

Degrowth at the Design Scale

A toolkit for post-war estate regeneration in the UK

ABSTRACT

As housing need intensifies, well-connected post-war estates have become prime targets for demolition-led regeneration, a model that displaces residents, shrinks social housing and discards the carbon already embodied in existing fabric. This research asks how degrowth principles can be operationalised at the design scale in that context. Through a literature review, four case studies in London, Liverpool and Amsterdam, and a toolkit tested on Wendling Estate and St Stephens Close in Camden, it finds that degrowth principles can guide regeneration that avoids demolition, keeps residents in place and respects ecological limits. What they cannot do is reach the Council's target number. That shortfall is not designed away. It is held open deliberately: fewer homes than the target, set against a community that stays put, social infrastructure that survives and fabric that is not rebuilt. The contribution is two-fold: degrowth codified at estate scale, and a toolkit that lets residents demand holistic refurbishment, beyond the housing stock, be appraised as rigorously as redevelopment.

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Introduction

1.1 Context

1.2 Research Background

1.3 Research Problem

1.4 Degrowth as an Alternative Estate Regeneration Model

1.5 Research Relevance

1.6 Research Question

1.1 Context

The need for additional housing is acute across the UK and globally, particularly in rapidly growing urban areas such as London. Within this context, post-war housing estates have become central sites of development pressure (Brunner, 2020). Increasingly framed as physically deteriorating and socially deprived spaces, estates have become targets for demolition-led regeneration (Watt, 2021). However, dominant regeneration approaches often generate significant social and ecological costs. This research explores an alternative, degrowth-informed approach to estate regeneration: one that can address the public-interest aims of regeneration while supporting existing communities and remaining within ecological limits.

1.2 Research Background

Post-war council estates were constructed at scale from the late 1940s onwards through substantial state investment to address severe housing shortages. Rather than being built as welfare housing, estates initially accommodated a broad cross-section of the working population (Boughton, 2018).

The contemporary condition of estates reflects both material problems and contested narratives. Processes of residualisation, driven by declining investment, reduced construction, and Right to Buy, concentrated economically marginal households within remaining social housing stock, contributing to the stigmatisation of estates (Hamnett and Randolph, 1987; Cole and Furbey, 1994; Slater, 2018). While estates face genuine challenges including disrepair, overcrowding, safety concerns, and problematic layouts, the key debate concerns how these issues are interpreted and addressed (Hodkinson, 2019; Wassenberg, 2018).

1.3 Research Problem

Current regeneration practices increasingly rely on public-private partnerships and cross-subsidy models, where demolition and higher-density redevelopment are financed through market housing (Beswick and Penny, 2018). Although responding to housing pressures, these approaches raise concerns over resident displacement and reductions in social housing provision (Reades et al., 2023; Penny, 2024), alongside the ecological costs of demolition, embodied carbon loss, and construction waste (Power, 2008).

1.4 Degrowth as an Alternative Estate Regeneration Model

Degrowth provides an alternative framework for examining these tensions. Rather than prioritizing endless expansion, this approach advocates for a democratically planned reduction of material and energy throughput to shrink ecological footprints while equitably protecting human wellbeing (Parrique, 2025). Although degrowth has increasingly entered planning debates, its application at the scale of buildings, neighbourhoods, and estates remains underdeveloped (Xue, 2021; Kaika et al., 2023; de Castro Mazarro et al., 2023). This research addresses this gap by exploring how degrowth principles can inform practical estate regeneration, while acknowledging the compromises required when applying a radical framework within existing institutional and financial structures.



Figure 1: Brutalist Park Hill Estate, Sheffield



Figure 2: Housing Demolition

1.5 Research Relevance

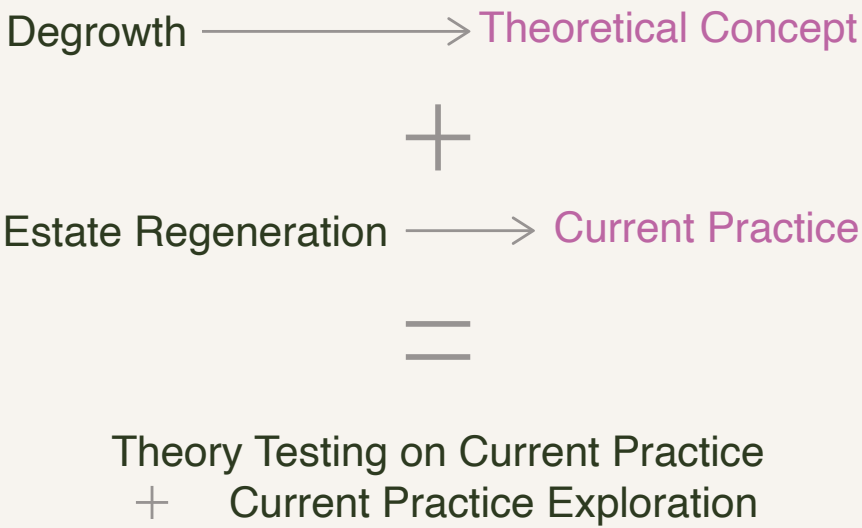
Degrowth remains largely theoretical, argued at the scale of economies and institutions rather than buildings and streets. The contribution here is to test it on the ground, translating its concepts into spatial decisions that can be made on a real estate. The reverse contribution matters equally: degrowth offers an unfamiliar lens on UK estate regeneration, one capable of informing current practice. The derived toolkit is collaborative in intent, usable by anyone involved in the regeneration process who wants an approach that protects both the environment and the existing community. Its central audience, however, is residents.



Figure 3: Extinction Rebellion Protest

1.6 Research Question

The research therefore asks:



Main
RQ

How can degrowth principles be operationalised at the design scale in the context of post-war estate regeneration in the UK?

It is guided by the following sub-questions:

Secondary
RQ

- 1. Which degrowth-adjacent concepts are spatially and institutionally actionable within UK estate regeneration?*
 - 2. How are these principles already being enacted in practice, and what do case studies reveal about enabling conditions?*
 - 3. What design principles can be synthesised into a coherent, communicable toolkit for practitioners?*
- How does that toolkit perform when applied to a real post-war UK estate?*

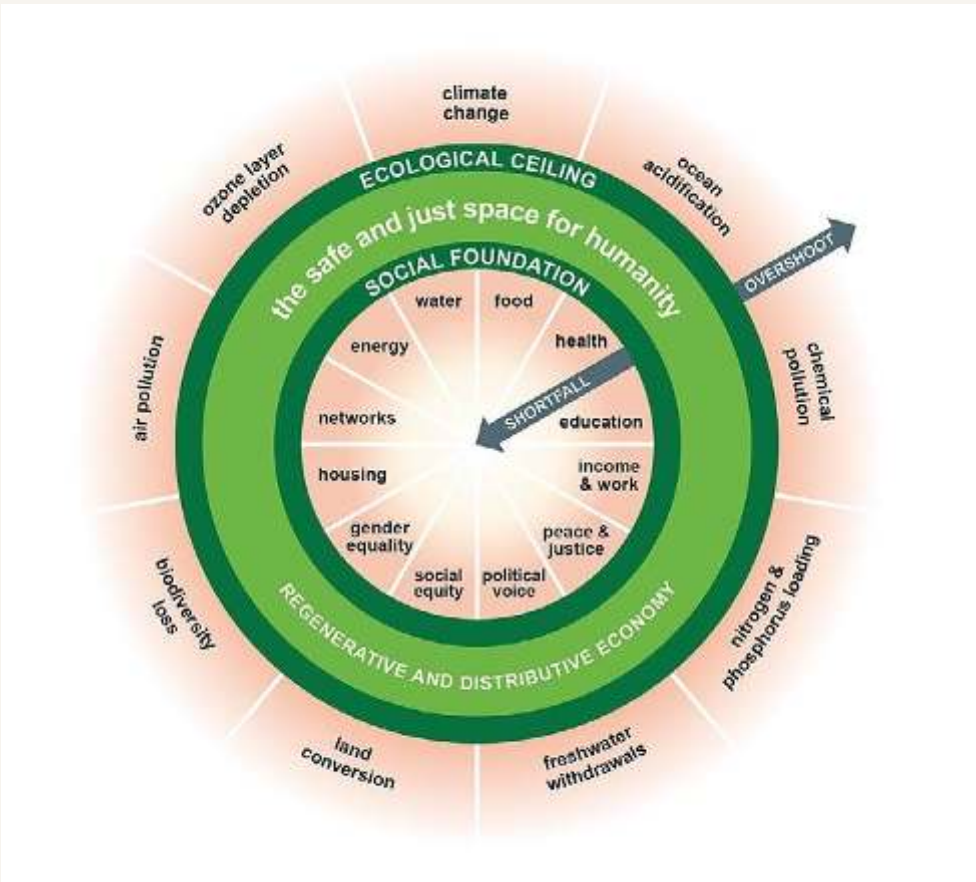


Figure 4: Doughnut Economics

Methodology

2.1 Line of Enquiry

2.2 Research Design

2.2.1 Literature Review

2.2.2 Case Study Analysis

2.2.3 Toolkit Synthesis

2.2.4 Site Analysis

2.2.5 Site-Specific Application

2.2.6 Conclusion

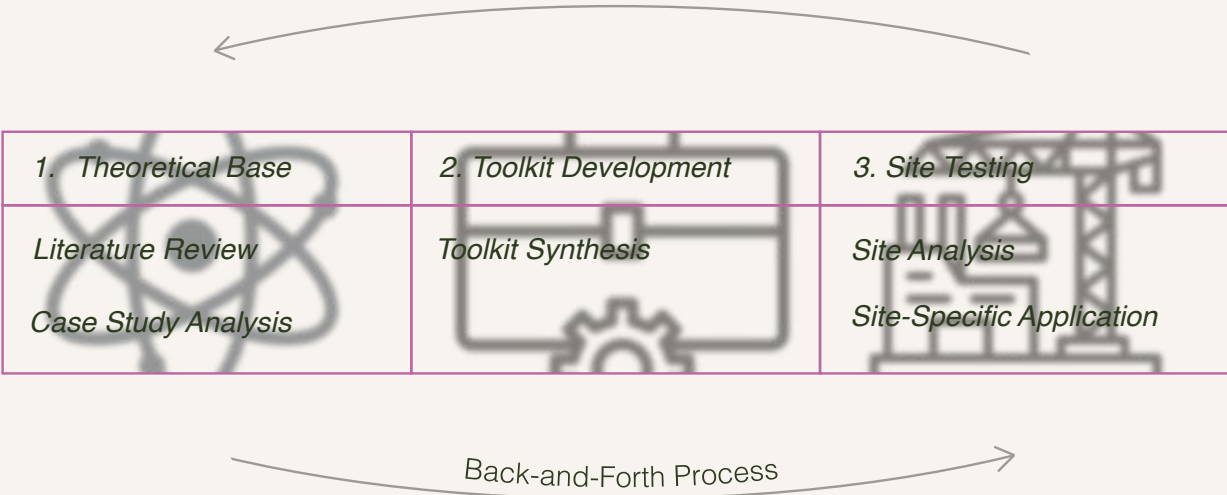
2.3 Ethics

2.1 Line of enquiry

The MRP adopts a research-led design methodology, moving from literature, to case studies, to design application. The purpose is to develop and test a degrowth-informed approach to estate regeneration. Each stage informs the next: literature establishes the analytical basis, case studies test its relevance in practice, and design tests its application within a specific estate. This methodology is well suited to the research because it connects theoretical enquiry with practical application, allowing degrowth principles to be translated into and tested through a real-world regeneration context.

2.2 Research design

The work proceeds in five stages:



2.2.1 Literature Review

A thematic literature review establishes the conceptual basis for the research and identifies the key domains through which estate regeneration can be considered from a degrowth perspective. A thematic approach is appropriate because the purpose is to synthesise relevant debates and establish a framework for the subsequent analysis, rather than provide an exhaustive review of the field.

2.2.2 Case Study Analysis

Case studies are used to examine how relevant principles operate in practice. Cases are selected purposively according to their relevance to the research question and their potential to provide transferable lessons. Desk-based analysis of project documentation, planning material and other published sources is structured through the themes established in the literature review. This provides the empirical basis for developing the toolkit.

2.2.3 Toolkit Synthesis

The literature and case study analysis are synthesised into a degrowth-informed framework and design toolkit. The framework establishes the objectives for regeneration, while the toolkit translates these into potential approaches.

2.2.4 Site Analysis

The framework is applied to the Wendling Estate and St Stephens Close as a single study area. This specific site was chosen due to being a currently contested regeneration site in the UK, and it is well-documented, both the regeneration and the resistance to it. The site provides a real regeneration context in which the framework can be tested. Desk-based research and site observation are structured through the same analytical themes, establishing the site's conditions, opportunities and constraints for the subsequent design stage.



Figure 5: Wendling Estate

2.2.5 Site-Specific Application

The toolkit is applied through a site-specific design proposition. This acts as a test of the framework, examining whether its principles can be translated into practical interventions within an existing estate. Where principles conflict with site conditions or require adaptation, these tensions are treated as findings. The aim is therefore to assess the framework's practical applicability and lessons rather than produce a definitive regeneration solution.

2.2.5 Conclusion

The conclusion evaluates the outcomes of the site application against the research framework. Its purpose is to assess the framework's practical applicability, reflect on the insights generated through its application, and identify its limitations and potential for further development.

2.3 Ethics

The research relies on secondary sources, publicly available material and observation of publicly accessible spaces. No participants are recruited and no personal data are collected. All external work is appropriately referenced, while the analysis, framework and design proposition are the author's own. AI has been used only in an assistive capacity for researching academic sources, improving written language, and developing visuals where appropriate, in accordance with applicable assessment requirements.

Literature Review

3.1 UK Post-War Estate Regeneration: Current Practice

- 3.1.1 Goals of Estate Regeneration

- 3.1.2 Residualisation & Stigmatisation

- 3.1.3 Physical and Design-Led Drivers

- 3.1.4 Financialisation, Displacement, and Ecological Waste

3.2 Understanding Degrowth

- 3.2.1 Definition and Intellectual Roots

- 3.2.2 Accession to Planning and Design

- 3.2.3 UK Estate Regeneration Implications

3.3 Domains of Convergence

- 3.3.1 Housing

- 3.3.2 Movement & Legibility

- 3.3.3 Green Spaces

- 3.3.4 Community Facilities

- 3.3.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

- 3.3.6 Ownership & Processes

3.1 UK Post-War Estate Regeneration: Current Practices

This section examines the material and discursive challenges of post-war estates, balancing official regeneration justifications against critical socio-ecological perspectives.

3.1.1 Goals of Estate Regeneration

Official estate regeneration is justified by several core objectives. The UK Government’s Estate Regeneration National Strategy posits that renewal should deliver more and higher-quality housing, stimulate local growth, and improve resident opportunities (DCLG, 2016). Upgrading existing stock—via retrofit or demolition—aims to provide high-quality, energy-efficient, and socially mixed housing (Power, 2008). Furthermore, density-uplift projections suggest a street-based model could raise London estate density from 78 to 135 homes per hectare, yielding up to 360,000 new homes (Savills, 2016). Spatial design objectives also seek to correct postwar layouts, which Coleman (1985) asserted fostered social disorder, framing physical integration as a comprehensive response to socioeconomic disadvantage (London Housing Directors Group, 2025).

3.1.2 Residualisation and Stigmatisation

While built as high-quality housing for a broad working-class demographic (Boughton, 2018), council estates became residualised during the 1970s and 1980s (Hamnett and Randolph, 1987). This shift was driven by Thatcher-era policies that cut public housing expenditure by over half, reduced municipal construction, and sold 900,000 homes under Right to Buy, eroding the political constituency defending public housing (Cole and Furbey, 1994:189). Residualisation established the conditions for severe stigmatisation. Slater (2018) argues the “sink estate” label served as an ideological tool to frame social housing as an inherent generator of welfare dependency. Residents actively resist this community pathology narrative, pointing to municipal disinvestment and physical disrepair as the true drivers of decline (Watt, 2020).

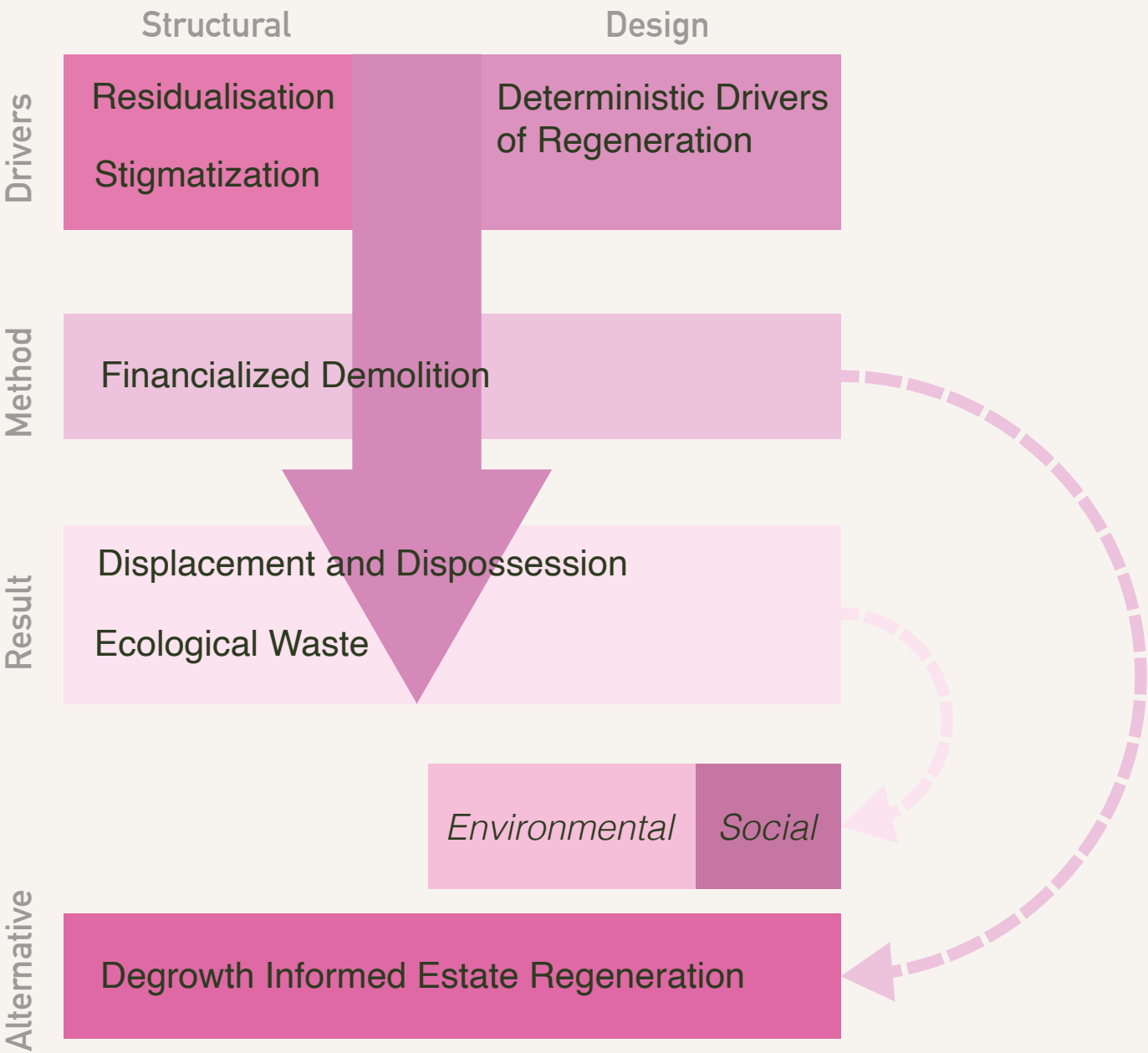
3.1.3 Physical and Design-Led Drivers

Estates face genuine material challenges: 10% of social homes are non-decent, damp affects 7%, and overcrowding has risen to 9% (MHCLG, 2024). Severe building safety failures, such as the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, highlight decades of privatisation, deregulation, and maintenance underinvestment (Hodkinson, 2019). While layout configurations like overhead walkways and disconnected paths can form a “labyrinth of routes” (GLA, 2023:6) that facilitates criminality (Coleman, 1985; Wassenberg, 2018; GLA, 2023), critics caution against environmental determinism, noting that poor design does not inherently dictate social outcomes (Spicker, 1987).



3.1.4 Financialisation, Displacement, and Ecological Waste

Since the 2000s, estate renewal has shifted to “financialised municipal entrepreneurialism” (Beswick and Penny, 2018:1). Constrained by austerity, councils partner with private developers to demolish and rebuild at higher densities, relying on market-sale units to cross-subsidise a reduced proportion of replacement “affordable” housing (Beswick and Penny, 2018; Penny, 2024). Penny (2024) documents a net loss of over 2,000 social tenancies across six major London redevelopments, with replacement rents averaging £80 more per week. This demolition-led model generates severe social and ecological consequences. First, it doubles resident displacement, systematically fracturing communities and dispossessing over 135,000 tenants and leaseholders since 1997 (Lees and Hubbard, 2020, Cited in Reades et al., 2023). Second, it causes massive ecological waste. New construction requires four to eight times more material resources than retrofit, and construction waste accounts for one-third of UK landfill (Power, 2008). Rebuilding incurs an embodied carbon debt taking decades to recover, whereas high-standard retrofits can reduce energy use by 80% while retaining existing structural carbon (Power, 2008).



3.2 Understanding Degrowth

This section defines degrowth, highlights its accession to planning scholarship, and outlines its implications for evaluating estate regeneration.

3.2.1 Definition and Intellectual Roots

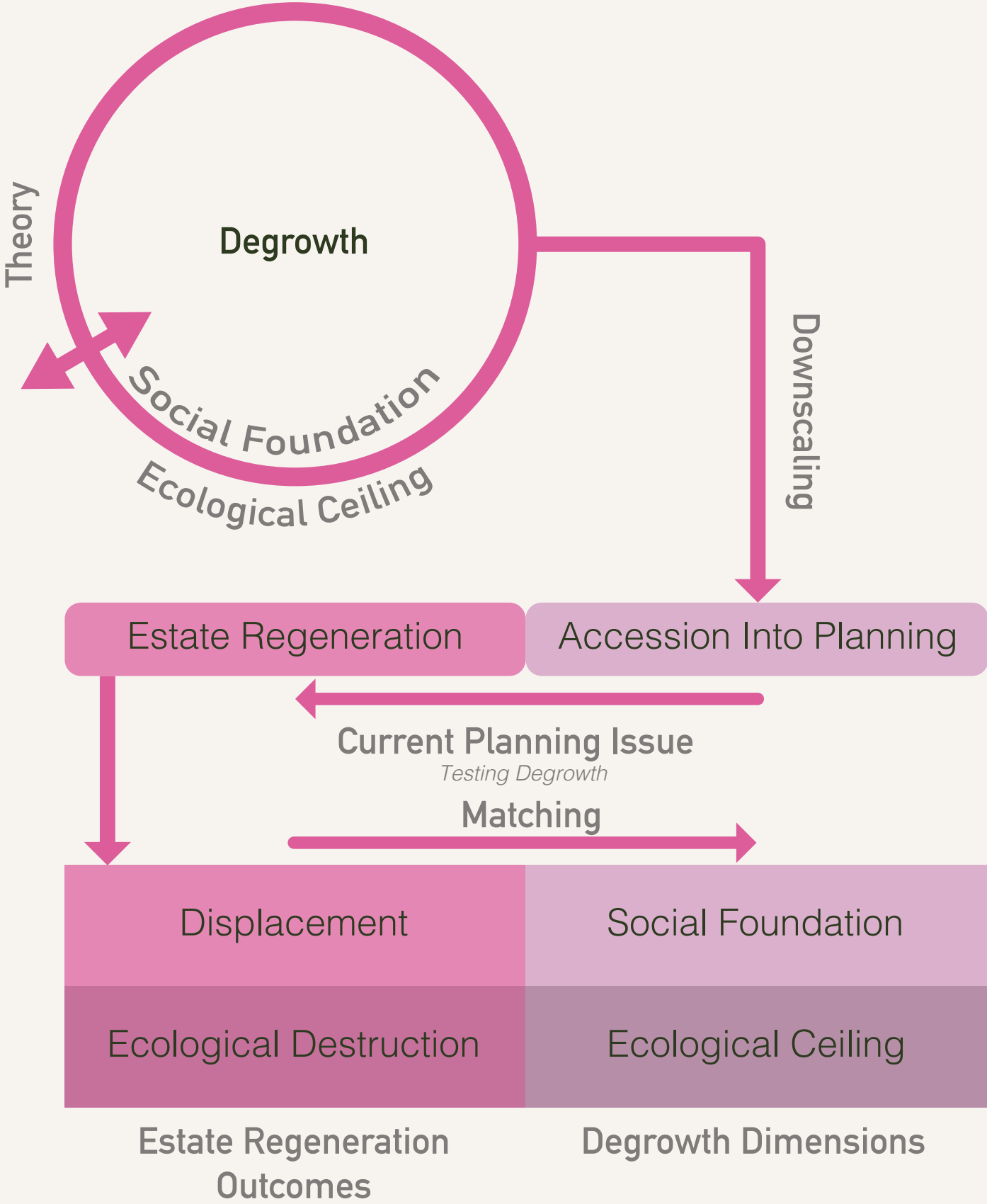
Degrowth is defined as “a downscaling of production and consumption to reduce ecological footprints, planned democratically in a way that is equitable while securing wellbeing” (Parrique, 2025:16). Emerging from the 1970s French décroissance movement, it asserts that ecological sustainability and social equity are inseparable (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). As a postgrowth framework, degrowth rejects “green growth” narratives, advocating for a redistributive contraction of resource throughput that prioritises sufficiency and well-being over GDP expansion (Savini, 2025a).

3.2.2 Accession to Planning and Design

Recently, degrowth has entered planning debates as researchers recognize that land use, housing, and infrastructure dictate material throughput (Xue, 2021). Savini (2021) established a planning framework of “habitability–finity–polycentric autonomism” (Savini, 2021:1) focused on sufficiency. While Amsterdam’s municipal adoption of the doughnut model (Florian, 2023) represents a policy application. A literature gap remains at the intermediate design scale—the block & building. Aligned spatial design practices remain largely uncoded, oscillating between macroeconomic theory and small grassroots actions (Kaika et al., 2023; De Castro Mazarro et al., 2023).

3.2.3 UK Estate Regeneration Implications

Degrowth shifts the valuation paradigm of estate regeneration. While mainstream models prioritise quantitative metrics like unit delivery, density, and value capture, degrowth evaluates success through sufficiency, care, and equity, within planetary boundaries (Savini, 2021). It diagnoses twin pathologies in UK practices: an ecological pathology (the embodied carbon of demolition) and a social pathology (resident displacement, loss of social housing, and mixed-finance gentrification). Degrowth insists these share a common driver: a model dependent on extracting land value through demolition-led densification. This framework treats the tension between demolition and refurbishment as both an ecological issue of material preservation and a social issue of “renoviction”.



3.3 Domains of Convergence

This section examines six domains where degrowth and estate regeneration literatures converge on public-benefit objectives rather than market outcomes: housing, movement & legibility, green space, community facilities, socio-economic wellbeing, and ownership & processes. In half of these domains, degrowth accepts the regeneration goal but disputes the means; in the rest, it questions the goal itself. Ownership and processes is discussed last because it determines how the other interventions are viable in practice.

3.3.1 Housing

Estate regeneration officially responds to housing need by treating estates as opportunities to densify and deliver more homes (Savills, 2016). Degrowth disputes the means: demolishing to densify is materially unsustainable. Rebuilding incurs a massive embodied carbon debt taking decades to recover, making retrofit the more sustainable option across the stock's lifetime (Power, 2008). Decades of municipal disinvestment often produce physical deterioration that is then used to justify demolition-and-rebuild as the only route to improvement (Retrofitting Social Housing, 2024). The primary degrowth-aligned principle is retrofitting over demolition (De Castro Mazarro et al., 2023). Retrofitting is most aligned when it minimises material throughput by retaining structural elements and upgrading performance, directly opposing the growth logic of demolition.

Furthermore, degrowth questions the goal itself: “more homes” is not a neutral output. The Public Interest Law Centre (2024) finds that demolition-led delivery overproduces market housing, comprising over half of new units, while reducing affordable council homes, with replacement social rents averaging over £80 per week higher. The degrowth adjustment is to build differently: new housing must be affordable, dense and compact, allowing residents to share spaces and infrastructure, emphasising sufficiency and sharing (Savini, 2024).

3.3.2 Movement and Legibility

Estates are frequently criticised for confusing circulation, poorly overlooked spaces, weak legibility, and unclear public-private boundaries (Coleman, 1985; GLA, 2023). Demolition-led regeneration enables a tabula rasa approach to correct these layouts, but this clearance is environmentally and socially unsustainable (Power, 2008). Furthermore, attributing poor social outcomes directly to layout carries a design determinism that is hotly contested and

bound up with stigmatisation (Spicker, 1987). Yet, layout differences are real: deck-access estates score significantly lower on wayfinding, integration, and overlooking (Tunstall, 2020).

The degrowth adjustment is to improve legibility and safety without wholesale clearance, using targeted and resource-efficient approaches. Aligned urban design interventions rely on minimal material inputs, such as the withdrawal of parking and removal of waste bins to reclaim public space, or the upgrading of informal areas through “acupunctural” public space and pedestrian interventions (De Castro Mazarro et al., 2023). Movement and legibility should thus be improved through precise, small-scale design changes that minimise material use while enhancing spatial quality.

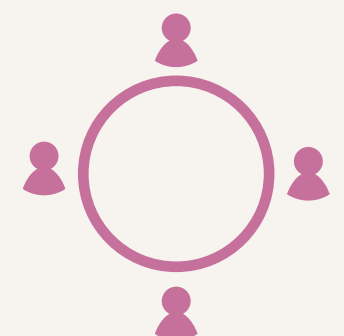
3.3.3 Green Spaces

In conventional practice, estate green space is often read as an underperforming asset and spatial liability, devaluing surroundings and crowding out private gardens—a framing that positions open spaces as prime land for redevelopment (Savills, 2016). Degrowth, conversely, reads green space as a commons to be co-produced and governed by those who use it, regardless of formal ownership (Kronenberg, 2025). Informal spaces, gardens, and allotments deliver vital food growing, social cohesion, and everyday contact with nature that market logic treats as oversupplied because they generate no direct revenue (Kronenberg, 2025).

For estate regeneration, this implies prioritising the retention and improvement of existing green space, including informal or residual green areas that manicured schemes would clear (Kronenberg, 2025). Infill development should preferentially occupy “grey space”—such as car parks, surplus roads, and derelict buildings—rather than erasing green commons (Roberts, 2021). Additionally, degrowth lowers the resource intensity of greening itself, favouring flower meadows, rewilding, micro-forests, and mature tree preservation over manicured, high-input lawns (Kronenberg, 2025). Concrete tactics include de-sealing hard surfaces, reclaiming space from cars, and supporting communal food growing (De Castro Mazarro et al., 2023; Kronenberg, 2025).

3.3.4 Community Facilities

Housing estates already act as an “infrastructure of social infrastructures” (Pile et al., 2026:1) where communal cooking, food cooperatives, and mutual support are spatially co-produced (Pile et al., 2026). Gantner et al. (2025) find dense “care ecologies”



consisting of unpaid carers, community centres, nurseries, and schools that form an established social fabric. However, regeneration frequently severs this infrastructure; facilities are demolished during densification or commercialised, dismantling the informal character on which the care ecology depends (Garbett, 2026).

The main degrowth principle here is the emphasis on shared infrastructure organised through the “foundational economy”—the sectors that meet essential human needs (Savini, 2025b). Growth-led agendas tend to marginalise the foundational economy and unpaid care, as land used for extractive, speculative development cannot simultaneously provide space for genuine community infrastructure (Savini, 2025b). The degrowth-aligned move is to recognise, defend, and retain the care infrastructure already embedded in the estate first, and only then adapt residual or underused spaces to extend it.

3.3.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Socio-economic initiatives in estate regeneration are structurally coupled to growth: employment and skills provision is secured through Section 106 obligations and contributions generated by development itself, so the offer depends on a continuing pipeline of redevelopment to fund it (Camden Council, n.d.).

A degrowth approach would decouple socioeconomic wellbeing from speculative building activity. It would strengthen the foundational economy by creating local employment centred on sustainable regeneration, retrofit, and the long-term maintenance of the estate. It would also provide physical spaces where residents can develop skills that directly support care, education, and community reproduction, fostering a self-sustaining and mutually supportive neighbourhood.

3.3.6 Ownership and Processes

Ownership and process are conceptually and practically inseparable: autonomy is an exercised capacity, and commoning is the institutional process through which collective ownership is realised and sustained (Savini, 2023). While London estate regeneration requires demonstrating resident support through ballots to secure funding for schemes involving demolition (GLA, 2026a), a critical distinction exists between consent and control. Ballots often return “yes” votes under highly unequal conditions, with landlords enjoying unlimited spending on pro-demolition campaigns and exclusive real-time turnout data (Berry, 2022).

Degrowth insists on autonomy, which means that communities should be able to govern themselves, and in their best interest (and the interest of nature) through direct democratic means (Savini, 2021).

This suggests three procedural conditions: co-design must run deeper than tokenistic consultation, refurbishment and demolition options must be appraised to equal depth, and the ballot must be conducted on democratically even terms.

Regarding ownership, conventional models leave the estate as a council-owned asset managed on residents’ behalf. Degrowth insists estate resources must become a commons (to provide autonomy), collectively governed and maintained by residents through “commoning” (Savini, 2023). In the UK context, this shift is supported by legal mechanisms like the Right to Transfer and Right to Manage. A key institutional expression is the Community Land Trust (CLT), where land is held in trust for long-term community benefit, permanently removing it from speculative markets and ensuring decisions remain collectively governed.



Case Studies

4 Case Studies

4.1 West Kensington and Gibbs Green Peoples Plan, London

4.2 Cressingham Gardens Peoples Plan, London

4.3 Granby 4 Street CLT, Liverpool

4.4 De Nieuwe Meent, Amsterdam

4 Case Studies

The following four case studies are examined as sources of transferable lessons for a degrowth approach to estate regeneration. While not all represent housing estates or explicitly adopt degrowth as a guiding framework, each demonstrates practices that align with the principles identified in the literature review, alongside additional degrowth-aligned practices. Rather than treating these projects as wholly degrowth examples, the analysis selectively extracts the practices and design strategies that align with degrowth principles and are relevant to estate regeneration. The objective is to synthesise these empirical insights with the theoretical findings of the literature review, forming a framework that is both conceptually grounded and informed by real-world practice.

1 West Kensington and Gibbs Green, London



Figure 6: West Kensington Towers

2 Cressingham Gardens, London



Figure 8: Cressingham Gardens

3 Granby Four Street, Liverpool

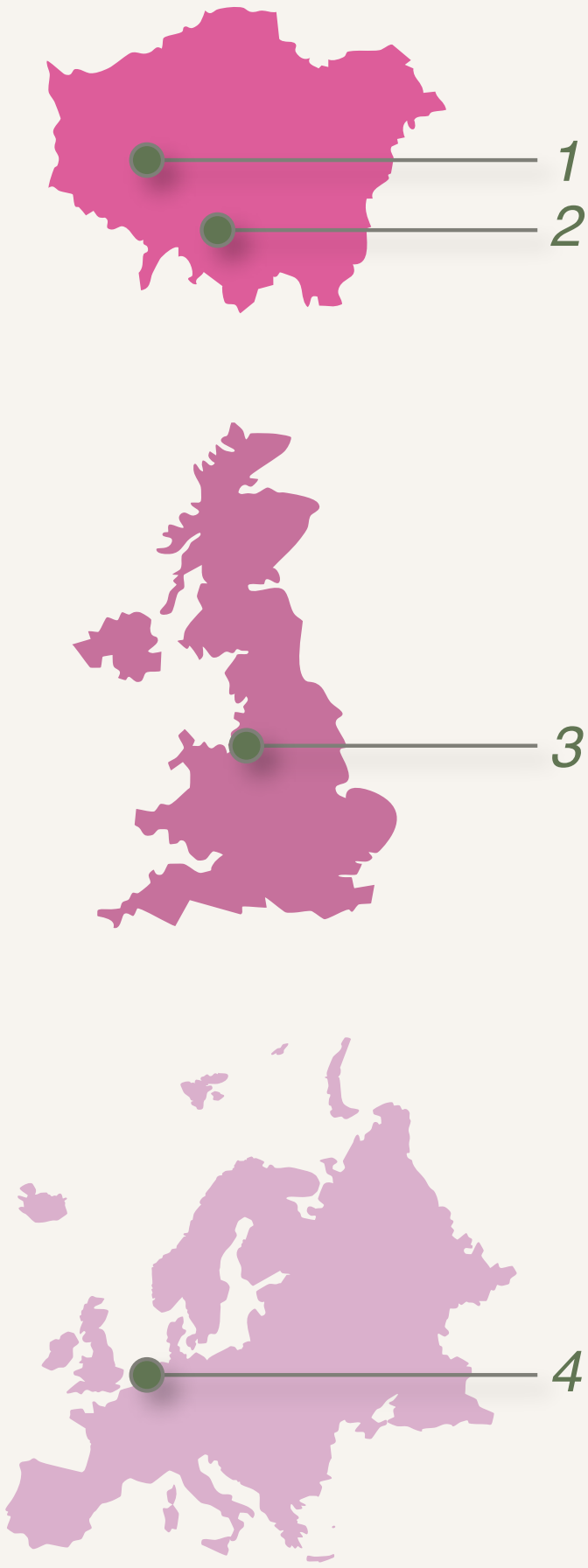


Figure 7: Granby 4 Street Corner

4 de Nieuwe Meent, Amsterdam



Figure 9: De Nieuwe Meent Render



4.1 West Kensington and Gibbs Green Peoples Plan, London

The West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates in Hammersmith and Fulham comprise 760 homes housing nearly 2,000 residents, with Gibbs Green completed in 1961 and West Kensington in 1974 on a former coal depot site (ASH, 2016). From 2013 both were under threat of demolition through a land sale to Capital and Counties Properties (CAPCO) under the wider Earls Court masterplan. Architects for Social Housing (ASH), led by Geraldine Denning, produced the People's Plan in 2015-16, commissioned by the resident-controlled West Ken Gibbs Green Community Homes (WK-GGCH) (ASH, 2016).



Figure 10: West Ken & Gibbs Green Render

4.1.1 Housing

The plan takes the existing fabric as its starting point, refurbishing all 760 homes through a layered set of interventions calibrated to problems residents had themselves identified (ASH, 2016). These include renewed insulation, re-cladding of the single-family houses, lifts extended or added to the towers, replacement of unsafe bin chutes, and winter gardens to the 1-bed tower flats, while local extract ventilation addresses chronic mold and condensation. Crucially, rather than clearing and rebuilding, the plan adds 253 homes selectively through infill and rooftop extensions, keeping the existing footprint and street pattern intact. Roof extensions use lightweight timber frame and prefabricated SIPs panels to stay within the structural capacity of the existing concrete frame, with low-embodied-energy materials and solar panels throughout the new roofs.

4.1.2 Movement & Legibility

The degrowth-relevant spatial moves centre on reclaiming space from the car rather than extending the built envelope. Surface parking is reconfigured across the estate to release land for infill housing and, at the bottom of Sharnbrook, for allotments, so densification lands on redundant tarmac rather than on demolished homes (ASH, 2016). Vehicular dominance is further reduced, with North End Road restricted to drive-through access, while pedestrian permeability is opened up and cycle storage added throughout to support active travel to the newly clustered everyday facilities.

4.1.3 Green Spaces

The landscape strategy reads the estates as part of a strategic wildlife corridor running into Kensington and Chelsea. Underused parking is converted to allotments, children's play areas consolidated, communal gardens placed under fob access, and native wild planting introduced alongside loggeries providing Stag Beetle habitat (ASH, 2016).

4.1.4 Community Facilities

Not Strongly Evidenced

4.1.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Not Strongly Evidenced



Figure 11: West Ken & Gibbs Green Infill & Extension

4.1.6 Ownership & Processes

In 2009, the West Kensington and Gibbs Green tenant associations invoked The Right to Transfer, proposing to transfer their estates to a resident-controlled landlord (WKGGCH, 2026). WKGGCH was incorporated in 2011 as a resident-controlled body to carry the transfer forward, governed by fourteen residents and four housing experts, and now representing over 580 members across nearly two-thirds of households (WKGGCH, 2026).

Supported by Nationwide Foundation funding, the model combined three elements: the Right to Transfer as the legal mechanism, WKGGCH as the governance body, and the People's Plan as the framework for community regeneration (WKGGCH, 2026). The People's Plan was developed through neighbourhood walks, workshops, and consultation before any design work (ASH, 2016). In total, 112 residents participated, and by October 2015, 57% of households had signed a petition supporting its implementation, but the council did not act on it (ASH, 2016).

The plan retains all 760 existing social homes and adds 100 affordable among the 253 new homes, 70 at social rent and 30 at shared ownership (ASH, 2016).

4.1.7 Status

West Kensington and Gibbs Green demonstrate a case where demolition was successfully averted, but community ownership was rejected. Residents' attempts to secure ownership of the estates were refused, and the properties subsequently returned to council control (ASH, 2019). At the same time, substantial investment is being directed towards the public realm, including a £2.5 million programme of open-space improvements over five years (Hammersmith & Fulham, 2026). The case therefore separates the prevention of demolition from resident ownership, while demonstrating that significant public-realm investment can still follow.



Figure 12: 1:500 Model of West Kens & Gibbs Green Infill & Extension

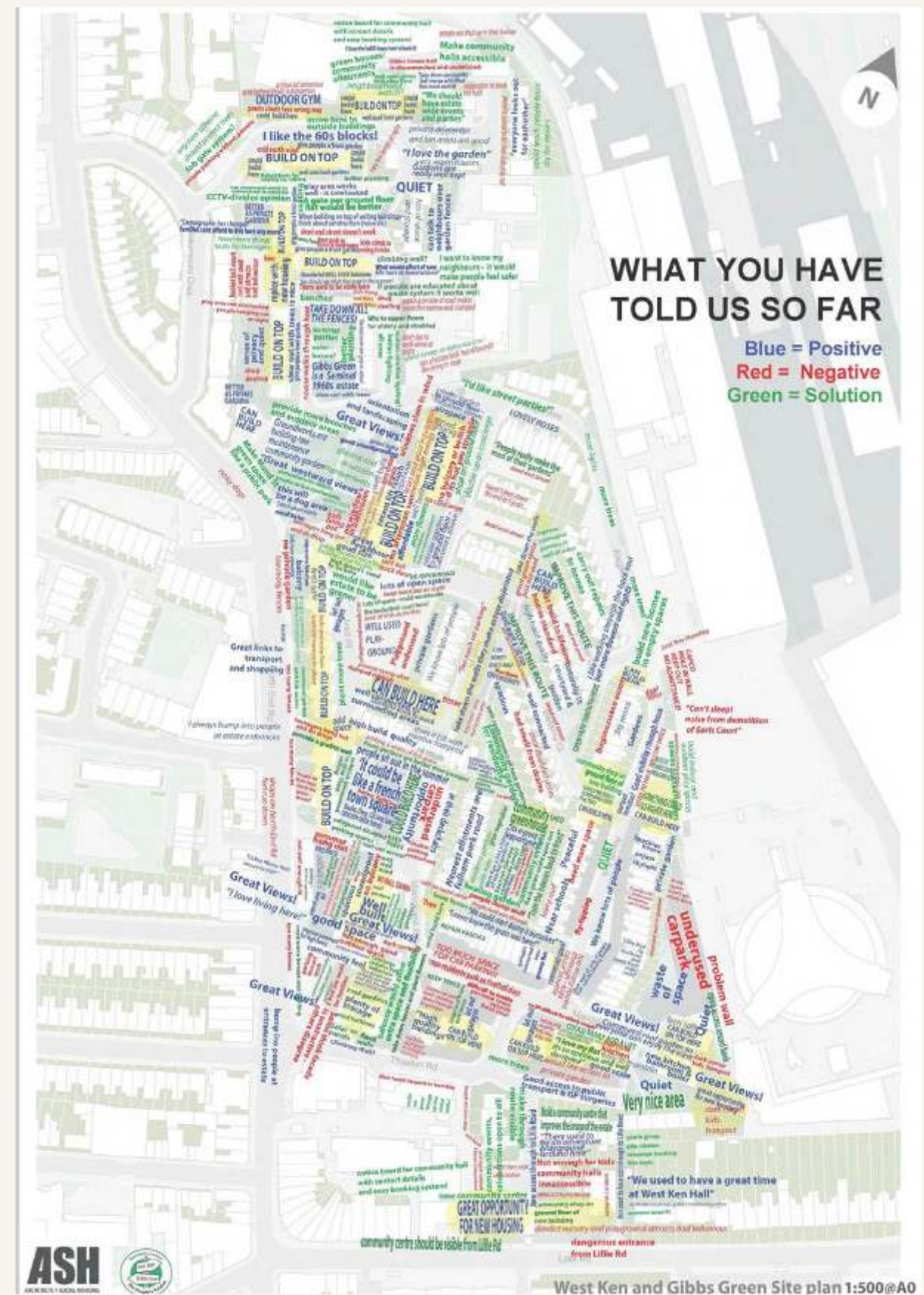


Figure 13: Feedback Map West Ken & Gibbs Green

4.2 Cressingham Gardens People's Plan, London



Figure 14: Cressingham Gardens Infill Plan

Cressingham Gardens is a Lambeth council estate of 306 homes on the edge of Brockwell Park, designed in the late 1960s and completed in 1978 (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016). Lord Esher, past president of the RIBA, described it on completion as warm and informal, among the nicest small schemes in England” (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016:33). Following Lambeth’s 2015 decision to demolish under Option 5 of its consultation, residents, supported by architects, surveyors and finance experts, produced The People’s Plan in March 2016 as a costed alternative grounded in the estate’s existing fabric (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016).

4.2.1 Housing

The retrofit programme combines envelope improvements, filling gaps around windows, internal floor and ceiling insulation, and upgraded kitchen and bathroom ventilation, with rooftop photovoltaics suited to the estate’s low-rise pitched-roof geometry, providing energy for communal use, feed-in-tariff income and reduced resident bills (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016). Accessibility upgrades bring the estate into compliance with the Lambeth Housing Standard. The plan adds 33 new homes through infill in the undercroft car parking, demonstrating density uplift without demolition.

4.2.2 Movement & Legibility

Cressingham is widely regarded as one of the better-designed post-war estates in London, with a layout that actively fosters neighbourliness: front doors face each other and rear garden gates open onto the communal spaces buffering the blocks, so that children move between gardens and shared areas under easy parental oversight (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016).

4.2.3 Green Spaces

The plan proposes a sustainable drainage (SUDS) and green infrastructure strategy that reduces flows into the sewers, easing flood risk in lower-lying areas elsewhere in the borough (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016). In doing so it removes drainage as a justification for demolition, showing the problem can be solved within the retained fabric.

4.2.4 Community Facilities

Cressingham extends the shared-infrastructure logic into care provision. The undercroft spaces released by infill could accommodate a GP surgery or outreach health facility significant for elderly and disabled residents, an elderly day centre reducing isolation among those with limited mobility, basic gym equipment, and a communal laundromat with drying facilities that addresses condensation caused by in-home drying (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016).

4.2.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Not Relevant



Figure 15: Cressingham Gardens Aerial Sketch

4.2.6 Ownership & Processes

The plan presents a tenure spectrum from continued Lambeth ownership to full community ownership, with sale-and-leaseback as an intermediate position (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016). Full community ownership is framed as the structural condition insulating the social-housing stock from policy turbulence, particularly the Special Purpose Vehicle route under which the council's scheme would have stripped secure tenancy and Right to Buy protections.

The plan also delivers a genuine social-housing gain within the retained fabric. All 306 existing homes are kept with secure tenancies protected, and the undercroft and void-property infill adds up to 33 new homes at council rent, meaning 90% of new homes are let at council rent, which is more than is proposed under the demolition option (Save Cressingham Gardens, 2016).



Figure 16: Cressingham Gardens Architecture Sketch

4.2.7 Status

Cressingham Gardens remains unbuilt and unresolved. In July 2019 the housing minister determined that the residents' stock transfer should be allowed to proceed, rejecting Lambeth's objection, but ownership never moved because Cressingham Gardens Community still had to raise the funding to purchase the estate (Barker 2019). Redevelopment was paused in 2023 and the estate is now undergoing a new options appraisal, with full refurbishment, retrofitting and demolition and rebuild all live options and business case work expected to conclude by the end of 2026 (Lambeth Council, 2026).

4.3 Granby 4 Streets CLT, Liverpool



Figure 17: Granby 4 Streets Greater Area

The Granby Four Streets project covers four streets of late-Victorian terraces in Toxteth, Liverpool, condemned for demolition under the Housing Market Renewal Initiative of the 2000s (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025). Residents refused to vacate, maintaining the streets through years of informal stewardship, and in 2011 incorporated the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust. Ten houses were acquired in 2014 and refurbished with Assemble, who won the Turner Prize in 2015. The Granby Winter Garden, completed in 2019, occupies two previously derelict terrace shells (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025). Despite not being a typical estate regeneration case, the CLT carries many valuable transferable lessons for a degrowth approach.

4.3.1 Housing

Before any architect was involved, remaining residents had begun informal grassroots activity, from painting derelict properties to gardening shared spaces, so retrofit at Granby began as a protest (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025). Once the CLT secured the ten houses this was formalised into deep refurbishment, using low-cost materials and leftover demolition waste (Parry, 2015). Retrofit here is inseparable from heritage retention and from the political refusal to demolish.

4.3.2 Movement & Legibility

Not Strongly Evidenced

4.3.3 Green Spaces

The residents' early stewardship included rewilding and gardening the shared spaces, and the Winter Garden later formalised a covered indoor-outdoor garden within the retained terrace shells (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025; Assemble, 2019).

4.3.4 Community Facilities

The Winter Garden makes the shared, refurbished infrastructure logic spatially explicit. Two houses that would otherwise have been demolished are retained in their raw state, including the collapsed floors, and reframed as communal indoor-outdoor infrastructure accessible to the wider neighbourhood, hosting events, residencies and gatherings, and held by the CLT rather than the local authority (Assemble, 2019).

4.3.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

The Granby Workshop was established by Assemble working alongside residents to rebuild the neighbourhood, producing tiles, mantelpieces and door handles for the refurbished houses, operationalising a foundational-economy logic of local production for local need (Assemble, 2015).



Figure 18: Granby 4 Streets Winter Garden

4.3.6 Ownership & Processes

The CLT holds the land in perpetuity, and because it formed in direct response to the demolition threat, collective ownership is conceived from the outset as the structural condition preventing that threat's recurrence (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025). The legal architecture converts the residents' informal stewardship into durable, legible asset control. The resident-led board makes anti-displacement protection internal to the governance settlement rather than an external policy condition that could be withdrawn.

4.3.7 Status

By 2019, Granby had completed eleven terraced houses and the Winter Garden, while subsequent expansion has focused on enterprise and community assets rather than further housing (Granby 4 Streets CLT, 2025). The Fourth Corner proposal adds a ground floor cafe and only one further CLT-rented apartment, suggesting a model that has expanded sideways into community infrastructure rather than through housing growth (Assemble 2020).



Figure 20: Granby Workshop Illustration



Figure 19: Granby 4 Streets



Figure 21: Granby 4 Streets Winter Garden

4.4 De Nieuwe Meent, Amsterdam



Figure 22: De Nieuwe Meent

De Nieuwe Meent is a resident developed rental housing cooperative located by Archimedesplantsoen in Amsterdam-Oost. Completed in 2025, it provides forty affordable homes for approximately fifty-five residents in a seven-storey timber building co-developed and co-financed by its future tenants (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). By removing the building from the speculative housing market through collective ownership and long-term resident stewardship, the cooperative treats housing as a shared social resource organised around the principles of commoning.

4.4.1 Housing

Although the project is a new-build rather than a retrofit, sustainability is embedded throughout its design and construction. The building employs circular construction methods, including dry building systems that facilitate future adaptation and dismantling (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). Renewable energy systems, including solar panels and geothermal heating, combined with high levels of insulation, enable the building to operate as energy neutral while minimising its ecological footprint. Internally, housing is organised into co-living groups, with each floor accommodating five private dwellings alongside extensive shared spaces. Flexible floor plans allow residents to collectively determine the balance between private and communal areas, reinforcing housing as a shared rather than individual resource (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025).

4.4.2 Movement & Legibility

The spatial organisation extends this emphasis on commoning beyond the building itself. Situated between the residential neighbourhood of Watergraafsmeer and Science Park station, De Nieuwe Meent is well integrated into the surrounding urban fabric while maintaining a strong communal identity (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). A semi-public courtyard serves as the primary outdoor gathering space, extending into accessible green roofs and a communal lobby containing shared kitchens, dining areas, meeting rooms and recreational spaces. This layout encourages interaction between residents and the wider neighbourhood while preserving a sense of collective ownership (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025).

4.4.3 Green Spaces

Nature-inclusive design is another central feature of the project (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). Residents collectively maintain landscaped courtyards, green roofs and vegetated façades, while low-tech water management systems support biodiversity and improve environmental performance. These spaces therefore function as both ecological infrastructure and collectively managed commons (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025).

4.4.4 Community Facilities

De Nieuwe Meent embeds resource sharing into everyday life through extensive communal infrastructure. Shared facilities—including laundry rooms, tools, children's equipment and communal kitchens—reduce material consumption while lowering household costs (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). These spaces support regular interaction between residents while reinforcing collective responsibility for the management and use of common resources.

4.4.5 Socio-Economic Conditions

Beyond its physical infrastructure, De Nieuwe Meent actively builds local social and economic capacity. Community-building is strengthened through the “Do-It-Together” programme, where residents and volunteers collaboratively complete construction work - fostering practical skills, mutual support and stronger social networks (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). The cooperative also supports locally oriented enterprises, including Noon Coffee & Culture, a resident-led bookshop and café that provides an inclusive cultural space centred on community and neighbourhood engagement (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025).

4.4.6 Ownership & Processes

De Nieuwe Meent is a non-profit cooperative offering an alternative to Amsterdam's housing crisis. As a legal entity the cooperative owns the residential building itself, so no individual member can sell a unit; members instead rent their homes and jointly manage the cooperative, with all rent directed towards management, maintenance and keeping housing costs low (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025).

Governance is organised around participatory principles. Residents collectively manage the cooperative through self-organised committees responsible for finance, legal affairs, communications and design (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). Neighbours, volunteers and supporters are encouraged to participate in working groups and public meetings, but formal decision-making remains with resident members, combining democratic participation with resident autonomy and rooting the cooperative's long-term direction in collective ownership and everyday practices of commoning.

4.4.7 Status

De Nieuwe Meent is the clearest built and operational example in the set. The cooperative was completed and occupied in 2025 after construction delays caused by rising costs and interest rates (De Nieuwe Meent, 2025). With all homes occupied and no waiting list, the project demonstrates community-led housing as an operating model rather than simply a proposal.



Figure 23: De Nieuwe Meent



Figure 24: De Nieuwe Meent Render



Figure 25: De Nieuwe Meent Render

Toolkit

5.1 Framework & Toolkit

5.1.1 Housing

5.1.2 Movement & Legiblity

5.1.3 Green Space

5.1.4 Community Facilities

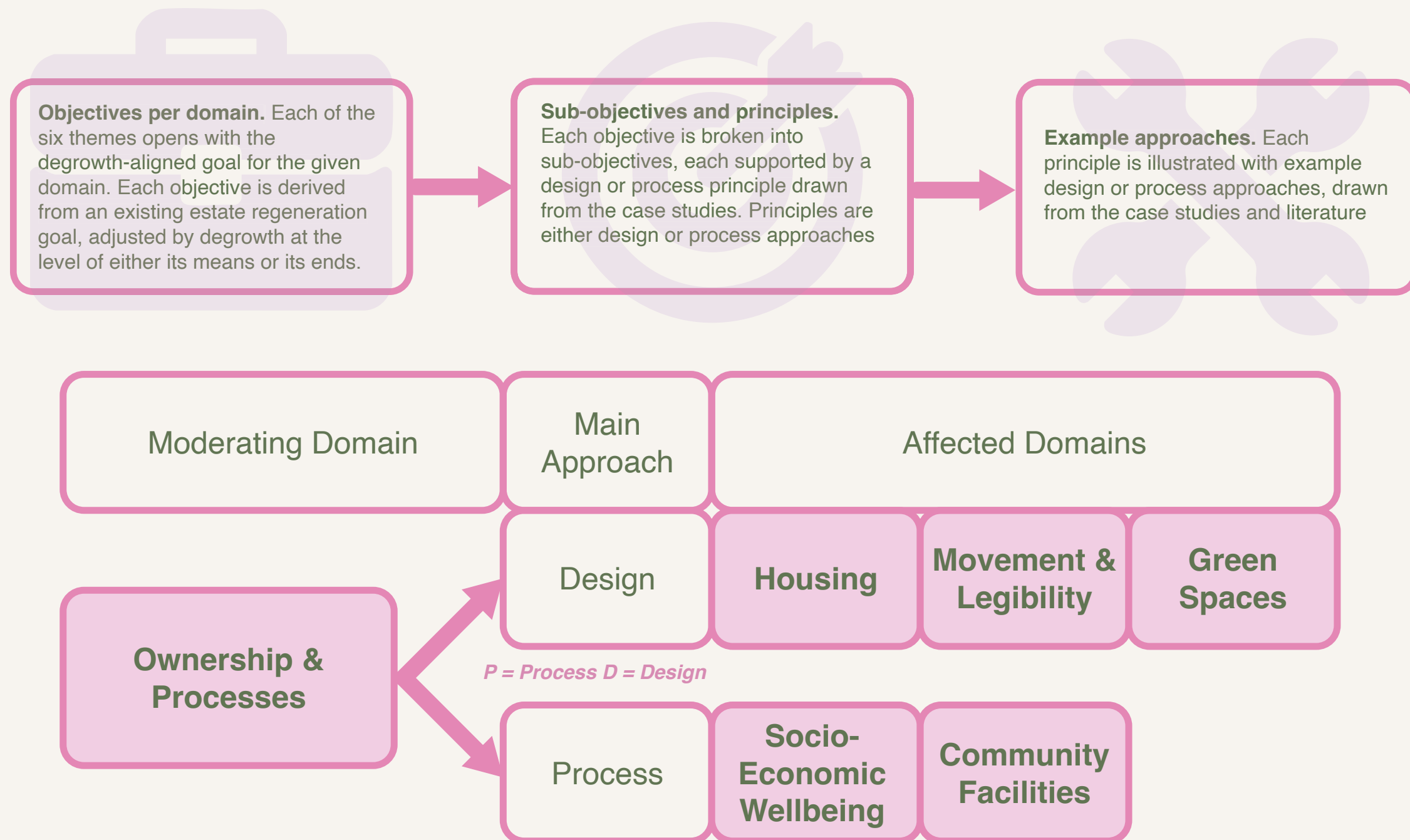
5.1.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

5.1.6 Ownership & Processes

5.1 Framework and Toolkit

Building on the literature review and case study analysis, the framework translates the objectives of estate regeneration into a degrowth context. It identifies key regeneration goals, critiques their conventional implementation through a degrowth lens, and reformulates them into adjusted objectives that respect ecological limits and social equity. Governance and Processes differs from the other domains in that it moderates rather than just sits alongside them. For example: *which green spaces are valued or which housing forms are wanted cannot be assumed from the literature or read off the site; they are settled through resident involvement, whether surveys, walks or co-design.* Each adjustment in the other five domains is therefore provisional until tested against the preferences of those who live there.

Under each objective sits the toolkit itself: a set of components, each addressing one sub-goal, with example actions attached to each. The toolkit is intended to be used collaboratively, setting out not only what degrowth asks of the design but how those measures should be arrived at, through resident involvement rather than expert determination. Content and process are held to the same degree.



Housing

Overarching Goal

Retain, improve and extend existing housing stock while increasing capacity through high-density, sustainable and collectively oriented strategies.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Retrofit the maximum proportion of existing homes , treating retained fabric as the default so that removal requires a justified structural or safety case	P Block-by-block structural and fabric survey D Deep retrofit, internally & externally (insulation, safety, comfort)
	Extend vertically wherever structure permits , with lightweight rooftop additions sized to load capacity, with added homes entering community or social tenure.	P Structural capacity study per block D One- to four-storey timber rooftop additions D Roof repair, insulation and extension in one operation
	Infill all underused spaces without taking green space , limiting infill to surplus parking, garage courts and redundant structures	P Residual-space inventory before infill is drawn D Gap-site buildings completing perimeters
	Build and run all additions at low carbon and low consumption , using sustainable or reclaimed materials, and demountable construction	D Timber frame and panelised systems D Layouts allowing merger or subdivision
	Design the additional homes for sufficiency, sharing and low carbon , with a combination of council rent units & shared units, built around sustainability and commoning principles	D Combination of council & shared units D Integrate sustainable energy systems into units D High-density units
	*Residents determine which homes and conditions come first , setting the retrofit sequence from their evidence and needs	P Household-by-household condition interview P Resident ranking of works priorities

Movement & Legibility

Overarching Goal

Improve safety, accessibility and legibility through targeted, low-intervention adjustments that strengthen the spatial structure.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Reconfigure and improve movement through the least material intervention that resolves it , correcting dead ends and severance while raising safety and comfort through wayfinding and lighting	P Route hierarchy derived from resident walks, not site plan D Use infill strategies to simplify movement paths D Implement Low-Intervention and adaptable wayfinding & lighting on paths
	Reclaim road and parking space for people , reducing vehicle space to evidenced need and assigning reclaimed area through the residual-space inventory.	P Car ownership and use survey D Filtered streets, consolidated parking, cycle storage
	Remove only what demonstrably blocks safety or permeability , with every removal evidencing a specific gain in safety, access or overlooking.	P Demolition case test per removal D Conversion of single undercrofts, blank walls, redundant garages
	Strengthen overlooking without restructuring , adjusting openings, entrances and ground-floor use within existing buildings.	D Reoriented entrances and ground-floor windows D Active ground floors on weak routes
	Residents determine which routes, hazards and boundaries matter , with their map of used, avoided and unsafe space forming the brief for this domain.	P Resident-led walks and hazard mapping P Resident sign-off on removals

Green Spaces

Overarching Goal

Protect and enhance existing green commons while creating accessible, biodiverse, productive and collectively managed landscapes.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Retain all mature trees and established landscape as fixed constraints on every other domain, including infill.	P Tree and habitat survey as inventory exclusions D Infill and routes drawn around retained canopy
	Make existing green space usable by all residents , treating underuse as an access and management problem before a design problem.	D Removal of fencing and level changes D Seating, shade and lighting on existing lawns
	Convert grey to green where it is not needed for homes , with sealed surface made permeable, planted or productive.	D Depaving of redundant road and parking D Rain gardens and swales on reclaimed surface
	Make landscape productive and low-maintenance , with native planting and food growing.	D Allotments and communal growing on reclaimed ground D Rewilding, meadow and native planting over mown grass
	Residents decide which spaces are kept, converted and managed by them , taking on management of chosen spaces under their stewardship structure	P Resident mapping of valued and unused space P Management agreements held by the resident body

Community Facilities

Overarching Goal

Recognise, protect and expand existing community infrastructure and facilities through refurbishment, adaptation and shared-use spaces.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Retain and refurbish every facility in active use before new provision is considered , securing existing halls, hubs and informal spaces first so that conversion is additional, not a replacement.	D Hall and hub refurbishment within the retrofit programme
	Convert residual enclosed space into shared facilities , drawing on garages, undercrofts and vacant units before any new build.	D Garage and undercroft conversion to workshop and care space D Vacant ground-floor units adapted for shared use
	Prioritise foundational-economy and care uses in allocating converted space, with childcare, health, food, repair and mutual support ahead of commercial or amenity uses.	D Space specified for food, repair and childcare P Allocation decided by the resident body
	Provide shared facilities that substitute for private consumption rather than supplementing it.	D Communal laundries, kitchens and tool libraries D Shared storage enabling smaller private units
	Residents distinguish what is present from what is used, and name what is missing , so that need is defined by socially embedded use rather than a standards audit	P Resident mapping of facilities in use, underused and absent P Resident ranking need for conversion

Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Overarching Goal

Develop durable local livelihoods through foundational-economy activities, resident skills development and local wealth circulation.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Tie employment to retrofit, maintenance and stewardship rather than just construction , treating the long programme of upkeep as the source of local work.	P Local labour and training clauses in retrofit contracts P Resident skills programme in retrofit and landscape care
	Specify ground floors for foundational-economy uses , as units whose rent is protected by collective tenure so that use is not set by market rent.	D Ground-floor units serviced for food, repair, care and enterprise D Active frontages on outside facing routes
	Keep value circulating within the estate , with commercial and shared space community-owned and income cycled into repairs and support	P Commercial units held by the resident body P Rent from community-owned units funds estate repairs
	Residents determine which skills, enterprises and services are supported , with training and enterprise space following their stated needs rather than a generic employment offer.	P Resident skills and enterprise audit P Enterprise space allocated by the resident body

Ownership & Processes

Overarching Goal

Embed resident control over decisions, land and long-term stewardship so that the remaining domains are worked out with residents rather than delivered to them.

Toolkit	Toolkit Component	Example Actions
	Make resident knowledge the primary evidence base , gathered on site before any option is scoped, so that local knowledge of routes, hazards, damp and care networks frames the technical survey rather than following it.	P Resident-led walks mapping use, avoidance and hazards P Household condition interviews alongside stock survey P Care network and informal facility mapping
	Work all options to equal depth before any decision , with retrofit, infill-and-extension and redevelopment appraised at equivalent budget and detail, counting embodied carbon, displacement and tenure loss alongside cost and yield.	P Independent options appraisal before a preferred scheme P Equal-depth presentation P Binding ballot across options, not on one scheme
	Move land and shared assets into collective tenure : new homes into community ownership under a council long lease, existing homes remaining council stock with Right to Transfer (s.34A) available, shared spaces passing by asset transfer.	P CLT formation in parallel with regeneration P Asset transfer of shared spaces
	Secure resident stewardship beyond the project , with maintenance, adaptation and investment priorities governed by residents	P Resident-led board with defined membership classes P Repairs & maintenance budget under board control
	Co-design the scheme with residents from the first drawing , so that briefs, layouts and phasing are produced in workshops rather than consulted on after the fact, with residents holding sign-off at each design stage.	P Resident design workshops at brief, concept and detail stages P Resident sign-off before each stage advances P Shared drawing and model as the working medium

Site Analysis

- 6.1 Context
- 6.2 Housing
- 6.3 Movement & Legiblity
- 6.4 Green Space
- 6.5 Community Facilities
- 6.6 Socio-Economic Wellbeing
- 6.7 Ownership & Processes

6.1 Context

In order to test the degrowth toolkit, the study applies it to The Wendling and St Stephens Close Estate, treated as one regeneration site. The two estates cover 2.6 hectares and comprise 194 council tenanted and 47 leaseholder homes (Camden Council, 2026a). Built in the 1970s, the estate is typical of post-war housing in its layout, construction and design. In 2010, the Council identified overcrowding, housing conditions, disrepair, and community safety as key issues in the wider Gospel Oak area. Following a 2017 Cabinet decision, a feasibility option appraisal was undertaken alongside estate-based engagement through a resident-staffed liaison team and the Wendling and St Stephens Close Steering Group. In July 2019, the Cabinet selected complete demolition and redevelopment (Option 3) as its preferred approach, with an indicative capacity of around 650 new homes in place of the existing 241, with a net increase of 6 (1%) homes for social rent (make:-good, 2019; Penny, 2024); a resident ballot held in June–July 2021 returned a majority in favour (Camden Council, 2026a).



Figure 26: Wendling Estate Figure Ground Map



Figure 27: Wendling Estate London

The site was selected because of the contested character of its regeneration process. A retain-and-infill alternative was also raised within the process itself. In its response to the 2022 consultation, the West Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum stated that Peter Barber Architects had worked with Wendling residents over two years on an infill scheme of 250 to 300 new homes that displaced no one, and that the reasons for its non-adoption had not been explained (Camden Council, 2022). No further documentation of this scheme appears in the public record; what the response does establish is that an infill option was considered viable by parties close to the estate and was not appraised to the same depth as redevelopment.

The nearby Bacton estate, demolished in 2018 and still partly vacant, illustrates the risks of demolition-led delivery. The ballot also made continued maintenance conditional: where residents rejected redevelopment, or an option retained existing homes, planned works would be weighed against other Camden priorities in the five-year cycle following 2024 (make:good, 2019). Although a decision has been taken, the site remains live, allowing refurbishment to be explored as a genuine, fully resourced alternative extending beyond housing to holistic site improvement through the degrowth toolkit.

The scheme was initially to be delivered through Camden's Community Investment Programme (CIP), a council-led model intended to generate surpluses for reinvestment in housing and services. By August 2024, however, the Council had shifted to what it calls a 'partnership' model, working through agreements with private developers and housing associations (Penny, 2024). This followed a decline in CIP finances, with forecast surpluses falling from £97m in 2018 to a projected £135m deficit by July 2021 (Penny, 2024). The partnership model is likely to weaken council and social housing outcomes. The same model is proposed for Bacton Phase 2, on which the relocation of Wendling and St Stephens Close residents depends (Camden Council, 2024).



Figure 28: Wendling Estate with Bacton Tower in the distance



Figure 29: Wendling Estate



Figure 30: Wendling Estate

6.2 Housing

The estate is predominantly composed of low-rise row housing, with a single tower providing some variation in height and form. Several residential buildings incorporate undercroft parking, creating substantial areas of underused ground-level space, and there are numerous gaps between buildings that could accommodate in-fill development, consistent with options previously considered by the council (Metropolitan Workshop, 2019). Approximately half of the existing buildings appear potentially suitable for rooftop extension, subject to GLA guidance (GLA, 2026b). 41% of the apartments are one-bedroom, compared to the England average of 12% (ONS, 2021).

A residents' submission to Cabinet in 2019 describes failing communal heating, damp, drainage faults, infestation and overcrowding, and a pattern of repeated repair rather than resolution (Wendling and St Stephens Close Residents, 2019). These are reported rather than surveyed conditions, but they describe faults of services and maintenance rather than structure. The stock is old and poorly maintained, but the estate's density is not particularly low.

Population	Site Area	Population Density
565	2.6ha	217pph

Low Rise Linear Block Point Block Mid-Rise Tower



Figure 31: Typology Aerial



Figure 32: Undercroft Parking Units

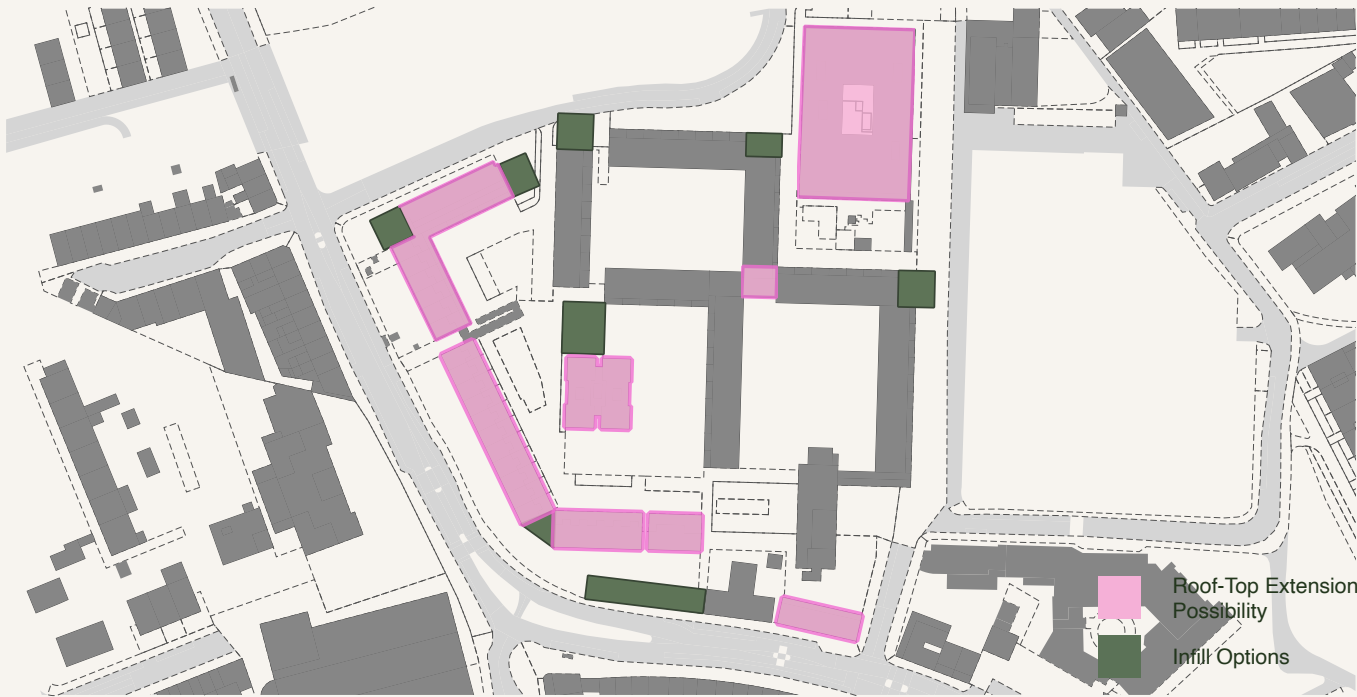


Figure 33: Infill & Rooftop Extension Map

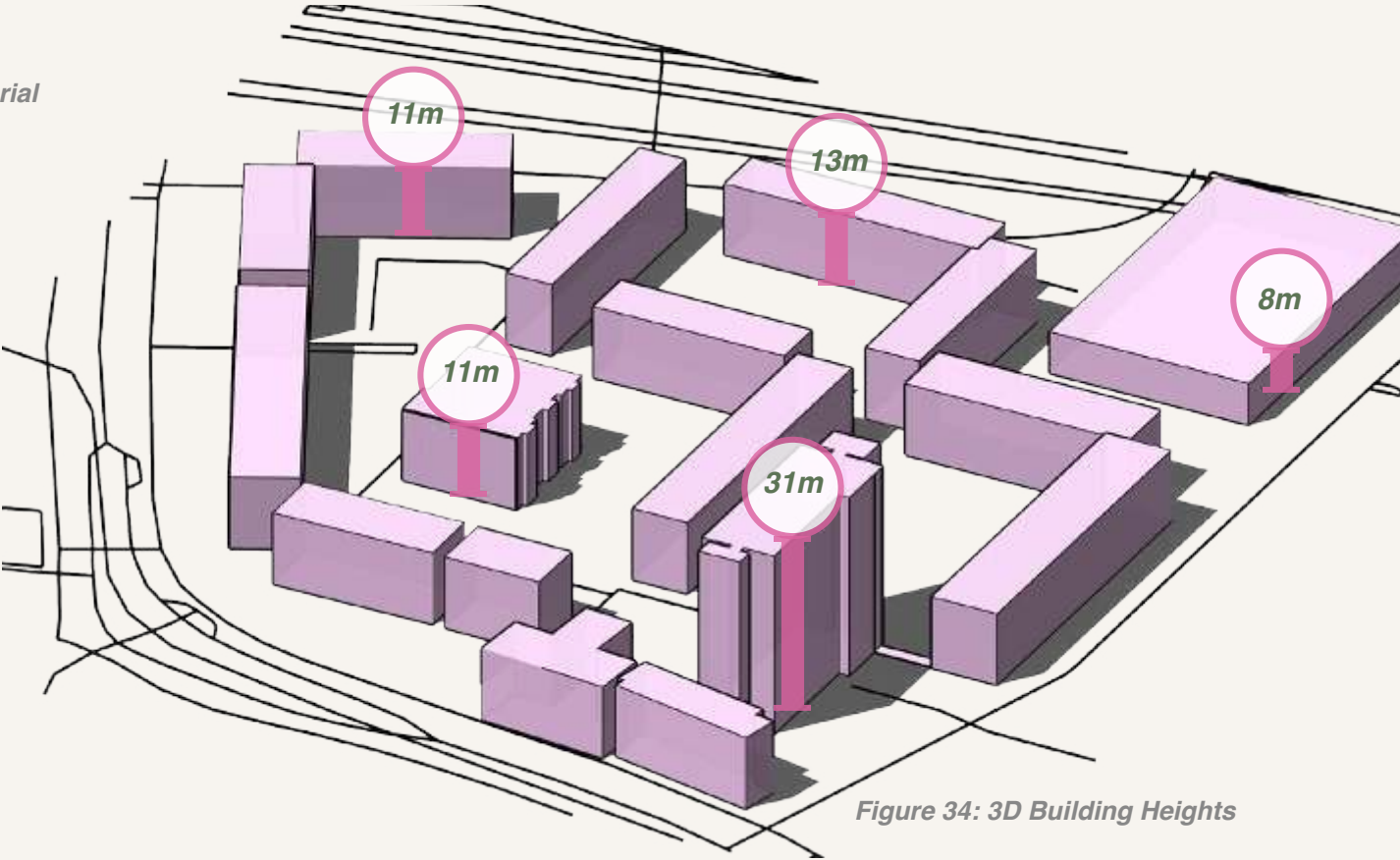


Figure 34: 3D Building Heights

6.3 Movement & Legibility

The estate's internal movement network is relatively car-centric, with parking and vehicle routes shaping much of the layout. Numerous narrow entrances between buildings create tight and sometimes unclear connections, while elevated walkways separate pedestrian movement from the ground plane and further complicate wayfinding. This separation is compounded at ground level, where garages occupying the lower floors of residential buildings leave routes lined by inactive frontages. Pedestrian passages therefore run past blank edges with little overlooking, so the same conditions that make the network hard to read also make it feel unwatched. The estate also lacks a clear spatial centre: the area that might otherwise function as a central gathering point is largely occupied by a parking lot, contributing to a confusing overall spatial hierarchy.



Figure 35: Narrow Corridors in East Side of Wendling

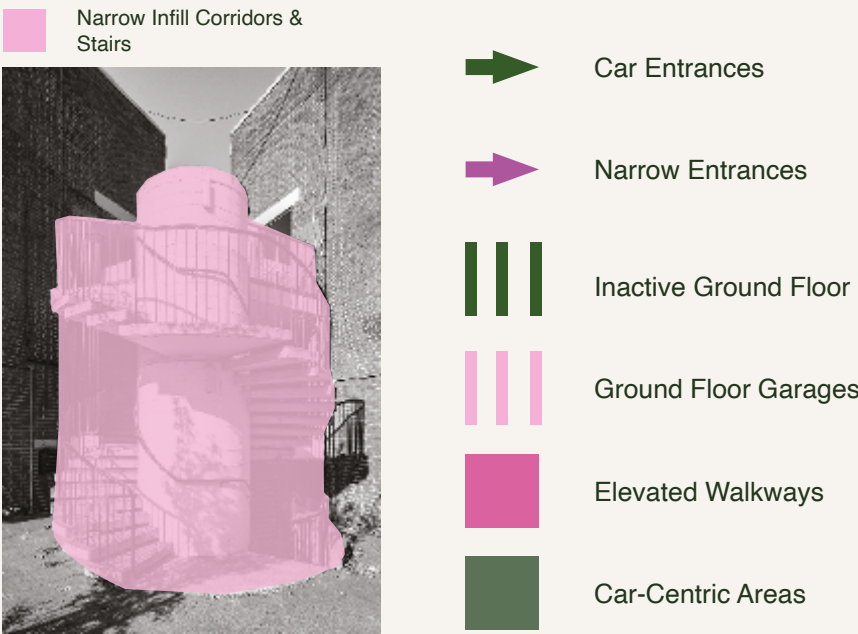


Figure 36: Narrow Stairs in East Side of Wendling

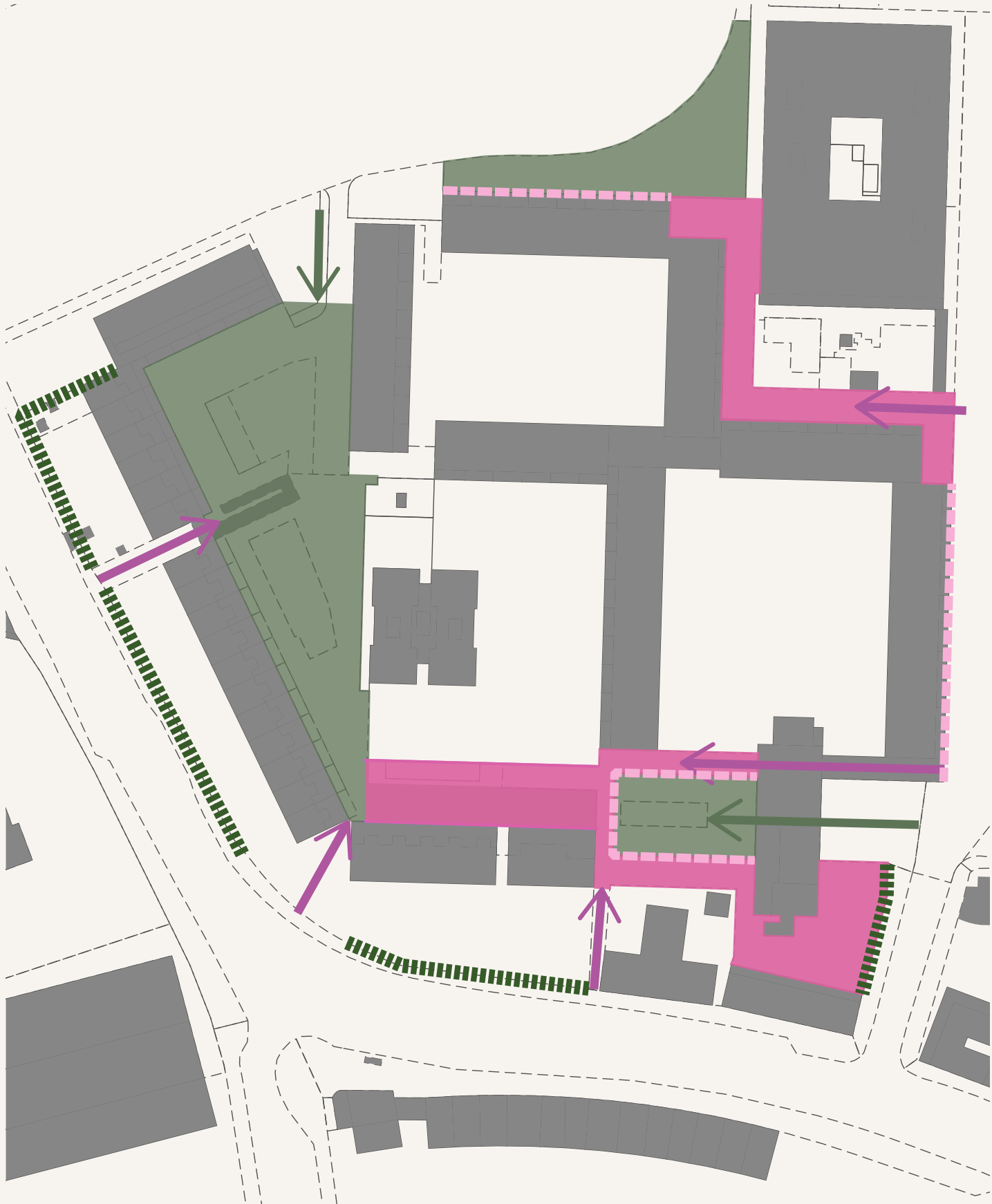


Figure 37: Movement & Legibility Analysis Map

6.4 Green Space

The estate as a whole is notably green, with substantial areas of open and planted space between buildings. Much of this greenery, however, exists in a semi-private condition, with unclear ownership and limited evidence of active use by residents. Several public green spaces are oddly enclosed, neither clearly accessible nor clearly private, and none is maintained as formal amenity space. The landscape therefore reads as residual rather than intentionally programmed. The western edge is characterised by private gardens backing onto the street, while a sequence of smaller modular green spaces runs along the western spine of the estate. The clearest exception is the community garden behind the community centre, actively run by the local food co-op and the one green space that is both socially embedded and in regular use.



Figure 38: Green Analysis Courtyard

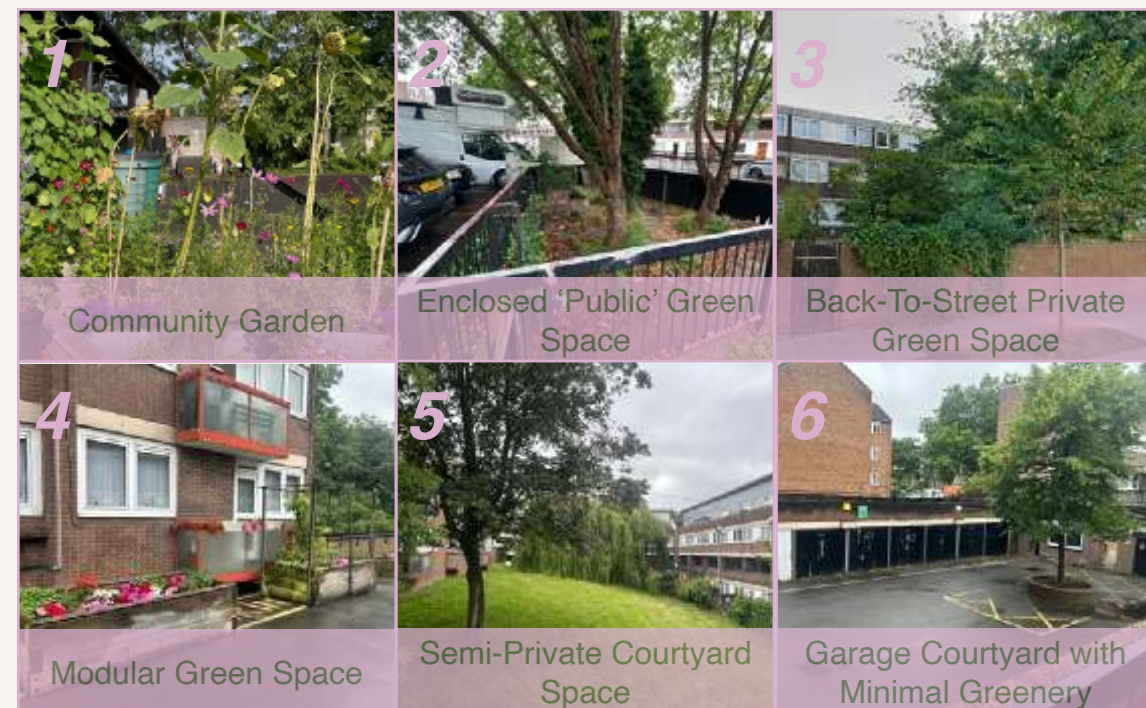


Figure 39: Green Analysis

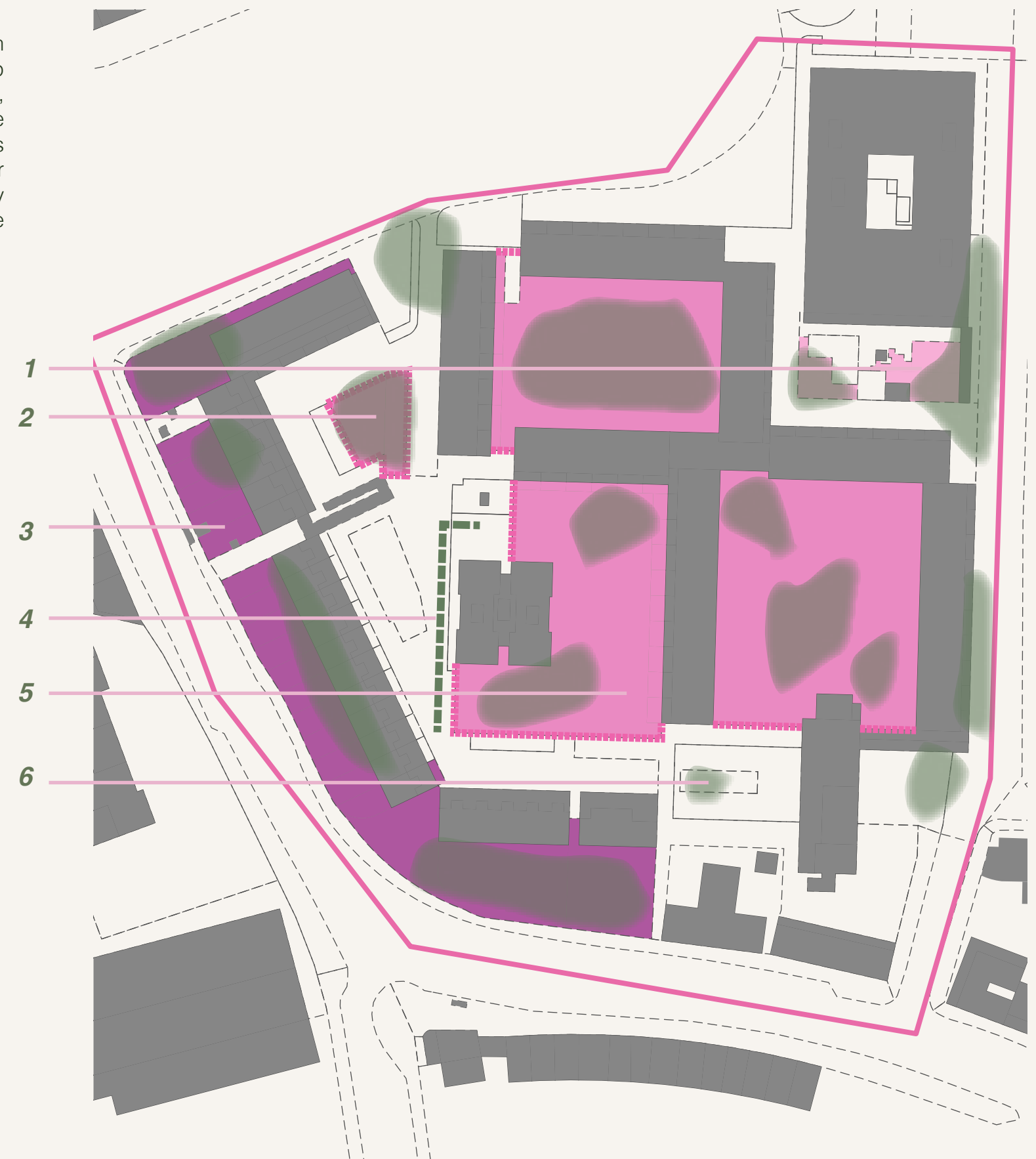


Figure 40: Green Analysis Map

6.5 Community Infrastructure

The estate and its surroundings are well served by community infrastructure supporting social, cultural, educational and everyday needs. Within the estate itself, however, this provision is concentrated in a single building in the north-east of the site, now within the demolition red line and at risk of permanent removal or relocation. The Cooperation Town Hub, a food co-op logistics space, also functions as a communal laundrette, an informal “living room” for casual meetings, a free social action psychotherapy project and the Gospel Oak Menopause Cafe (Cooperation Town, 2026).

Residents’ own account of what the estate lacks is set out in the 2019 submission to Cabinet (Wendling and St Stephens Close Residents, 2019). Play facilities are the only care provision identified as wholly absent. Some flats lack a balcony or garden for drying laundry, a function the Hub’s laundrette partly absorbs. Beyond this, residents ask that provision for health, education, leisure and transport be considered where necessary. Notably, the Hub’s existing functions are not named, either as valued or as missing, which suggests infrastructure that is in use without being registered by the demolition case.

1. Playground
2. Health Centre
3. Community Centre
4. Nursery
5. Food COOP
6. Primary School
7. Youth Hostel
8. Community Centre (2)

Figure 41: Community Infrastructure Map

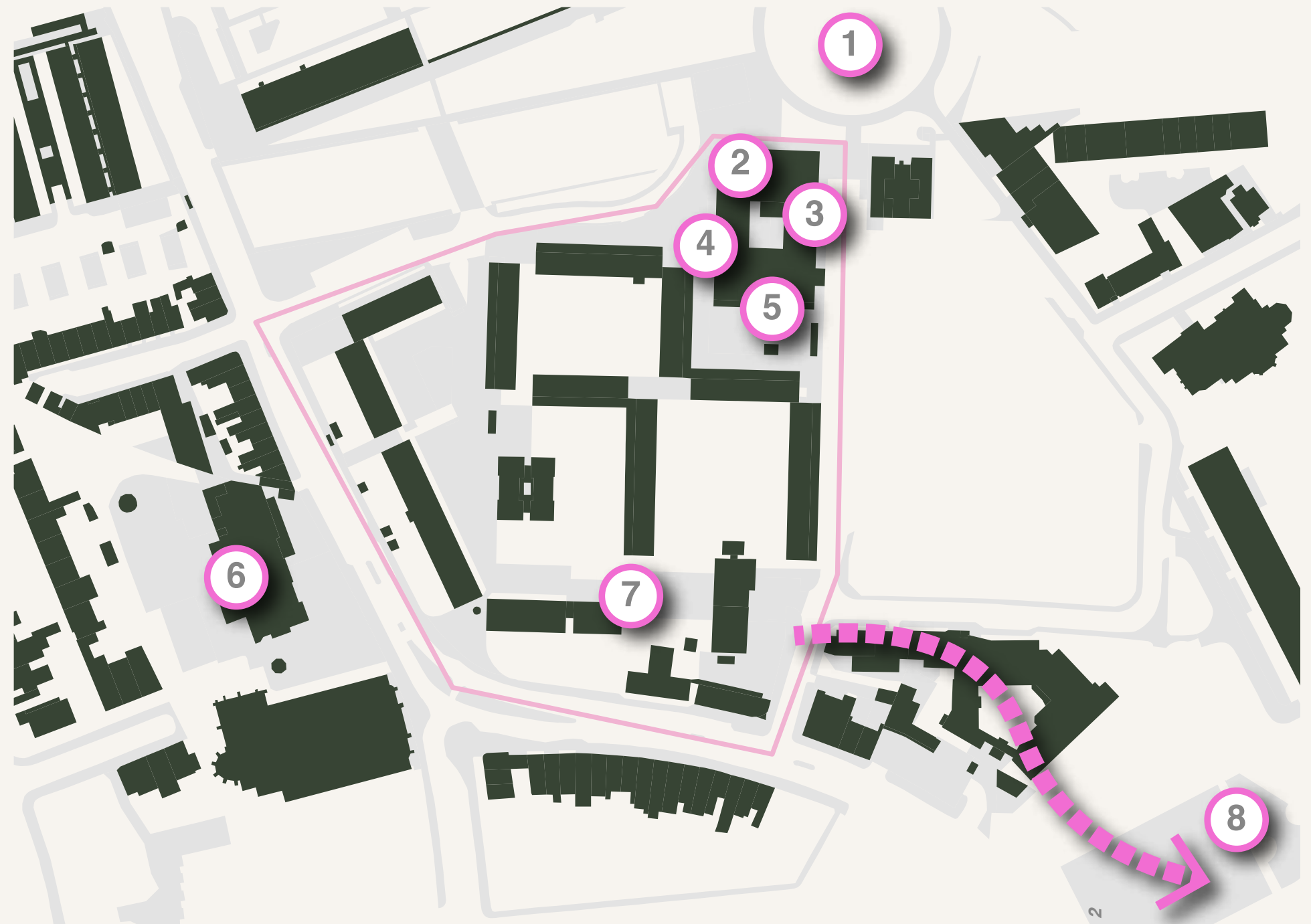


Figure 42: Playground



Figure 43: Health Centre



Figure 44: Community Centre

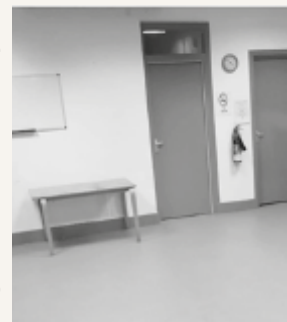


Figure 45: Nursery



Figure 46: Food Coop



Figure 47: Primary School



Figure 48: Youth Hostel



Figure 49: Community Centre 2



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8

6.6 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Around a third of residents hold no qualifications, double the England figure, yet the share with degree-level qualifications is close to the national average. The profile is polarised rather than uniformly low.

Long-term unemployment and economic inactivity run at about twice the national rate, and mid-level trade, administrative and self-employed occupations are largely absent.

The household deprivation map places this in context. Over 40% of households on the estate are deprived in at least one Census dimension, against under 30% in most adjacent areas, and the boundary follows the estate’s boundary line rather than grading across the neighbourhood, Wendling is thus a discrete pocket of need, and its residents are less able to absorb rising housing & living costs.

Figure 50: Household Deprivation Map

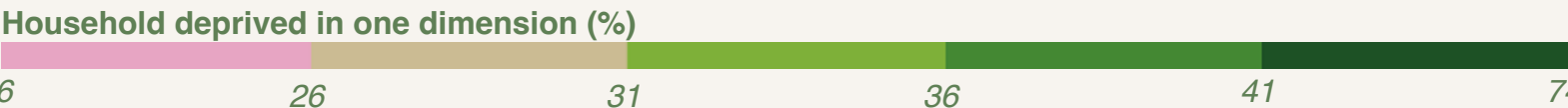


Figure 51: Wendling Estate Education Level

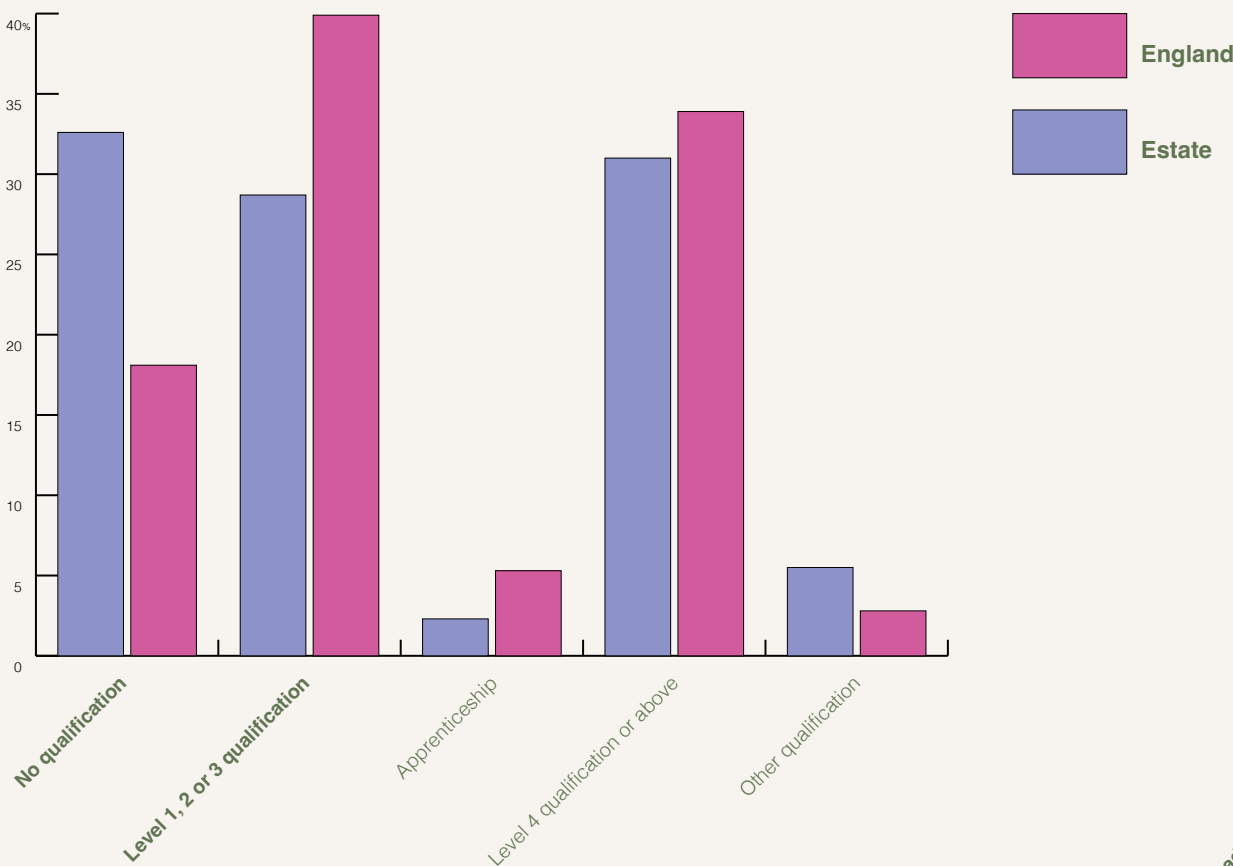
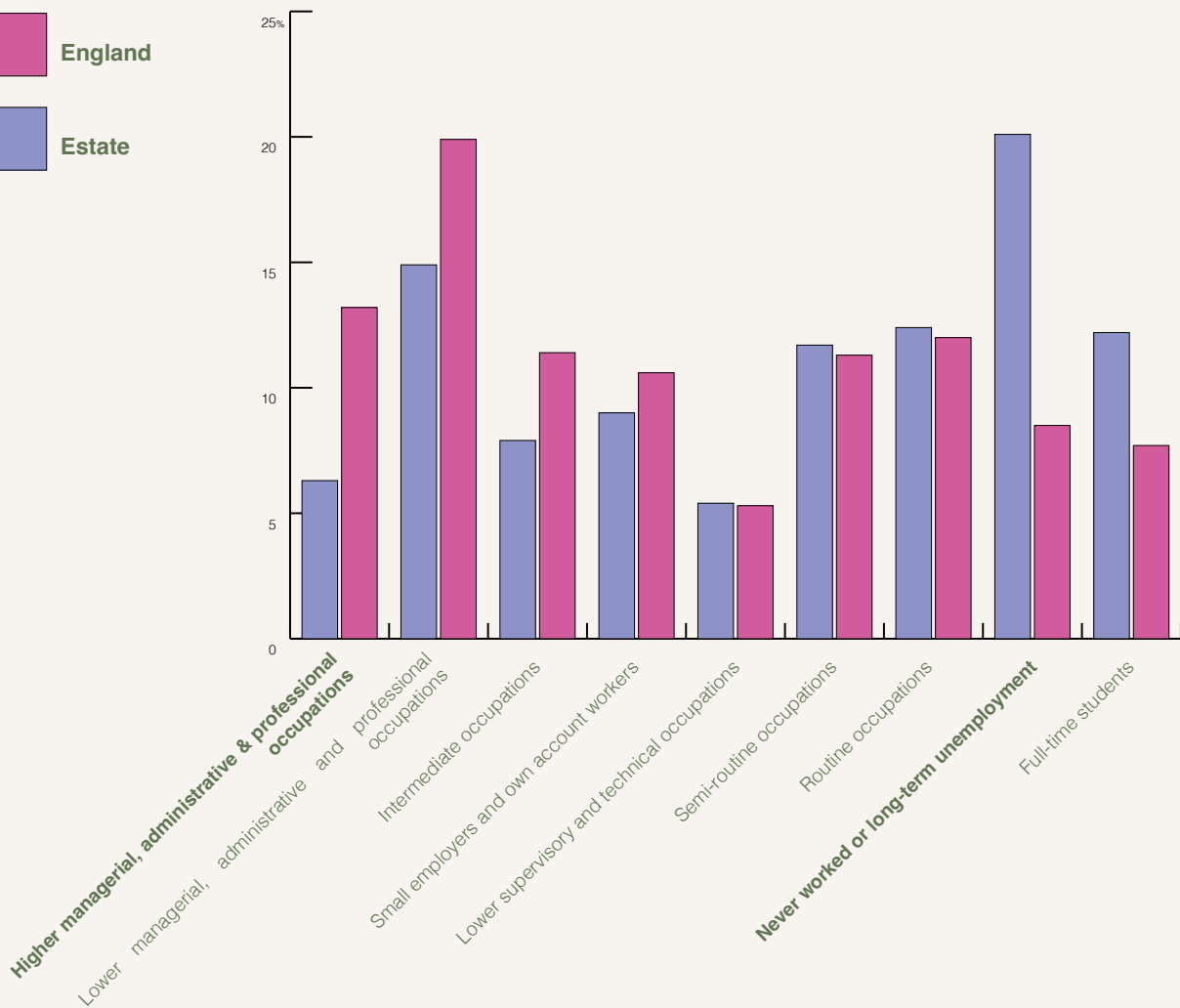


Figure 52: Wendling Estate Occupation Level



6.7 Ownership & Processes

Community engagement throughout the regeneration process was extensive and residents' views were broadly well documented. However, the process was not necessarily structured in the interests of local residents or climate objectives. The three options were developed unevenly, with the lower-intervention alternatives receiving far less detail than the preferred redevelopment option, while the sustainability assessment did not adequately account for embodied carbon. The ballot was also conducted within a context that encouraged redevelopment, including council officials actively promoting a "yes" vote, while voting against redevelopment effectively meant leaving existing maintenance and repair issues unresolved (Camden New Journal, 2021a).

Beyond the process itself, resident organisation on the estate is limited and mostly run through the council. There is an active Wendling Tenants and Residents Association with a hall on Wellesley Road, but St Stephens Close has no association of its own (Camden Council 2026b). The regeneration Steering Group was chaired by a councillor, with no independent advisor recorded, and held no formal decision-making power (make:good, 2019; Estate Watch, 2026). Opposition has been persistent but weak, centred on a 2020 vote of no confidence and complaints about the 2021 ballot (Camden New Journal, 2020, Camden New Journal, 2021b). The strongest community capacity comes from Cooperation Town, whose food hub on the estate runs the Gospel Oak Living Room together with the TRA (Cooperation Town, 2026) Both the TRA hall and the hub lie within the demolition site.

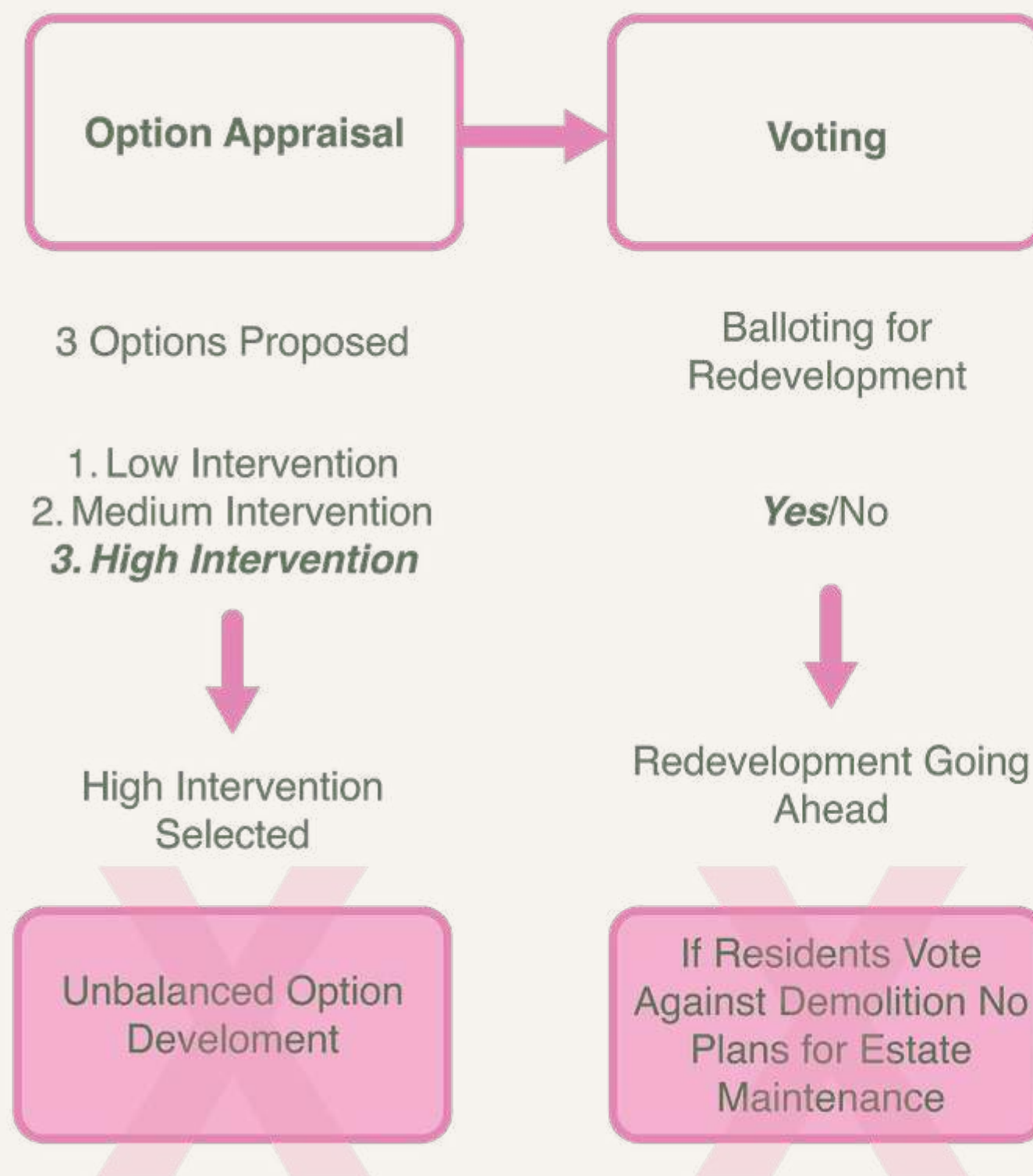


Figure 53: Process & Maintenance Issues



Site Application

7.1 Housing

7.2 Movement & Legiblity

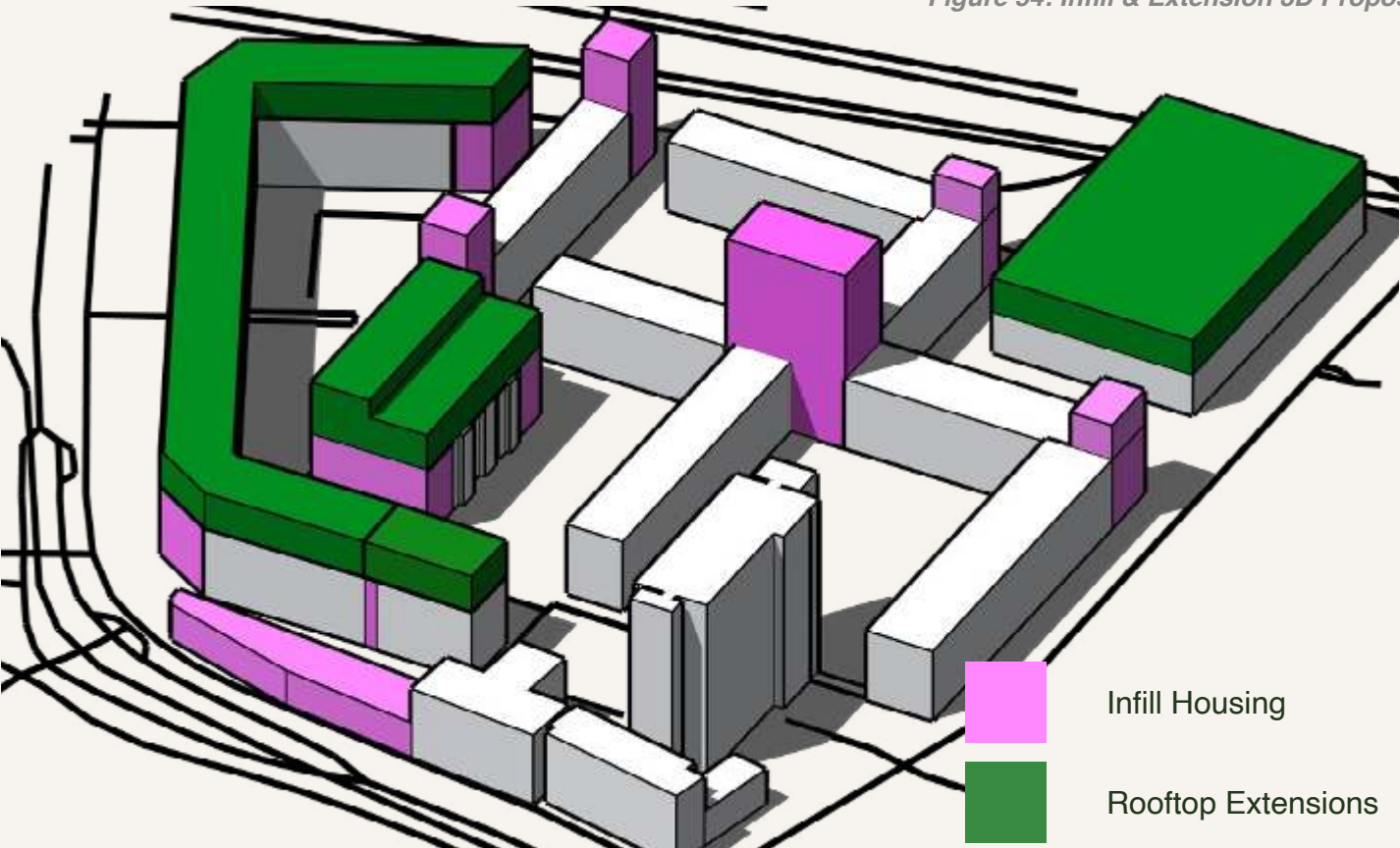
7.3 Green Space

7.4 Community Facilities

7.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

7.6 Ownership & Processes

Figure 54: Infill & Extension 3D Proposal



7.1 Housing

The retrofit programme is sequenced from resident evidence. Defects identified in the resident-com- piled condition report are addressed first or in parallel with new construction, so that improvement of existing homes is not deferred until development revenue arrives.

Vertical extension follows the structural logic of the estate. Blocks with flat roofs gain two to three storeys, avoiding the curved-roof blocks where extension would force major reconstruction of the existing top-floor flats. Infill buildings on surplus parking and garage courts rise to between two and four storeys, with heights set by daylight impacts on neighbouring homes and by maintaining adequate separation between buildings. The community centre is also extended to provide further shared space.

All additions, whether rooftop or infill, are built in timber frame and panelised systems, using sus- tainable or reclaimed materials and demountable construction, keeping embodied carbon low and allowing future adaptation.

Communal heating: no control, seasonal access, breakdowns	Overcrowding	Ongoing water problems	Poor air quality, humidity and damp
Rehaul the heating system, with controls and meters in each home so residents manage their own heating; residents oversee its performance	Help overcrowded and under-occupied households swap homes within the estate; join flats together where possible; reserve larger new homes for overcrowded families already living here	Survey the water pipes and renew failing sections as part of the wider refurbishment	Insulate homes and improve ventilation at the same time; fix the cold spots where damp forms

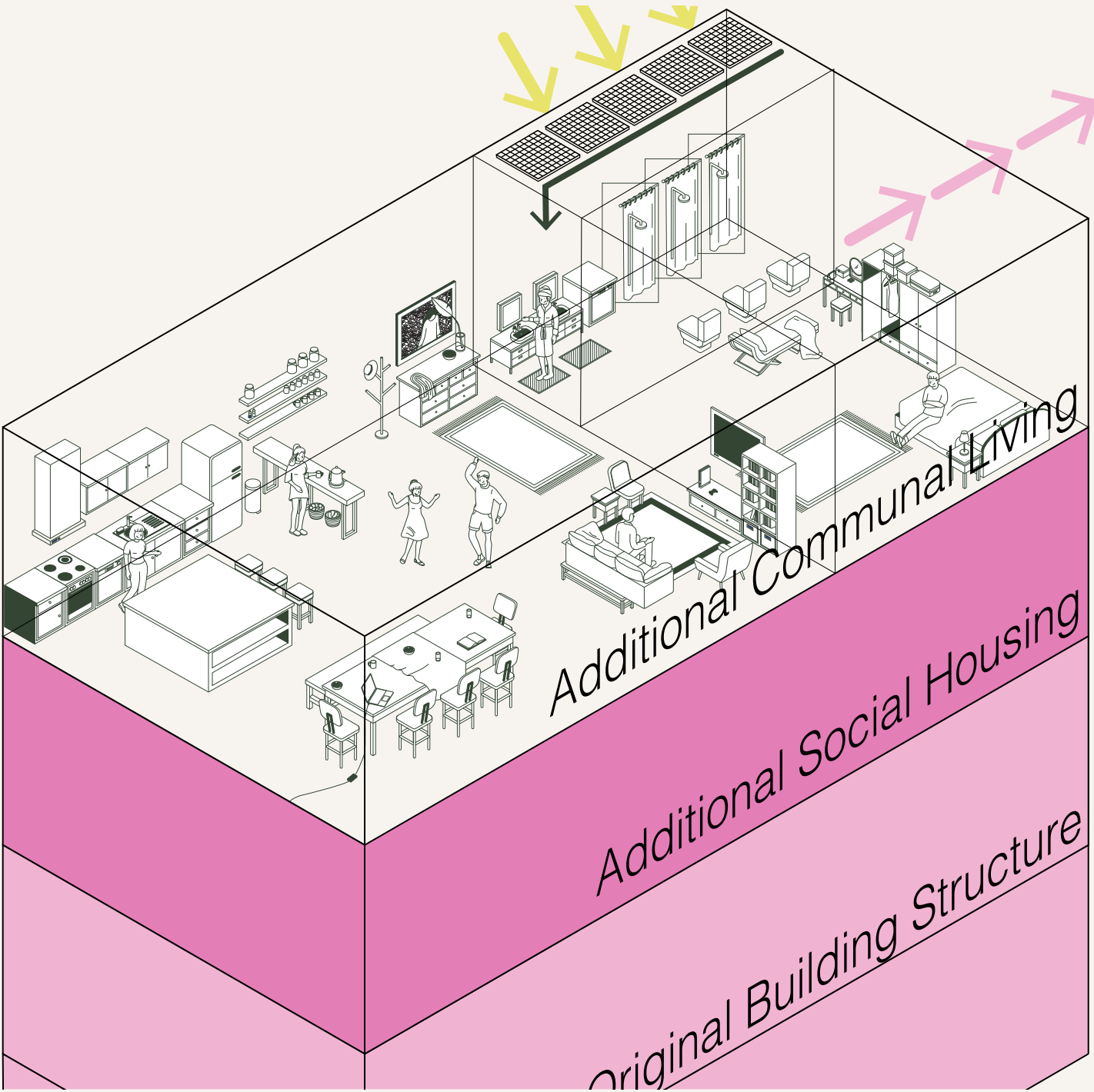
Sewage and drainage problems	Corroding handrails, structural doubts	Cables hanging from flats	Infestation
Survey underground drains and renew failing sections; use planting and landscape to soak up rainwater	Commission an independent structural survey and share the results with residents; replace corroded handrails and balustrades	Tidy and re-route external cables when the outside of the buildings is refurbished	Estate-wide pest control; seal the gaps and openings pests use during refurbishment

The additional homes split between self-contained council units and communal living units. Following discussion of resident needs, over half of the new units are designed for sharing, with clusters of five bedrooms around one set of shared facilities including a living room and kitchen, drawing on the model of De Nieuwe Meent in Amsterdam, where clustered units combine private rooms with collective spaces under a cooperative structure. All new units are held at social rent and integrate renewable systems, with rooftop solar as standard.

In total the scheme delivers around 172 new units. With 98 of these as five-person shared clusters, the scheme provides 490 shared bedspaces alongside 74 self-contained homes, housing roughly 600 total additional people depending on household size.

	Infill	Rooftop Extension	Total
Gross Internal Area (m²)	5,523	8,600	14,123
Net Internal Area (80%) (m²)	4,418	6,880	11,298
Self-contained homes at average 45 m²	29	45	74
Shared-living clusters at 80 m² (5 per person)	38	60	98
Total new residential units	67	105	172

Figure 55: Interior Commons



7.2 Movement & Legibility

The estate has too many small side entrances, which blur the public/private divide; this ambiguity both invites antisocial activity and erodes residents' sense of ownership over shared space.

The application clarifies the existing spatial hierarchy through small interventions. Selective removals, infill and elevated connections between the estate's two levels resolve the ambiguity. Three clear primary entrances, marked with signage and wayfinding maps, replace the indistinct gaps, with the residual alleys between blocks largely filled by infill housing; two central character areas give the estate a heart through which main routes converge. Whether the courtyards are opened up is decided fully by residents, whose mapping of the routes forms the brief. The aim being that each courtyard reads clearly as open or closed, with a wayfinding board or map at the entrance of any opened courtyard signalling that it is public.

The north-eastern edge route would require demolition and rerouting at a scale the toolkit rules out, so it is managed instead through continuous lighting and bright, well-maintained surfaces.

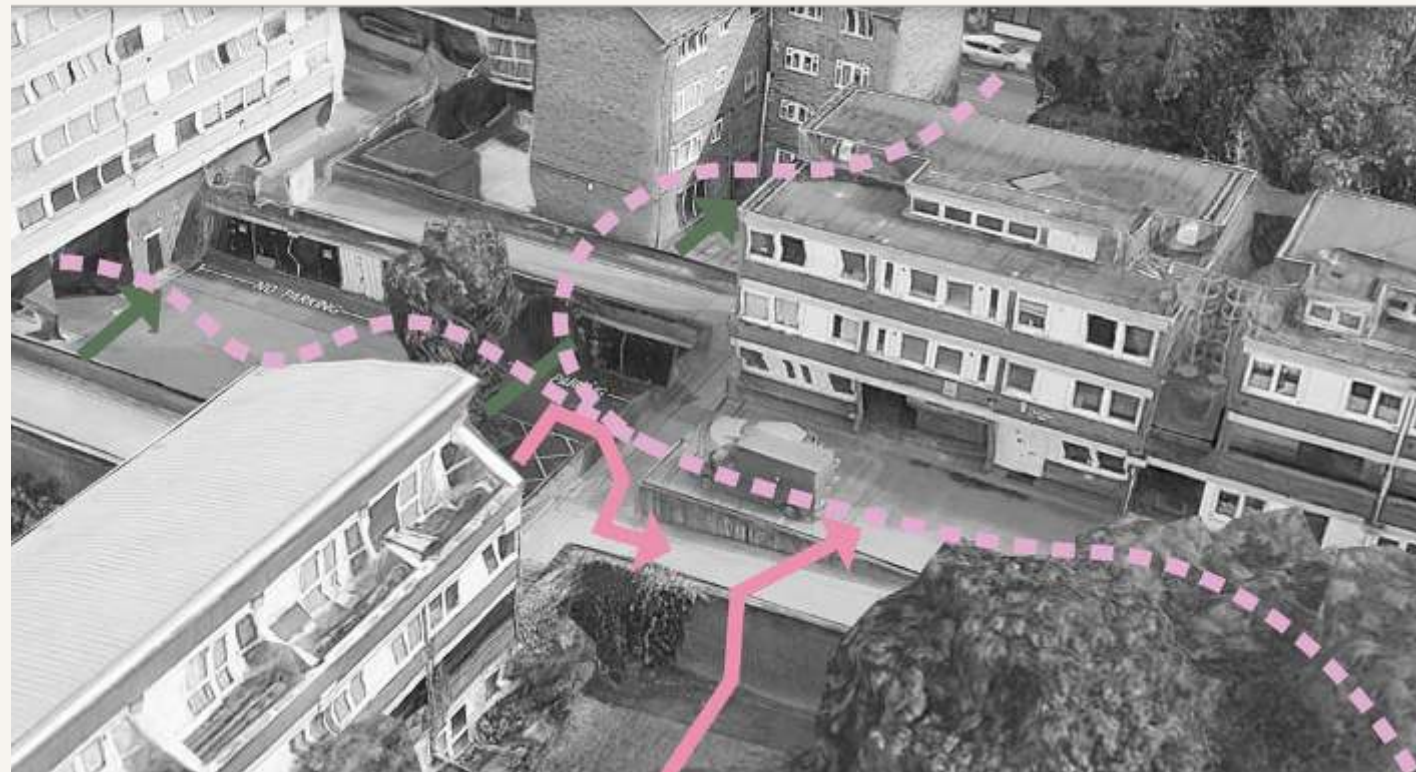


Figure 56: Wayfinding Illustration



Figure 57: Movement & Legibility Map

7 SITE APPLICATION

7.3 Green Spaces

Empty parking areas and concrete in the character areas are turned into green space. Planting is wild and mixed rather than tidy, so it needs less upkeep. Where paving cannot be removed, on the elevated walkways and along roads, planters are added to what is already there. New rooftops and opened-up ground get drainage through swales and permeable paving.

The Cooperation Town food garden works, so it is spread across the estate in different forms. Some plots are private for the blocks next to them, others are shared with the wider neighbourhood.

The courtyards and the western gardens are currently underused, and even ground-floor residents have no clear way in in some areas. They should either become private gardens or be opened to the block. Opening is preferred, since shared space is more likely to be looked after. *However, what stays private, what is shared and what is actually needed must come from residents' own knowledge of these spaces, and is settled with them under Ownership & Processes.*

Figure 58: SUDS Illustration



Figure 59: Modular Green Infrastructure



Figure 60: South-East Garages



Figure 61: South-East Re-greening (AI Utilized)

-  Current Food Garden
-  Private Productive Landscape
-  Semi-Private Productive Landscape
-  Potential Access to Green Space
-  Improved Access to Green Space
-  Paths with Modular Green Infrastructure
-  De-Sealed Areas
-  De-Sealed Areas



Figure 62: Green Application Map

7.3 Green Space

7.4 Community Facilities

A playground, the one absence residents name in the 2019 submission, is placed in the west. The Cooperation Town Hub in the north-east is retained as the community heart of the estate, securing the food co-op, laundrette and care functions already in use. The undercroft garages are converted into further shared space, and rooftop extensions and infill blocks each carry communal laundrettes. Suggested uses follow the toolkit's priority of foundational-economy and care functions — childcare, food, repair and mutual support — though the final mix rests with residents' own mapping of what is in use, underused and absent.

Location follows a simple rule: infrastructure relying on wider neighbourhood participation sits at the estate's edges, infrastructure for mutual support within it. The Hub already does both, drawing Gospel Oak in through the food co-op while serving everyday estate needs, which is why its retention and refurbishment is essential.

Outward Facing Enterprises
focused on
fostering
community within
the larger area

Inward Facing Enterprises and Care Infrastructure
focused on
supporting the
estate community

Examples

1. Repair Workshops
2. Community Run Cafe
3. Ceramic Workshop & Store

Examples

1. Playground
2. Shared Laundry
3. Library of Things

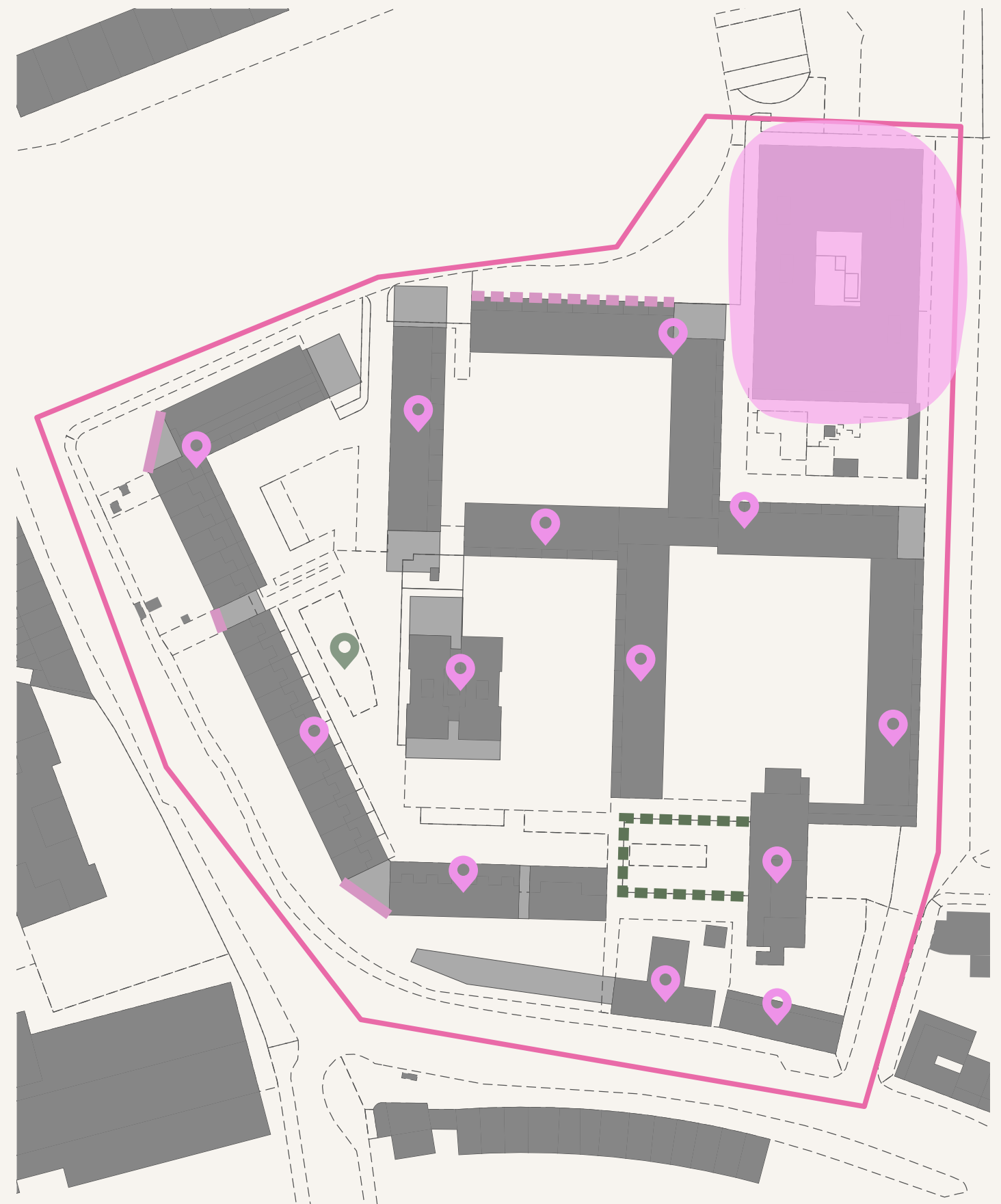
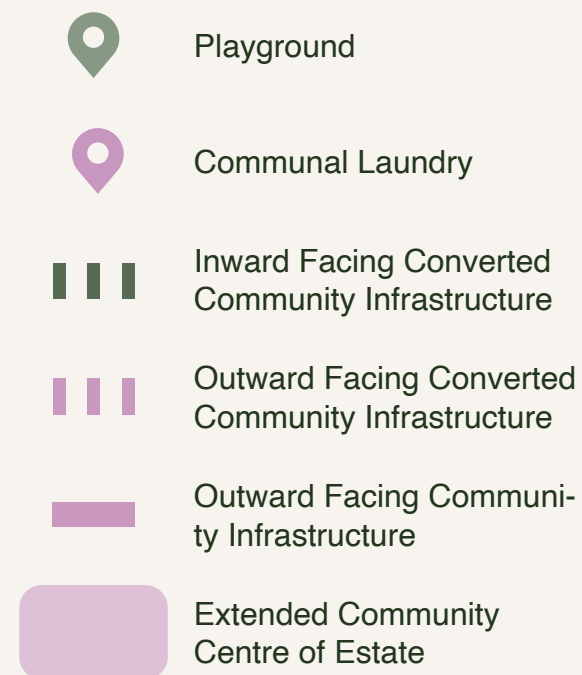


Figure 63: Community Facilities Map

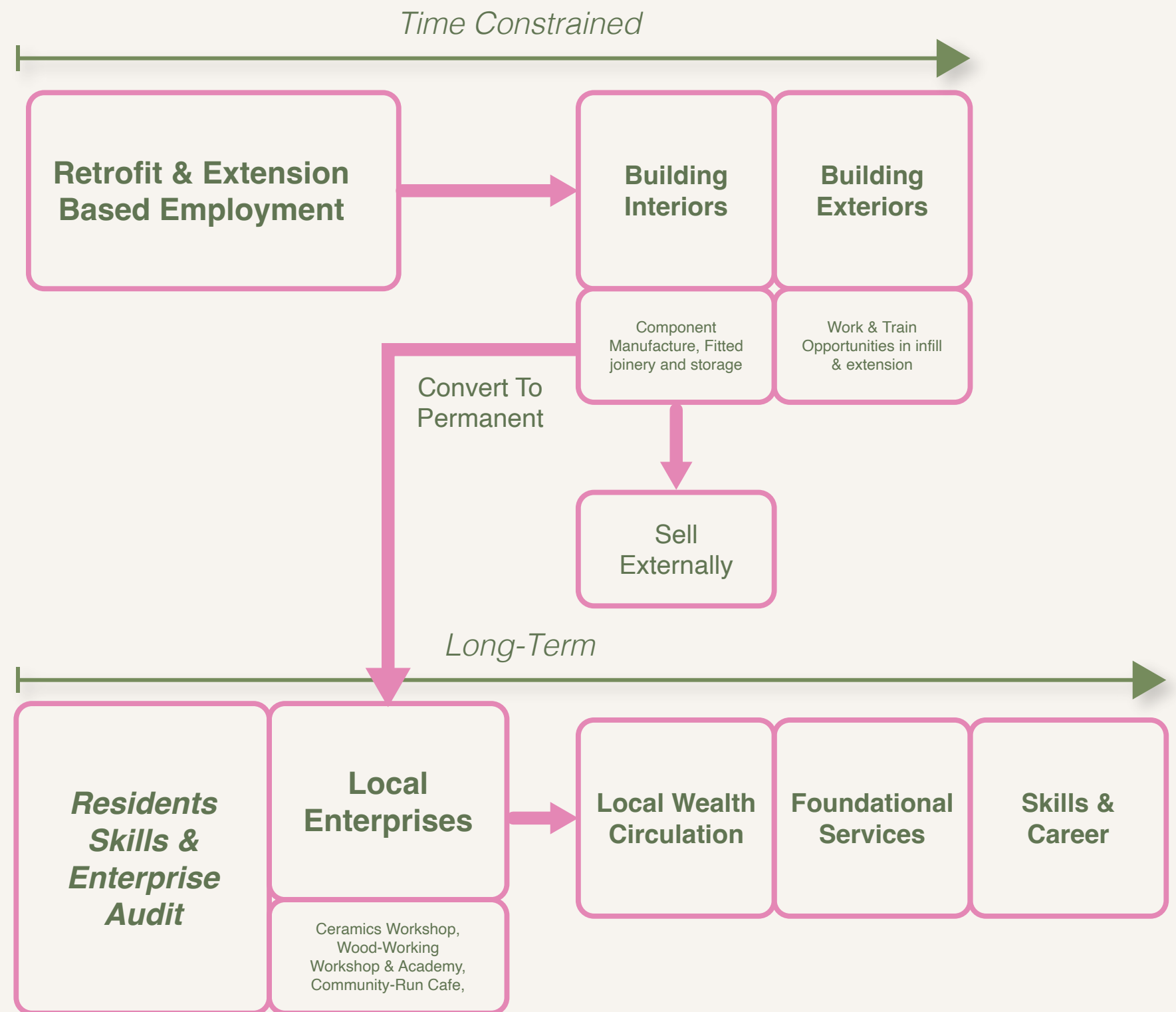
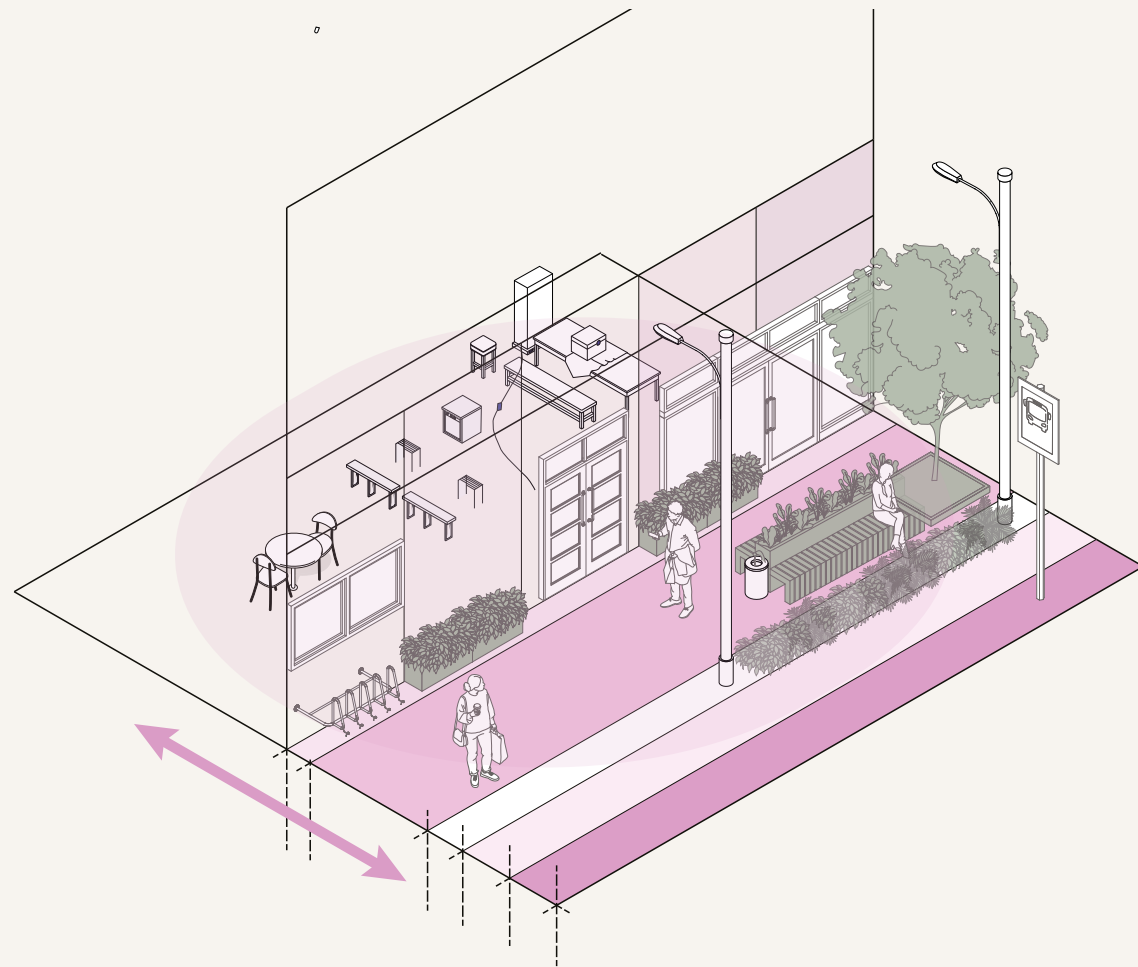
7.5 Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Employment at Wendling operates in two phases. The first is time-constrained: the retrofit programme becomes the source of local work, through apprenticeships, placements and jobs tied into retrofit contracts. The second is long-term: permanent enterprises in the foundational economy, meeting everyday needs rather than external markets.

The mix follows from residents, not a masterplan. A skills and enterprise audit establishes what residents want to learn and what services are missing; training and enterprise space follow. Examples include a ceramics workshop, wood-working workshop and community cafe. Retrofit workshops bridge the phases, converting into permanent enterprises once works conclude, as at Granby Workshop.

These enterprises are held by the resident body, rents protected by collective tenure, income circulating back into repairs, training and care. Ground-floor locations on outside-facing routes activate the street.

Figure 64: Ground-Floor Activation Map



7.6 Ownership & Processes

The design proposals above are suggestions, not instructions. The toolkit only works if it is applied with the community it concerns, so resident walks, meetings and open discussion should come before any component is applied. Resident knowledge matters most here. A degrowth toolkit is meant to support residents, so it should read as guidance that adds to local knowledge rather than something imposed from above. The same holds for the options themselves, which need to be explored fully and openly, and shaped around what residents say they need alongside the ecological limits the scheme works within.

Ownership and internal governance follow from this, and the toolkit places both in a community land trust. Decisions serve residents when residents hold the land and the decisions together. The board would be made up of residents, wider community members and the council, with residents holding executive power, and degrowth values written into the trust's constitution so that protecting residents and the local environment is an obligation rather than an aspiration.

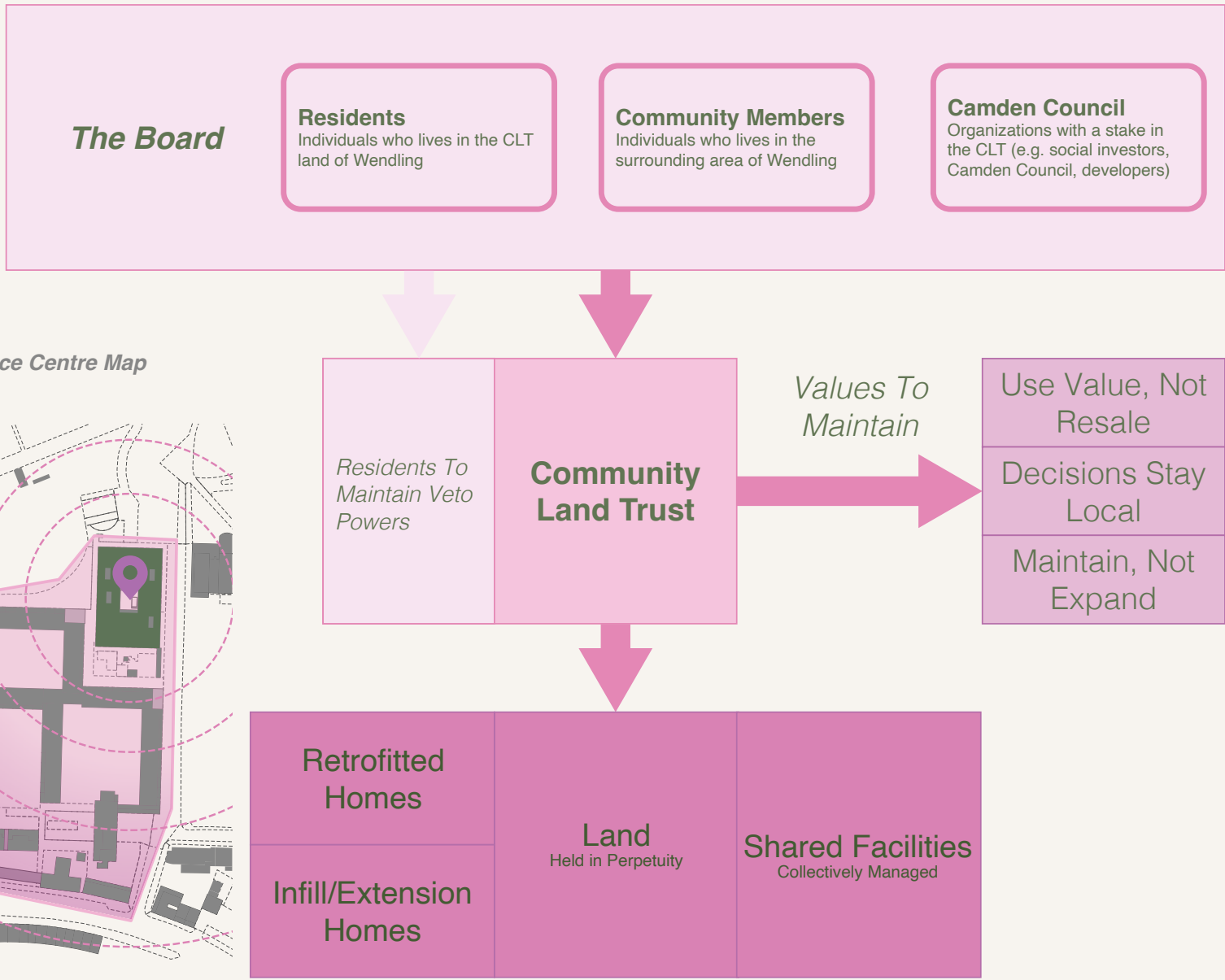
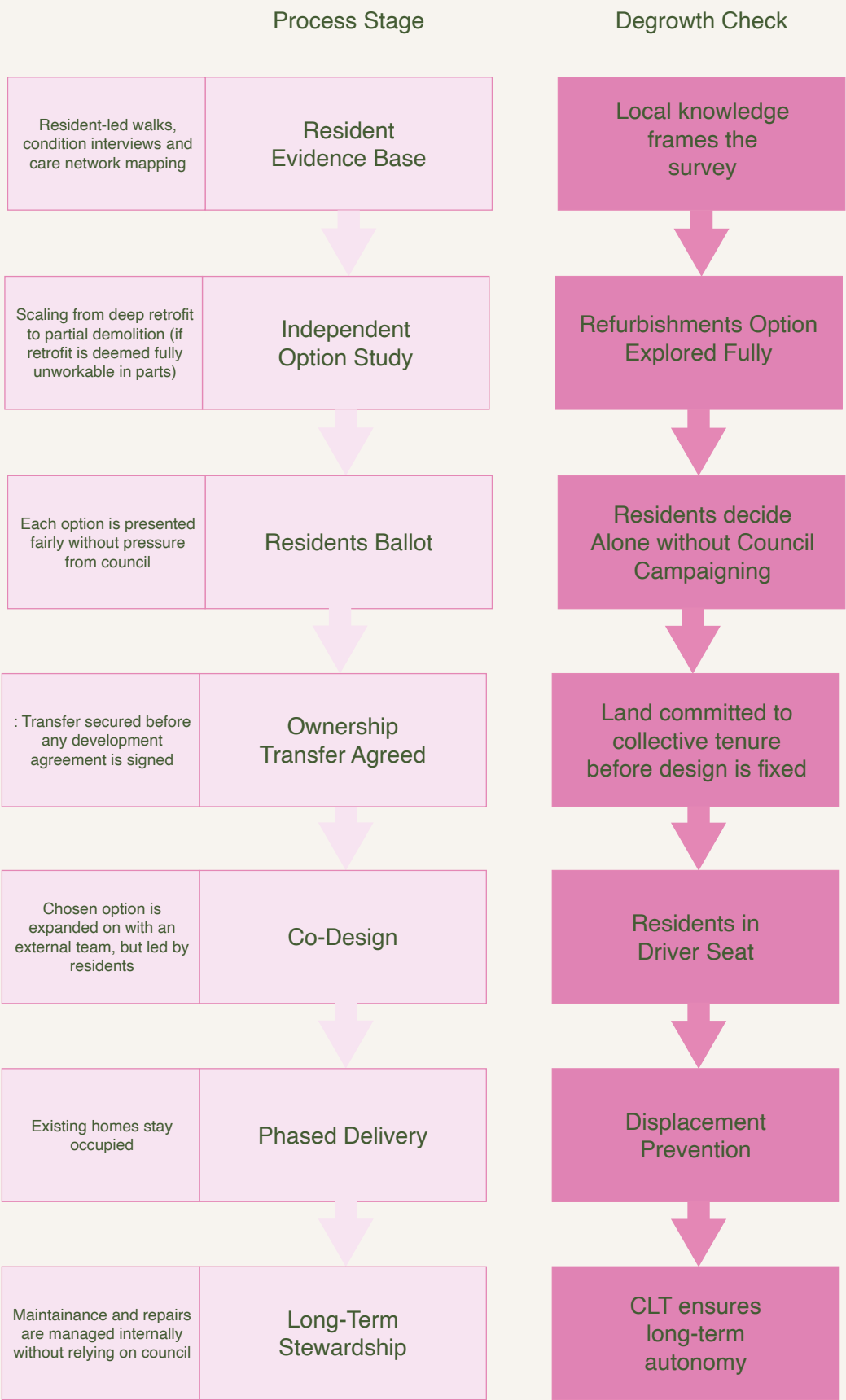
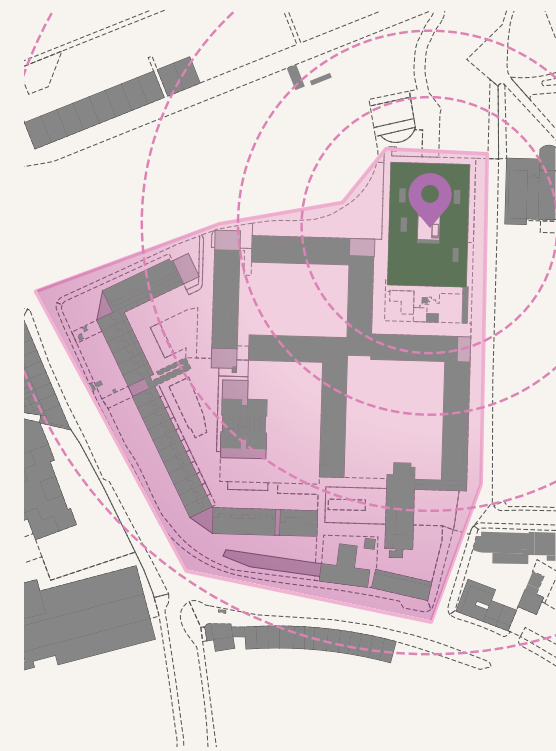


Figure 65: Governance Centre Map



7.7 Character Area 1 - West

The first character area sits to the west and acts as the heart of the estate. It opens up access to the existing green space to the north and deseals the remainder, converting what is currently parking into usable ground. The area is made productive through allotments, combined with areas of wilder planting and open flat grass that can be adapted to resident needs over time. It also accommodates the children's playground, consolidating play, growing and informal amenity within a single legible space.

Figure 66: Character Area 1 Zoom In

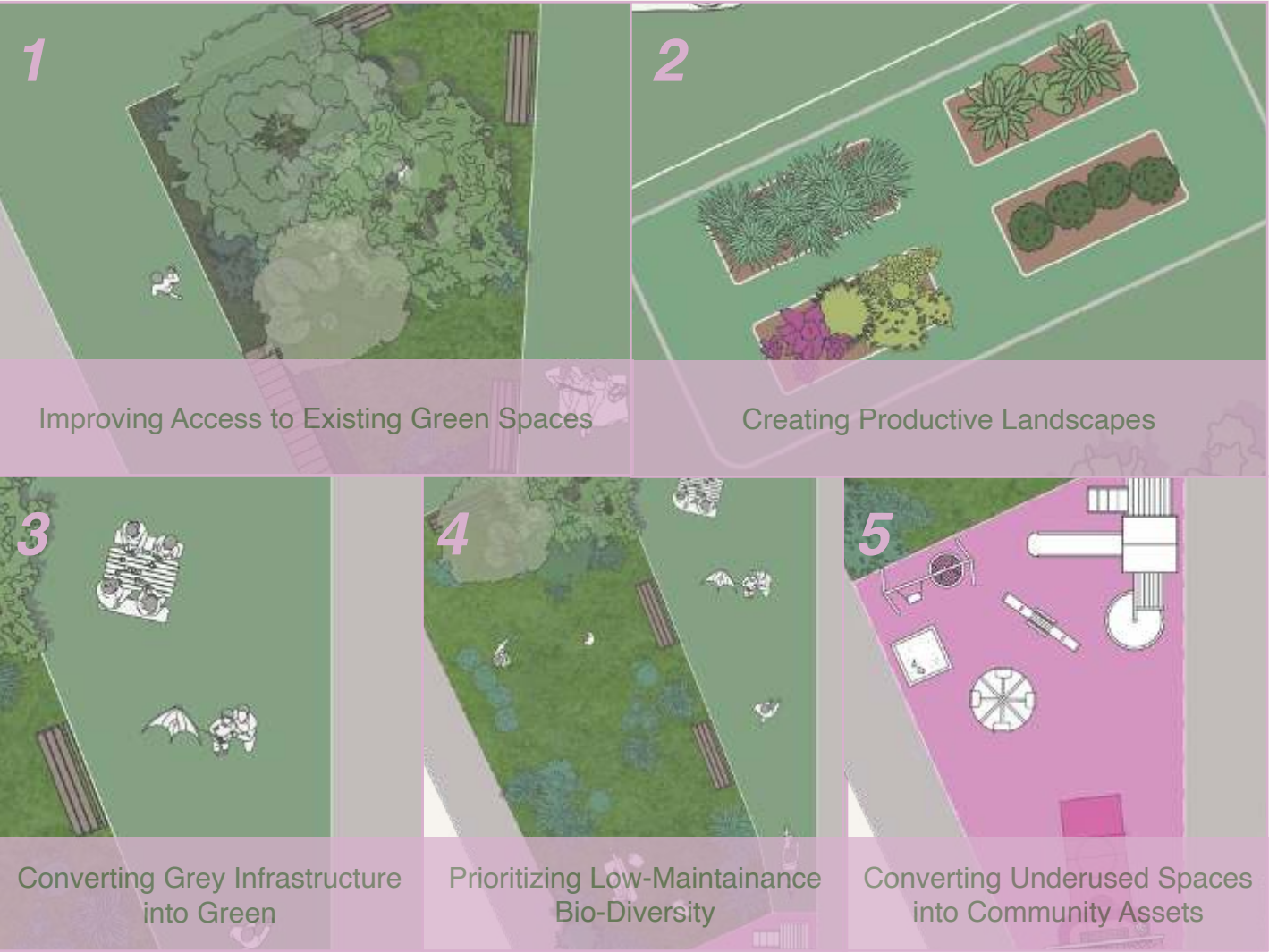


Figure 67: Character Area 1

7.8 Character Area 2 - South-East

The second character area sits to the south-east. Its central feature is the conversion of the undercroft garages into community infrastructure, repurposing existing structure rather than replacing it. The area is de-sealed throughout to increase soft ground and planting, with modular greenery placed along the pathways so that provision can be adjusted to resident needs over time. Selective small-scale demolition and enclosure clarifies the public and private divide, defining thresholds that are currently ambiguous.

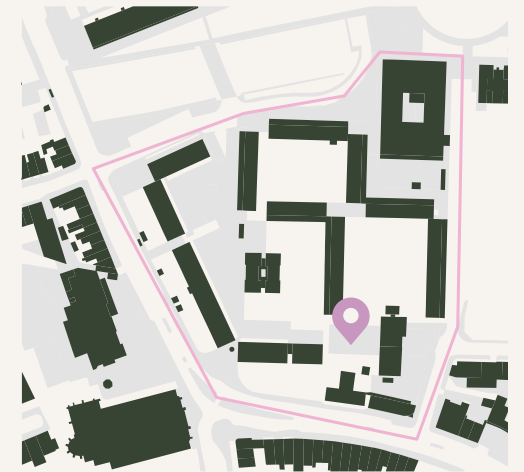


Figure 68: Character Area 2 Zoom In

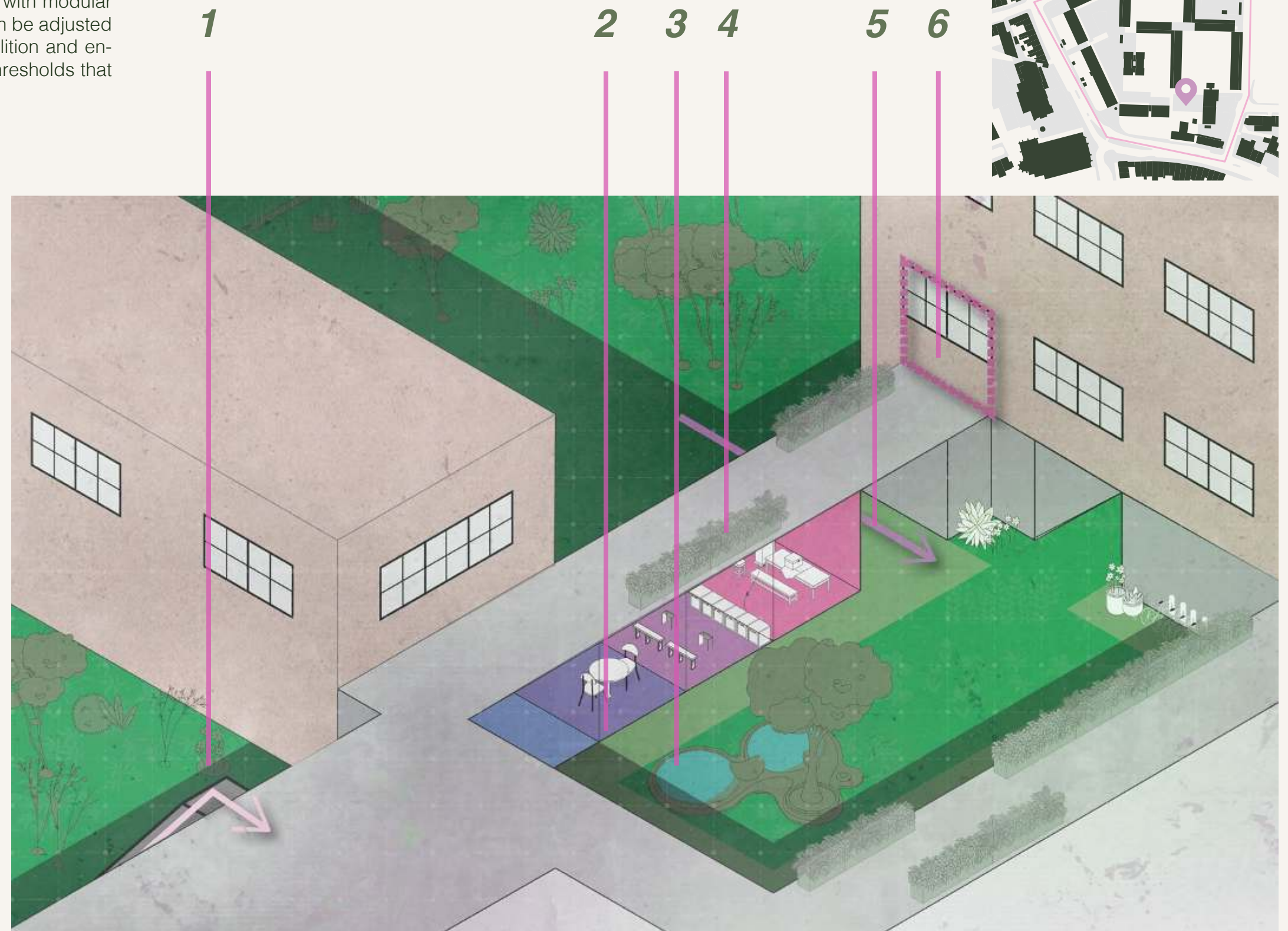


Figure 69: Character Area 2

Conclusion

8.1 Research Overview & Rationale

8.2 Key Findings

8.3 Impact on Academic and Practice Debates

8.4 Project Limitations

8.5 Opportunities for Further Research

8.1 Research Overview & Rationale

This research-led design inquiry set out to operationalise degrowth within post-war UK estate regeneration. Driven by the social and ecological costs of dominant, demolition-led cross-subsidy models, it explored how a sufficiency-based framework could protect existing communities while remaining within planetary boundaries. A thematic literature review was synthesised with empirical insights from pioneering case studies, from retrofit-based plans in London to co-housing in Amsterdam, to construct a design toolkit. This toolkit was then tested through a design proposition applied to Camden’s Wendling and St Stephens Close Estate.

8.2 Key Findings

The site-specific application yielded critical lessons across each design domain. For housing, substantial capacity can be added cleanly through lightweight vertical extensions and grey-space infill while retaining the existing fabric, proving a demolition alternative. In movement, confusing layouts can be resolved through precise, low-intervention acupunctural design—clarifying entrances and improving wayfinding—rather than wholesale clearance. For green space, underused paving should be reclaimed as a productive commons, converting redundant parking into community allotments and wild planting. Regarding community facilities, social infrastructure is best expanded by adapting residual spaces like undercroft garages into shared care facilities. In the socio-economic domain, local livelihoods are best supported by anchoring employment in long-term estate upkeep and establishing resident-owned foundational enterprises. Finally, the overarching lesson of ownership and process is that long-term resident stewardship and protection from displacement require transferring assets into a Community Land Trust.

8.3 Impact on Academic and Practice Debates

This project fills a critical literature gap at the intermediate scale of buildings and estates, where degrowth has historically remained uncoded. It translates macroeconomic theory into tangible spatial decisions, challenging the growth-dependent paradigm that equates progress with value extraction. Practically, it equips residents and practitioners with a collaborative toolkit to challenge tokenistic consultations and demand equal-depth appraisals of refurbishment options, shifting estate renewal back to care, sufficiency, and collective equity.

8.4 Project Limitations

Relying entirely on secondary data restricted direct resident col-

laboration. Because degrowth-informed design depends on resident preferences and localized stewardship, the absence of active participation limits the proposal’s democratic validation. Testing on a contested site in Camden also means the model’s adaptability across different planning policies and municipal borrowing constraints remains unproven.

8.5 Opportunities for Further Research

Future studies should focus on empirical testing of the co-design process with real resident groups, to observe how spatial and financial trade-offs are democratically negotiated on the ground. Quantitative research modeling whole-life carbon and long-term maintenance costs of deep retrofits versus redevelopment is also needed to provide robust environmental evidence. Finally, exploring legal and financial pathways to scale Community Land Trusts and resident-led cooperatives is essential to move these visions from speculative proposals into built reality.



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AI DECLARATION

I declare that GenAI tools were used in an assistive role only, in line with UCL's AI Assessment Category 2 and BSP guidance. I acknowledge the use of Claude (Anthropic, claude.ai), NotebookLM (Google, notebook.google.com), Gemini (Google, gemini.google.com) and Google Scholar Labs (Google, scholar.google.com) to identify and review academic sources, to proofread and improve written language, and to assist in developing visuals where appropriate.