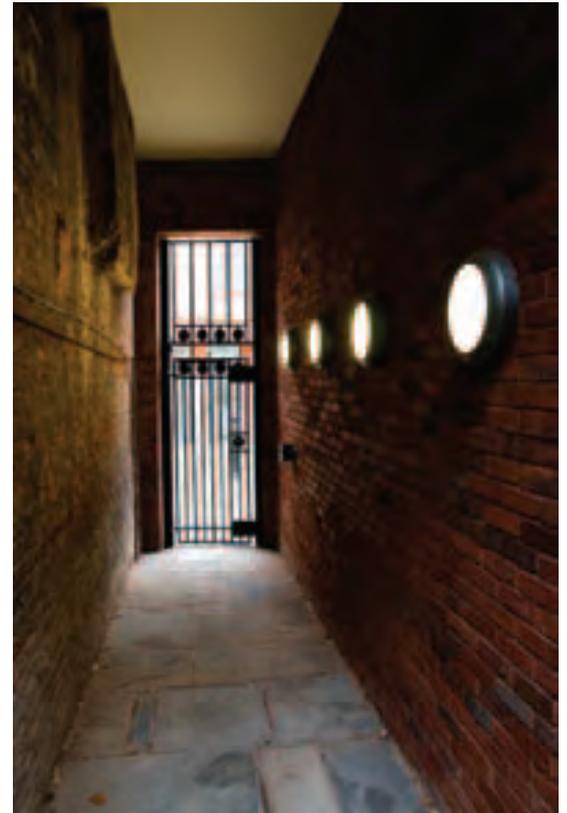
A development of sixteen sheltered flats which is highly specific to its site and wider context. With the exception of some communal apartment areas it is very difficult to find a single aspect of the scheme that is standardised.

Elements of this development which face the street are designed to integrate with their neighbours, while a private courtyard is more informal and innovative.

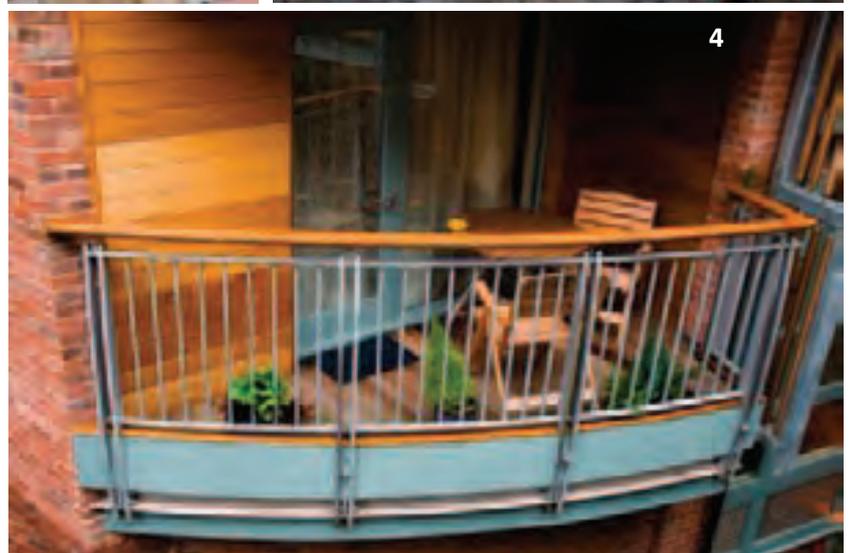
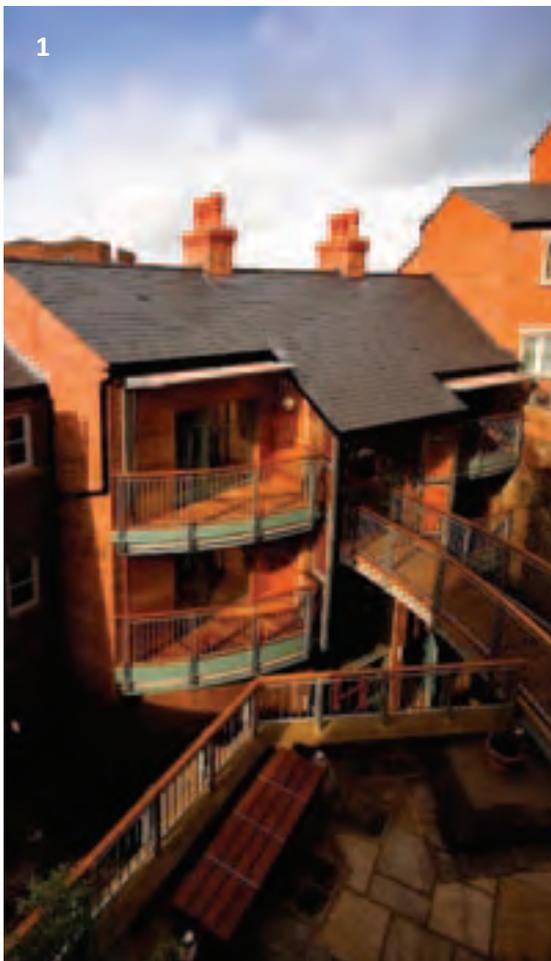
New development faces into the courtyard utilise a modern palette of materials such as steel and timber, whilst deep-set and curved balconies jut-out at different angles, reinforcing privacy for residents.

The scheme presents a continuous building line and active edges, reinforcing both a pedestrian orientated shopping street and a key pedestrian route. Historic vennel routes are maintained, but are now used as private access points into the residential development.

There is no car parking within the scheme. There are public car parks within a few minutes walk. All buildings take priority over roads and parking.



brightly lit vennels



illus; 1 internal courtyard, 2&3 external views at street, 4. balconies

case study: Ropewalks, Liverpool

creating vibrant, attractive spaces

The Rope Walks project has introduced coherent, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and attractive urban squares to this quarter of Liverpool city centre. Identified by English Partnerships in the mid 1990's as a target area for regeneration, Liverpool Rope Walks is a compact and densely developed area

New development formed part of an overall Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for regeneration, the three overarching themes of which were a public realm programme, a development projects programme and a business support and training programme.

The completed scheme has created a coherent high quality network of streets and public spaces with a strong local identity. It has helped to stimulate inward investment with numerous private conversion and new build residential and commercial developments bringing activity to a previously neglected part of the City.



case study: old town, edinburgh

using local settlement pattern

This private housing project takes as its starting point and inspiration the famous 1647 aerial map of the Old Town of Edinburgh by James Gordon of Rothiemay. The regular sub division of building fingers of about seven metres has been reproduced to create two tall thin parallel buildings on a steeply sloping site in the Old Town tradition. Emphasis has been placed on the roofscape which can be viewed either at eye level from the Royal Mile or at high level from the Cowgate.

At ground level two external spaces are created by the configuration of blocks: a public space on the north west side and a private garden on the south east side





current context

North Ayrshire towns reflect the way in which the Ayrshire area has developed as a whole.

At the beginning of the twentieth century North Ayrshire was a successful industrial and agricultural hub. Following the War some of its town centres had started to decline but the coastal towns were still popular holiday destinations. Development of new houses tended to be at town edges and the resulting new suburbs meant a corresponding decline in residential occupation of town centres.

During the 1960s Irvine New Town Development Corporation was created and as result of its activity significant new development was introduced in and around the original old Irvine town and the other towns of its development area. With more development outwith the centres of the existing towns, they became significantly larger than they were one hundred years ago but retained centres consisting largely of small scale buildings reflective of their 18th and 19th century history and coastal and rural locations. As a result larger buildings associated with more recent development are often unduly prominent in the wider landscape setting especially where there are long views towards town centres from the coast and across the countryside.

Although they have some beautiful buildings and characterful spaces, North Ayrshire's town centres have often been overwhelmed by more recent development and in places this has eroded their overall quality. The centres of all towns generally share some important characteristics:

- **pedestrianised streets:** these can be the location of characterful older buildings. These areas should be a focus for activity and a destination for out- of-town visitors - instead, shops, pubs and restaurants are sometimes located in areas of poorly lit public realm and unsympathetic newer infill development.
- **rear servicing of shops:** as a result of the pedestrianisation of streets, and roads design changes to accommodate this, town centre shops are often serviced from rear service yards. These are often exposed and viewed from main roads within the towns. They are ugly and unsightly and add to an overall poor town centre character.
- **important 'town' streets 'engineered' to prioritise traffic movement:** roads 'improvements' to ease traffic congestion in town centres (with consequent faster moving traffic and the subsequent need for crossings and pedestrian barriers) prevent main streets functioning as effective social and shopping centres from a pedestrian perspective. Most engineering solutions - traffic barriers etc. - are ugly and unattractive.
- **fragmented development:** often newer development has not been designed to take account of local context. As a result, older characterful development remains but the overall feel of the location lacks cohesion - there is no 'legible' urban structure. Roads design decisions and 'improvements' have eroded the original network of accessible streets and spaces and there is a lack of connectivity between old and new.
- **out of scale, out of place new development:** many town centres are made up of small scale properties which help to give them their distinctive character. Older, characterful existing buildings (and their successful modern counterparts) are generally a maximum of three storeys high and sit directly at back of the pavement. Poorly integrated, overly large new buildings are often constructed at a scale which would be more suitable for larger towns, and are located on their site differently from their older neighbours.
- **present urban centres provide a poor setting for civic buildings:** there remain fine civic buildings in the town centres but their scale and importance is undermined by uncomplementary, poorly designed or 'undesigned' modern settings.
- **anonymous, could be anywhere new development:** some new development derives little from its Ayrshire context in terms of materials and architectural style, resulting in streets and spaces which "could be anywhere"



poor quality STEVENSTON: a main street which promotes traffic and makes pedestrian movement difficult



inappropriate development ARDROSSAN: out of scale development



poor setting KILWINNING poorly integrated parking



"back to front" IRVINE: fragmented urban environment exposes rear of properties to view



poor setting SALTCOATS: poor quality urban centre



potential

North Ayrshire's town centres have the potential to be lively destinations for visitors and attractive places to live. At present they have:

- **a stunning landscape setting**

North Ayrshire's towns sit within an attractive, rolling landscape which ranges from moorland, through farmland to the coast. Each town's location in the landscape dictates its impact on long views across the countryside.

Inland, compact small towns clearly differentiate between the edge of settlement and the countryside. At the coast, more extensive twentieth century development is located around a series of town centres, each with their own character - including Largs, Irvine, Saltcoats and Ardrossan.

- **a character shaped by its architectural heritage**

The majority of North Ayrshire's towns have robust town centres whose older buildings have a distinctive local and small scale, rural Scottish character. This is as a result of their historic, feued development pattern which has shaped a series of enclosed, informal and attractive public spaces. These have historically been the location for a range of local shops and services. Pedestrianisation has often enhanced the town centre's small and enclosed public spaces.

- **easy access and good connectivity**

North Ayrshire's historic town centres are generally within walking distance of good quality family housing on the town's suburban fringes, and the majority of North Ayrshire's towns have good road and rail connections between each other and to the wider area Glasgow conurbation.

North Ayrshire's towns have inherent positive qualities which should be enhanced by sensitive, well designed developments and public realm. This will unlock North Ayrshire's potential to be an attractive and exciting place to visit and to live.



illus (top) one hundred years ago - busy prosperous Ardrossan (bottom) today: the potential remains.....



a “context driven” approach

This Guidance advocates a context driven approach to the design of new buildings and spaces.

“**Context-driven**” means that designers and developers need to consider **carefully** the context of their site and use its potential and positive characteristics to shape their proposals; they should consider the way in which the massing and siting of new buildings can:

- create, or consolidate, a location with its own distinctive character
- frame and shape coastal spaces
- promote pleasant movement to, and views towards, the coast
- provide physical connections between town and coast

For example, the character of **Ardrossan’s main street** is very different from that of Kilwinning. Ardrossan is a Planned Town which had its beginnings early in the 19th Century when it was planned as a “genteel resort”. Development was arranged in blocks, on a grid of streets which are wide and straight. The facade of each individual property was designed to contribute to the view of the street as a whole.

In contrast, **Kilwinning is a historic Abbey Town**, which has developed naturally and more slowly. Development has grown along the main street and the town’s design has been influenced by the shape and size of the feued plots on which buildings sit. Each property is different from its neighbour though most share the same massing, proportions and scale.

In both towns, poorly designed new buildings look out of place - they detract from the experience of being in a special place with its own character. Though some new development uses appropriate materials and copies historical features (such as window surrounds and roofing materials) it still looks out of place. This is because it is badly sited and/or adopts massing and proportions which are not the same as contextual neighbouring buildings.

Sometimes newer development does not complement its location

Even though some new developments use appropriate materials and copy historical features (such as window surrounds and roofing materials) they will still look out of place if they are badly sited and adopt massing and proportions which are not the same as good quality neighbouring buildings.

Other new development does not succeed - despite designers aims for high quality “landmark” architecture - because conventional aspirations and expectations of architectural style are imported from other locations which are more urban and anonymous in character. Often these types of development do not provide, or contribute to, attractive external spaces and fail to encourage connection to the wider area.

Poorly designed new buildings which use “standard” solutions can not only look out of place, but fail to contribute to an enjoyable experience of being within North Ayrshire’s small-scale towns, with their own special character.

Better design solutions complement their important urban locations. They provide bespoke solutions with appropriate siting, massing and proportions based upon a sensitive understanding of the site and any neighbouring good quality development.

Ardrossan: a planned town

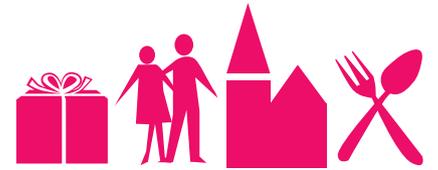
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Kilwinning: main street and historic feued development

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design principles



design principles

This Guidance outlines Design Principles which should underpin all new development. These Principles are intended to promote design solutions which assist designers to develop “North Ayrshire-specific” proposals which are based upon an analysis of the place where they are located.

The Design Principles are organised as follows:

Landscape and townscape setting: ensuring development proposals do not impact adversely on wider views from and of the countryside

Using Settlement Patterns to inform design proposals: successfully integrating new developments into North Ayrshire’s towns

Character

- **Small scale infill:** providing the backdrop for street activities - some buildings can be ‘quietly’ and simply designed
- **Scale and Massing:** basing proposals upon consideration of local scale and massing, building lines and street facades
- **Materials and details:** using the qualities of older materials to inspire contemporary choices
- **Shopfront improvements:** improving residents’ and visitors’ immediate experience of the area.

Public Spaces

- **Shaping shared spaces** better design proposals promote connected street networks which are safe, secure and a focus for positive activity
- **Links and routes:** low key pedestrian connections which are pleasant, safe and secure
- **Pedestrian priority areas:** a focus for pedestrian activity with limited access for vehicles
- **Parking:** minimising impact.



successful existing development

'feued' development creates courtyard spaces

small variations in building line and a shared rhythm to the facades

small scale main street with vennels to plots behind



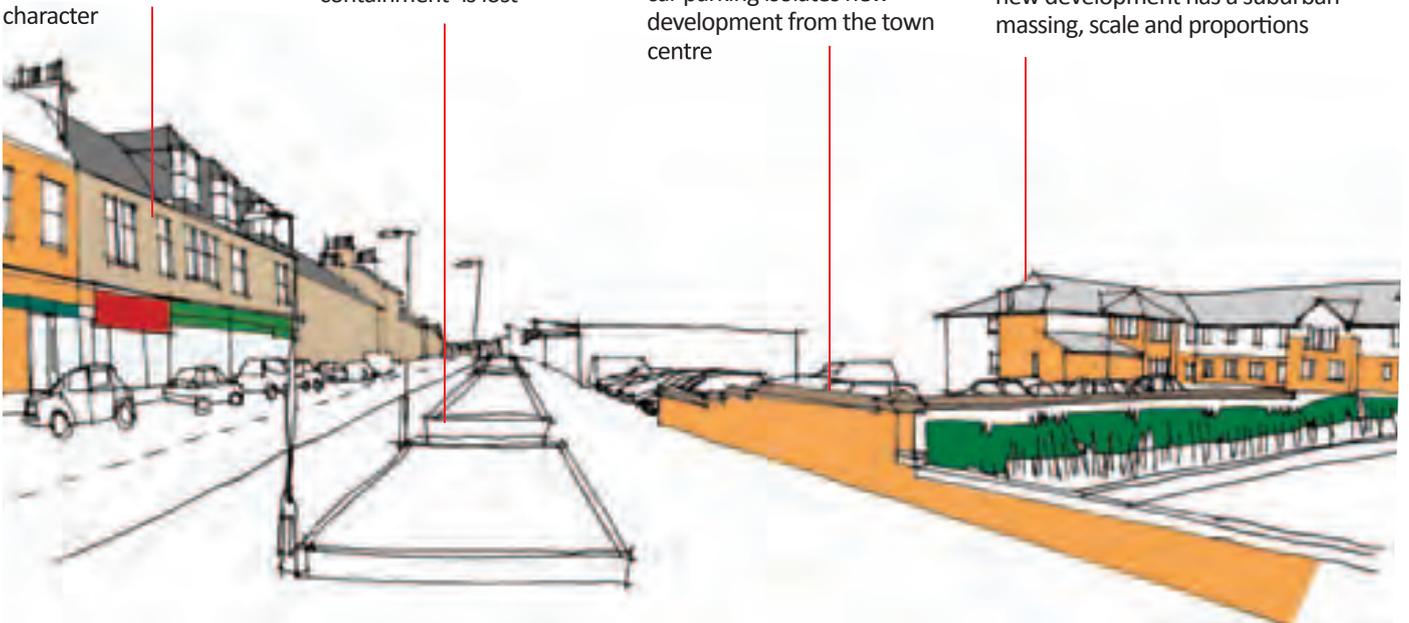
poor new infill and streetscaping impact on character

Here a small-scale main street provides a distinct building line at the back of the pavement
This side of the street feels contained and urban in character

The street-line would normally start here but instead this is the location for a series of planters. The effect is to widen the street so that any impression of 'containment' is lost

car parking isolates new development from the town centre

new development has a suburban massing, scale and proportions





landscape and townscape setting

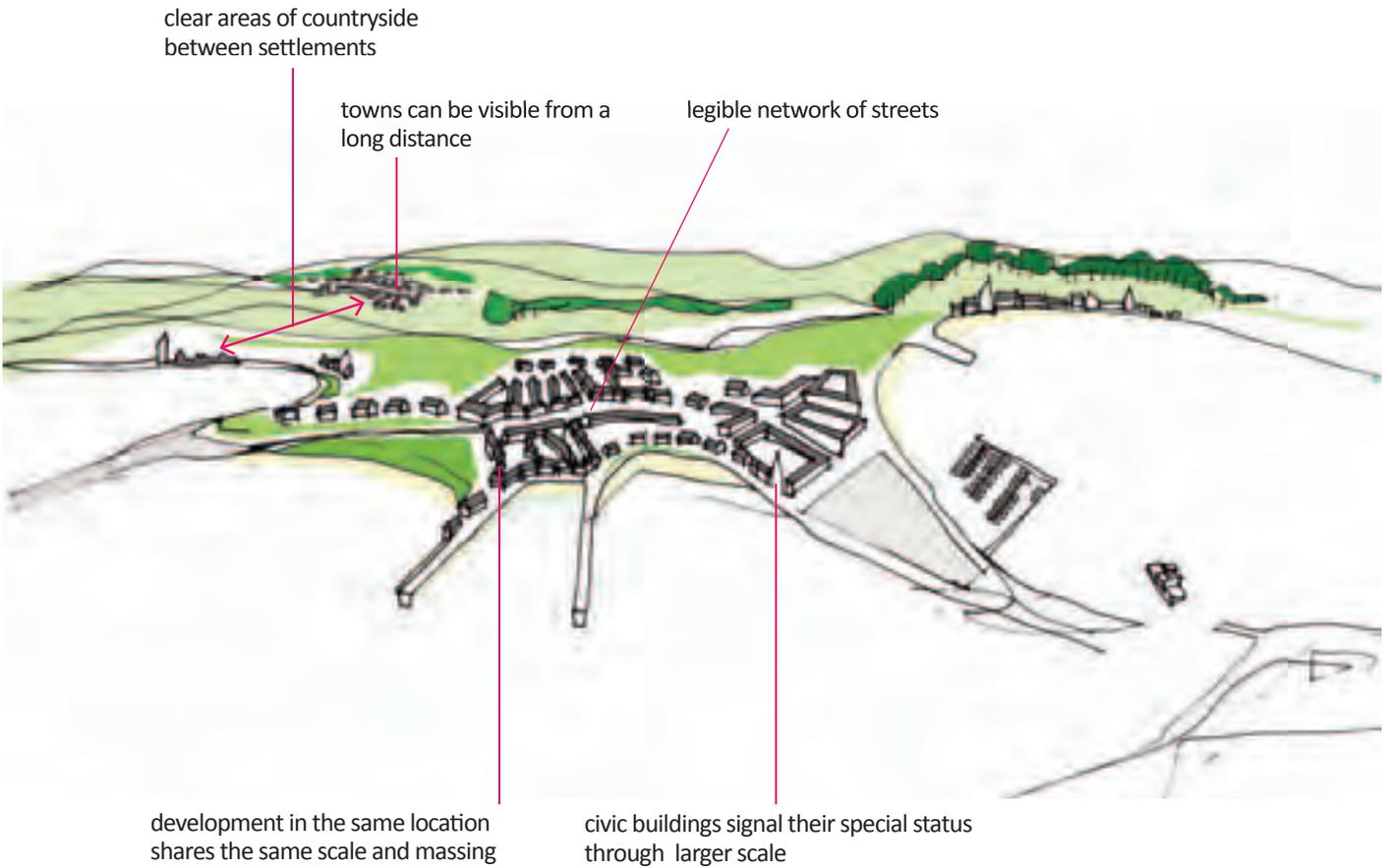
Potential development needs to be carefully considered in terms of its impact on important views. New developments should retain and, where appropriate improve, the quality of views across North Ayrshire's countryside.

Designers should always demonstrate that their proposals are compatible with the wider context. Sometimes new development which has been carefully considered in terms of how it integrates with its immediate surroundings can be unexpectedly prominent in terms of its impact on views towards the site from elsewhere. Depending on the design this may or may not be appropriate. When required photomontages and sketch models can be used to assess potential impact.

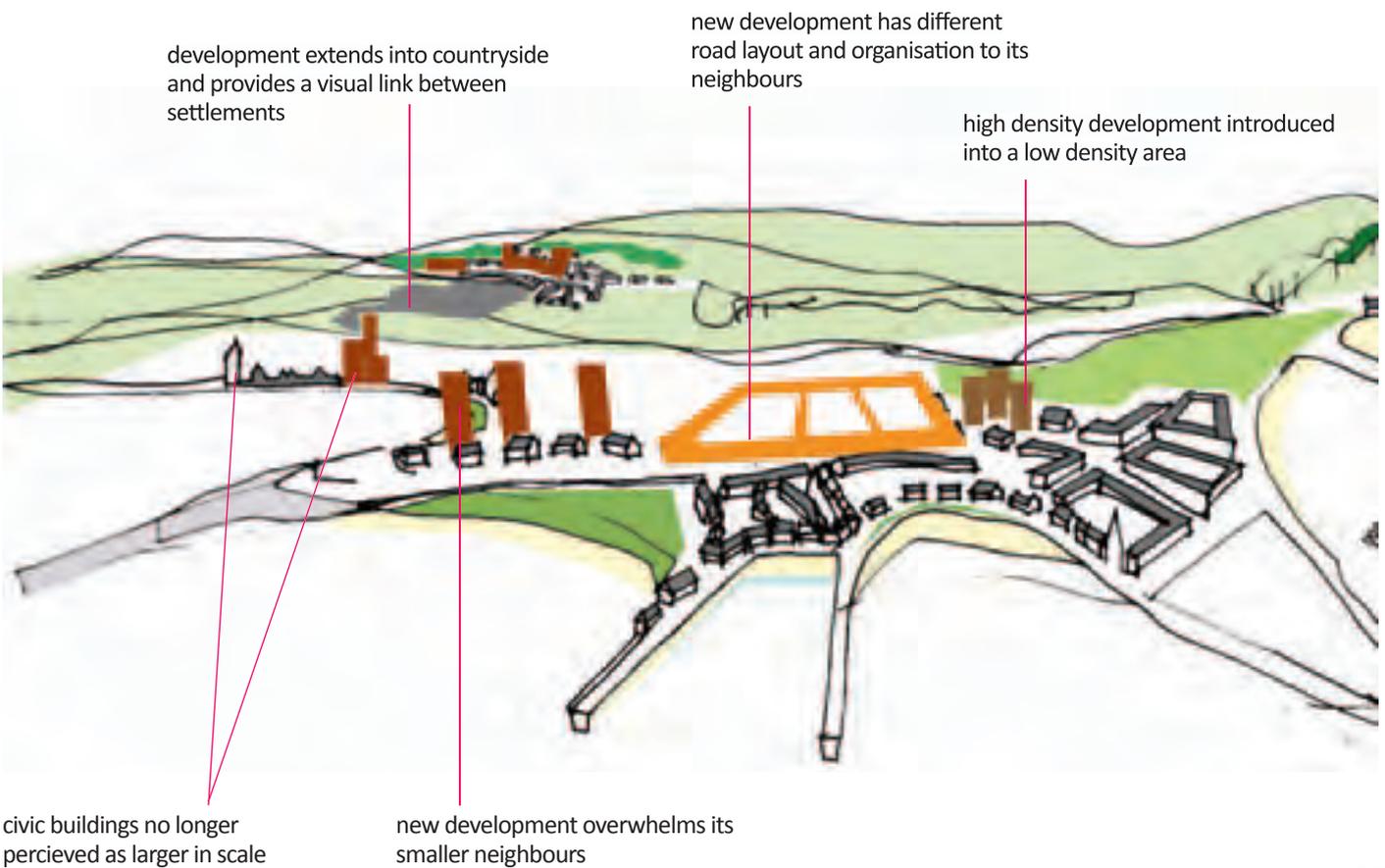
New developments should take account of way-finding and views within North Ayrshire's towns.

- Some larger new developments can be overscaled for sensitive locations; they become visually dominant compared to their older neighbours. North Ayrshire's buildings are small in scale and neighbouring properties tend to respect and relate to each other in their siting.
- Designers should aim to provide developments which are respectful of adjacent buildings and make connections with them.
- Feature buildings should be incorporated at nodes and important locations where they can help a visitor to locate themselves and understand the town. Elsewhere designers should acknowledge that some buildings should be designed to quietly fit in to the townscape.
- Where required new road layouts should be designed based on pedestrian friendly principles.

✓ integrated development



✗ poor new development





using settlement patterns to inform design proposals

It is important that designers successfully integrate new developments into North Ayrshire's towns so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

New urban infill is an opportunity to both provide new, good quality accommodation and to shape attractive, well-used public spaces.

Designers therefore need to develop co-ordinated, integrated solutions which achieve a Sense of Place

New developments should be based upon the appropriate and attractive characteristics of the layouts and design of their generally older neighbours. Designers should adapt and modify traditional street and settlement patterns to develop appropriate contemporary responses to the way in which buildings are located on their development site.

Active and interesting public spaces with a "sense of place" share some similar characteristics:

- **they are clearly defined** - the way in which buildings enclose spaces determines their special character
- **they feel safe and pleasant to be in** - traffic and cars do not dominate pedestrians; buildings and structures provide shelter from the worst of the elements; there are opportunities to stop and sit
- **they are easy to understand and get around in** - buildings and routes work together to help visitors to understand how the town is laid out; key routes and desire paths are not blocked by roads, development boundaries or other obstructions
- **they are well used throughout different times of the day and the week** - mixed use development (both residential and commercial/cultural) should be incorporated when possible as it ensures that new development areas are busy and active more of the time, and therefore more likely to be viable and sustainable.



seaside town

mix of development types - feued development at high street and villas elsewhere

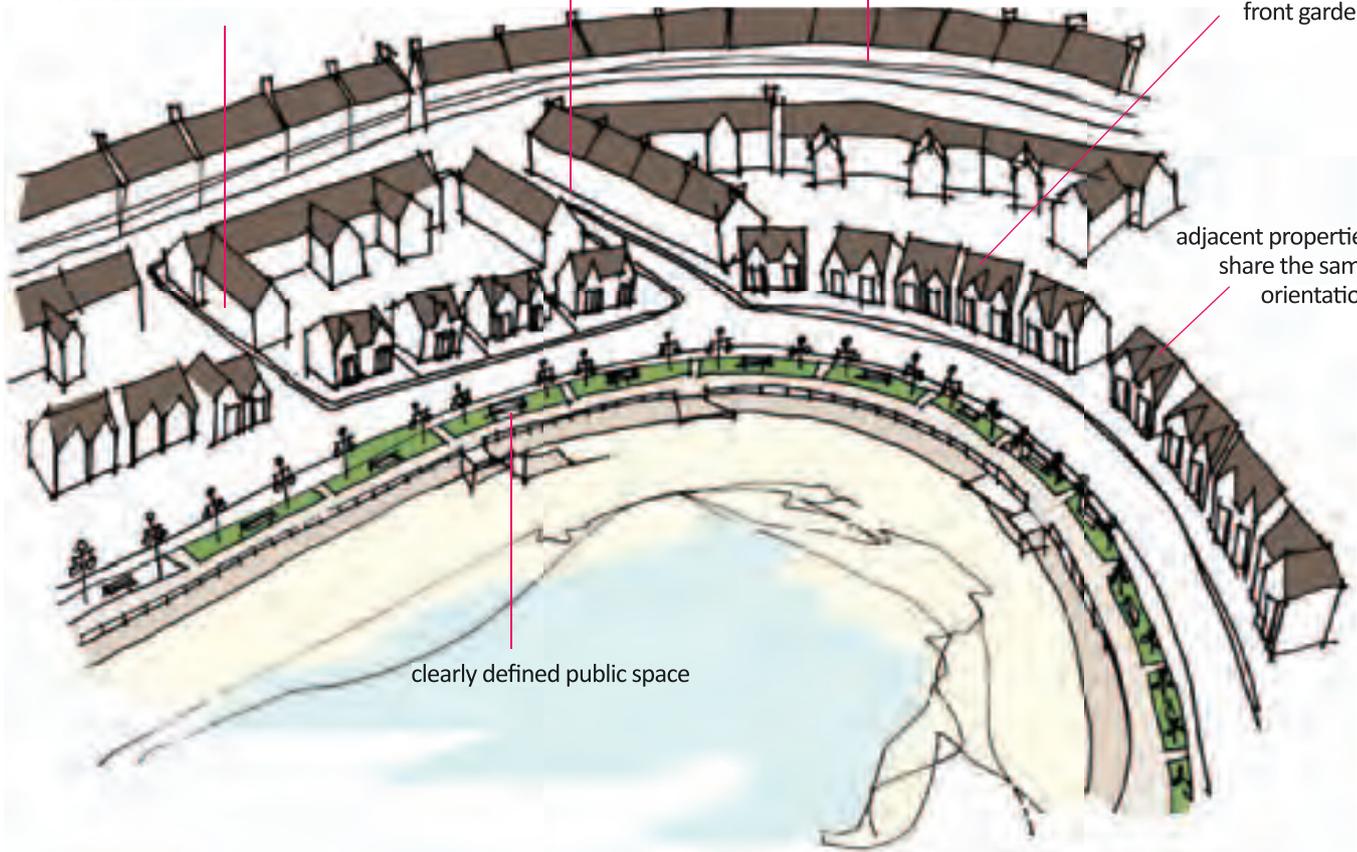
network of streets provides connection

main shopping street is narrow - buildings form a continuous line at the back of the pavement and enclose the street space

in this location properties all have front gardens

adjacent properties share the same orientation

clearly defined public space

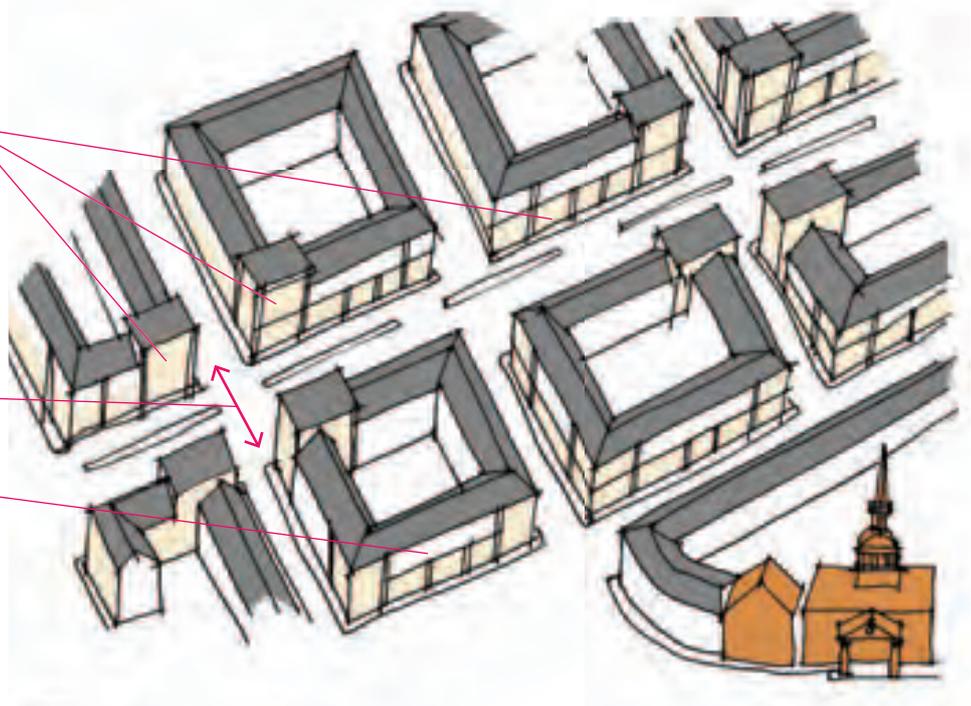


planned town

urban blocks are designed to be viewed as a whole - sometimes the facade for each building provides an integrated design stretching along a whole street

this main shopping street is much wider than its equivalent in older, feued towns

development forms urban blocks - often with special, defined corners

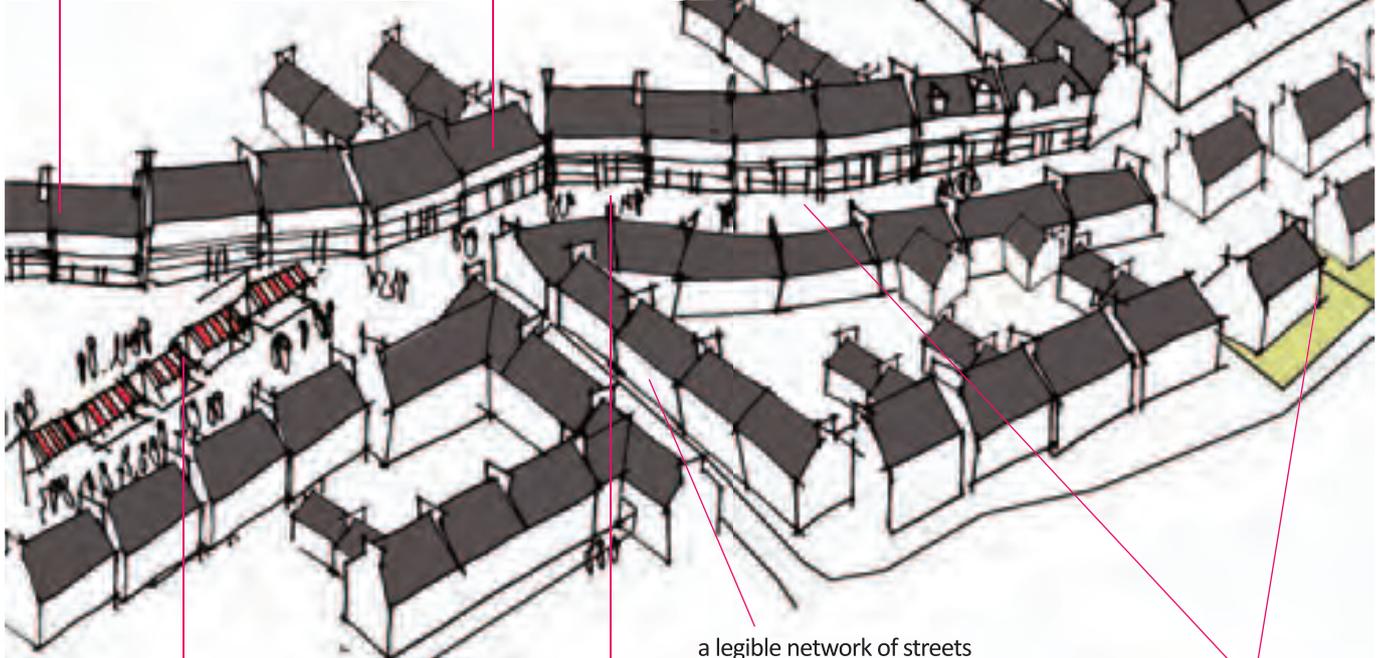




older town

this main street has developed along a route - it has a feued development pattern, rather than the urban blocks of the planned town example

properties share consistent proportions, plot depth, and plot size.



buildings shape informal public spaces

compact urban centre provides main shopping street

density varies across settlement; higher density in urban centre and lower density towards edge of settlement



harbourside town

good connectivity between town centre and harbour

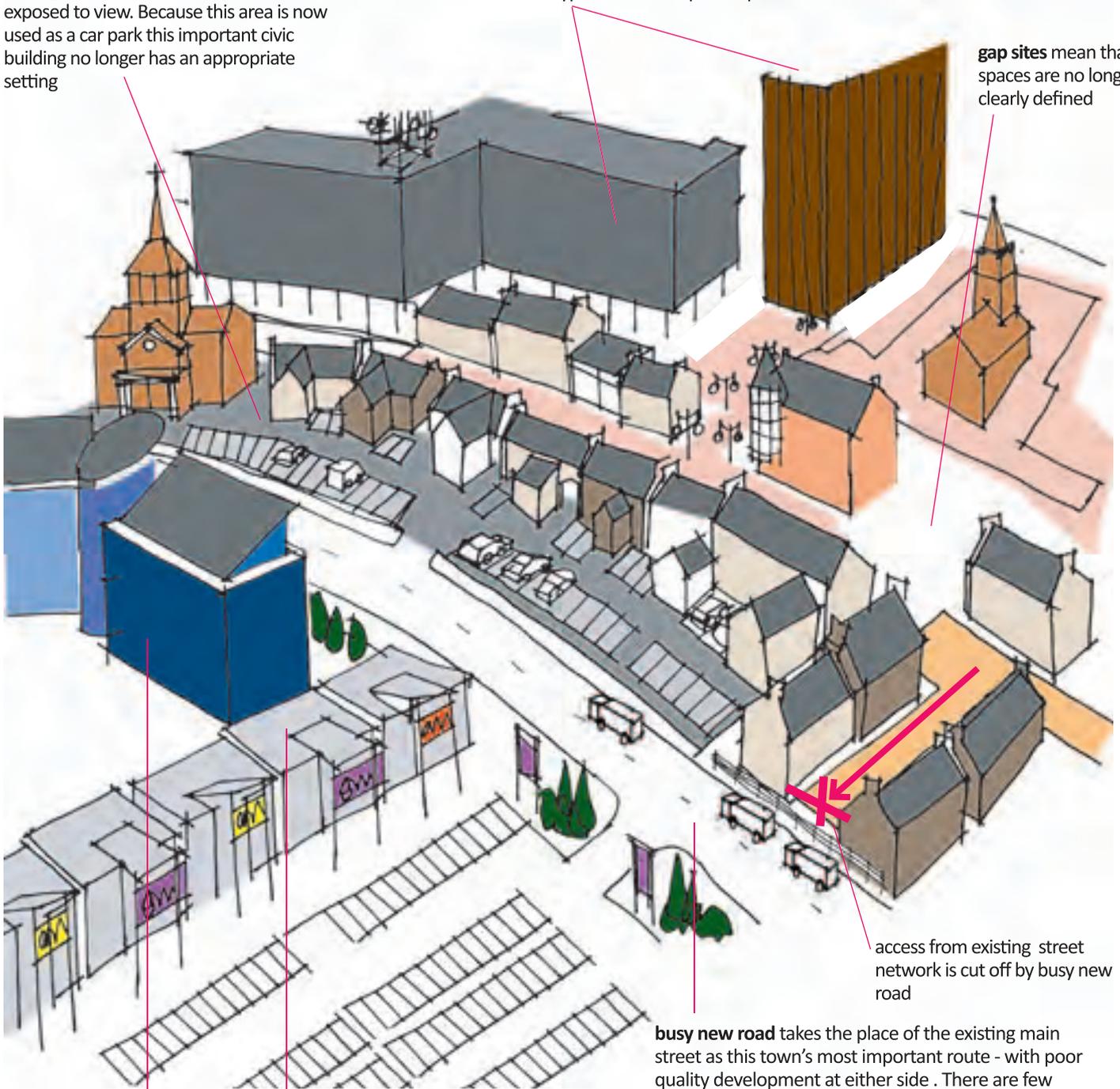


✗ how it can go wrong

older properties have been demolished leaving unattractive rear elevations exposed to view. Because this area is now used as a car park this important civic building no longer has an appropriate setting

large scale new development overwhelms its older counterparts. It occupies its site in a different way to its older neighbours and does not create the same types of outdoor public spaces

gap sites mean that spaces are no longer clearly defined



new retail park: forms clearly defined "zone". There is no connection to the town centre and it is difficult to reach for pedestrians. It uses anonymous, standard building types and plot sizes - 'could be anywhere'

further education college: access to the town centre is through unsafe, dark and unattractive vennels between existing buildings

busy new road takes the place of the existing main street as this town's most important route - with poor quality development at either side. There are few crossing points for pedestrians

access from existing street network is cut off by busy new road



using settlement patterns to inform design proposals

• **Integration with the wider Town Centre**

Successful places are not a series of 'siloes' use zones such as retail parks and business centres. They have a clear 'public realm' shared by pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles that links various developments together. They are connected by attractive streets and squares which are well used by pedestrians. New development should continue or re-instate this approach or 'pattern'.

• **Appropriate Scale**

Where new development might dominate small scale neighbours, to reduce their impact, successful developments should consider:-

- **breaking down massing** rather than designing a single monolithic structure, by using setbacks that continue key heights at existing adjoining eaves levels etc. or other devices such as high quality and light, framed glazed structures. Flat changes of materials, monolithic skins of glass and other 'graphic' solutions on elevations do not work
- **using local elevational 'rhythms', proportions and volumes** - scale can be broken down by massing the building to reflect the proportion and rhythms of local buildings. Again 'graphic' changes of materials does not work
- **reduce the impact of larger elements of a development** -such as multi-storey car parking - by locating them appropriately, perhaps in the centre of the urban block, or elsewhere where they will be screened by other development and not dominate street views

• **Inclusive and Accessible places**

To be well used, new developments should be designed so that building users are happy to walk to public transport and to other parts of town. To achieve this, new development needs to:

- **be accessible to all** complying with the Disability Discrimination Act
- **be safe and secure** if places and spaces are overlooked they feel safe, blank facades to the street and poor lighting provide opportunities for crime.

• **New development which follows the principles noted above should be very similar to its successful neighbours:**

- it will occupy its site in a similar way - with links to the wider town centre,
- it will incorporate successful, sympathetic outdoor spaces
- new buildings will have massing and proportions similar to their attractive older counterparts.

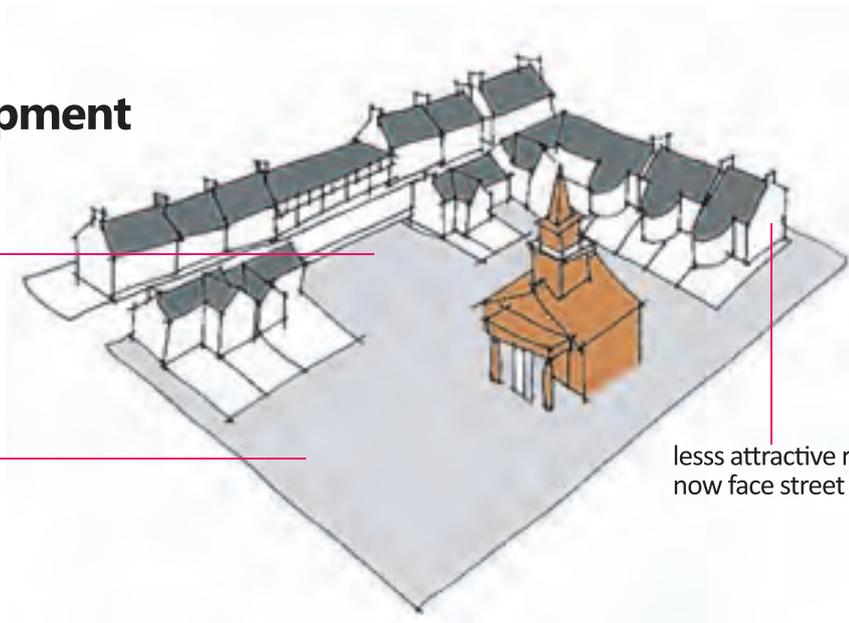
Because this kind of development will already be integrated with its setting there should be scope for designers to incorporate innovative, contemporary materials and construction details, rather than copying the architectural styles of the past.



before development

gap site at main street

existing buildings have been demolished



less attractive rear elevations now face street



better, integrated development

new infill at main street

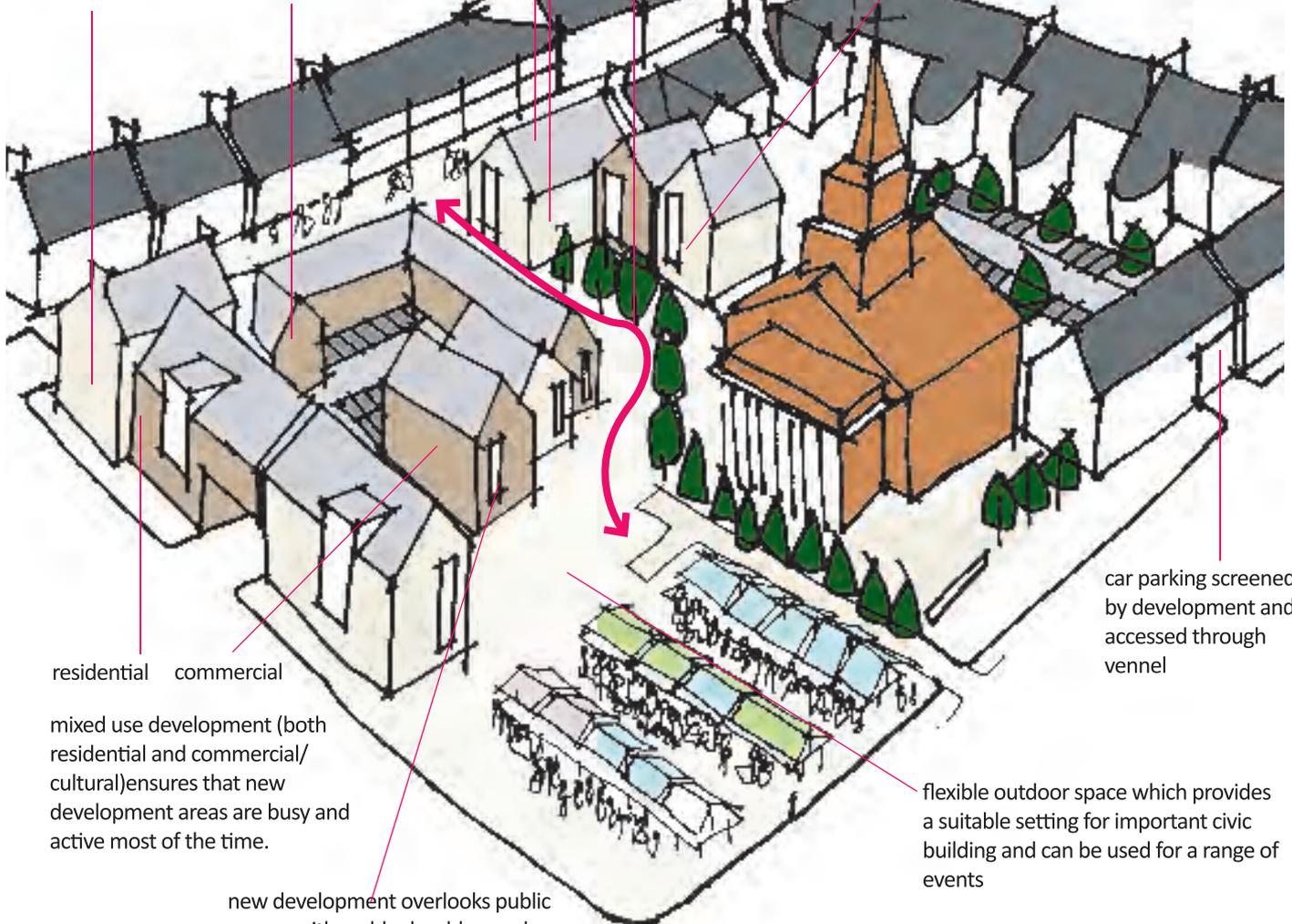
new pedestrian route links different areas of development together.

new development uses innovative materials and contemporary fenestration

newer development has massing broken down into smaller components and uses simple proportions

three storey

two storey



car parking screened by development and accessed through vennel

flexible outdoor space which provides a suitable setting for important civic building and can be used for a range of events

residential commercial

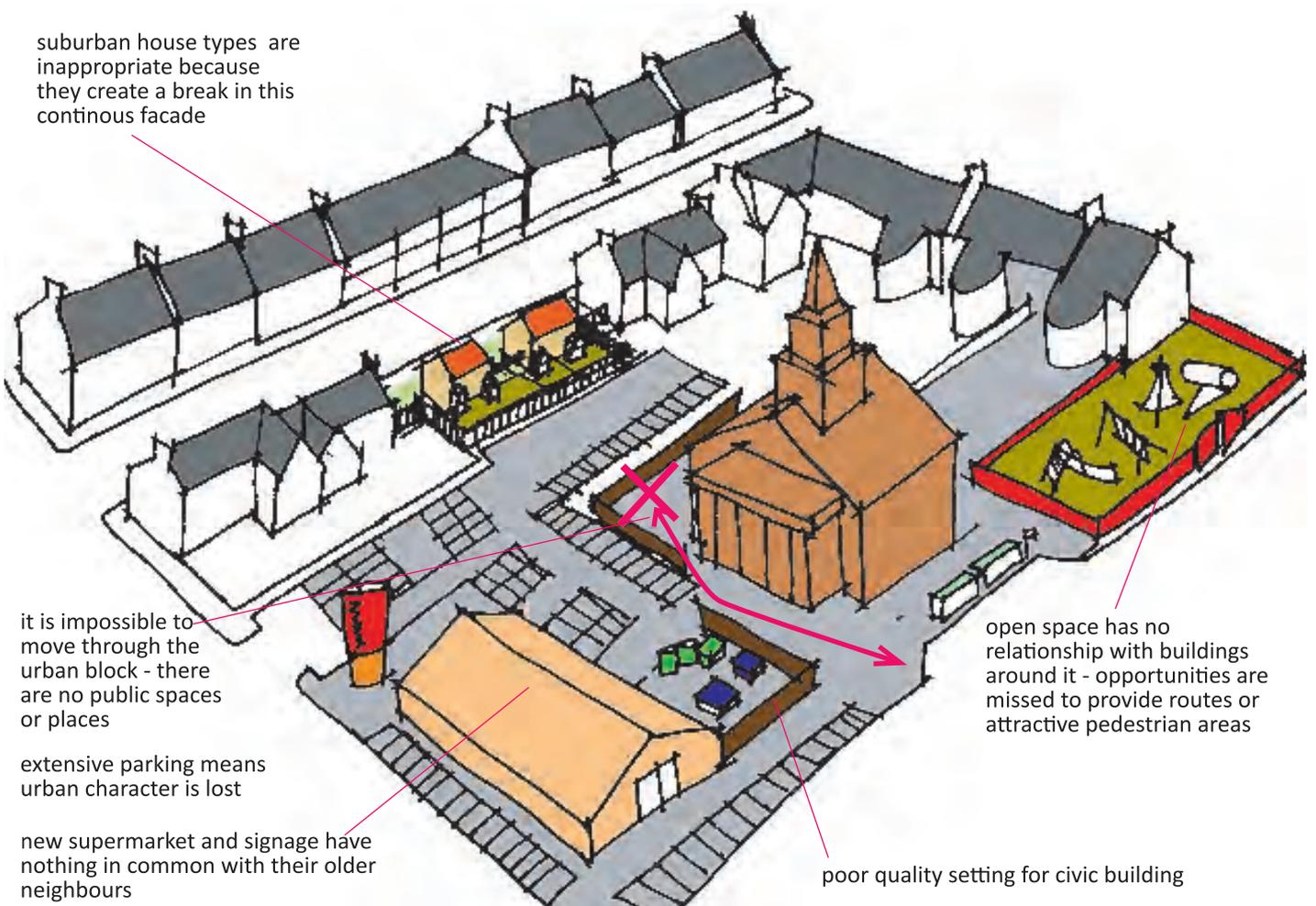
mixed use development (both residential and commercial/cultural) ensures that new development areas are busy and active most of the time.

new development overlooks public spaces, with no blank gables and so passively polices them

X suburban, low density development; not a suitable model

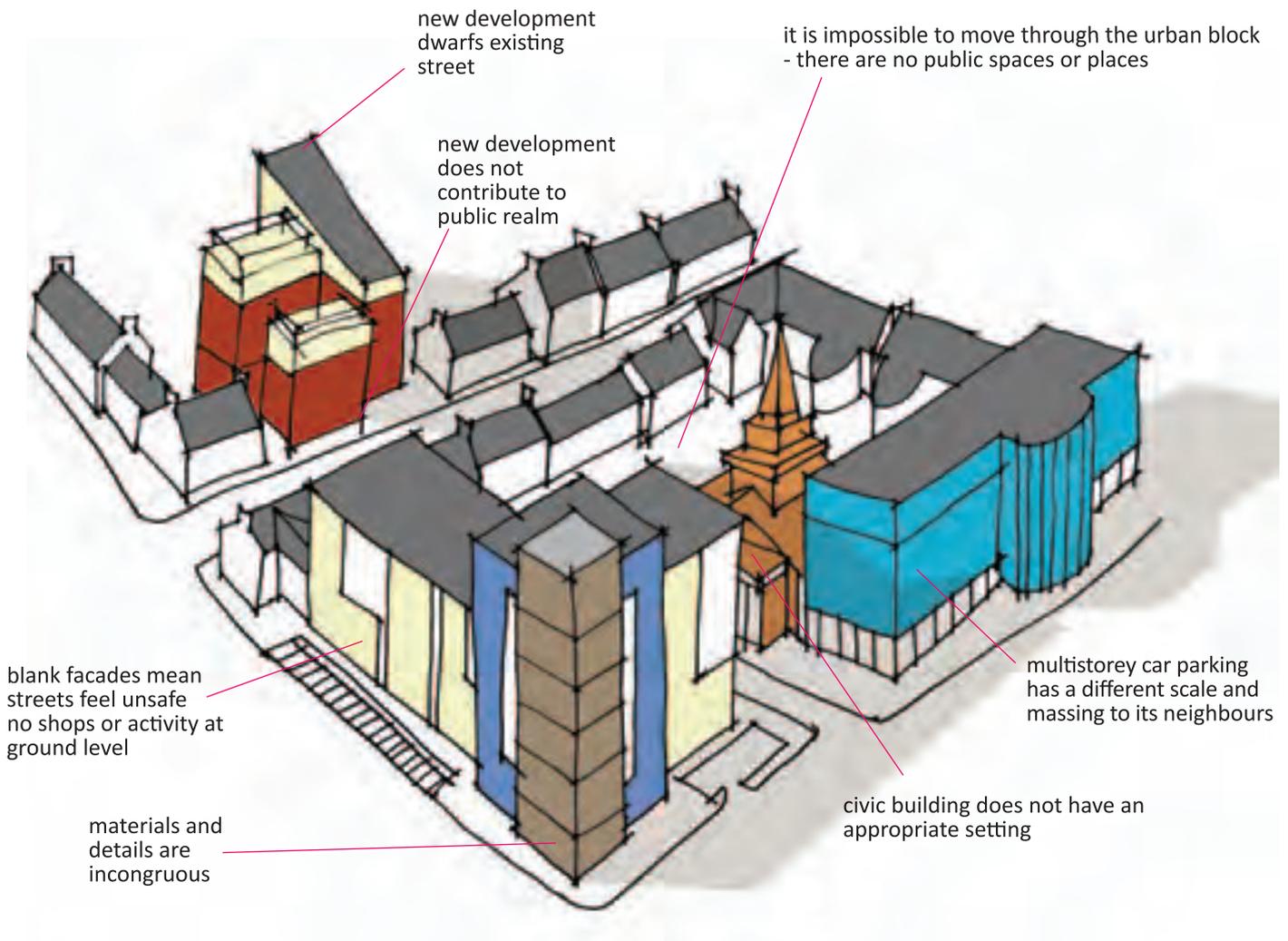
This new development follows 'conventional' planning guidance which aims to protect amenity in more suburban or out-of-town locations. This results in low density residential development with prescribed front garden sizes, driveways, back gardens and screen fencing.

Commercial development complies with requirements for parking and signage which are not appropriate for a town centre where successful older properties do not follow this development pattern.



✗ urban, out of scale development; not a suitable model

New development is designed using standard, urban architectural styles associated with large urban areas. These designs are not sensitive to their location. They are not based upon an understanding of the way the place around their site works, or aim to contribute to the quality of the streets and places. They have a 'city' scale and are designed to be very visible. They are not suitable for North Ayrshire's smaller towns.





infill

Where proposed development is smaller in scale the designer should still, where possible, find a way to “complete” streets sympathetically - taking every opportunity to improve not just aesthetic appearance, but public spaces and connectivity.

The best streets within North Ayrshire have a character derived from the shared qualities of the buildings which frame and shape them. Well-considered design proposals will share these characteristics, and are detailed on the following pages.



good new infill



traditional street pattern retained



car parking accessed through vannel to parking court

development uses common building lines and proportions to integrate with older properties but incorporates contemporary materials and details

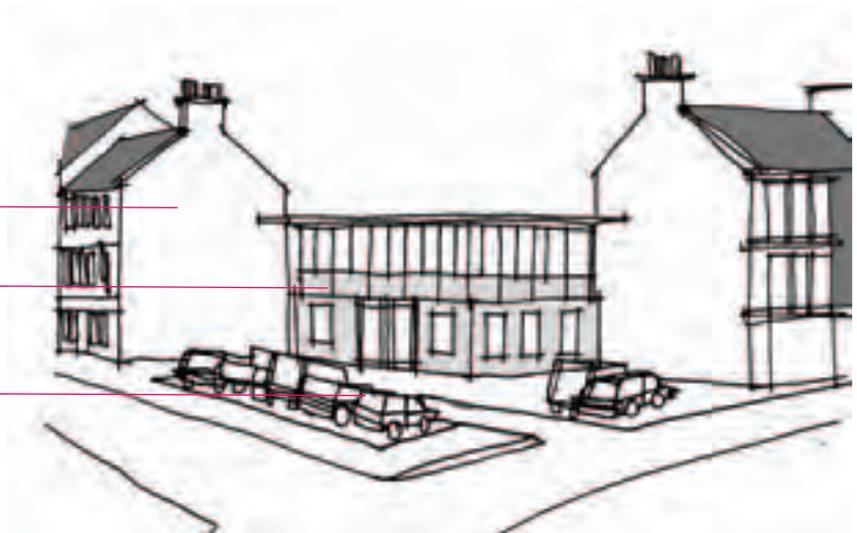


poor new infill

no relationship to street pattern

building has no characteristics in common with its neighbours

car parking is intrusive





scale and massing

Generally, buildings in streets share similar floor to ceilings heights. Because they are built on very similar site 'footprints' they share similar overall plan depths and widths. Consequently the overall effect is of a similar area or street 'scale'. Although there is a lack of absolute uniformity, the best of North Ayrshire's older buildings share an elevational rhythm and sense of regularity which controls the proportion and massing for their particular locale.

New infill within town centres therefore should respect this and aim to:

- retain the same height and number of storeys as their neighbours (generally two and three storeys)
- if required break down larger developments into elements based upon the proportions of adjacent existing buildings

Where new development is significantly out of scale, it will adversely impact on its immediate neighbours, on views within the town, and also on long views from across the landscape; affecting significantly the way in which the North Ayrshire area as a whole is perceived.

✓ appropriate scale and massing

new development has a similar scale to its neighbours- eaves and ridge heights are the same
contemporary reworking of traditional scale and proportions



✗ out of place scale and massing

overscaled new development - both in terms of massing and in terms of the size of each building element - such as the monopitch roof and glazed screens

views to civic building obliterated

shared public spaces used for parking





building line and street facades

In some locations a street's character is derived from a series of flat facades which have a greater area of wall to window. Other streets are very different - their facades are made up of a range of features such as bay windows, balconies and pediments. Some spaces benefit from variety – such as Saltcoat's shopping streets. Others – like the centre of Ardrossan - gain their impact from long views of similar facades where too much difference will have a detrimental impact.

Despite their apparent differences, successful streets and places are made up of buildings which share similar rooflines and floor heights. They often have similar window heights and string courses which continue across the façade of one or more building.

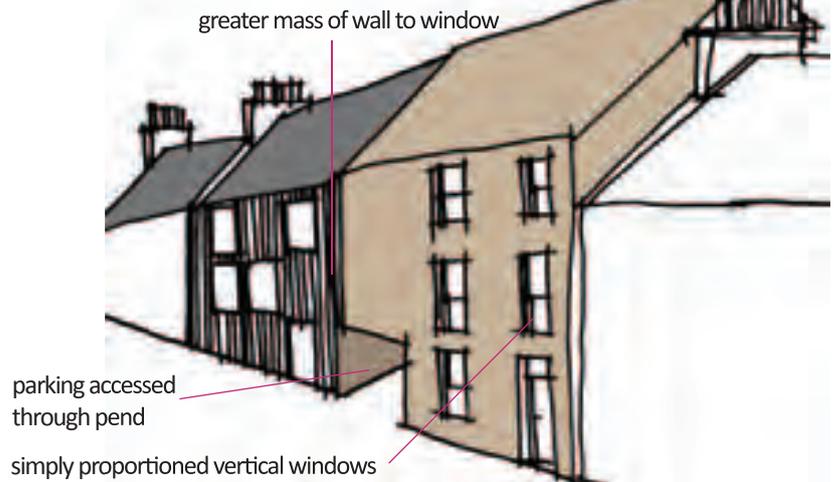
The shared characteristics of well integrated town centre buildings should be used as a basis for new proposals. These generally (but not always!) include:

- **A location at the back of the pavement, in a continuous line**
- **“Active” facades - instead of views of service yards or back gardens, or blank facades**
- **Vertically proportioned windows**
- **Continous shop fascia heights**
- **A range of small scale variation in terms of architectural features and materials**

Existing development : flat facade continues in the same plane for all properties . Simple proportions .



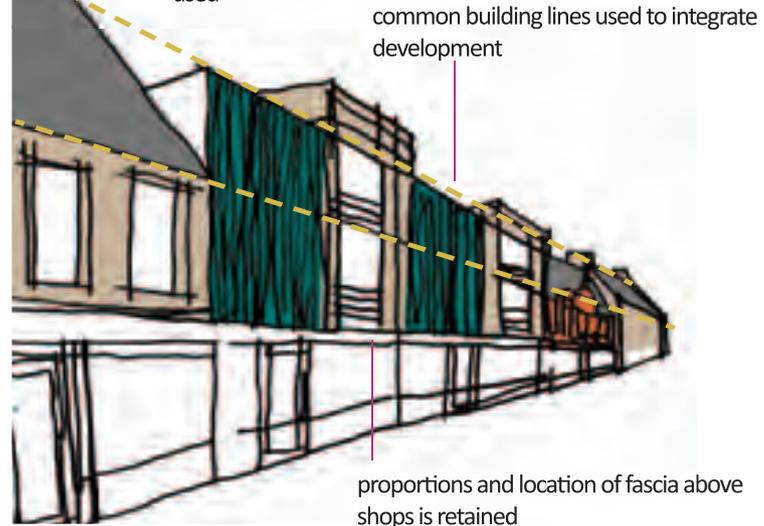
✓ **New development :** massing and proportion are similar to older neighbours, contemporary materials used (eg. timber cladding)



Existing development : a series of complex modulated facades and a range of building heights; shops to ground floor



✓ **New development :** although this is a higher building than it's immediate neighbours, its massing and proportioning are appropriate in the street context. Contemporary materials are used





shaping smaller places

Sometimes, only a small proportion of a development site will directly abut a street or access road. In order to maximise a site's potential, designers need to consider the site as a whole, and make the most of opportunities to shape attractive development behind those properties located on the street.

This type of development pattern is derived directly from North Ayrshire's traditional feued settlement pattern and is an appropriate way to maximise development footprint. It allows designers to minimise a development's impact on streets and spaces and maintain the scale and massing of neighbouring buildings.

These types of small scale developments need to be carefully designed to provide amenity in the form of characterful sheltered courtyard and garden spaces, and to ensure that proposals do not cause problems with overlooking of adjacent properties

✓ good new infill - permeability

- small courtyard space created behind street
- feued development pattern used to inform design proposals
- parking located behind street
- plot size, massing and proportions are similar to successful neighbouring buildings



✓ good new infill - activity

- small scale public space created at entrance
- passive overlooking and an active street frontage
- uses traditional proportions and massing in a contemporary way





materials and details

The previous pages suggest ways in which new contemporary designs can integrate with their setting through appropriate siting, massing, scale and character.

Buildings designed in this way are already integrated with and sympathetic to their neighbours so there is scope for designers to incorporate innovative, contemporary materials and construction details, rather than copying the architectural styles of the past.

Sustainable modern materials and details may incorporate functional features which can help to improve energy efficiency and emissions such as renewable energy solutions ; other environmental possibilities include living roofs, soft engineering and landscaping - these should be considered where suitable opportunities are presented.

Older materials can be used to inspire new, contemporary designs

Historically, designers have been restricted to local materials such as render and stonework. Nevertheless, they have found a range of ways to add interest and variety. They have:

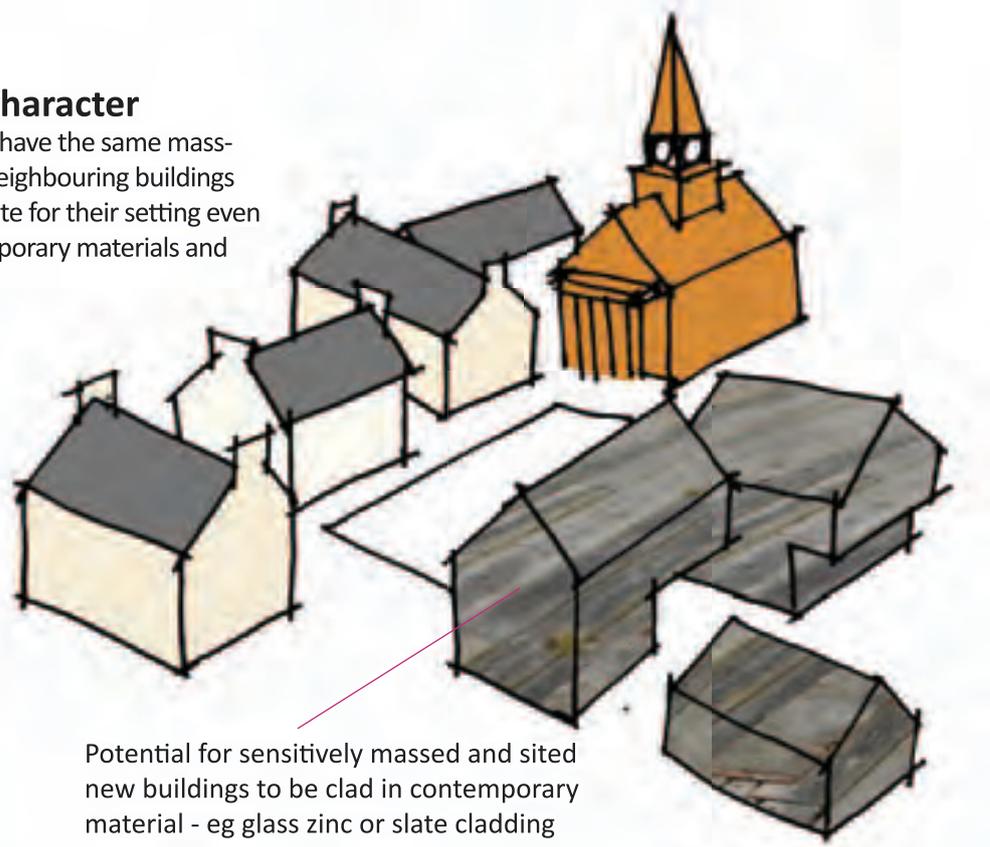
- Explored a wide range of ways of using materials to modulate and articulate facades
- Used materials made up of a series of smaller components, rather than monolithic solutions
- Used colours and materials to add interest and variety
- Designed facades which incorporate a wide range of component shapes and sizes.

Contemporary designers have a much wider range of materials to choose from than their historical counterparts. Nevertheless they can continue older building traditions using newer materials and technologies.



North Ayrshire Character

Contemporary buildings have the same massing and proportions as neighbouring buildings - they still look appropriate for their setting even though they use contemporary materials and details



✓ traditional north ayrshire materials and details



✓ good choices for materials and details

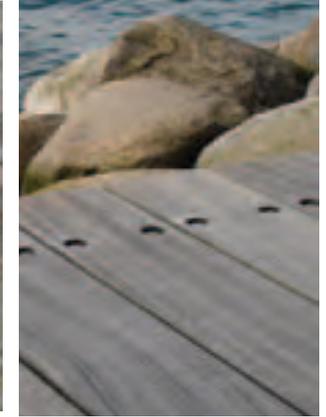
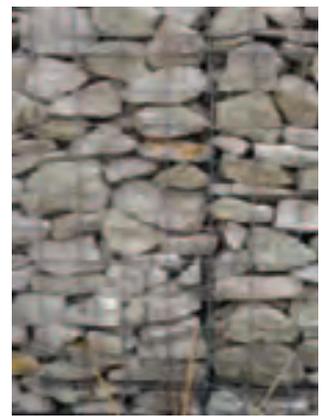
details: derived from traditional counterparts

1. Window retains vernacular vertical proportions
2. Contemporary reinterpretation of simple vernacular roof;
3. Metalwork is a traditional material in the area, here reinterpreted in a modern way;
4. Modern equivalents to traditional eaves details



materials: contemporary versions of tradition

- (top) **traditional material** - random rubble: **contemporary reinvention** - gabion and dry stone walling
 (lower) boardwalk at Irvine Harbourside and new boardwalk at Malmo Sweden



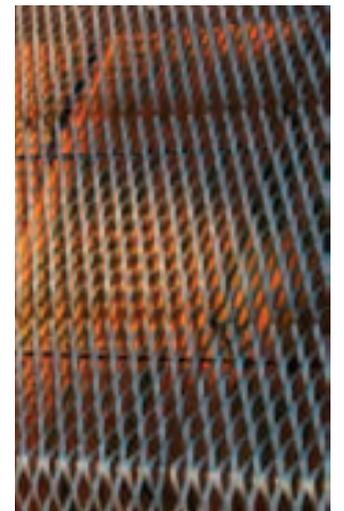
✓ good choices for materials and details

Contemporary choices - well proportioned, small scale components

contemporary metalwork



contemporary glazing



small scale components



✘ standard massing, materials and details

Well-intended designers can produce proposals for North Ayrshire's town centres attempt to incorporate some of the features of good local buildings, but which still look out of place. Often the reason for this is because a building can be a compromise - the result of a designer's attempt to reconcile traditional aesthetics, modern lifestyle, building regulations and newer construction techniques. Particular problems include:-

inappropriate massing and proportion

- **too large a scale:** because of greater floor to ceiling heights than original old properties, or developers aspirations for a greater number of flats on a site
- **standardisation:** many developers use standard house plans they have built elsewhere. These can never, therefore, look particular and specific in a North Ayrshire town centre site.
- **proportions and therefore massing are very different:** many developers 're-elevate' plans based on suburban house types. These types are often deep from front to back and have a narrower frontage in order to make the most of plot sizes. Even with the use of local materials and features these developments tend to look out of place in North Ayrshire's town centres. Also, if floor plans are developed without proper consideration of massing and scale, a property's final proportions can start to become overly complex and therefore inappropriate in their specific location.

inappropriate materials and details

- **materials and construction techniques are suburban in character:** for example, the use of large areas of paviors for parking is more generally associated with suburban developments
- **materials and techniques which contradict local massing and proportions** - local small-scale proportions and massing can easily be overwhelmed by unsympathetic materials and clumsy construction details - for example heavy and complicated eaves and verges.

Urban Solutions - not suitable for North Ayrshire



case study: murdoch nisbet court, newmilns

sustainable urban infill

This new housing for older people and wheelchair users is set within a conservation area, with two storey blocks arranged over the site. Its layout has been specifically designed to integrate with the historic townscape of Newmilns. The new homes are set within walled gardens and provide a sense of security for the residents. Although a modern addition, the buildings are well suited to maintain the architectural richness of this historic town



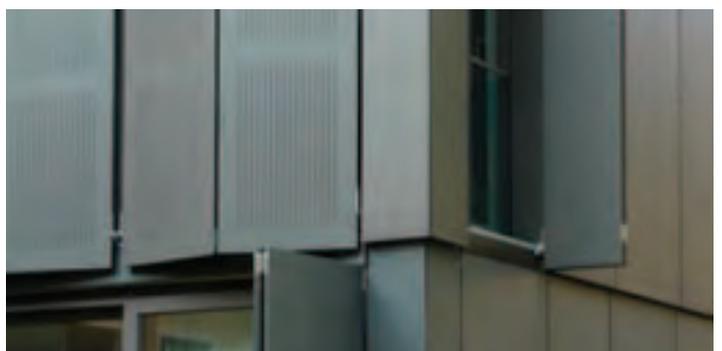
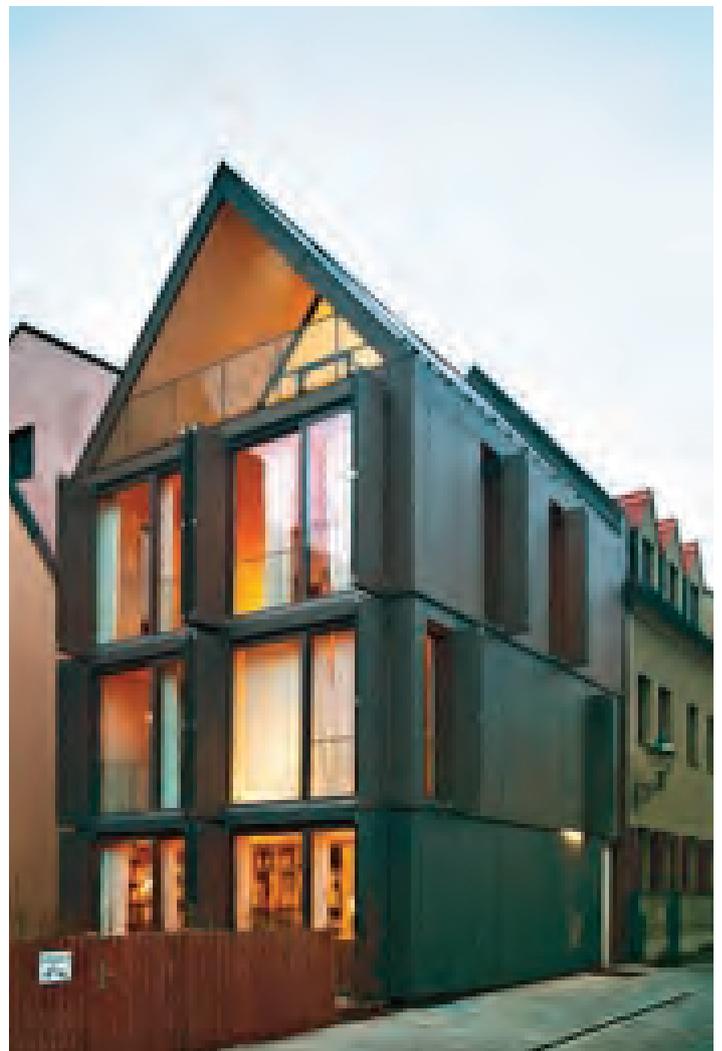
case study: house in Augsburg

exciting contemporary design

The scale, proportions and massing of this dwelling on the edge of a historic town centre is similar to that of its neighbours, but it has a contemporary design. The façade and roof are clad in dark-brown fibre-cement boards; with a generously glazed façade oriented to the neighbouring garden.

The exterior has a series of perforated folding-sliding shutters and curtains which make it possible to regulate the amount of daylight.

A glazed gable, set back from the façade under the roof, makes room for a terrace within the building massing.



PAGES 44-47 HAVE BEEN REMOVED

PLEASE SEE SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE

[Shopfront Design Guidance \(pdf 1.57mb\)](#)



shaping shared spaces

North Ayrshire's town centres comprise different areas, each with their own spatial and architectural character.

Visitors and residents do not generally experience each street or space in isolation, instead they move from one place to another. The way in which spaces inter-relate becomes an important contributor to the public's experience of local distinctiveness and a "sense of place".

Newer development can negatively impact on the way in which people experience places:

- **New roads and/or inappropriate traffic management adversely affects pedestrian movement in town centre streets:** fast moving traffic makes it difficult to cross easily from one side of a shopping street to another, important civic buildings and spaces can become "cut-off" from key parts of the town centre.
- **There is a lack of physical connection within and between recent development areas** (for example retail parks and supermarkets) and historic town centres. This 'zoned' approach to development planning can make it unpleasant to walk between different town "zones". There are often no designed footpath connections between residential, commercial and business or light industrial areas. Often people create their own "desire paths" which in turn can become a nuisance or unsafe.
- **Parking dominates:** civic character and a sense of enclosure can disappear when large parking courts are created as part of a new development. (Parking should be underground, multi-story or reduced significantly (with efficient and free Park and Ride) if Town Centres are to survive, thrive and be attractive)
- **Unsympathetic street furniture and design:** Some newer elements of street furniture introduced in order to improve the public realm can become overly significant - such as poor quality brick planters, red tassellated surfaces for the partially sighted

It is therefore important that new developments do not concentrate solely on the design of buildings themselves, but instead carefully consider how better design proposals can promote connected street networks which are safe, secure and a focus for positive activity.

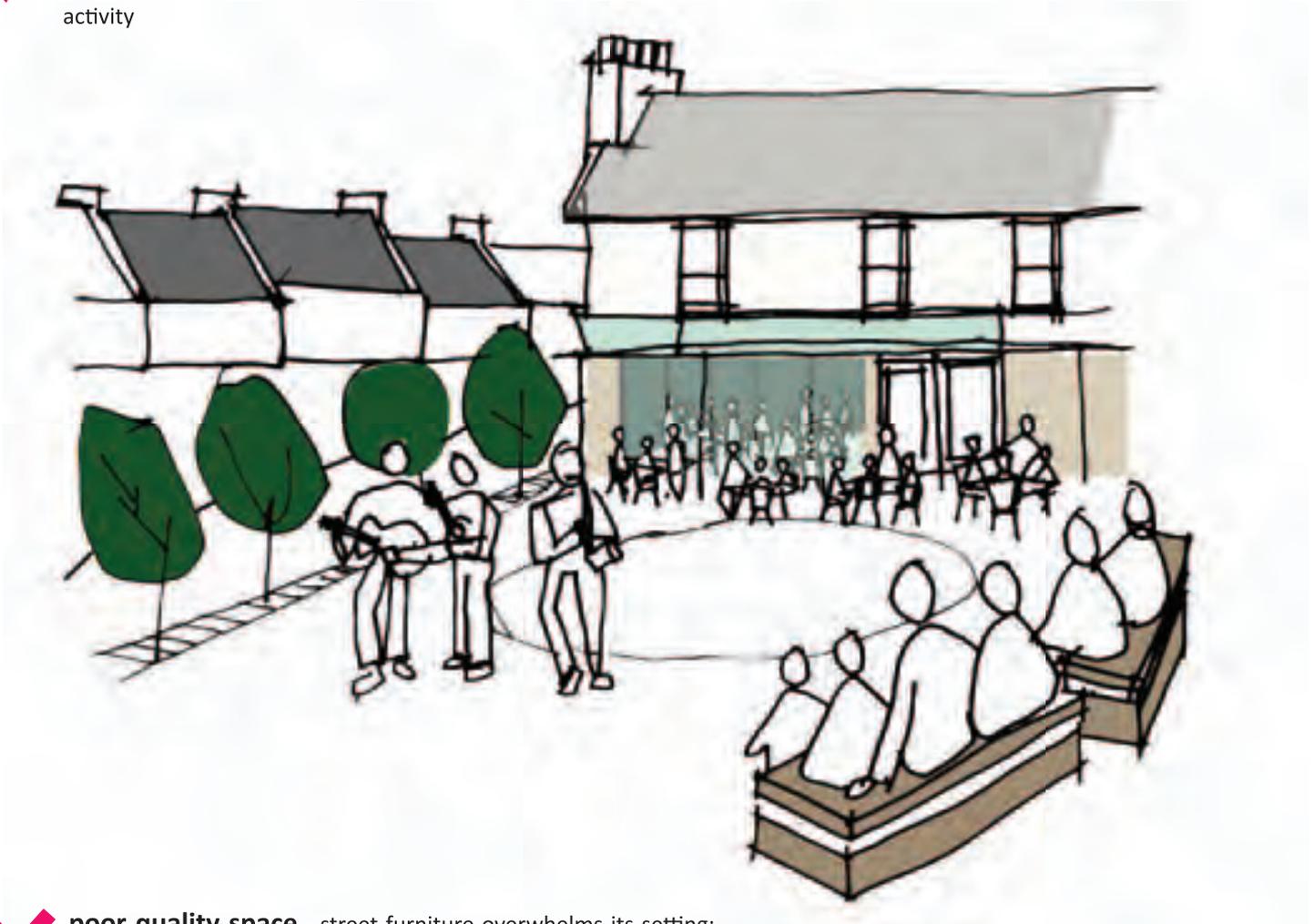
The Guidance on the following pages is structured around a hierarchy of spaces which include:

Safe linkage Smaller scale streets and pedestrian routes which link between different areas - low-key pedestrian connections which are pleasant, safe and secure

Pedestrian Priority Areas These spaces should be a focus for activity. Although they should and can provide access for vehicles, they are primarily a space which should attract and retain pedestrians for shopping and socialising. They should be designed to provide attractive streetscape and spaces where people come to meet each other and where street entertainers and public performances can be accommodated.



good quality space - the background for activity and movement - a much simpler setting which encourages movement and activity



poor quality space - street furniture overwhelms its setting: this space is not flexible - it cannot be used for performance, or markets and it does not relate well to surrounding buildings.





links and routes

low key pedestrian connections which are pleasant, safe and secure

North Ayrshire's towns have much to offer in addition to the experience of the town centres themselves. Walking is an important part of any urban experience and visitors impressions of the area will be significantly improved if they are able to walk between transport hubs, town centres and the coast.

These low-key pedestrian links are important and need to be carefully considered. They should be improved and extended wherever possible as part of new development and public realm investment.

In order to be effective these types of spaces should be:

- **Legible:** Pedestrians should be able to locate follow clearly defined and well 'signed' routes to important locations - e.g. the sea, the high street or the town art gallery . These routes should have a distinctive visual character and, wherever possible, provide clear views to their destination which are not impeded by street furniture.

The best of these routes function without any actual signs; instead buildings clearly contain the route and attractive, high quality ground surfaces emphasise the route's importance.

- **Secure:** pedestrian routes should be overlooked and promote opportunities for informal monitoring and policing through passive surveillance. They should be well-lit. A mix of uses such as shops, cafes and houses, located on these routes means that they are well used and are an important way of encouraging additional safety and amenity.

- **Traffic:** Over recent years there have been important changes in the way that engineers understand the effects of road design on traffic safety. It is now accepted designing very obviously for pedestrian priority is a key way of slowing traffic.

- **Accessible:** All routes should be accessible for those using a wheelchair or with impaired sight or mobility, with dropped kerbs and the use of appropriate, easily negotiable materials. Rather than specifying standard solutions it is suggested that representatives of disabled groups be involved in examining more interesting and contemporary alternatives.

✓ better quality connections



Better quality connections: integrated and inviting pedestrian spaces in Irvine



Better quality connections: (from L to R: the Scottish Parliament; bespoke paving, Denmark; sympathetic traffic calming, Newcastle; good lighting, Ireland)

✗ poor quality connections



1. Saltcoats: route from the town centre to the coast
2. Irvine: poor quality surfaces in a street suggested for a new business centre in the town's Regeneration Plan
3. Kilwinning: poor quality connection between main shopping street and local college



pedestrian priority areas

a focus for pedestrian activity with limited access for vehicles

Within North Ayrshire's town centres there are many locations where pedestrians take priority over traffic. These range from areas which traffic cannot access at all (and where separate arrangements need to be made for servicing shops) to areas where access for traffic is controlled. Often pedestrianisation can bring together a loose series of spaces and designers need to impose a legible structure which will function in a range of locations. To achieve this they need to consider:-

Promoting movement and activity

Outdoor spaces should be designed to provide a backdrop to people and activity. Designers should provide:

- street furniture in a well defined zone so that it is contained and does not overwhelm its setting
- sufficient space for cafes and restaurants to extend onto pavements
- flexible, robust spaces which can be used for a range of events from markets to street performances
- sheltered spaces which are overlooked and feel safe, secure and sheltered from the worst of the elements
- spaces which continue to be used in the evening - by encouraging a mix of uses so that streets are not empty at night
- appropriate public art and attractive lighting design - to stimulate and involve those who use the spaces and engender local pride and identity

Creating identity

Pedestrians and shoppers are influenced by every aspect of their immediate surroundings when they make decisions about the quality of their shopping or visitor experience. It is important to develop interesting and distinctive design solutions which use high quality materials and design.

- Materials, features, installations and details will have local resonance if they link to the area's existing character - designers and public artists might consider historic materials used in the area to see if they can incorporate them into proposals or complement what is already there.
- An overview of materials traditionally used for street finishes in North Ayrshire's towns could be used as a benchmark for sourcing new products (for example, historic paving types already used in the area)

Minimising traffic impact

In these areas vehicle access should be restricted - with access only at certain times of day, for example, or for particular users such as those with a disability.

Where vehicle access is absolutely necessary pedestrian needs should be the starting point for design and traffic calming will therefore be integral to public realm proposals, rather than an "add-on".

An accumulation of traffic signage within or adjacent to pedestrian areas can impact negatively on local character. All Designers and Roads Engineers should specify a minimal number of traffic related signs.



sense of place

this space accommodates a range of uses including comfortable seating with a good view, spill-out spaces for the local pub, space for local markets and events



good quality, low impact parking

pleasant shopping street

spill-out area for pub

continuous space across building frontages physically connects buildings and encourages pedestrians to move from one side of the street to the other



could be anywhere

street is split in two by busy road - it is difficult for pedestrians to move around



signage, lighting and street furniture dominate

limited parking

there is nowhere pleasant to sit outside



shaping spaces: parking

Within North Ayrshire's town centres, residents' aspirations and need for carparking have to be balanced with sustainable practice in terms of urban infill and integrated public transport.

Residents should be encouraged to walk or cycle around town centres, rather than drive. This is a growing trend elsewhere (ironically in the most affluent communities) and has health and costs benefits as well as environmental ones. Nevertheless it is unrealistic to assume that most car owners will be prepared to give up their cars, as they will continue to be needed - especially for out of town journeys. Good quality car parking needs to be incorporated in a sensitive way, and if new development is to truly prioritise creating new high quality town centre areas innovative solutions will be required to be used. Designing Streets Policy should be considered and advice should be sought with the Planning and Roads Departments at an early date.

Parking proposals should not be adopted that compromise the design quality and urban amenity of new developments. Consideration should be given to:

- **dividing larger parking areas into a series of discreet, small parking courtyards** located behind new development, not on the street - generally up to ten spaces, separated by hard or soft landscaping. These can be accessed through a pen in order to maintain a continuous facade facing onto busy streets.
- **basement/part basement parking or multistorey parking** ideally parking should be "designed-in" to new proposals. Larger multistorey car parking (for example parking associated with shops) should be located within the centre of the urban block and its visual impact reduced by other built form. Basement and semi-basement parking can be provided in town centre development; whilst more expensive this parking solution is used more frequently now in Scotland than previously.
- **creating individual parking spaces** in well-designed areas of high quality hard-standing within developments. (for example, at Poundbury dense housing layouts have been provided with high levels of resident parking which is accommodated in good quality garages and behind walls in courtyards and gardens. It does not, therefore, dominate views of streets and is also safer.



Better solutions:

1. Parking contained and screened (Copenhagen)
2. Courtyard parking areas defined by high quality hard surfaces (Newcastle on Tyne)
3. High quality public parking spaces (Irvine)
4. Shared surfaces and informal parking (Poundbury)



Poor quality existing car parking in North Ayrshire's towns



case study: denmark, nicolai janssen innovative designs

The designer has used a range of unexpected materials and structures to make this external space distinctive and interesting. It has become a focus for those living and visiting the area.

at night



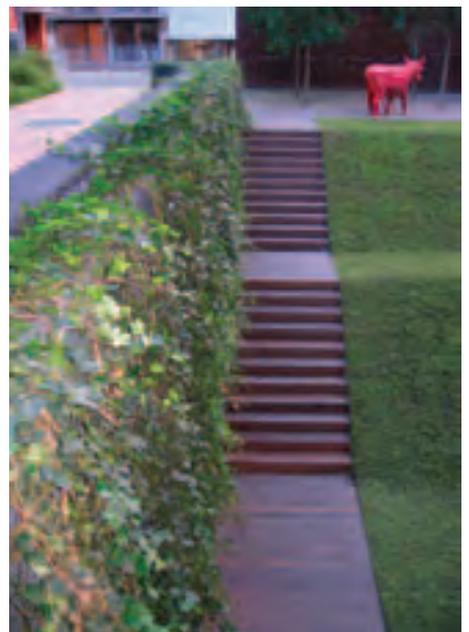
during the day

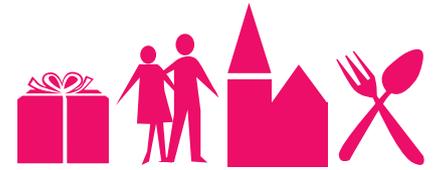


case study: urban splash (manchester)

innovative designs

New development within Manchester's city centre frames and shapes an elegant small scale courtyard. Although situated behind new development and the street care has been taken in the choice of materials and details to provide a space which - although accessible to the public - communicates its function as a more private shared space. The courtyard is located over a basement parking area.





summary

• **Landscape and townscape setting**

Sometimes new development which has been carefully considered in terms of how it integrates with its immediate surroundings can be unexpectedly prominent both in terms of its immediate locale, and on views towards the site from elsewhere.

Designers should aim to provide

- **developments which are respectful of adjacent buildings and make connections with them**
- **developments that impact positively on wider and more extensive views from elsewhere**
- **feature buildings should be incorporated at nodes and important locations where they would help a visitor to locate themselves and understand the town.**
- **elsewhere designers should acknowledge that some buildings should be designed to quietly fit in to the townscape.**

• **Using settlement patterns to inform design proposals**

New urban infill is an opportunity to both provide new, good quality accommodation and to shape attractive, well-used public spaces. Because this kind of development will already be integrated with its setting there should be scope for designers to incorporate innovative, contemporary materials and construction details, rather than copying the architectural styles of the past.

Designers therefore need to develop co-ordinated, integrated solutions which achieve the following:

- **a Sense of Place achieved through the design of active and interesting public spaces**
- **integration with the wider Town Centre**
- **an Appropriate Scale; avoiding new development which dominates small scale neighbours,**
- **inclusive and accessible places;- new development needs to be accessible to all and to be safe and secure.**

• **Infill, scale and massing**

Although there is a lack of absolute uniformity, the best of North Ayrshire's older buildings share an elevational rhythm and sense of regularity which controls the proportion and massing for their particular locale.

New infill within town centres therefore should respect this and Designers should aim to:

- **retain the same height and number of storeys as their neighbours (generally two and three storeys)**
- **if required, break down larger developments into elements based upon the proportions of adjacent existing buildings.**

• **Building line and street facades**

The shared characteristics of well integrated town centre buildings should be used as a basis for new proposals.

These generally (but not always!) include:

- **A location at the back of the pavement, in a continuous line**
- **"Active" facades - instead of views of service yards or back gardens, or blank facades with no entrances.**
- **Vertically proportioned windows**
- **Continuous shop fascia heights**
- **A range of small scale variation in terms of architectural features and materials**

- **Materials and details**

Designers should demonstrate an understanding of local character and contribute to their locale by.....

- Responding to key local design and construction elements or features - e.g. massing, siting, scale, proportion, window patterns, materials or details
- Referring to the attractive characteristics of adjacent, successful buildings
- Ensuring the building sits well in its site

Good developers and designers should choose materials and construction details specifically for their town centre location, rather than incorporating standard solutions which do not take account of their site.

Designers should therefore incorporate the following into their proposals:

- Environmentally friendly, low energy construction
- Locally manufactured materials and components
- Modern materials and details which complement their older counterparts

- **Shopfronts**

Shopfronts are one of the most immediate and direct ways in which a town centre's success is communicated to its residents and visitors. Successful shops with good quality shopfronts give an impression of affluence and confidence which attracts shoppers to the area

Designers should recognise that shop front design is important. Shopfronts should therefore:

- Complement the building of which they are a part
- Contribute to visitor's experience after shops are shut
- Be carefully detailed to engage the public's interest
- Be accessible: shops should be designed for ease of access for people with mobility problems and impairments.

- **Shaping shared spaces**

The way in which spaces inter-relate is an important contributor to the public's experience of local distinctiveness and a "sense of place".

Low-key pedestrian links are important and designers need to develop proposals which are:

- Legible
- Secure
- Traffic impact reduced
- Accessible

Pedestrian priority areas should be a focus for pedestrian activity with limited access for vehicles. To achieve this, Designers need to consider:-

- Promoting movement and activity
- Creating identity
- Minimising traffic impact

Parking proposals should not be adopted that compromise the design quality and urban amenity of new developments. Consideration should be given to:

- Dividing larger parking areas into a series of discreet, small parking courtyards
- Basement/part basement parking or multistorey parking
- Creating individual parking spaces