

SETTING CLEAR URBAN DESIGN
PRINCIPLES AND GUIDANCE

PART **D**

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INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve the Vision set out within the previous section and to formulate the urban design framework strategies later in the report there are a number of design and place making principles and guidance that should apply across the Town Centre.

The design principles can be sub-divided into two strands. The first are a set of general place making principles that have been developed through a review of best practice and government guidance such as By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System (DETR, 2000), the Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships, 2007) and Sutton's Urban Design Guide. The second strand is aimed more specifically at Sutton Town Centre, taking into account issues of connectivity, legibility and achieving a high quality public realm.

PLACE MAKING PRINCIPLES

Central government and those public sector agencies involved with shaping city and town centres are seeking to emulate established ideas of integrated, vital, vibrant and sustainable ways of urban living. The principles of development that we describe and illustrate in the following pages are the essential features of a successful urban environment founded on current urban design best practice and the accepted principles of good urban and town design, documented in guidance alluded to previously.

The essence of the approach is to create a pattern of public spaces and new development within which all those who make use of a place can contribute to its value, variety and interest. Innovative proposals and ideas that permeate through the report are further progressions and additions to these principles.



Achieving Connections and Links

The essence of a traditional urban environment is integration of buildings, transport modes and public spaces, thus enabling interaction between people finding themselves in the same place, for different reasons. It presents the opportunity for face to face exchange of products, information, ideas, knowledge and money: the essence of town and city living. An integrated grid of streets is the most effective platform for urban growth. The grid maybe orthogonal or deformed by local features or design, but a pattern of routes is proven to be the most successful foundation on which successful towns can grow. There are a number of different types of routes which make up the grid, arranged in an understandable hierarchy. These range from strategic highways through streets, passages and footpaths, all of which are likely to feature to some degree in Sutton already.

Making Clear Development Blocks

The block is the collection of land parcels which sit in between the network of routes and thoroughfares. There is a clear relationship between the size of the block and the grain of the network at the larger scale, and the design of buildings and spaces at a more detailed level. This is critical to creating development which sits easily with the existing city and works with it rather than being imposed on the urban fabric which has developed incrementally over time. The scale and massing of new development will be critical if the delicate urban grain of the town centre is to be maintained.

Creating a Vital Public Realm

It is the activities which take place within the physical fabric of the town centre which determine its vitality.

The public domain is made up of a hierarchy of different spaces and places which generally perform different functions for different people, but overall working in an integrated and complementary way. Civic spaces and squares are used variously for festival and celebration, as a marketplace and theatre, for relaxation and for meeting others. In designing new or improved public spaces it is imperative that a large proportion of space is public and is freely available, at all times, to all users. After civic spaces, the network of routes and streets provides the most substantial part of the public domain. These are therefore the key to vitality and vibrancy of new development and of the wider city centre and they are described and characterised by the qualities of the buildings which enclose and define them.

Ensuring a Mix of Uses

The intricacy and complexity of uses apparent in the traditional town centre is another requirement for the creation of a stimulating, sustainable and attractive urban place. A mix of land uses unlocks many levels of variety within the town; it attracts varied people for different reasons; it requires different building types to be locked together; it encourages different activities, at different times, in the same place. Mixed use can be created by design and encouraged by ensuring that the built fabric is adaptive to changes of use over time. The objective should always be to maximise mixed use at the town wide scale, within the neighbourhood, within the street and, wherever possible, within individual buildings. This principle is particularly relevant to North Sutton considering the amount of single use development there is currently which creates a less vibrant place.





Ensuring Legibility

The choice and variety that a connected network provides is best enjoyed if it is possible to 'understand' it and to easily deduce the direction in which activity maybe found. A townscape not only needs a high level of connectivity it also needs to be legible. In terms of legibility, the work of Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City* (1960), is still relevant today. He identifies key features which are easily seen to help our understanding of a town or city. These are paths, edges, nodes, landmarks and districts.

Defined routes or paths often play the most important part in people's perception of the layout of an urban environment. Giving a route a strong and memorable character that reflects its importance within a hierarchy encourages legibility. Focal points also play an important role. There are two kinds: nodes, which occur at the intersection of important paths and become natural places for social interaction and; landmarks which are experienced as visual markers and references.

The use of landmarks and nodes as integral parts of the design will be key to ensuring that new development within Sutton is easy to understand and find from other parts of the town. The number of taller development around Sutton station already sets out a pattern of development and built form that aids the existing legibility of the town centre through local landmarks and nodal elements such as the station. Also, the concept of character areas can assist in orientation at the town centre scale. They are often associated with a dominant theme of activity or land use.

Achieving Flexibility

Sustainable urban environments need to be adaptable. The adaptability of individual buildings and public spaces is important not only to allow for physical change but also cultural and social changes. The most successful places are products of growth over time, shaped by and able to accommodate changing economic conditions, development aspirations and cultural differences. Adaptable buildings ensure that they can be easily modified over time to fulfil a range of different needs and uses. This will ensure that they can be refurbished rather than demolished and redeveloped which is a significant waste of natural resources.

Protecting the Environment and Biodiversity

A successful urban environment must be sustainable and must address issues of how to utilise and preserve the natural environments that exist within and around it. This is addressed on two levels: On a general level, the achievement of good environmental design focuses on the relationship of land use and transport, the enhancement of green spaces and the preservation of biodiversity. The optimum approach involves the maximisation of natural resources whilst placing minimum demands on the environment and natural resources. On a more detailed level, solar design, water recycling, energy conservation and the potential of solar and wind harnessing is now an important part of town and place making. South-facing buildings, natural lighting, sustainable water management, natural heating systems, alternative energy sources and minimising waste are all elements that have been implemented within urban places to prevent environmental degradation.



The detailed design of proposals in later stages of development of key sites will provide an opportunity to include many of the above elements.

Creating Visual Richness and Visual Delight

Vision is the dominant sense in terms of most peoples' experience of an urban environment. The richness and variety of design add greatly to the sensory experience. Within many urban environments there is incredible richness of design which supports the case for seeking to protect or re-use important features. However, it is important to find innovative, contemporary, interesting and cost effective ways to achieve visual interest that is complementary to this. Public art, with the primary purpose of adding visual delight, makes a further and often spectacular contribution to the urban environment. Public art can be a focus for activity, a landmark, or even an object but good public art is always considered from the outset of the design process and fully integrated with the buildings, streets and spaces rather than being added later.

Lighting has an important role in safety and security and can also play a part in allowing more enjoyment of the townscape after dark, invariably in a more dramatic way than in daylight. Lighting adds vibrancy and contributes to uplifting or accentuating the image of a place, whilst highlighting particular architectural or landscape features. In addition to just the visual delight of towns and cities, the pursuit of overall sensory richness - sound, touch and smell are important parts in the experience of using and travelling through urban places.



SPECIFIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES & GUIDANCE FOR SUTTON TOWN CENTRE

The key issues identified previously that affect the study area as a place and a functional town centre have drawn out a number of responses. In part, this means establishing a clear set of specific design principles and guidance that have formed the basis of the Urban Design Framework. As a result of this approach, Sutton Town Centre can evolve over time with the knowledge that it is set upon the best principles of place making and the ideas that will lead to the creation of a more distinctive place capitalising on its Metropolitan Centre status.

These specific design principles provide the justification and process that has lead to the Urban Design Framework, making it clear how the pattern of built form has been developed, where the important gateways are and where the new open spaces should be. The principles also aim to link back to the place making ideas and the overarching objectives of the brief. Collectively, they aim to form a convincing argument about how best to develop Sutton Town Centre as a responsive environment that will grow and have the capability to adapt over time.

Sustainability

The principles of sustainability respond to a much wider agenda rather than aiming to improve a particular condition within the town centre. It is a key part of the Vision and therefore needs to be represented within all of the projects created. Firstly, the need to achieve a sustainable community within the town centre by enhancing the centres offer, encouraging a mix of land uses and public open spaces that are well connected. Secondly, and more specifically, the need to encourage the expansion of a green network throughout the town which is currently only satisfied by Manor Park, Sutton Green and a number of church yards as the only substantial green spaces able to support biodiversity.

Sustainable Communities

We believe there is an immense opportunity for Sutton Town Centre to distinguish itself as a leader in

environmental issues building on the success of BedZED in the Borough by accommodating new forms of eco-development, providing suitable accommodation and the required image for fostering green businesses and industries.

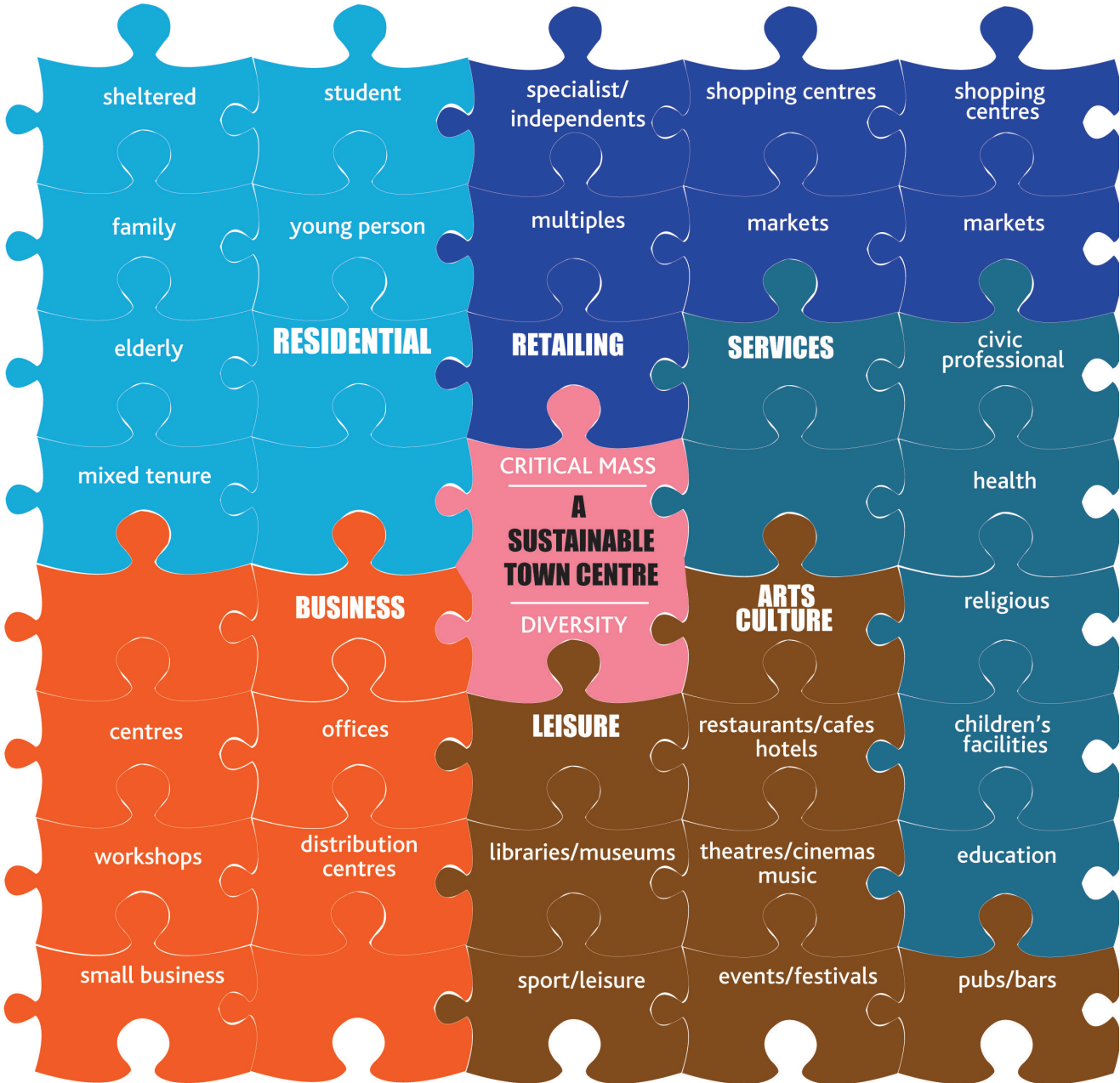
Create a greenspace network and natural grid

The aim of the principle is to provide the town centre with a strong green character, reinforced by a series of green spaces and linkages, which will mean new natural gateways connected by substantial planting and

corridors that encourage the movement and growth of wildlife. It will also gives the town a sense of natural enclosure and aid orientation.

Encourage sustainable forms of energy and design

This design principle is concerned with developing new eco-opportunities by way of alternative energy developments, particularly around north Sutton where new gardens and eco-development can play an important educational resource for people to learn from and have a greater affinity with.



The criteria for a sustainable town centre

Accessibility

This principle seeks to enhance accessibility into and within Sutton Town Centre for all users. Key movement routes should assist the arrival experience and present a clear structure for negotiating routes within the centre and to key locations such as car parks and the rail station within the town centre. The location of car parks and the amount of space visually dominated by cars, presents a challenge to the creation of a town centre that is attractive to shop in and to visit. Finding ways to reduce and manage vehicular intrusion forms the basis of this concept.

Enhancing the arrival and movement experience through the Town Centre

New proposals aim to break down the barriers which exist e.g. around the gyratory and create direct and easy access routes into the town centre. The aim is to create a town centre for people, without neglecting the balance between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists that is required for places to function well. The access principles ensure places are easy for people to get to, to do so in safety and comfort, and to be able to at any time of the day or night. They key routes should be developed to be inclusive, safe and pleasant for all users.

Create and celebrate better Town Centre gateways and arrival points

The objective is to ensure key gateways and arrival points into Sutton Town Centre are distinctive and memorable and provide a clear indication of the quality of environment they lead into. These could be quality spaces that reflect the significance of arriving in the study area and the start of a more understandable journey into the town.

Consolidate the majority of parking to the periphery of the town centre

The Town Centre is fortunate that the existing car parks are generally located on the peripheries of the Town Centre. These should be maintained and the potential for a new carpark on the northern end of the centre should be explored. The image and frontages of the existing car parks should be improved, potentially through redevelopment skinning the parking in development with active frontages. Encouraging visitors to leave their cars on the periphery and walk to their destination will help to ensure a vibrant centre. The aim is to help people experience Sutton Town Centre by walking past places, people and life that they would ordinarily miss by parking much closer to their destination.

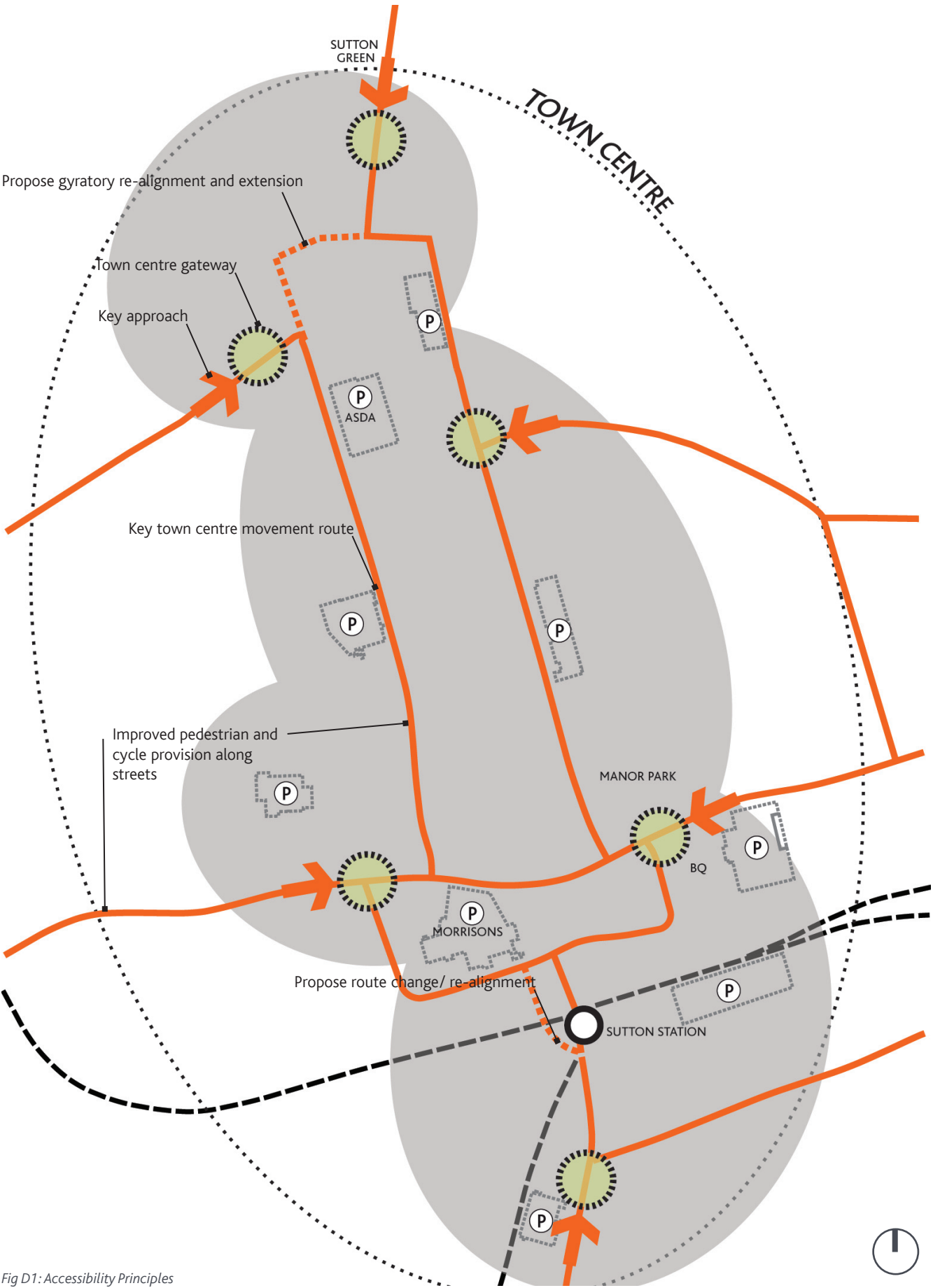


Fig D1: Accessibility Principles

Connections and Linkages

The principle addresses the issues of movement and the poor connections both within the town centre and between the centre and its wider context. The theme aims to ease movement to and within the Town Centre for all users, through new and improved routes.

Extend the physical capacity of the Town Centre by breaking the barrier created by gyratory

Potential to reconfigure the gyratory as a 'green necklace' with a series of environmental and physical improvements such as tree planting, at-grade pedestrian priority crossings at key junctions, traffic calming and improve the appearance along the entire route. These interventions will create a calmer and safer pedestrian and cyclist environment and a more efficient movement corridor. A green necklace will be achieved through planting and changing the route from a racetrack into a Town Centre street.

Improved connectivity by creating pedestrian and cycle priority links

The aim is to provide a hierarchy of clear connections between key destinations both existing and proposed. The hierarchy is based on an improved balance of pedestrians and vehicles. Many of the streets within Sutton Town Centre would be enlivened by redressing the current vehicular dominance. This is particularly so for east-west streets such as Grove Road, Throwley Road, Lodge Place, Manor Place, Cheam Road and Hill Road. These roads could be reclaimed as streets for people without the over intrusion of cars.

New development should provide or fund improved pedestrian and cycle connections. Achieving a clear unity and simplicity in terms of public realm design and materials, removing physical and visual barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement, facilitating easier crossings, tree planting and increasing the width of pedestrian footpaths is key.

The idea of a visitor circuit around the town is an important starting point. People will be able to experience the centre in a new way. This could support a significant expansion of the town centre from the High Street into the surrounding areas with new retail and leisure opportunities.

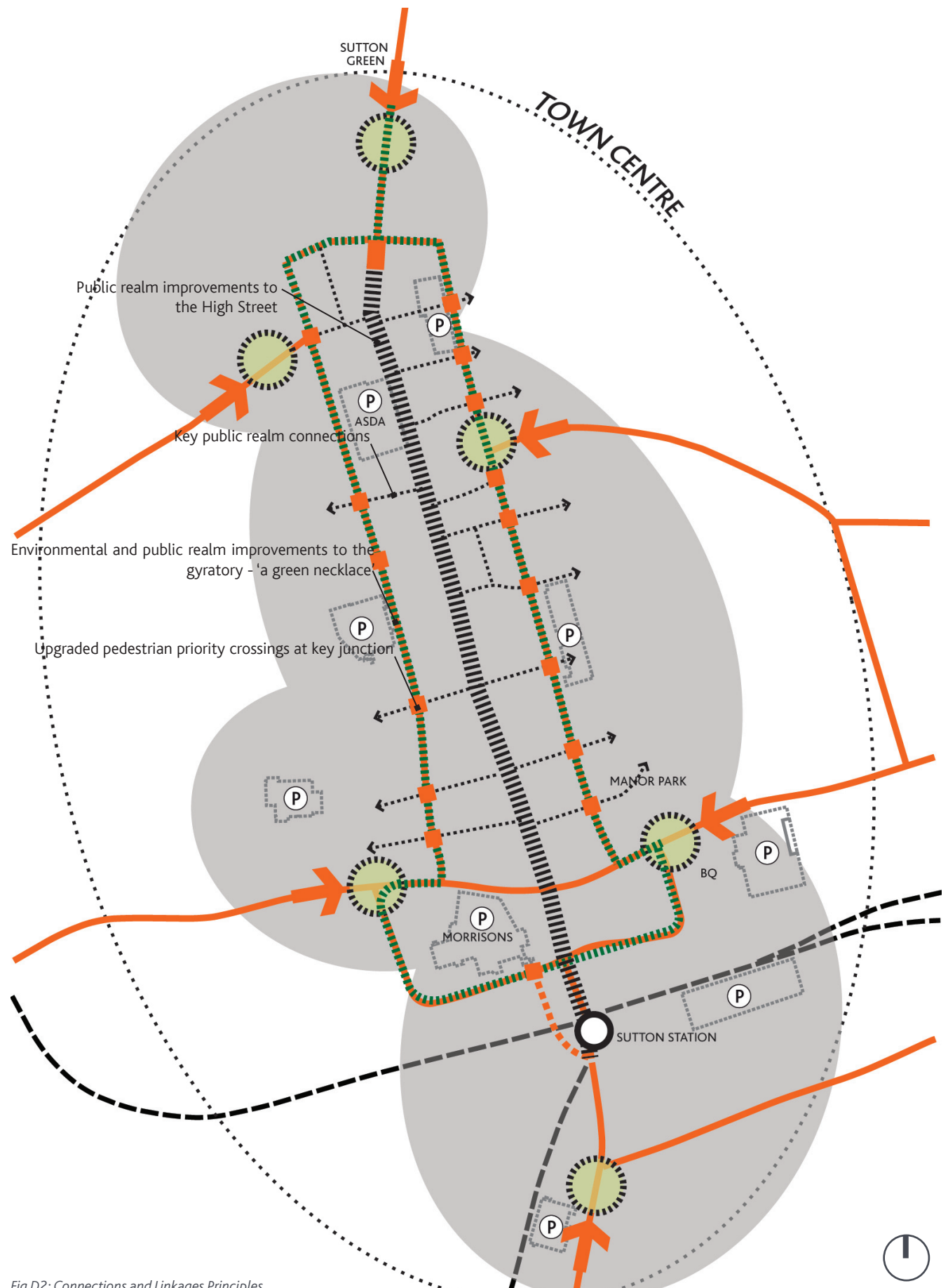


Fig D2: Connections and Linkages Principles

An Improved Public Realm

This principle seeks to improve existing and create new public spaces at critical locations, such as along key routes, arrival points and at important junctions that act as transition spaces between the edge and core of the town centre and within the town centre itself.

Create high quality streets and public spaces

The plan opposite illustrates the network of high quality streets and public spaces by identifying key pedestrian routes, defining a hierarchy and network of public spaces and reinforcing connections to existing spaces. The opportunity arises to improve important areas such as the setting of the Zurich Tower (Zurich Place) and the centre of the town through an improved High Street environment and a revamped town square to give Sutton a central focus alive with activity.

Current proposals for the High Street being pursued by the Council will greatly improve the appearance and function of the High Street. Improved spaces will have a significant effect on the Town Centre drawing people to them for extended periods of the day providing new places to eat, drink and enjoy. A new public space will be created adjacent to the Civic Centre as well as the new railway station. Other spaces which will be improved are Manor Park and Sutton Green.

Enhance visual and physical connections to key spaces, landmarks and destinations

Within Sutton Town Centre the High Street, Zurich Place, Manor Park, Civic Centre area and the Station, are all important destinations. Any new development is likely to increase activity and desire lines between them further. New development should provide or fund an improved public realm.

These links between key public spaces should involve not only reinforcing the north-south High Street spine but also extend the public realm in an east-west direction. East-west streets such as Throwley Road, Lodge Place, , Grove Road, Manor Place and Hill Road will complement this approach and provide important links.

The principle is to establish more through town connections, increasing the directness of movement encouraging more activity on the street. Innovative new proposals will undoubtedly bring new destinations, such as the cultural hub, which must be connected into the town network in order for them to be known and used by people.

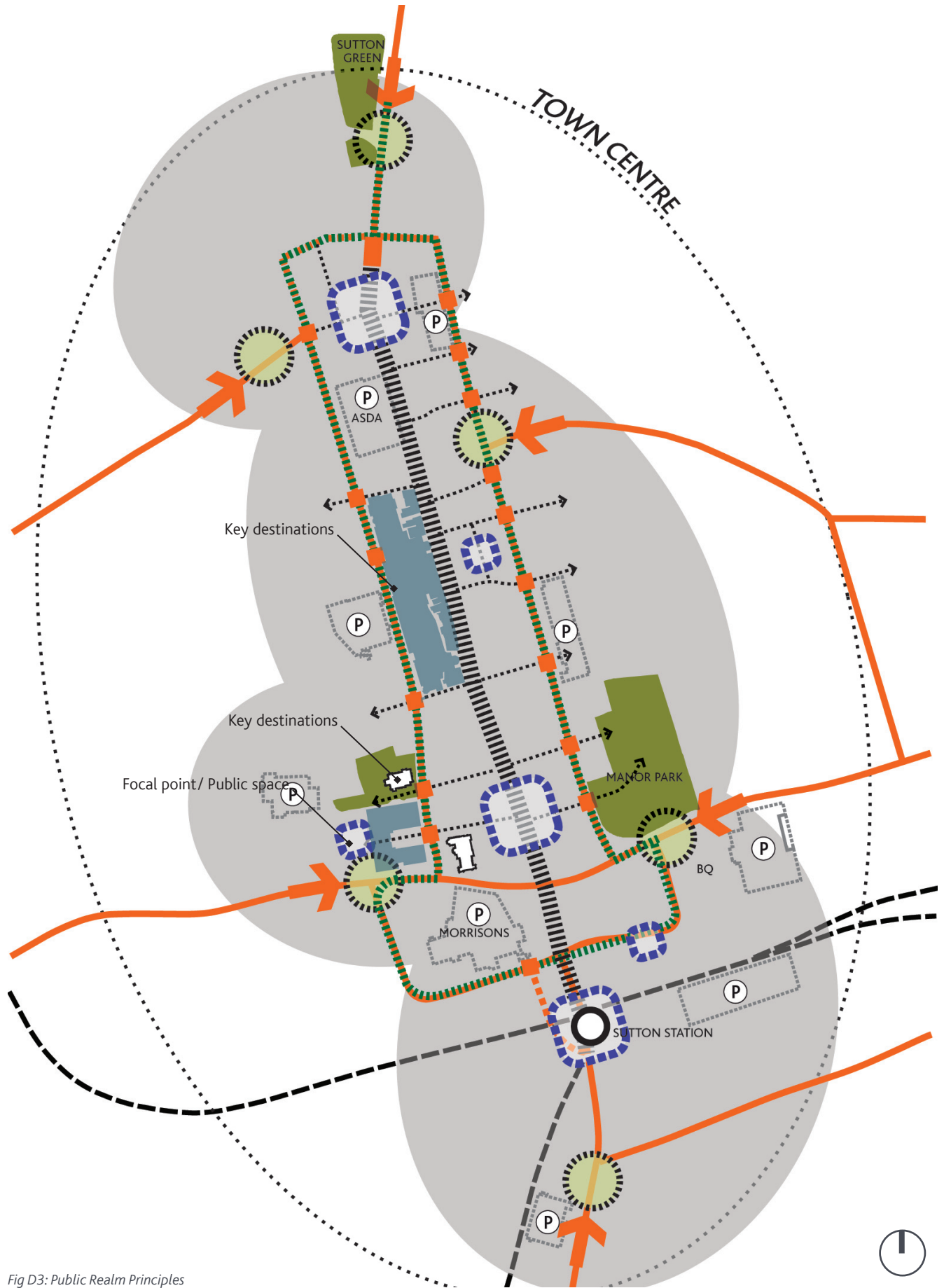


Fig D3: Public Realm Principles

Exemplary Development

New development is necessary in order to improve the offer and appeal of Sutton Town Centre as a place to live, work, visit and spend time in. There are considerable opportunities available within the town centre through redevelopment of both council and privately owned sites. Development proposals throughout the Town Centre need to be exciting and attractive ensuring that they will draw people from a wide catchment and become part of the towns' distinctive offer enhancing and establishing Sutton Town Centre as a destination

Quality visual experience through street and building design

Crucial to the development concept is making Sutton Town Centre an inspirational place to work, shop and live in. This means creating new buildings, new art and lighting elements and places that people can be enthusiastic about. Central to this are ideas such as a cultural hub with an art, education and media centre, 21st century learning facilities such as libraries and the possibilities of a new theatre, arts and shopping facilities, cafes and a public space. Also, a new business and commercial area with buildings that provide quality floorspace in order to accommodate new employment and provide the potential for developing new learning and skills

Revealing and creating landmarks

Landmarks are an important element of a towns' identity and provide a means of identification, orientation and navigation. The recognition and enhancement of landmark features or buildings should be explored to reflect both their historic role and perceived importance within the urban fabric. For instance, the Station and Civic Centre complex provide strong points of identity and reference within Sutton Town Centre. However they suffer in terms of the quality, use and connectivity of buildings and spaces. These could be improved to enhance the overall significance and identity of the area. Appropriate locations for new landmark features or key buildings will include main points of arrival or orientation and locations that present or strengthen local character and identity.

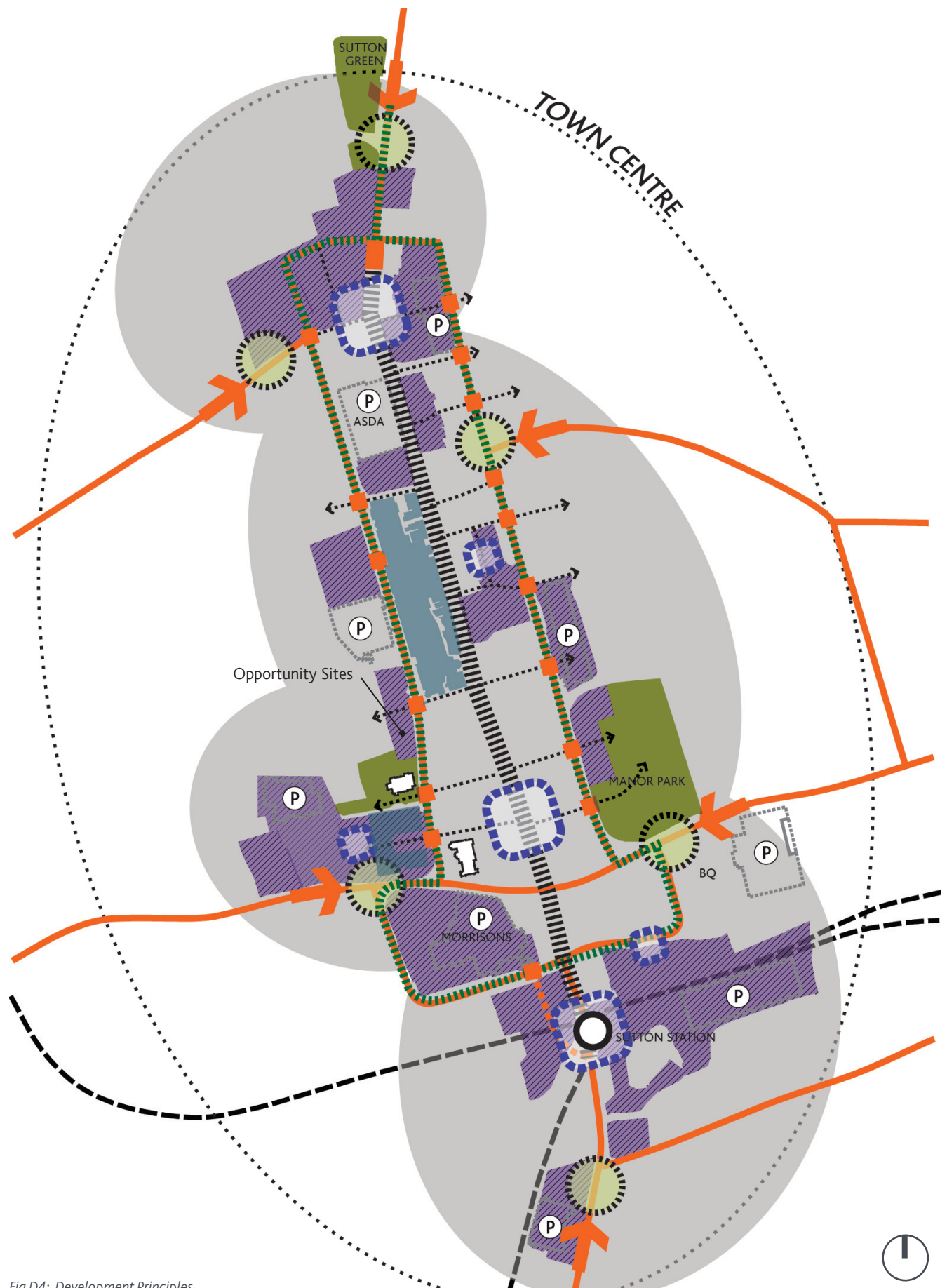


Fig D4: Development Principles

