



A PLACE NOWHERE

Authors

James Mitchell - Partner
jm@axiomarchitects.co.uk



■ AXIOM
■ ARCHITECTS



*'I know a land where the wild flowers grow,
near, near at hand by train you go
Metroland, Metroland'*

METRO-LAND

PRICE TWO-PENCE

Metroland Promotional Poster

Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Limited

INTRODUCTION

The suburbs. Not town, not countryside, not urban. This call for evidence will explore 'The Nature of Suburbs', and 'The Suburban Experience'.

It will explore the historical influences of the earliest examples of suburban life, the influences of Metro-land in the 1930s and the vernacular, combined with the modern marketing material selling the dream.

It will explore the qualitative characteristics of the original, early suburbs, through to current examples, and how this idea has been potentially lost.

It will explore the relationship between the greenbelt, and demonstrate the influence, good and bad on suburbs.

The suburban lifestyle could potentially be more

METROLAND

Great infrastructure offers great opportunity.

From 1915, the metro-line (now metropolitan line) with the switch from steam to electric went from busy central London Baker Street to the new extended Harrow, Wealdstone, Wembley, Pinner, Northwood to the Chilterns and leafy Amersham.

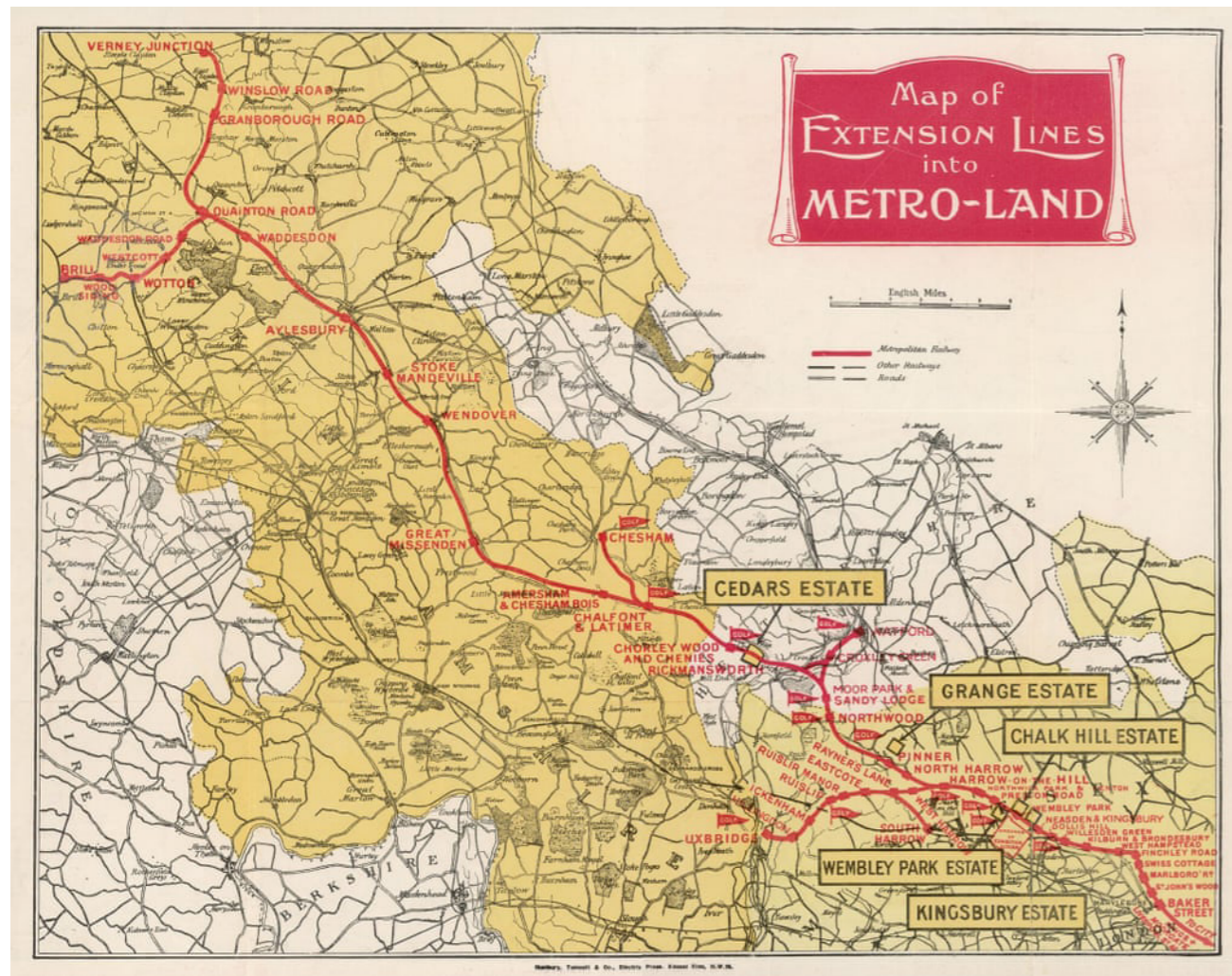
The metro-line owned swathes of land throughout Middlesex,

and provided an explosion of opportunity for home ownership and an escape from the busy, dirty, urban city.

Metro-land was a guide produced by the metro line marketing department, advertising the dream of living in the countryside. It was aspirational, showing images of the typical English countryside living with poetic, attractive language.

Over the next few decades and beyond, fields were filled with endless avenues of mock-Tudor "country" villas: semi-detached dwellings with steep roofs, bay windows and half-timbered gables.

A rural idyll ideal within the city limits was created.



'Each lover of metroland may have his own favourite wood beech and coppice, all tremulous green loveliness in spring and russet and gold in October'

THE GREENBELT

Focusing on London. The Green belt was and is seen by many as sacrosanct. The fundamental philosophy first introduced in 1938 was to protect the countryside from sprawling Urbanisation.

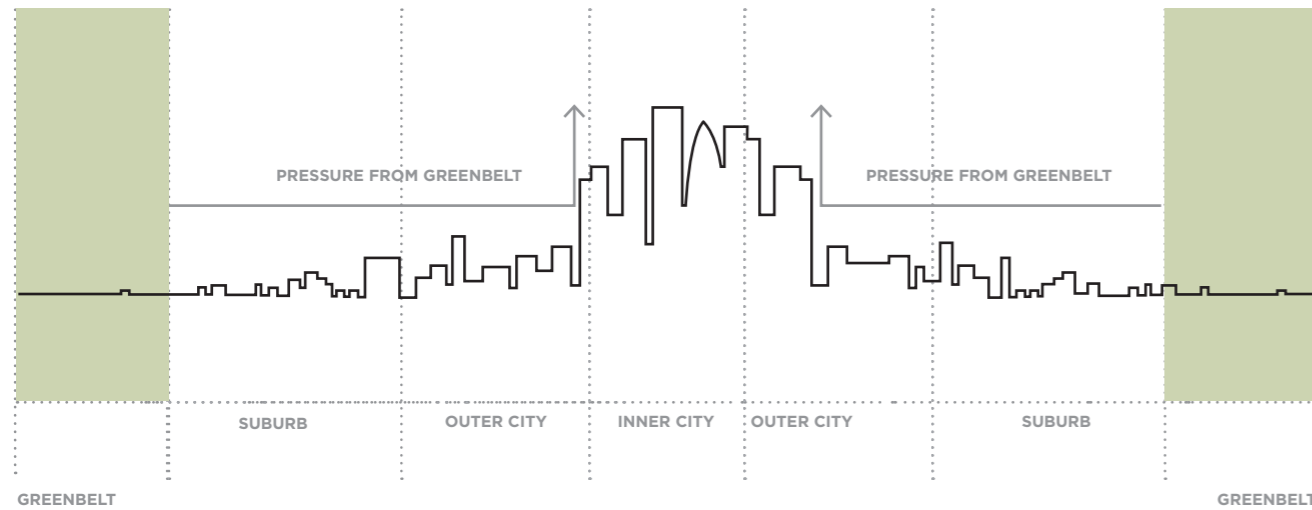
Attlee first introduced the New Towns Act 1946 to enact the designation of green belts. Urbanisation was accelerating at pace, with the 50s, 60s providing home ownership and car travel. Over the next few decades, urbanisation and population density accelerates.

Harrow and Weald, once seen as the capital suburb went from a leafy village to part urban sprawl, losing some of its original character and identity. We explore this in more detail in our study.

Although the greenbelt is a successful policy, it has contributed to a divide in quality of place, squeezing density back towards the city and reducing land capacity. Our diagram shows the green belt pushing density back towards the centre, putting pressure on space and scale.

It's no coincidence that places further along the metropolitan line such as Rickmansworth, Amersham and closer to Harrow Pinner benefit from the protection of the green belt.

Our study explores this in more detail looking at the nature of these places.



MAP OF THE EXISTING GREENBELT



Established in 1938 the Greenbelt surrounds London. Outlying suburbs benefit from immediate proximity to the openland and the protection from expansion and development.

Suburban areas are constricted by the greenbelt. Town centres are diversifying into out of town retail parks, and sprawling high streets of secondary retail uses turning into extensive thoroughfares between these 'urbs'.

As densification increases, house prices rise in central locations, forcing people from the outer city, into the suburbs to avoid long commutes of moving outside the greenbelt. The outer suburbs protected by the Greenbelt can't expand and so the 'in-between' starts to sprawl to accommodate the demand.

DREAM

URBAN PLANNING

Regular large wide streets, intermittent green pockets, communal amenity, large equal plots, Set with the backdrop of countryside, close proximity to the 'country village' and easily accessible good schools.

THE STREET

Large plots, green front gardens, street greening, regular trees, and neatly designed semidetached tudor style dwellings were the characteristics of these idyllic streets. The ideal home for the city commuter to return to.

THE HOME

The face of the Metroland: Semi-detached Tudor-style homes, For Harrow, E.S.Reid designed 16 types of home for the new 'country gentleman' to choose from.

SUBURBAN IDENTITY



HOMES IN METRO-LAND

 SEEING IS BELIEVING 4 & 5 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 2000 SQ. FT.	 NORTH HARROW & PINNER VILLAGE 3 & 4 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1800 SQ. FT.	 ROBINSON'S LATEST TYPE 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1600 SQ. FT.	 KENTON 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1500 SQ. FT.
 WATFORD'S BIGGEST BARGAIN 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1400 SQ. FT.	 'COSTIN' HOUSES AT KENTON 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1300 SQ. FT.	 CHOOSE A HADDOW HOUSE 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1200 SQ. FT.	 EASTBURY PARK NORTHWOOD 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1100 SQ. FT.
 THE CEDARS ESTATE, RICKMANSWORTH 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 1000 SQ. FT.	 HARROW GARDEN VILLAGE 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 900 SQ. FT.	 WELLER ESTATE, HARROW 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 800 SQ. FT.	 CANNON CROFT ESTATE, PINNER 3 BEDS, 2 BATHS, 2 TOILETS, 2 GARAGES, 700 SQ. FT.

Collection of London Transport Museum
 www.ltmcollection.org

SUBURBAN LEGACY



PINNER

URBAN PLANNING

Even now the legacy is evident in the affluent suburbs at the outskirts of London. Streets retain character of the country urban. Low rise, green pockets and a centre of retained character and identity.

THE STREET

Despite the rise in cars, streets retain their green nature and private yet open character..

THE HOME

Suburban homes remain idyllic to their traditional vernacular. Green frontages, and well kept gardens remain

WEALDSTONE LOST IDENTITY

URBAN PLANNING

In areas streets have sprawled out without the integration of pockets of amenity. Repetitive streets are disconnected from any 'heart' and lose its 'close to the country' nature.

THE STREET

Transport infrastructure and vehicle usage has changed the streets. Scale has increased and human scale is distorted as pedestrian and driver compete for being at the top of the hierarchy of users of the 'high street'. The endless road with no beginning or end.

THE HOME

Homes are set within the smaller plots. Street fronting homes are hardscaped to accommodate off-street paving or stores for refuse and cycles.

Brownfield sites re-purposed to blocks of flats and intermittent infill development has changed the typologies.



METROLAND LEGACY

A LEAFY LEGACY

Today, Pinner is considered a wealthy part of Harrow and has held the city's longest annual street fair since 1336.



A PLACE TO NOWHERE

Today, parts of Wealdstone in Harrow are never ending. Have no beginning, middle or end, and really struggle to find their identity.



URBAN PLANNING: THE STREET

PINNER HIGH STREET



GARDENS



TREES

PINNER HIGH STREET



HARDCAPED FRONT GARDENS



PUBLIC GREEN SPACE

WEALSTONE HIGH STREET



GARDENS



TREES

WEALSTONE HIGH STREET



HARDCAPED FRONT GARDENS



PUBLIC GREEN SPACE

URBAN PLANNING: HIGHSTREETS

PINNER HIGH STREET



MASSING



TARMACED SURFACE



TREES

PINNER HIGH STREET

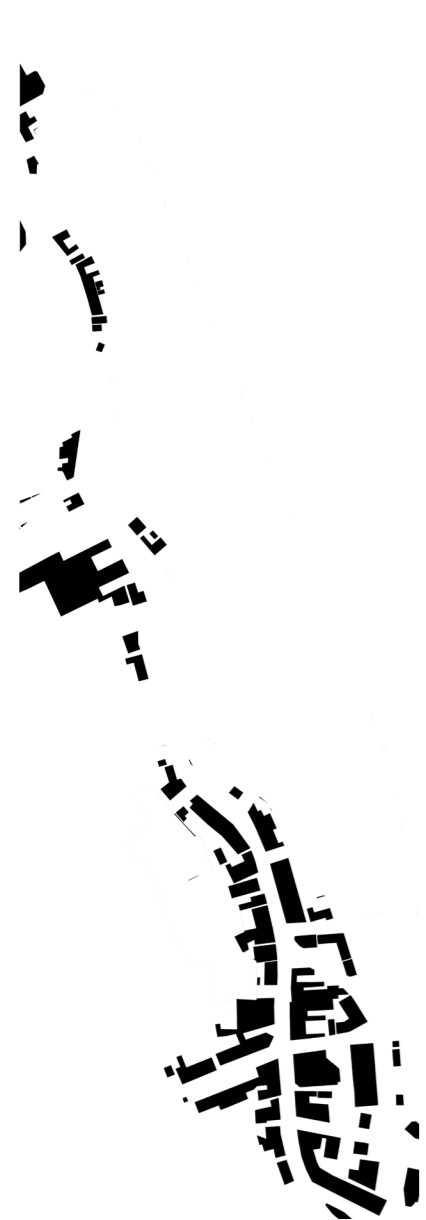


PUBLIC GREENING

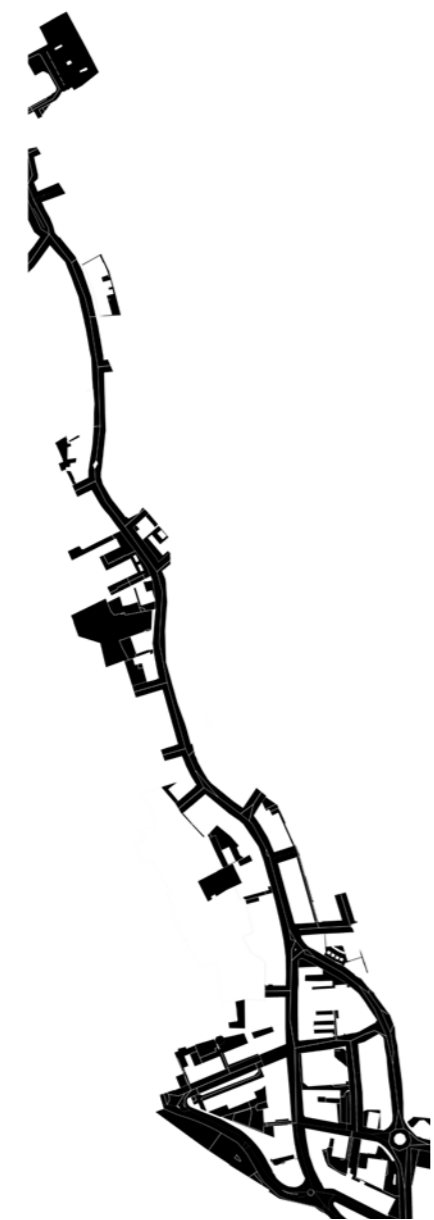


UNDERDEVELOPED LAND

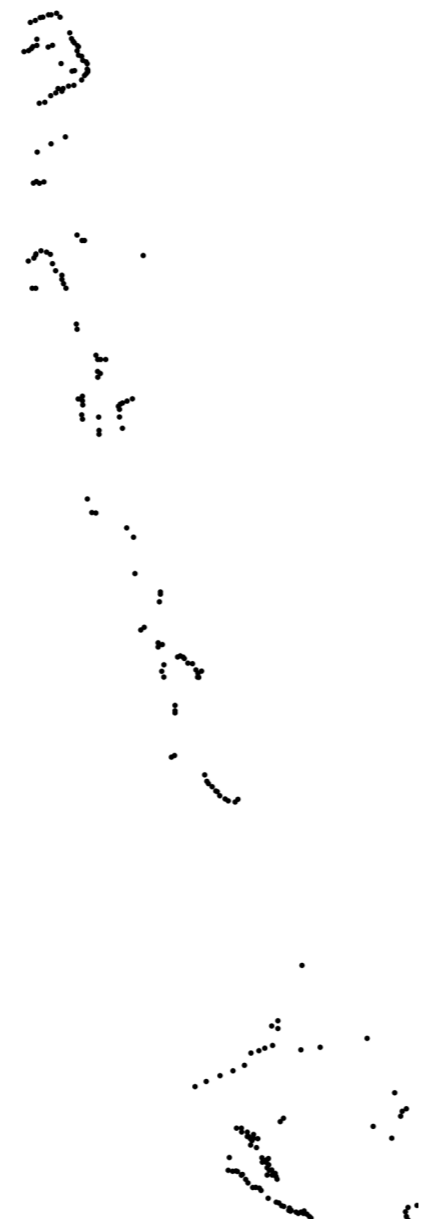
WEALDSTONE HIGH STREET



MASSING



TARMACED SURFACE



TREES

WEALDSTONE HIGH STREET



PUBLIC GREENING



UNDERDEVELOPED LAND

HIGHSTREET SPRAWL

Here illustrates the nature of the urban sprawl. the contrasting highstreets of pinner and wealdstone capture the essence of how the inner suburban towns are suffering from 'becoming places to nowhere'

where roads like the a409 cut through these suburbs they become lined with secondary retail and extend the high street along roads designed for vehicles rather than people.

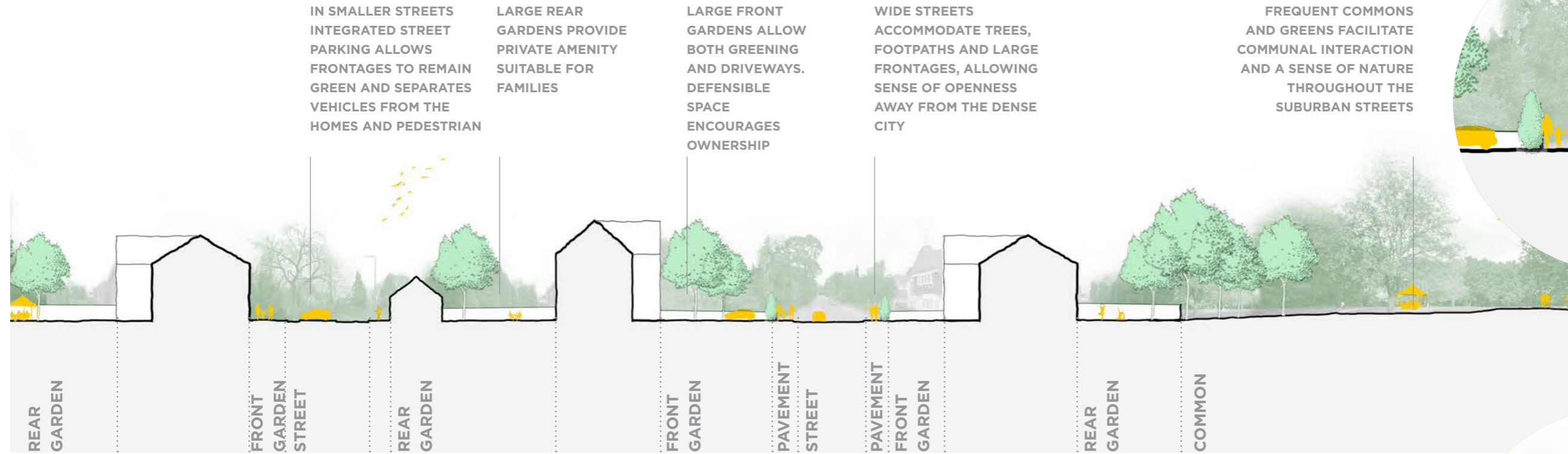
Comparatively with places like Pinner, high streets are centred and less expansive

Elsewhere in the suburb local amenities are provided interspersed in the residential streets

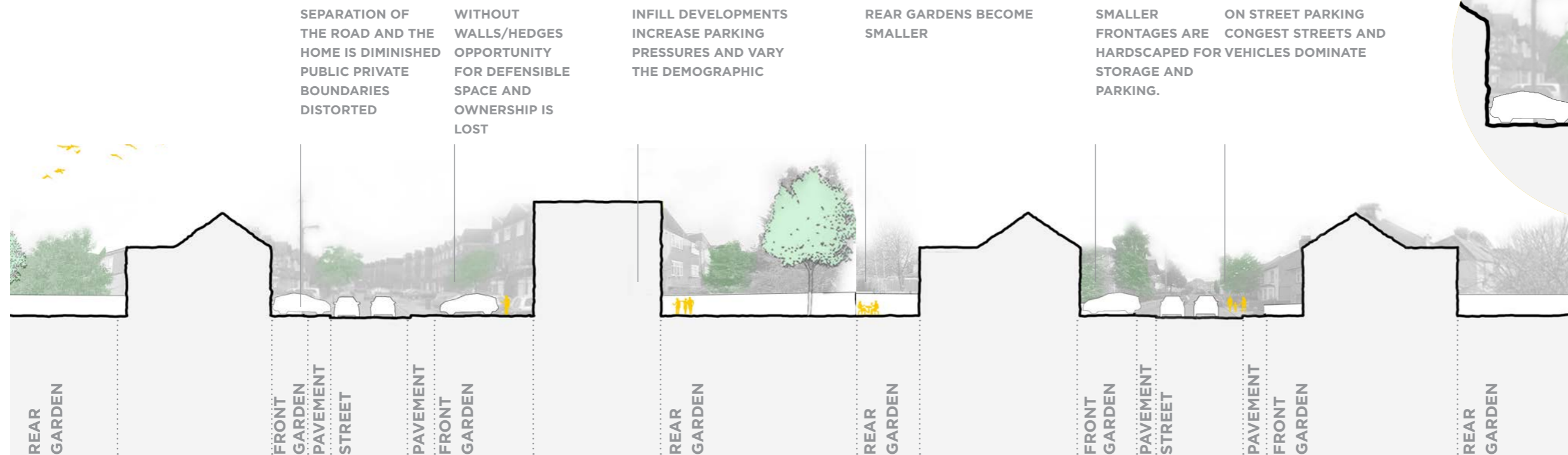
STREETScape EXPERIENCE

RESIDENTIAL STREETS

CHANGING SPACES



PINNER - TYPICAL RESIDENTIAL STREET



WEALDSTONE - TYPICAL RESIDENTIAL STREET

STREETScape EXPERIENCE

HIGHSTREETS

HIGH STREETS REMAIN IN PROXIMITY TO GREEN SPACE OF SMALL PARKS OR GREENS

CAR PARKING IS ACCOMMODATED TO THE REAR OF THE HIGH STREET

RESTAURANTS, PUBS AND BARS OFTEN HAVE OUTDOOR SPACE

WIDE STREETS ACCOMMODATE CULTURAL EVENTS AND CAN BE TEMPORARILY PEDESTRIANISED

BUILDINGS RETAIN CHARACTER AND DESIGN QUALITY SCALE IS FOCUSED ON THE PEDESTRIAN

RESIDENTIAL AREAS ARE CONNECTED TO THE CENTRES



PINNER HIGHSTREET

PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE LAND TO REAR OF HIGH STREET BECOMES CRIME SPOT

CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF BUILDINGS IS DIMINISHED

ROAD SURFACE DOMINATES WITH HIGH LEVELS OF TRAFFIC AND INFREQUENT PEDESTRIAN CROSSING POINTS

NO VIEWS TO OPEN PARKLAND OR GREENSPACE INSTEAD EXTENSIVE OFTEN CONGESTED ROADS

OVERALL SCALE INCREASES AND CONNECTIVITY TO NATURE IS LOST

HIGHSTREET USES VARY AS RETAIL USES DIMINISH

BACKSTREETS INFILL DEVELOPMENT OFFERS NO RELIEF TO THE STREET OR PRONE TO ENHANCEMENT OF ITS SETTING. LITTER AND OVERALL SCALE INCREASES CRIME



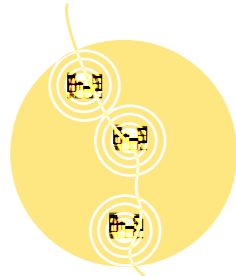
WEALDSTONE - HIGHSTREET

URBAN VILLAGE NEW IDENTITY

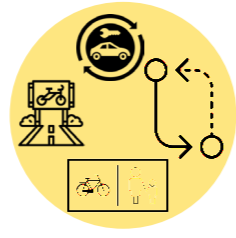
URBAN PLANNING

Intermittent nodes

Permeation to allow pocket parks and amenity



REDEFINE THE 'HEART' AND CREATE NODES OF COMMUNITY



ADDRESS CONNECTIVITY ISSUES - NEW INFRASTRUCTURE



PROVIDE JOBS AND INITIATIVES TO EMBED RESIDENTS

THE STREET

Reclaim the street for culture and greenspace. Retain old and introduce new placemaking markets



INTRODUCE POCKET PARKS AND AMENITY BACK TO THE STREETS



REDEFINE PUBLIC / PRIVATE BOUNDARIES

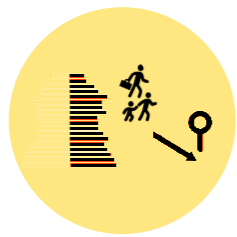


STRATEGIC INFILL AND OPENING OF LAND

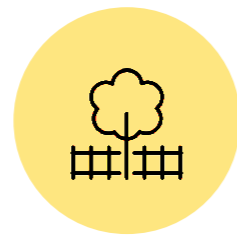
THE HOME

Diversifying to quality varied typologies

Planning for mixed communities with multipurpose spaces

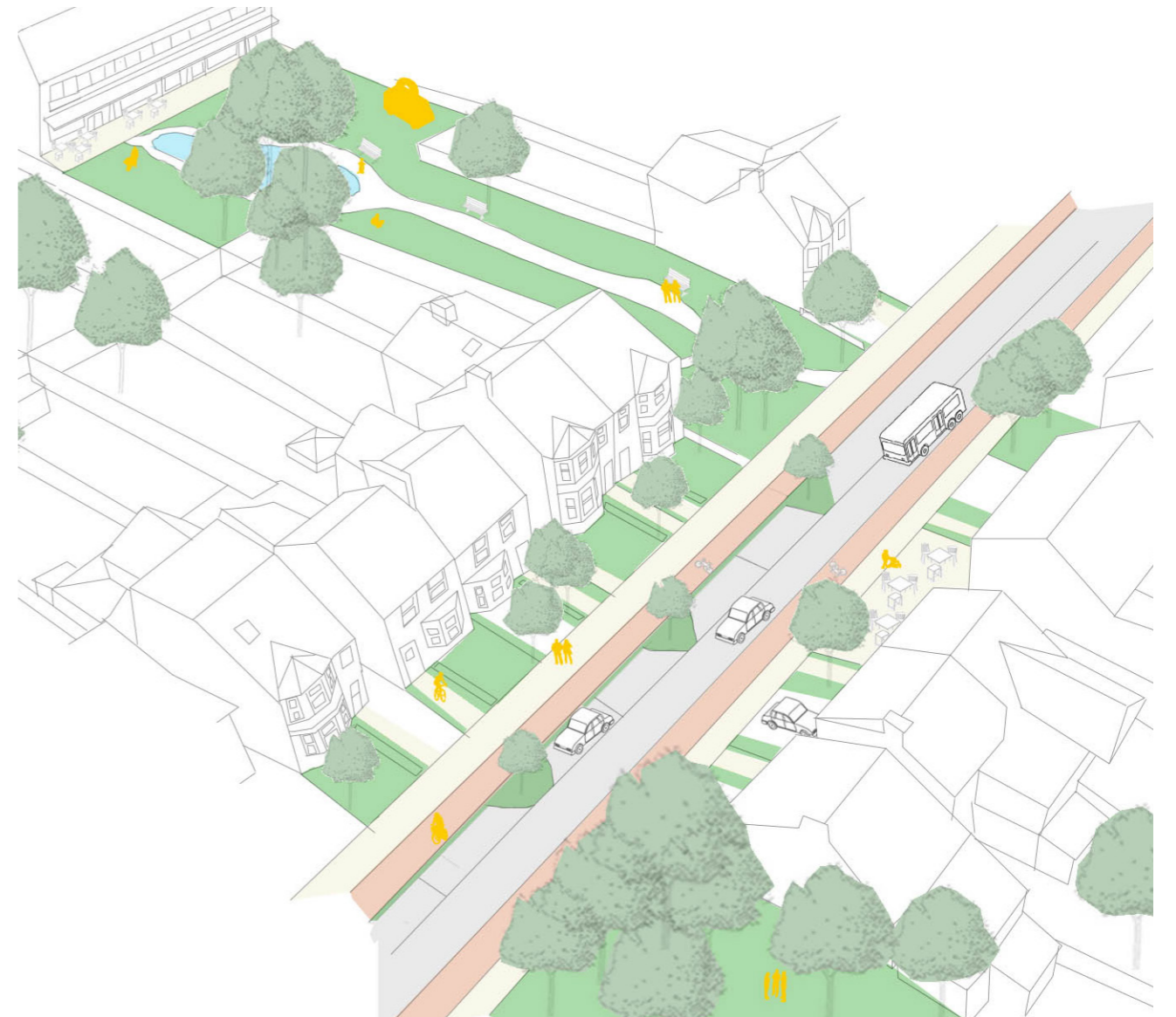


ACCOMMODATE A DIVERSE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC



PROMOTE OWNERSHIP THROUGH DEFENSIBLE SPACE

WHAT IS THE ASPIRATION?



CONCLUSION

In the 1920s and 30s, there was a genuine dream of suburban life. A place which provided space, garden and privacy, with close links to the countryside away from the busy, noisy city.

'Each lover of metroland may have his own favourite wood beech and coppice, all tremulous green loveliness in spring and russet and gold in October'

100 years later, it's clear from our research that parts of suburbs are suffering from an identity crisis. Not village, not countryside, you could argue stuck in 'no-mans land' or Suburbia. The worst of both worlds.

With urbanisation and infrastructure pushing outwards, and pressure of the greenbelt forcing the development inwards, land was only ever going to increase, both in scale and value.

The result of this is a neglect in investment to the outer boroughs and suburbs. With such a lack of investment, this cycle only gets worse in relation to quality and identity.

It should be noted, the suggestion is not to pull down the greenbelt, or start building tall buildings in Pinner, but we should at least acknowledge the challenges many suburbs face. There is clearly a fantastic opportunity to transform our suburbs, either existing or new. To really interrogate the notion of 'what is a nice place?' A vision for a place which offers pocket green spaces, human scale high streets and interactions.

Perhaps we should be rethinking not just the nature of suburbs, but perhaps the renaming to 'Urban-village'.

FURTHER RESEARCH

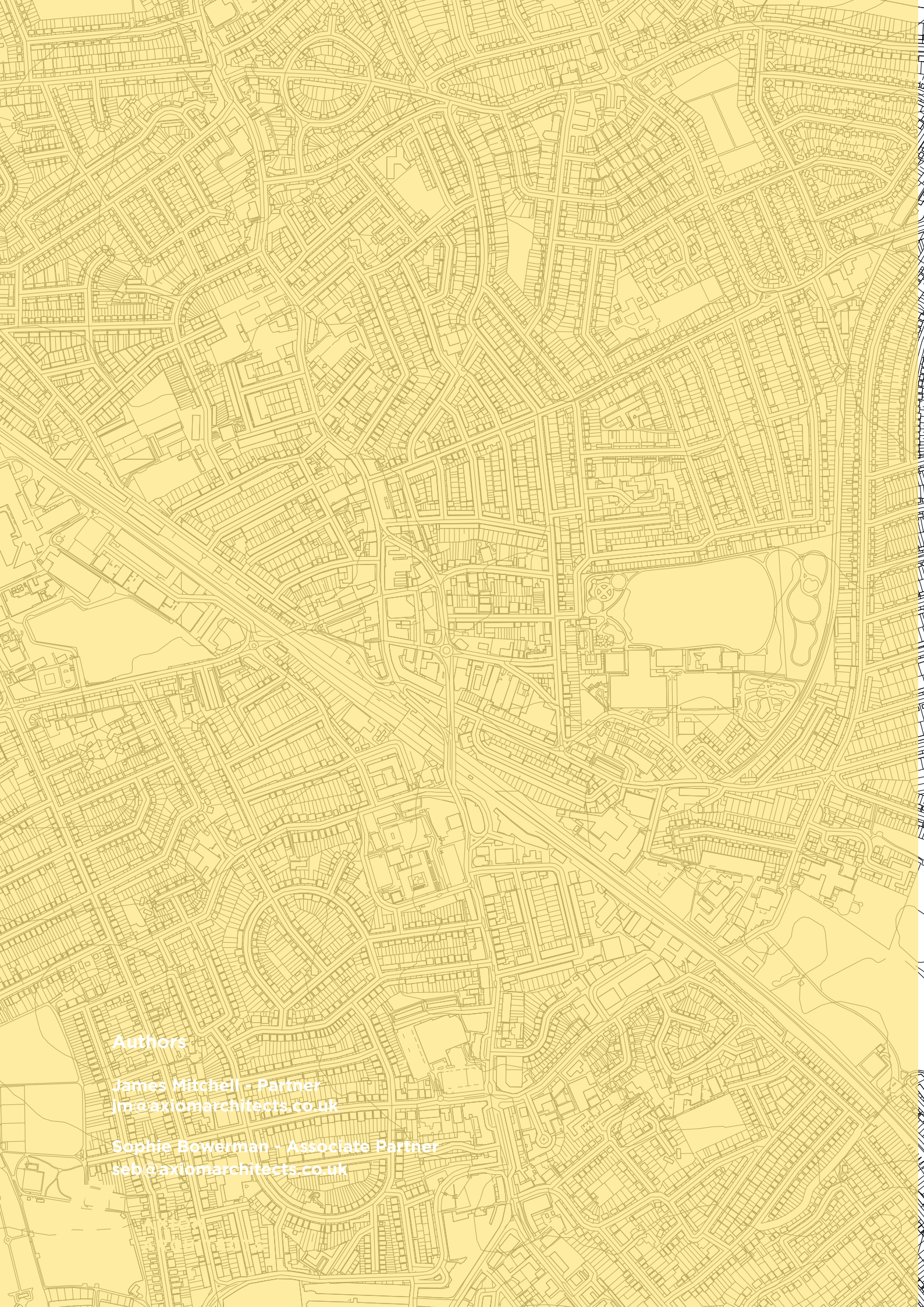
- Suburban Taskforce study trip to Harrow and Wealdstone
- Explore towns and other suburbs that suffer from identity
- How have vehicles altered our spatial experience
- Bringing back human scale to high streets



SUBURBAN TOWNS



TOWNS SUFFERING FROM LOSS OF IDENTITY



Authors

James Mitchell - Partner
jm@axiomarchitects.co.uk

Sophie Bowerman - Associate Partner
seb@axiomarchitects.co.uk