

heavitree road exeter

design and access statement
april 2025

**brown
+company**



introduction

purpose of this document

This design and access statement is provided in support of the proposed erection of 414 co-living units and 399 purposed built student accommodation (pbsa) rooms on the former police headquarters and magistrate court at Heavitree Road, Exeter.

The submission application follows an extensive pre application process, working in close collaboration with members of Exeter City Council and consultation with the general public and elected members of Exeter City Council. A summary of the pre application process and changes are included within this document.

revision: P2 - 15/04/25

executive summary

The proposed application seeks to develop 414 co-living units and 399 purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) rooms on the site of the former police headquarters and magistrates’ court on Heavitree Road, Exeter.

This proposal directly addresses and resolves key concerns raised in a previous application on the site. As a result, the scheme has been completely redesigned to significantly reduce its overall impact, creating a high-quality development that better aligns with the character of the area.

Key Design Changes

Scale & Footprint

1. Instead of the previously proposed two large buildings, the new design features seven smaller, more appropriately scaled buildings. This change reduces the overall height, footprint, and mass of the development.

2. Building heights across the site have been lowered, now ranging between four and six storeys. The tallest structures have been placed in less sensitive locations, while lower buildings are positioned near areas such as St Luke’s Campus and Higher Summerlands. Additionally, buildings have been set back from sensitive boundaries to further minimise their impact.

Permeability

3. The redesigned scheme introduces both visual and physical permeability across the site, reducing its previously overbearing nature. New sightlines and connections are created from Heavitree Road, Gladstone Road, Higher Summerlands, and St Matthew’s Close.

4. A newly introduced public route will allow pedestrian and cycle access through the site, linking Heavitree Road with St Matthew’s Close to encourage active travel.

Ecology

5. The revised proposals aim to minimize ecological disruption while enhancing biodiversity. The scheme prioritises retaining as many existing trees and green spaces as possible, while also introducing native hedges, and over 150 new trees to improve the site’s ecological value.

Use & Amenity Spaces

6. The new design incorporates two spacious courtyards, one for each type of residence. These areas are designed to provide privacy and security while remaining open and well-lit, offering high-quality green spaces for residents.

7. The balance of uses within the development has been adjusted, reducing the number of PBSA rooms and increasing the provision of co-living spaces. This shift allows for a greater number of affordable homes in line with the Exeter Local Plan.

8. The co-living model has been refined to foster a stronger sense of community. Shared kitchens are now located on every floor, while ground-floor amenities such as a gym, theatre kitchen, lounges, and workspaces enhance opportunities for communal living. These improvements align with the principles of the Greater London Guidance on shared living.



summary of pre application

summary of pre application process

An extensive pre application process has been undertaken, consisting of four meetings summarised below prior to formal pre application responses were received from all required consultees. Following receipt of the formal comments two further meetings were held with the planning officer and urban designer which as resulted in the proposed submitted.

- pre application meeting 01 - 02/05/24** - site visit and presentation with planning officer and urban designer to review the new design direction
- pre application meeting 02 - 23/05/24** - presentation to establish key views, aligning with liveable exeter and movement in and around the site.
- pre application meeting 03 - 28/06/24** - presentation of site layouts, site movement and hierarchy. initial massing provided of proposed scheme
- pre application meeting 04 - 22/07/24** - discussion with highways regarding vehicular site access, future bus lane and fire tender access.
- pre application meeting 05 - 15/01/24** - discussion following the receipt of the formal pre application comments and potential alterations to the scheme to resolve outstanding comments
- pre application meeting 06 - 05/02/24** - presentation of alterations including introduction of pedestrian route through the site.

key pre application comments

- Below is a summary of the key pre-application comments on design, and how they have been addressed (green) within this application.
- Promote active travel through the introduction of a new public route through the site.*
- The submitted scheme includes a new permissible route that connects Heavitree Road to St Matthews Close. This route is located between the two uses and will be open to use by members of the public.
- Concern that the Co-living scheme does not provide sufficient amenity space.*
- Amenity space within the Co-living has been increased to achieve over the 3.2 sqm per bed as stated within the GLA guidance.
- Consider the design to the gable ends onto Heavitree Road. Fenestration has been altered to provide end units have dual aspect.*
- Gable ends design has been reviewed and redesigned to create greater variation and interest onto Heavitree Road.
- Consider the rotation of co-living block 3 (rear block) to relate to St Matthews Close and avoid awkward spaces on the perimeter of the site.*
- Coliving block 3 has been rotated, this improves the outlook for residents on Higher Summerlands.

- Co-living amenity is all located in one area, consequently rooms in separate blocks are not well related to the facilities.*
- Co-living model has be adjusted to allow for shared kitchens to be located on every floor to align with the GLA guidance, the amenity has also been split to allow better access for residents
- Provide a variety of rooms sizes within the co-living, and opportunity for future provision to join rooms to create 1 bed apartments appropriate for dual occupancy.*
- The layouts have been altered to allow for a greater variety of room sizes. Due to the construction of the partitions (lightweight partitions), these could be removed for future alterations to include a greater variation of rooms such as dual occupancy, see adaptability section.
- Public facing amenity spaces to be designed to allow for some 'private' non public facing areas.*
- Indicative layouts for the amenity have been provided within the application which demonstrates a variety of amenity provisions. Furthermore, some amenity has been relocated to the southern end of the site, which is away from any public views.
- Introduce glazing to the staircases and internal glazing into the shared kitchens to encourage use.*
- Glazing has been introduced to the staircases. A internal glazed partition has been introduced between the co-living amenity spaces and the core area.



summary of consultation

design review - comments

On the 13th August 2024 brown + company, dpp and oobe presented the new direction to design west, the design review recommendations were as follows:

- welcomed the shift away from the previous scheme with the creation of a more granular scheme.
- important to take safeguarding issues into account in the public/private demarcation of the space without relying on signage.
- breaking of blocks and reduction of height and scale is welcomed, but needs further explanation and robust evidence before delving deeper into detail.
- contribution of the landscape is essential to the success of the scheme, with a 3D approach required to result in delightful opportunities between the buildings.
- Root protection zones of existing trees need to be shown and resolved.
- acknowledgement of the wider heritage context and how that informs the height and massing of the new proposed buildings.
- scheme should be influenced by renewable energy measures and liveable Exeter's overarching themes.
- consideration to be made to improve pedestrian movement and crossing given the anticipated increase in foot traffic.
- innovative use of surface materials could help downplay the impact of the service road.
- the panel recommend some incremental 3D massing studies which will lead to more coherent representations of the spaces, gaps and access arrangements.

We have reviewed and considered the comments provided within the design review and have made alterations to the design as detailed within this report

public consultation

A public consultation was held at the New Town Community Association on the 25th October 2025. Six boards were presented at a drop in session which included local councillors and members of the public. Generally the scheme was welcomed a summary of comments on the design are below. Please refer to DPPs public consultation document for further information.

- Layout of the plan is significantly improved, potential to add more seating and tables within the landscape design
- Proposed designs look good, consider design alterations to the gable ends of the co-living blocks. Could the existing sculpture on the police headquarters be reused.
- introduce basement or rooftop parking to negate any negative impact on the local residents
- Layout is good, with several blocks around courtyards. Consider increasing the height of the buildings on heavitree to address the key approach into the city centre
- Concerned about the potential new route to the north west corner of the site, and the impact the local residents within St Matthews Close.
- Support for the principle of high density development, it is essential to upgrade crossings.



1.0 site analysis

- 1.1 project brief
- 1.2 site location
- 1.3 site history
- 1.4 site analysis
- 1.5 liveable exeter

1.1 project brief



1.1.1 overview

The project brief is to develop the site of the former Police Headquarters on Heavitree Road to create a residential student scheme that respects the existing site, its history and neighbouring relationships. It should engage with the public and attempt to improve infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists along Heavitree Road as a busy main route into the city centre.



1.2 site location

1.2.1 existing site

The Site is currently vacant, previously home to a former police headquarters and magistrate court and ancillary office accommodation.

The ambulance station is a separate site which has been developed as a co-living development named The Gorge. This campus of compatible civic uses and buildings date from the late 1950s. They are bespoke designed and the scope for suitable re-use is limited.

The buildings are arranged centrally on a large plot around 1.2 hectares in size. They are set back behind a perimeter of greensward to the south and Eastern boundary which includes mature ornamental planting, trees, and also some utilities. This creates a separation between the site, heavitree road and development at higher summerlands. The Western site boundary similarly includes a grass buffer at a smaller scale which again sets the site back from Gladstone Road.

Buildings range in scale and height with single, two, three and five floors for the central admin office block. Behind the greensward is a perimeter access road and car parking, with the main point of entry being from Heavitree Road in the south eastern corner of the Site and secondary access points in Gladstone Road.

To the rear of the Site between the campus buildings and the boundary with Saint Matthews Close is the bulk of the car parking, which is open, surface level and tarmac surfaced.



1.3 site history



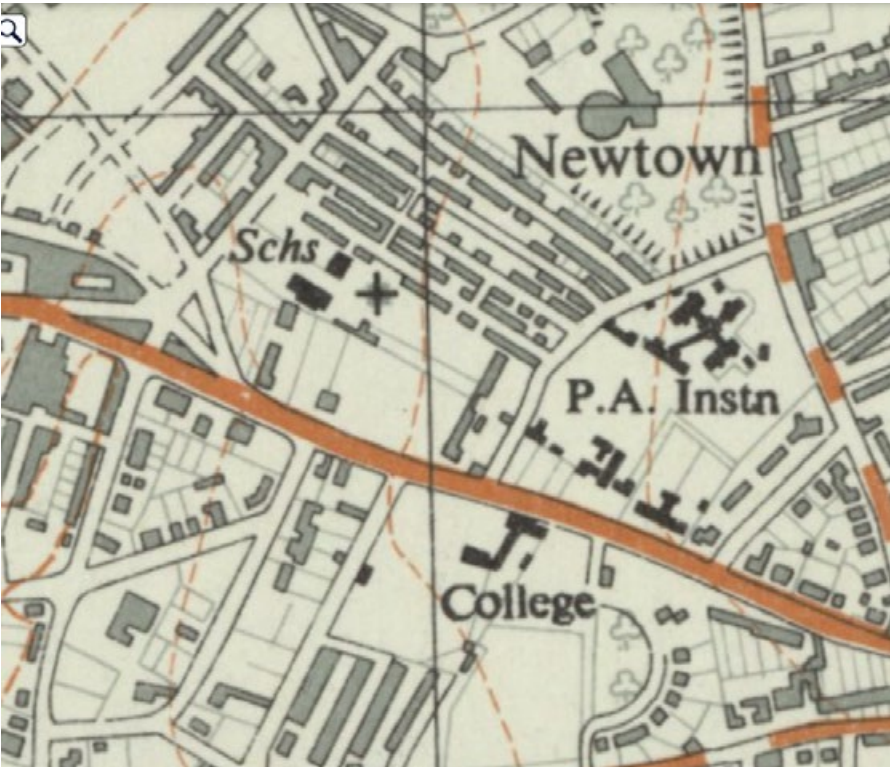
1905 Plan

The site was occupied by terraced houses running in a continuous block parallel to the street. The terraced block features a generous offset to provide a front garden and large green rear gardens for each of the properties. To the East of the site the area was utilised as a plant nursery giving the junction between Gladstone Road and Heavitree Road a predominantly commercial / community usage and activation.

1949 Plan

The site has been predominantly cleared following the WWII bombing with the exception of one of the terraces which was salvageable. The nursery to the East also retained its function at this time.

(St Lukes College Bombed)



1963 Plan

The site is now occupied by the dominating mass of the police headquarters. The footprint of which rivals the main building at St Lukes College as it existed at that point and replaces the site of the nursery. The site becomes more of a private landscape the nature of the composition making it seem unapproachable to pedestrians and passers by

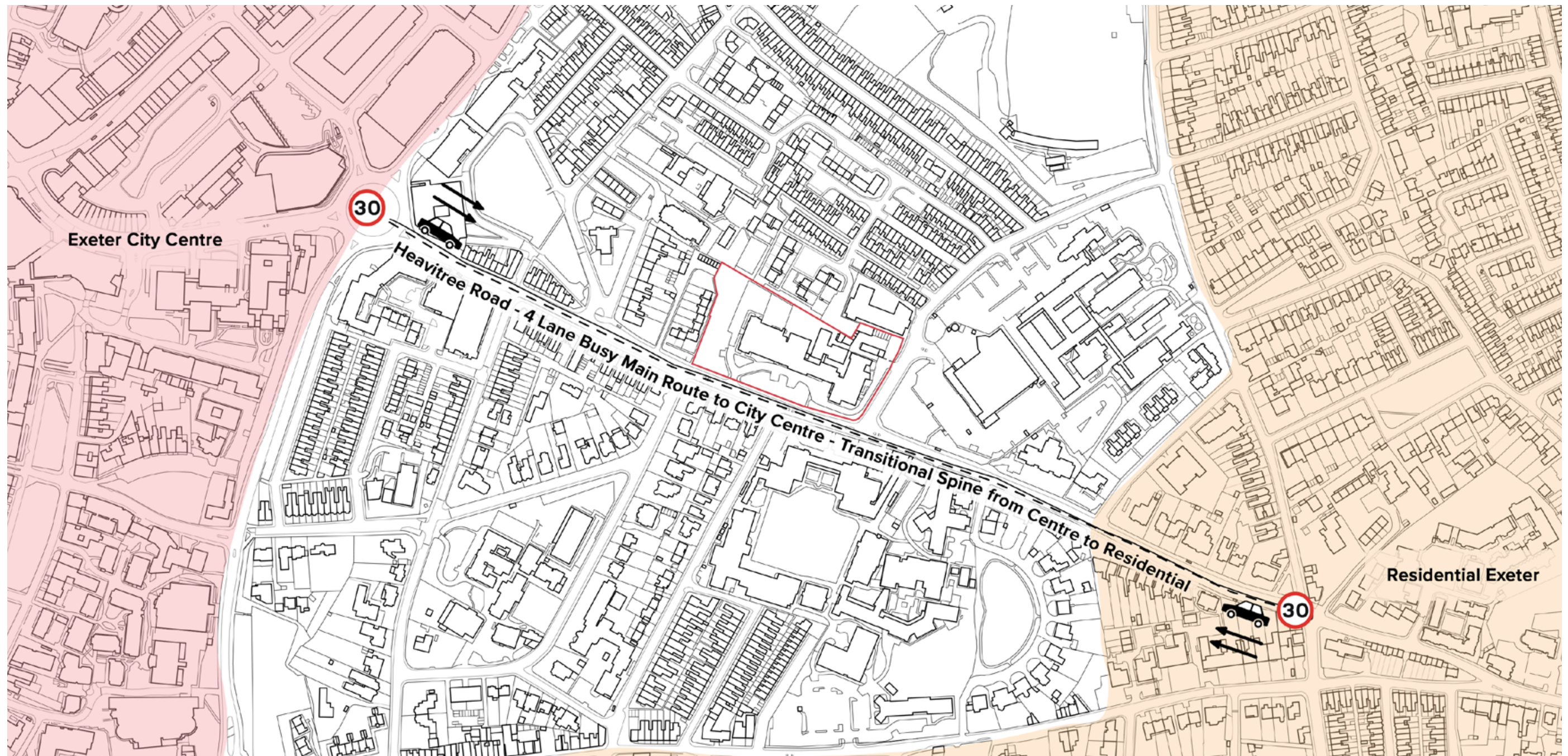
(St Lukes College Rebuilt)

refer to Montagu Evans Heritage statement for further historic analysis of the site.

1.4 site analysis

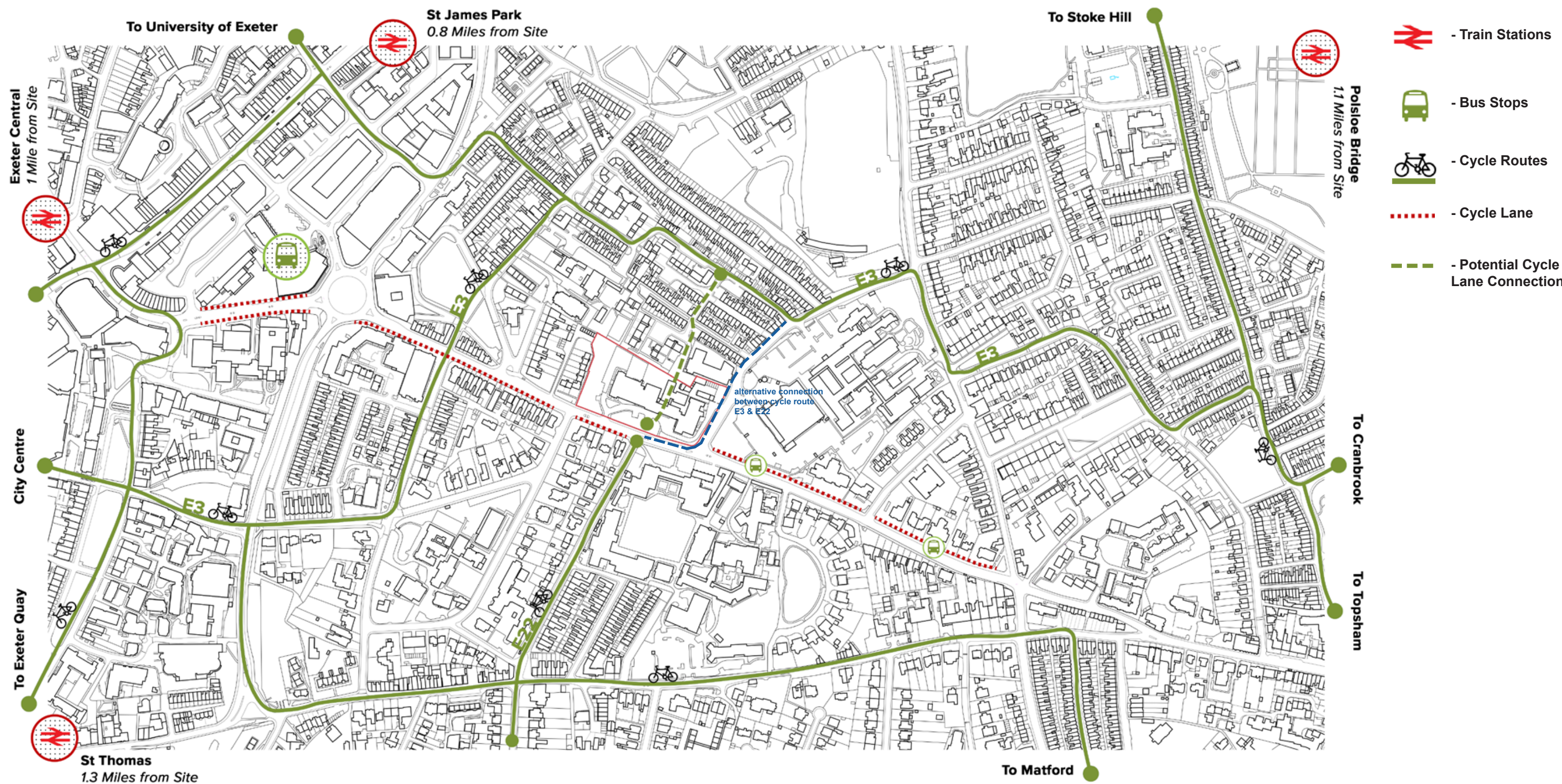
1.4.1 heavitree road as a transitional spine

Heavitree Road likely has origins as a Roman Road, and is still of the main routes into Exeter City Centre. The 2023 Active Streets Trial for the Heavitree / Whipton noted that most of their residential streets - including heavitree road traffic volume surpass 2000 vehicles a day which tends to discourage people from choosing to cycle. As a result cycling provision and integration should become a consideration in the proposed scheme to ensure cycling becomes a more realistic option for commuters by providing connecting routes that allow cyclists to diverge onto quieter safer roads as opposed to travelling along primary axes such as Heavitree Road.



1.4 site analysis

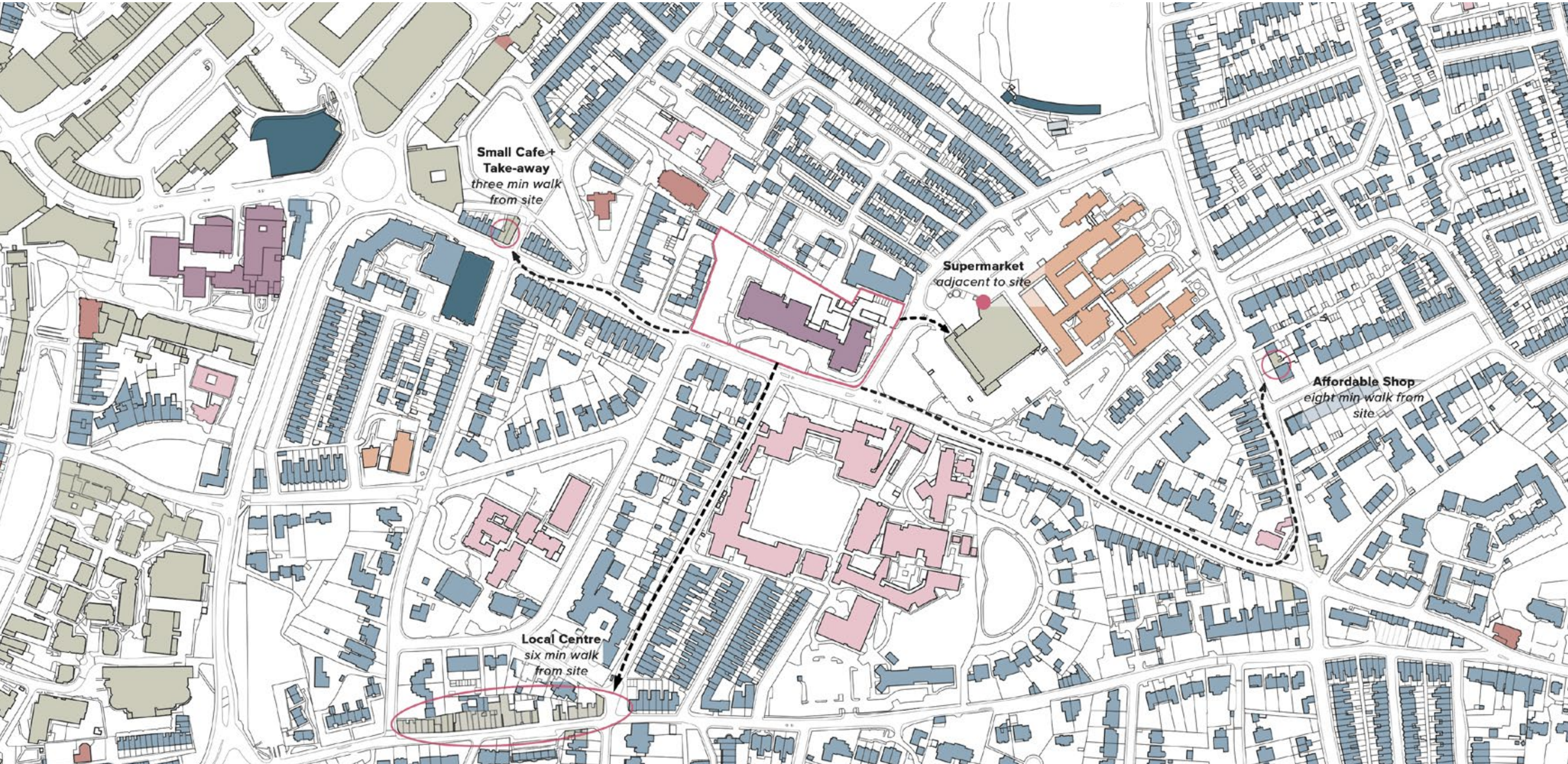
1.4.2 locality, cycle routes and transport links



1.4 site analysis

1.4.3 local uses

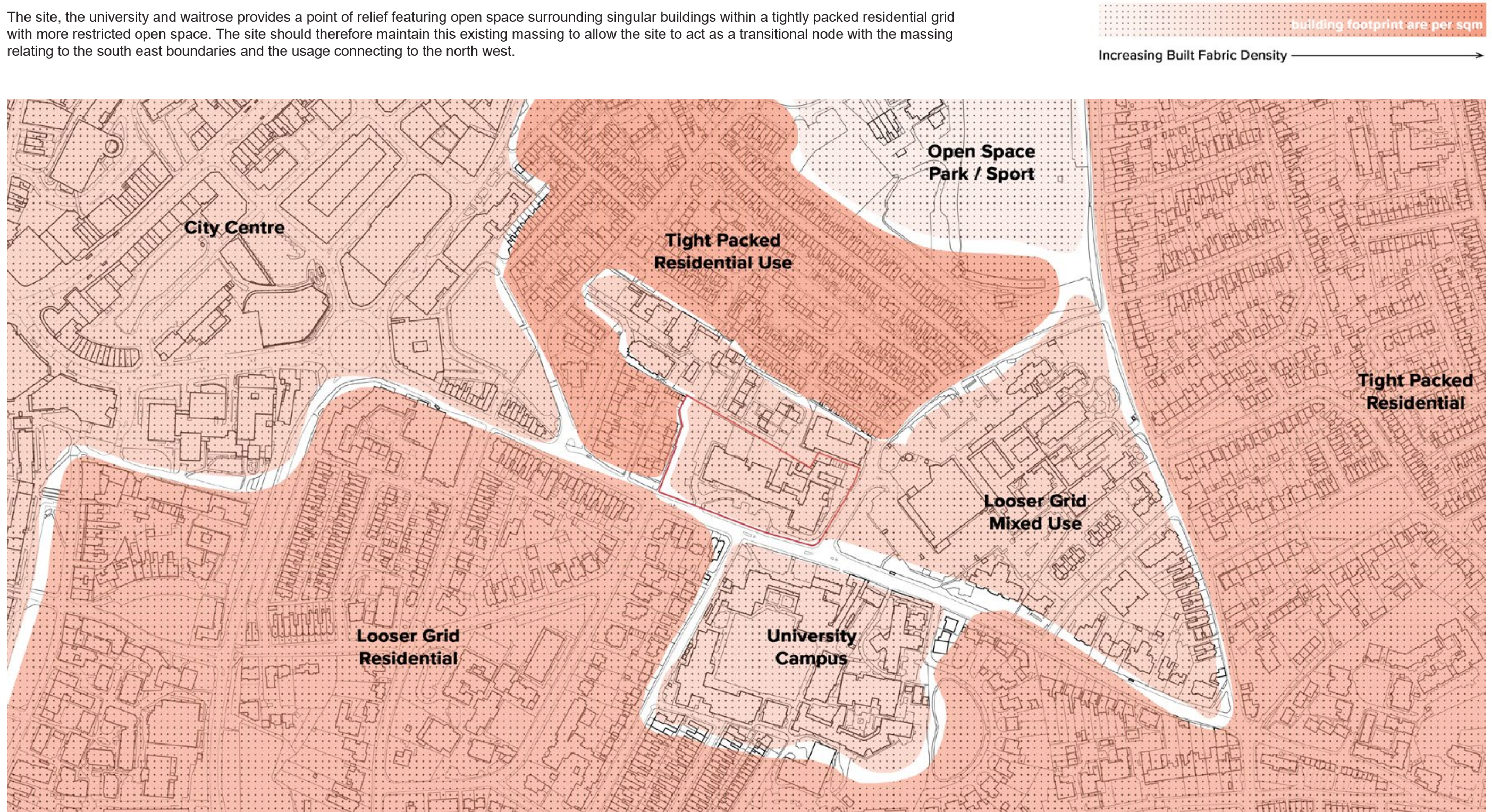
The proposed site along with the university and waitrose provides a central node of mixed use plots, these are surrounded by predominantly residential use. Reinstating residential use is an appropriate approach to the site. There are several key local commercial amenities including shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs within walking distance of the site.



1.4 site analysis

1.4.4 urban massing density

The site, the university and waitrose provides a point of relief featuring open space surrounding singular buildings within a tightly packed residential grid with more restricted open space. The site should therefore maintain this existing massing to allow the site to act as a transitional node with the massing relating to the south east boundaries and the usage connecting to the north west.



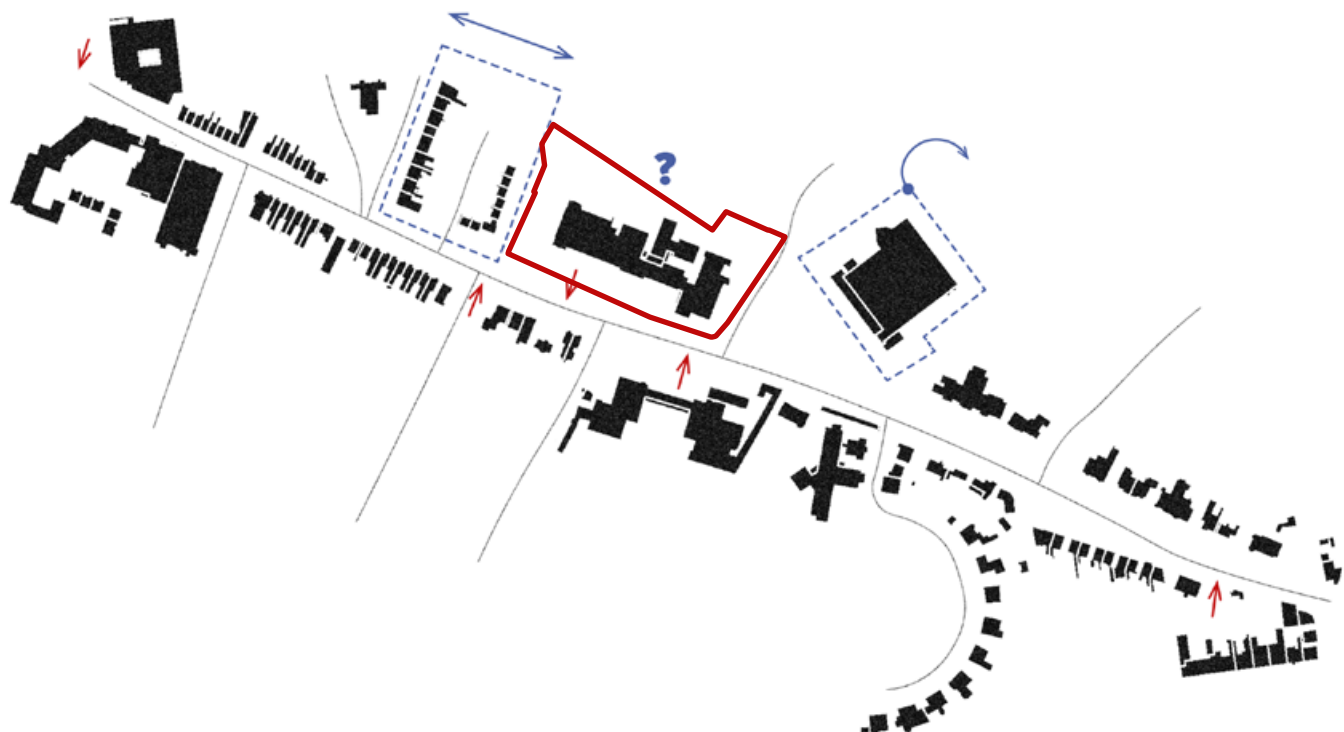
1.4 site analysis

1.4.6 urban grain



heavitree road / 1890 urban grain

blocks predominantly run parallel to the street grain with lower Summerlands beginning to break away from this by running perpendicular

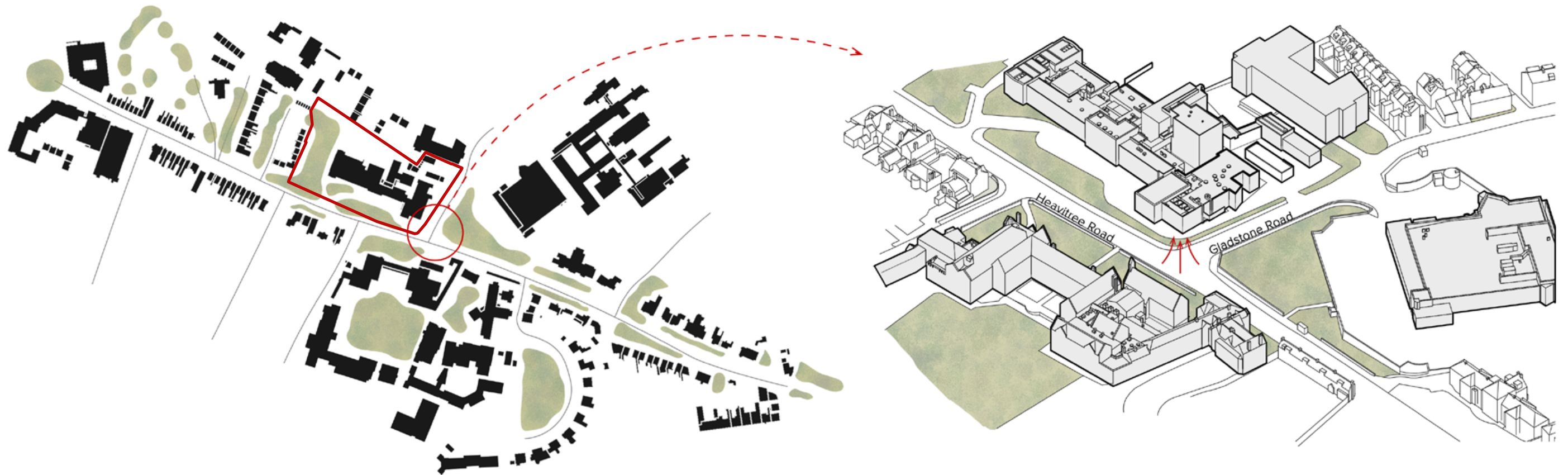


heavitree road / present urban grain

higher summerlands then mirrors the perpendicular layout of historic lower summerlands which runs perpendicular to heavitree road. The development at waitrose further contrasts the original parallel relationship the blocks had to heavitree road through its angled position to parallel axis. The proposed development will attempt to transition between the perpendicular blocks at the 'summerlands' and the remainder of the parallel blocks along heavitree road by integrating two grains within the scheme.

1.4 site analysis

1.4.7 green corridor



With the exception of the green roundabout, the western end of heavitree road lacks planting and green space. Gradually as the area becomes more residential, the built form becomes set back from the road, providing opportunity for greenery. Beginning at lower summerlands, heavitree road becomes a green corridor into the city centre. The junction of Gladstone road becomes a key node with large green spaces in front of Waitrose and the university. However the poor quality greening on the current site detracts from this.

There is opportunity for the proposals to enhance and further re-enforce this nodal point through introduction of a high quality green street frontage.

1.4 site analysis

1.4.8 conservation areas

Three conservation areas surround the proposed site on Heavitree Road, 'St Leonards', 'Mont le Grand' and 'Lower Summerlands'. Together these define the character of the street. Primary features of all three include, symmetry, repetition, use of red brick and render with historic detailing relevant to the development period, horizontal banding and arches at ground floor. Pitched roofs are also a prevailing feature.

Lower Summerlands Conservation Area

Lower Summerlands is an area of special architectural and historic interest to the immediate north west of the city centre that contains several listed and locally listed buildings, a church and a school.

Key Features

- Quiet historic street with mature trees and landscaping creating a suburban feel
- Rhythm + Repetition of both property delineation and window placement
- Red brick usage throughout unifies the buildings and enhances the areas character although render is used on the properties parallel to Heavitree Road.

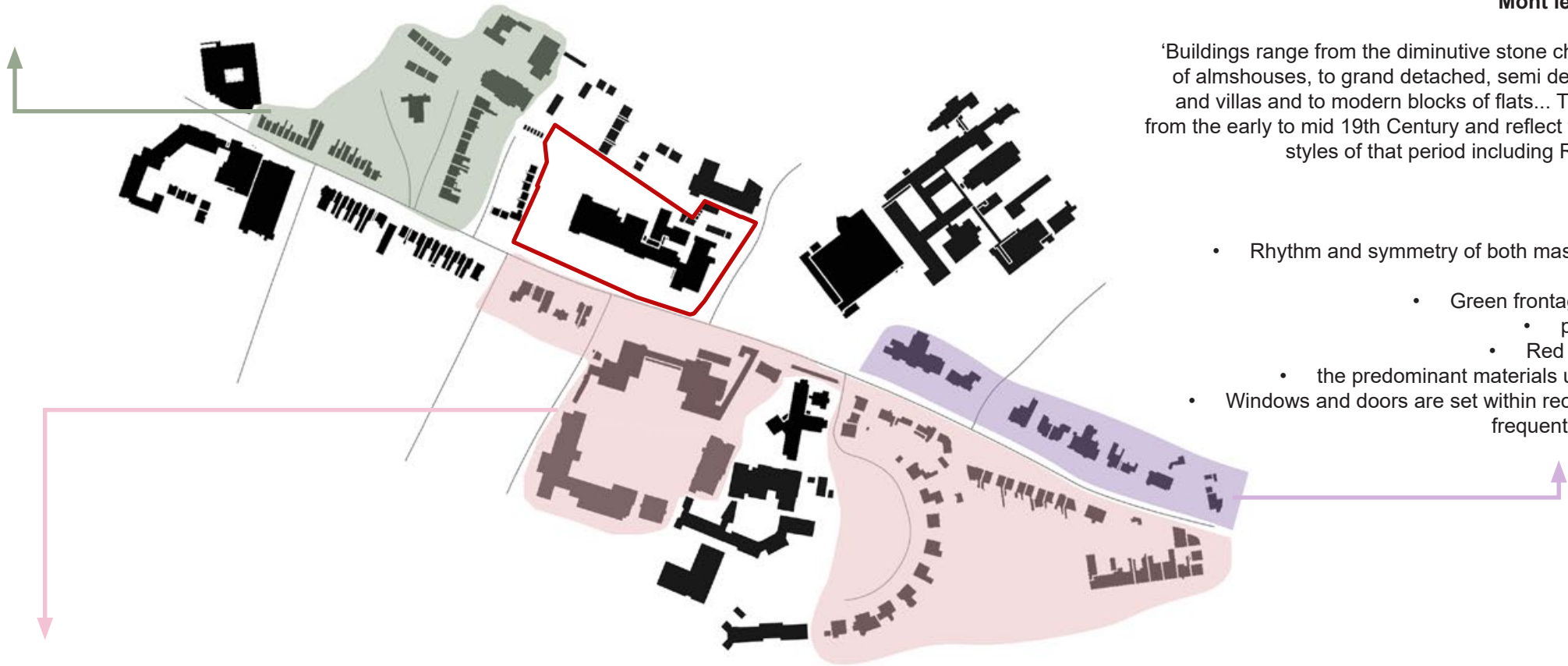


Mont le Grand Conservation Area

'Buildings range from the diminutive stone chapel of St Clare, to terraces of almshouses, to grand detached, semi detached and terraced houses and villas and to modern blocks of flats... The majority of buildings date from the early to mid 19th Century and reflect the fashionable architectural styles of that period including Regency and Greek Revival.'

Key Features

- Rhythm and symmetry of both massing and window placement
 - horizontal banding
- Green frontages / screening to busy road
 - pitched roofs and gable ends
 - Red brick, stucco and render are the predominant materials used, with natural slate roofs
- Windows and doors are set within recessed openings with arches frequently used at ground floor level.



St Leonards Conservation Area

Majority of the buildings (bar shops at the Barrack Rd junction) are listed, high quality, early to mid 19th century buildings. Positive features noted in this area are 'pleasing symmetry of design and generally well-screened front gardens offer enclosure' (referring specifically to Midway Terrace) - Area Appraisal

Key Features

- Rhythm + repetition of both property delineation and windows
- horizontal banding
- Green frontages / screening to busy road
- pitched roofs and gable ends
- typical finish: render or exposed stonework



1.4 site analysis

1.4.9 route hierarchy

Fore Street diverges into two primary routes- Heavitree Road and Magdalen Road, these have connecting secondary routes which both span between and branch off of them, primarily at traffic controlled junctions until these routes meet the city centre at the primary route Western Way. The intersection of these primary routes are demarcated by the roundabout terminating Heavitree Road and a cross junction terminating Magdalen Road. All other branches off of these roads are tertiary routes which primarily serve residents or specific user groups. These routes prioritise serving access to plots and properties as opposed to forming main connections between axes.

- traffic controlled junction
- multi-branch junction
- primary route -
main route prioritising vehicular movement
- secondary route -
connecting route prioritises vehicular movement as well as safer pedestrian / cycling zones
- tertiary route -
quieter vehicular movement mainly prioritising car access for residents and specific user groups alongside pedestrians / cyclists.



1.5 liveable exeter

Liveable Exeter represents a city wide initiative for transformational change. Exeter wishes to become a global leader in addressing social, economic and environmental challenges.

The 7 liveable Exeter principles are provided as guidelines to contribute to the delivering the outcomes of the Exeter Vision 2040.

The emerging proposals at Heavitree Road will adhere to the Liveable Exeter principles as follows:

- contribute positively to the areas character and identity
- respond to the local topography and create new open spaces
- enable and encourage sustainable transport
- enhance Exeter's natural, built and historic environment
- provide high quality and affordable homes
- provide safe, healthy, accessible and inclusive homes
- create a people friendly, human scale development
- improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure
- provide beautiful buildings which complement the local character
- create an energy efficient development
- ensure high levels of natural daylight and ventilation
- make direct connections to the active travel network
- maximise parking and storage for cycling with infrastructure support electric bikes.
- car free development
- retain and enhance existing green networks and spaces
- maximise landscaping, planting and trees
- promote vitality and inclusivity by creating safe and attractive places
- support the local economy



Active streets



Connected culture



Liveable buildings



Memorable places



Outstanding quality



Spaces for people & wildlife



Welcoming neighbourhoods

2.0 design approach

- 2.1 objectives
- 2.2 city wide movement
- 2.3 key approaches
- 2.4 site layout
- 2.5 vehicular movement
- 2.6 new direction
- 2.7 site optioneering
- 2.8 use, movement + hierarchy