

With reference to their homogeneity, how can standardised housebuilding typologies be diversified within their morphological settings to enhance place character?

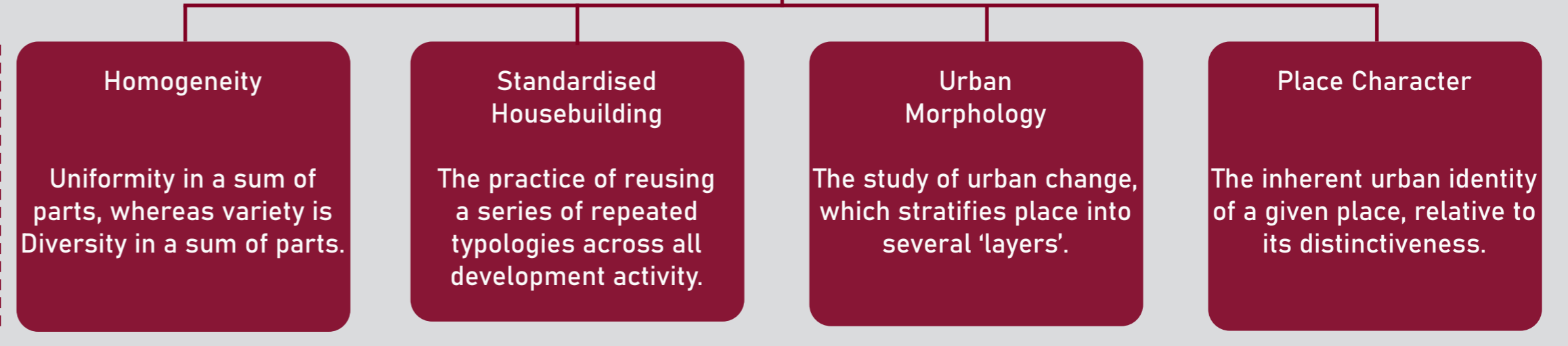
Context

England is facing a housing crisis; Lichfields (2023) calculated a shortage of some 2.1 million homes - a figure which grows every year as housing targets fail to be met. Thanks to the diminishment of the council house over the latter half of the 20th century (Tihelková, 2021) the principal method of housing delivery is now by private housebuilders, who operate on a national basis. As a result, the price, tenure and location of the homes built by these developers are dictated by market forces (Colenutt, 2020).

Such estates carry a range of criticism; on the relatively slow building rate of large sites, despite high demand, Oliver Letwin MP (2018) called for a 'de-homogenisation of housing type, tenure and design' and 'more distinctive settings, landscapes and streetscapes'. While an audit of 142 housing estates across England by Place Alliance (2020) praised the range of housing typologies and tenures on offer, the obviousness of standardised typologies used for housing and the extent to which these units define the streetscape were denounced as 'contributing to an absence of 'positive new character' and ultimately possessing 'little distinguishing personality'.



- Definition of Terms -



Aim and Objectives

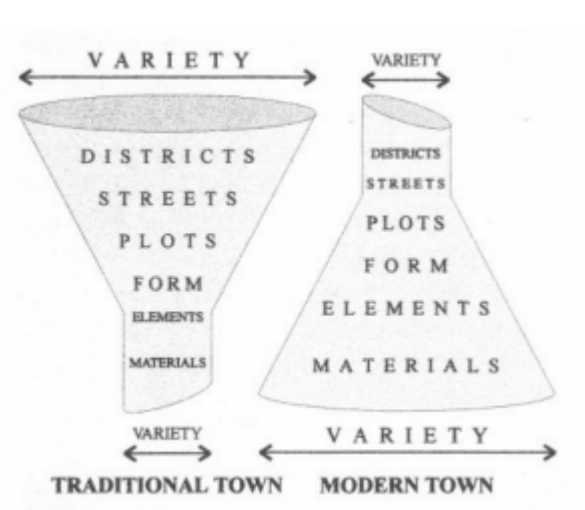
Given the context, it is my concern that owing to desire by the market to deliver a high quantity of housing in meeting high housing demand, the quality of delivery is being sacrificed. Furthermore, the background literature stimulates several questions, including: is the homogeneity of these places problematic? What causes the absence of character?

As such this, research aims to pinpoint, if not homogeneity, what practice or quality surrounding the use of standardised housebuilding typologies contributes to the absence of place character in high-volume housing estates, thereby producing guidance for diversification to enhance place character.

This aim is to be achieved by the following objectives:

1. To develop an analytical framework in conceptualising character in reference to homogeneity
2. To utilise the analytical framework in assessing patterns of character within contemporary high-volume estates to establish where diversification is required
3. To examine developer processes to understand where diversification can be implemented
4. To make recommendations for policy and developer reform to drive diversification of housing typology

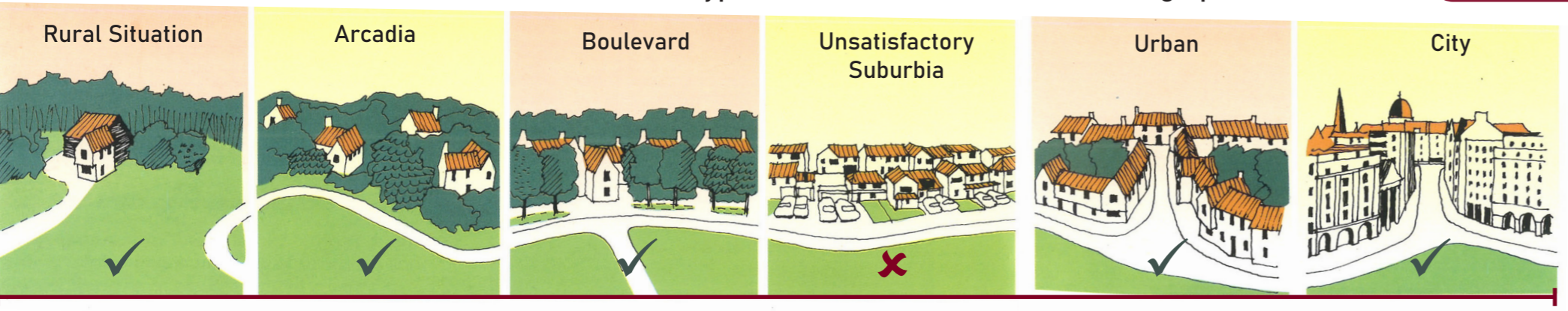
Methodology



Literature Review has been key in scoping the direction of the research. Key findings from which indicate that, historically, homogeneity has been a useful design principle for creating character (Bourdon, 2019) - repeated elements within places joining together to create harmony. McGlynn and Samuels (2000) concur, indicating that in the traditional town, variety - and consequently, homogeneity- were applied at diametric levels to modern development - see the Variety Funnel.

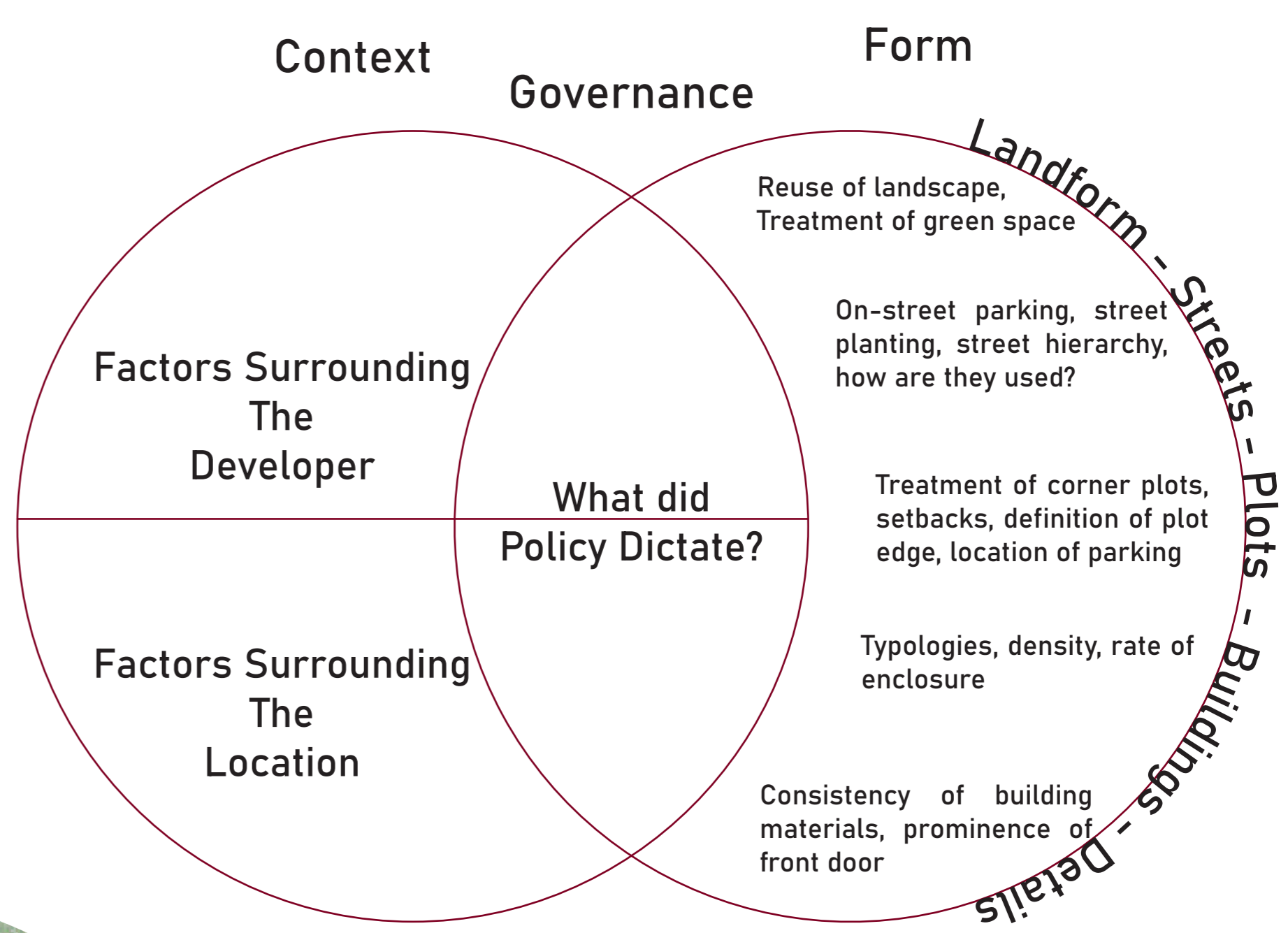
This can be linked with the Essex Design Guide (1973) which identifies modern 'Unsatisfactory Suburbia', within its Spectrum of Visual Density, as failing to generate local character. Furthermore, it suggests suburban house types do not properly 'enclose' the street, recommending 'urban' house types in densities above 20 dwellings per hectare.

Variety Funnel
Spectrum of Visual Density



Literature Review

Analytical Framework



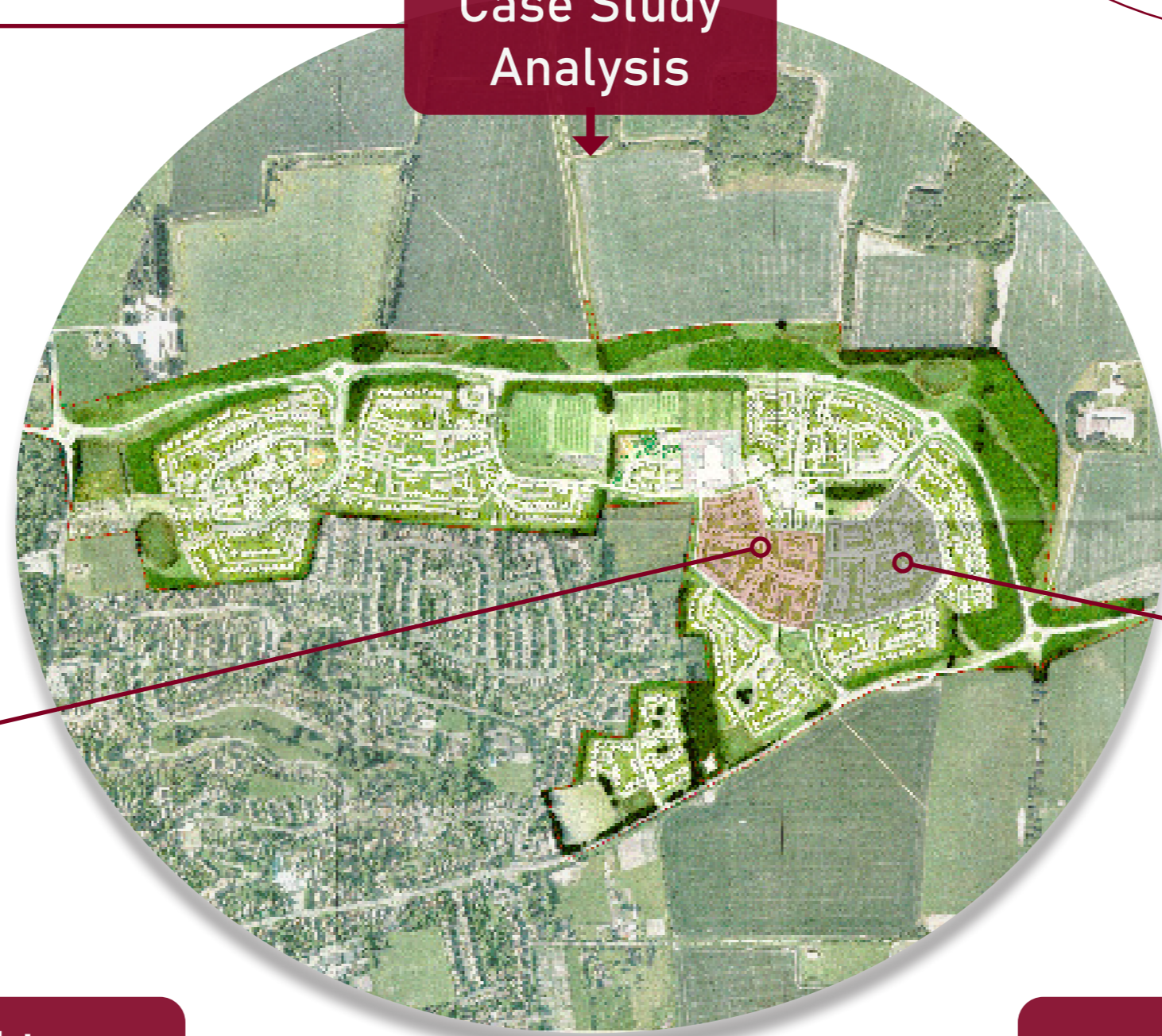
Case Study Analysis

'Crab Hill'
Wantage, Oxfordshire

Crab Hill, also known as Kingsgrove, is a large development on the outskirts of Wantage undertaken by master developer St Modwen Homes. Outline planning permission was granted in 2013 by Vale of White Horse District Council under application P13/V17640/O. As a master developer, St Modwen are concerned with the overall site.

Crab Hill has been divided into several residential parcels, each sold to a separate housebuilder. The development of each has been subject to an individual planning application. Two of which have been selected for Case Study Analysis.

The shared locational and site context demonstrate a degree of standardisation, while the differing governance and developer contexts of each point of analysis isolate variables which may contribute to homogeneity and character of form.



The above framework establishes the requirement to gather a range of data;
Context - largely secondary. Achieved via Desktop Analysis,
Form - largely primary. A checklist for Observation has been devised.
After gathering the above data, the framework and findings are discussed in a 'review panel' with industry experts, in which developer processes will also be discussed in line with Objective 3.

Case Study 1
CALA Homes

Case Study 2
Taylor Wimpey



Desktop Analysis

Review Panel

Observation

Initial Findings

Results

- There is a propensity for homogeneous street layouts with limited hierarchy
- There is a propensity for over-application of variety in terms of building detail
- The absence of garden walls, or other vertical edges at the forefront of a plot, mitigates the character of a street by increasing the perceivable breadth and diminishing enclosure
- That buildings appear to share limited relationships with each other and the street
- The space required for car parking has profound effects on the layout of buildings, and thus character of place
- That Highways Authority standards limit freedom in terms of human-scale street design
- Ultimately, homogeneity becomes problematic when places loses their distinctiveness to each other - national housebuilding has mitigated local character
- Distinctiveness, variety and character, is now dependent developer, rather than location

- Recommendations**
- The visual effect of the car, both on-street by Highways Authority standards and off-street by the space required for parking, must be mitigated by design and practice.
 - Streets must exhibit more variety, by there being a clear hierarchy of uses.
 - Buildings must exhibit more homogeneity, demonstrating a collective design and relationship between houses and, indeed, the street.
 - There must be a reintroduction vertical plot edges, by building frontage, garden wall or landscaping to better define the street
- Areas for Further Research**
- Trends of individualism and collectivism exhibited by volume housing estates, their residents and their lifestyles, and to what effect the car has driven these.

