

Welcome to
WOODLEY

MANCHESTER URBAN DESIGN LAB
& STOCKPORT MBC COLLABORATIVE
DESIGN CODE STUDENT PROJECT

WOODLEY



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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

This document is the output from a collaborative project between Manchester Urban Design LAB (MUD-Lab) at the University of Manchester and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council - the partnership was established to inform the Council's borough-wide Design Code. This Woodley study was undertaken by a group of 15 students studying on the 2024-25 MSc Urban Design and International Planning (UDIP) course supervised by the MUD-Lab staff team.

Manchester Urban Design LAB

Established at the University of Manchester, the MUD-Lab is made up of academic and technical members from across the urban design, planning, and architecture disciplines. It is a leading design laboratory providing design-focused research and publications, technical resources, and training. Training is provided through the taught MSc in UDIP, professional practitioner training courses, and bespoke engagement events. At the core of the MUD-Lab ethos is collaboration with industry partners, which is exemplified through this Stockport Design Code student project. For more information on the MUD-Lab, please visit:

<https://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/mudlab/>

Stockport Design Code

In 2024, Stockport Council were selected as one of DLUHC's (now MHCLG) Design Code Pathfinder projects. The delivery team identified an opportunity to work with students on the MSc UDIP course at the University of Manchester, as part of the wider consultant team, to develop the code – providing an opportunity for students to learn about the coding process, and to develop and utilise their urban design analysis and design skills on a professional project, with Stockport Council as the client.

Process

Through discussions between the MUD-Lab and the wider project team, including Stockport Council, urban design consultant Tibbalds, and engagement lead Design Yorkshire, two local focus areas were identified – Davenport and Woodley. Limited spatial information was available for these local centres, and so the student remit was to undertake an urban design analysis to inform a series of contextual design priorities for each area. These design considerations would be used by the wider consultant team to inform the borough-wide Design Code. This document provides the analysis and design priorities for Woodley.

The project formed an extra-curricular optional opportunity for students, and so was limited to six workshops, alongside their academic studies. The six workshops included:

1. Site Visit – a group site visit to the local centre, guided by Richard Wood, Planning Policy Manager at Stockport Council, followed by student-led exploration of the area.

2. Initial Analysis Workshop – students undertook analysis of the local centre, following the MUD-Lab's 'Applied Urban Design process'⁽¹⁾. Analysis was based around the five themes of neighbourhood attributes and identity; built development; connectivity; public realm and green infrastructure; and character. Analysis techniques were undertaken based on the methods outlined in the MUD-Lab's Urban Design Toolkit⁽²⁾.

3. Analysis and Opportunities and Constraints Workshop – students concluded their analysis of the local area and used this to identify opportunities and constraints to future development in the area. This workshop was attended by Hannah Mitchell, Senior Planning Policy Officer at Stockport Council. Hannah provided feedback to the student groups on the analysis undertaken.

4. Design Considerations to Inform the Design Code – this workshop was attended by Jamie Wilde and Robbie Ormrod from Design Yorkshire, and Jaimie Ferguson from Lucid Design. Having undertaken public engagement on the Design Code project, these members of the consultant team worked with students to inform a series of design and development objectives and actions for the local area. These objectives and actions will be used to inform the wider Design Code.

5. Graphics and Document Preparation – in this workshop, students focused on communicating their analysis graphically and communicating their process clearly through the following spreads of this document.

6. Finalising the Document – students undertook a review of their project outputs, providing commentary on their analysis and finalising the public-facing document, to be presented to Stockport Council.

The entire process was led by the student group, with supervision and administrative coordination from the MUD-Lab staff team. The students followed the process taught through the MSc UDIP course and outlined in the book, Applied Urban Design⁽¹⁾. Any errors, inaccuracies, or omissions are the authors' responsibility.

Thanks from the MUD-Lab team must go to Hannah Mitchell and Richard Wood from Stockport Council for proposing this collaborative project, and for supporting the student group with their expertise and enthusiasm.

References

1. Black, P., Martin, M., Phillips, R. and Sonbli, T. (2025) Applied Urban Design: A Contextually Responsive Approach. New York: Routledge.

2. Black, P., Kerr, R., and Sonbli, T. (Forthcoming) The Urban Design Toolkit. London: RIBA.





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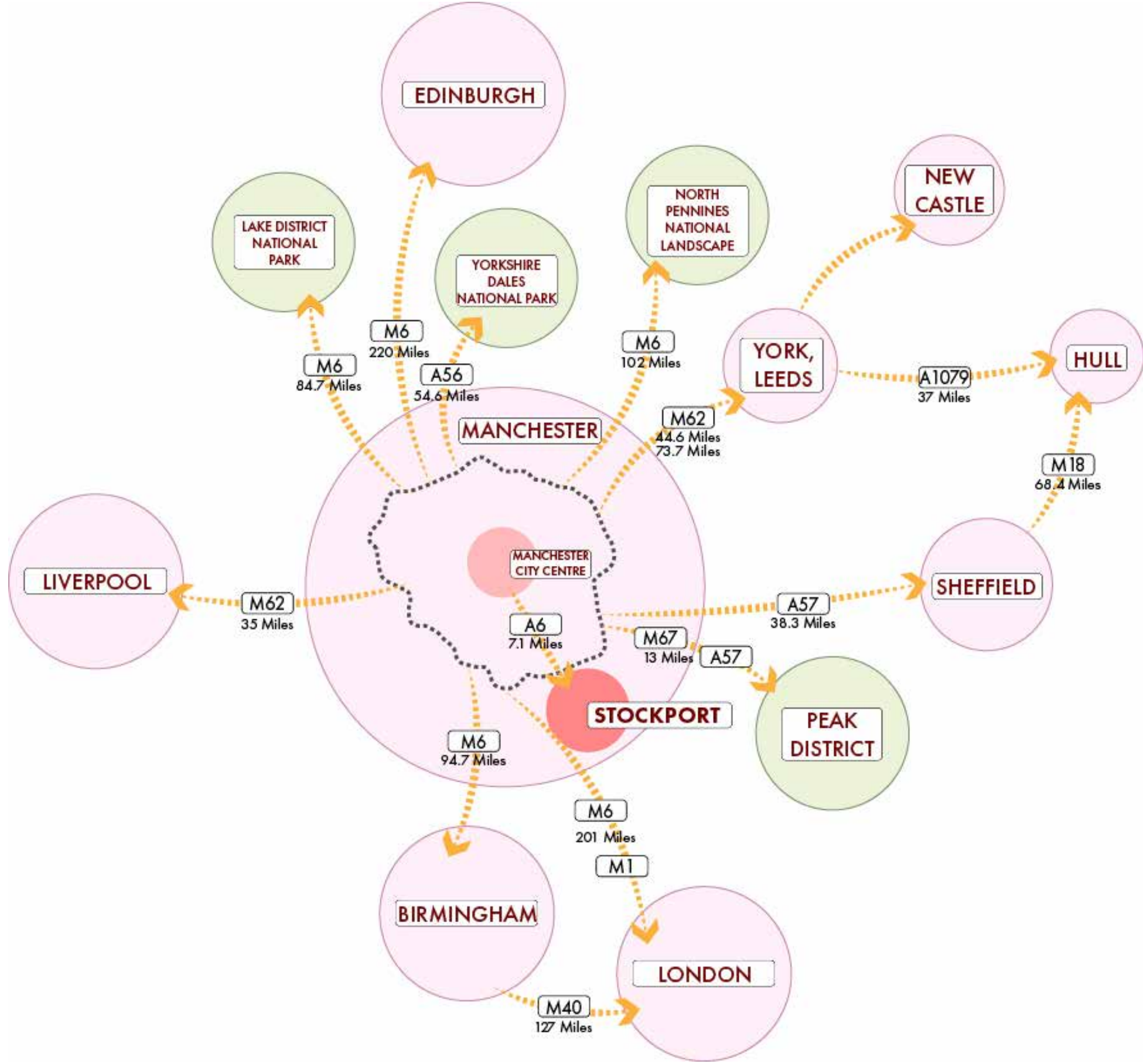
1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Woodley is one of Stockport’s local centres, located in the north-east of the borough. The borough of Stockport is located to the south-east of Manchester, crossing the M60 ring road and extending towards the Peak District to the south-east. The borough is varied in character, and Woodley is locally representative of this variation, having developed over time along Hyde Road. At the centre of the suburb us Woodley Shopping Precinct which provides local services and facilities for the local area. Woodley forms the edge of the urban area and is surrounded to the north and east by greenbelt.

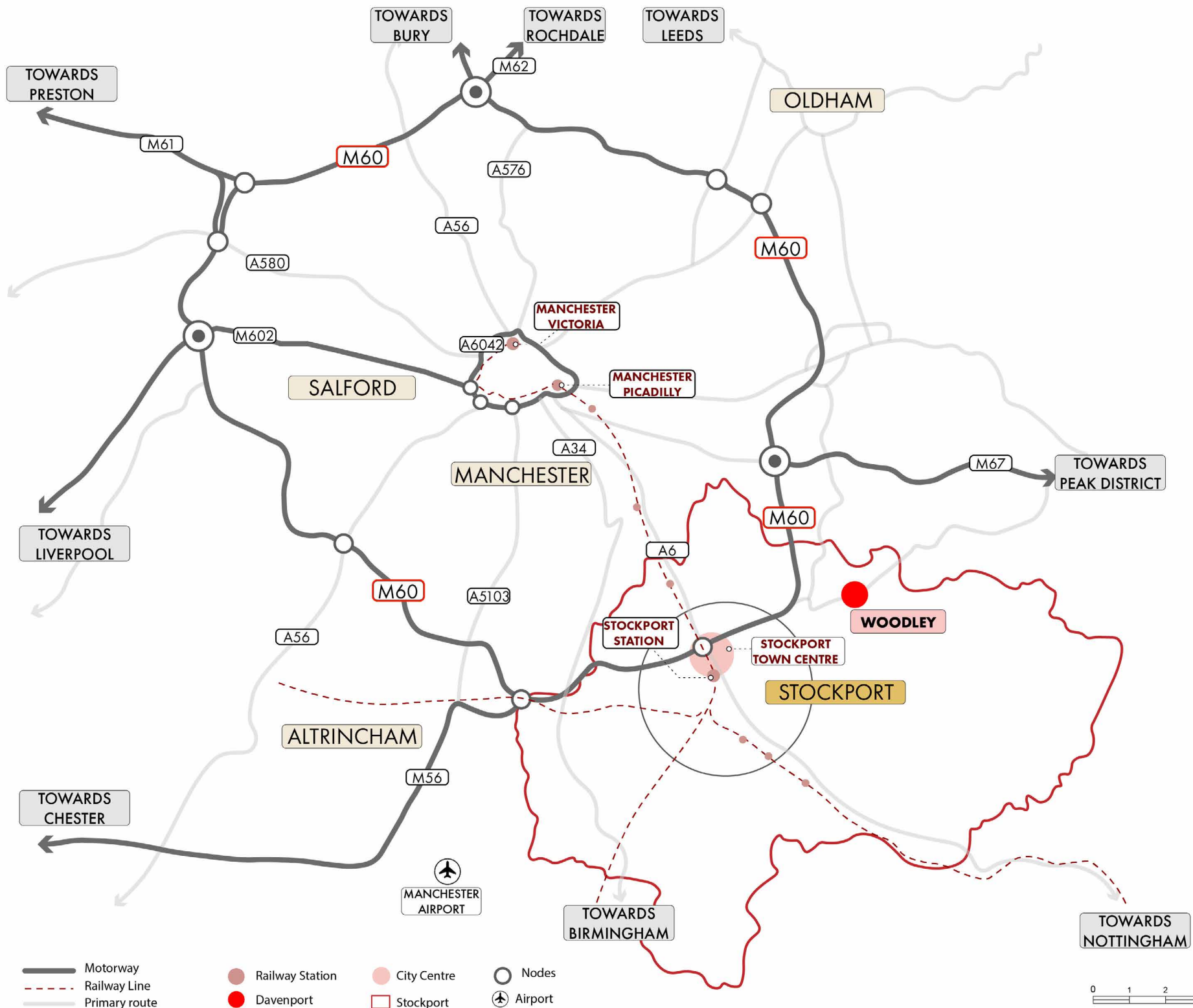
Woodley is located approximately 5km from Stockport town centre and its associated facilities and national public transport connections. Woodley train station provides connections into Manchester Piccadilly within 25 minutes.



Woodley is well connected to the facilities in Stockport Town Centre including the Underbanks.



Woodley Precinct provides the area with an active and accessible centre right at the heart of the local community - defined by local independent retail and a well maintained public/green space.



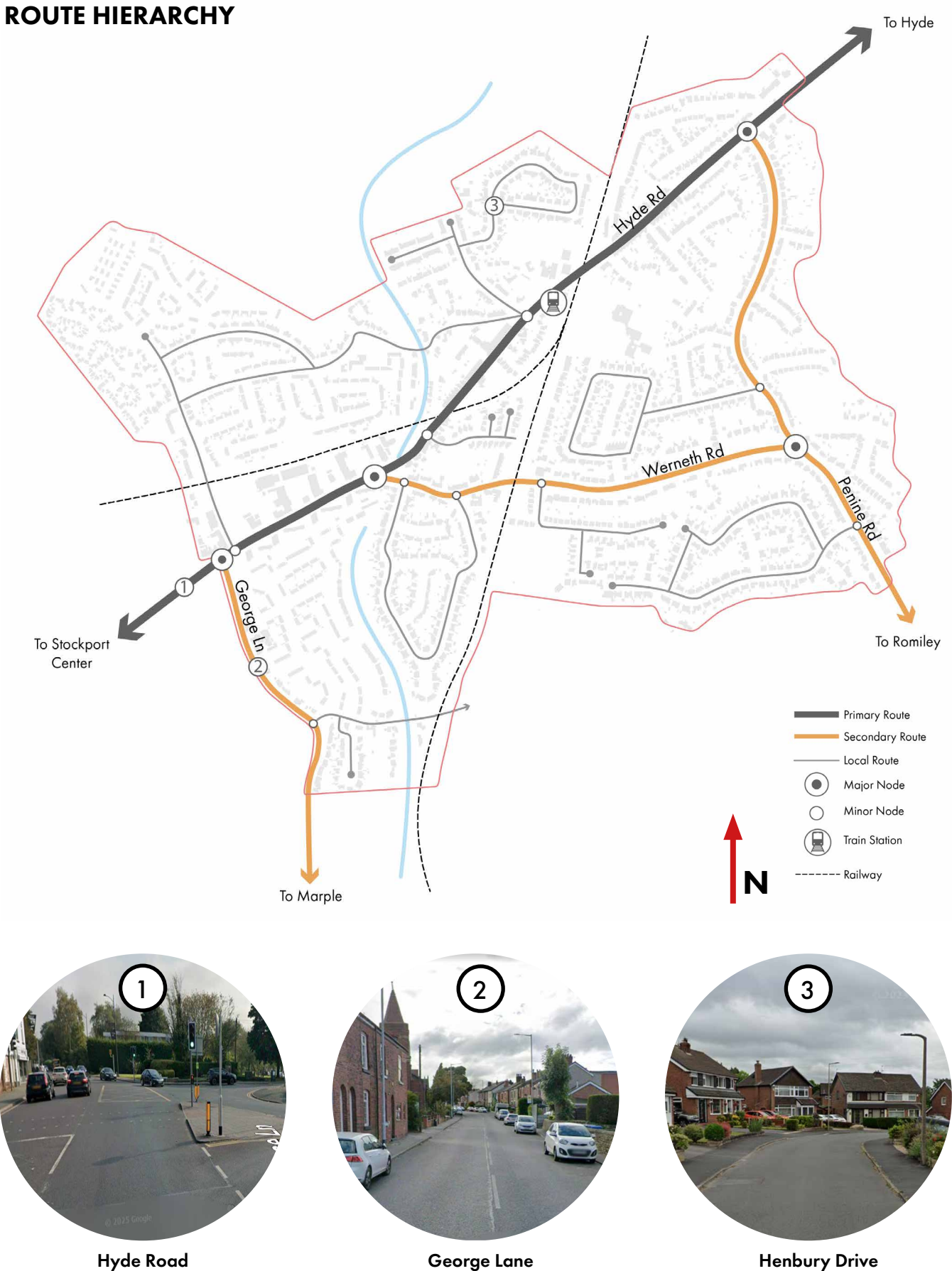
2a. TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY - Neighbourhood

Hyde Road functions as the sole primary route through Woodley, acting as a vital spine that supports both local and regional connectivity. It is a consistently busy corridor, linking the neighbourhood directly to larger centres including Hyde and Stockport. This route also intersects with several secondary roads, forming a number of key junctions that become congestion hotspots, particularly during peak travel times. These intersections are often wide and difficult for pedestrians to cross safely, making them potential barriers for non-vehicular movement. As such, Hyde Road takes on an outsized role in the local movement network, handling traffic beyond what would typically be expected of a single primary route in an area of Woodley's size.

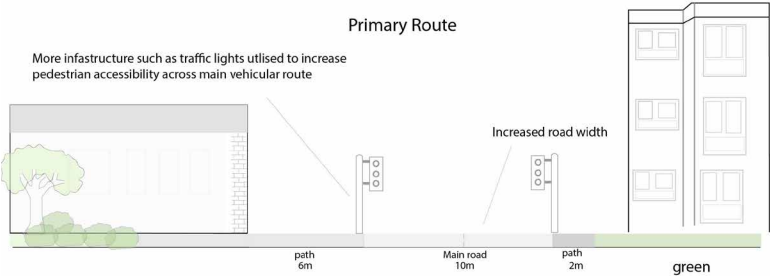
Secondary routes in Woodley offer essential links between the local centre and surrounding settlements such as Romiley and Marple. These roads act as feeders into the primary network. However, the connectivity offered by these routes is often undermined by inconsistent street layouts and a lack of direct paths between key destinations. As a result, although they serve a secondary role in the hierarchy, their practical usefulness varies and can often feel fragmented, particularly where they intersect with natural or manmade barriers.

Local roads in Woodley are notably fragmented and suffer from poor legibility. A large number of cul-de-sacs dominate residential areas, leading to limited through-routes and forcing residents to take long, roundabout routes for relatively short journeys. This is particularly problematic for pedestrians and cyclists, who often find themselves needing to backtrack or use indirect paths. The presence of multiple barriers to movement, such as canals, railway lines, and pockets of industrial land, further compounds these issues. These obstacles prevent the development of a cohesive, connected and walkable street network. Consequently, many residents rely more heavily on Hyde Road for both local and longer journeys, putting more pressure on this already congested corridor.

ROUTE HIERARCHY

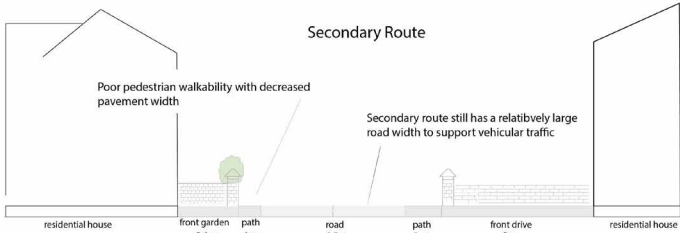


1. Primary Route - Hyde Road



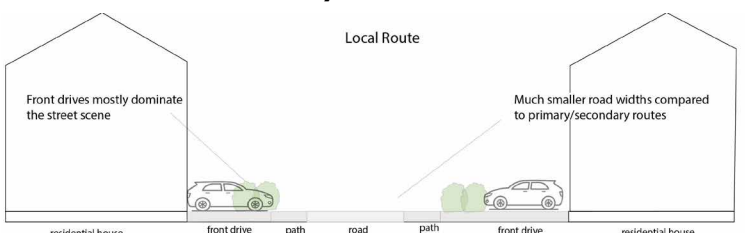
Primary routes mainly consist of Hyde Road as the predominant vehicular route, this route features wide roads to support travel through Woodley as well as sustainable travel infrastructure, with the majority of bus routes along this road. The surrounding development either side of this route is a mixture of residential dwellings and a mixture of retail services.

2. Secondary Route - George Lane



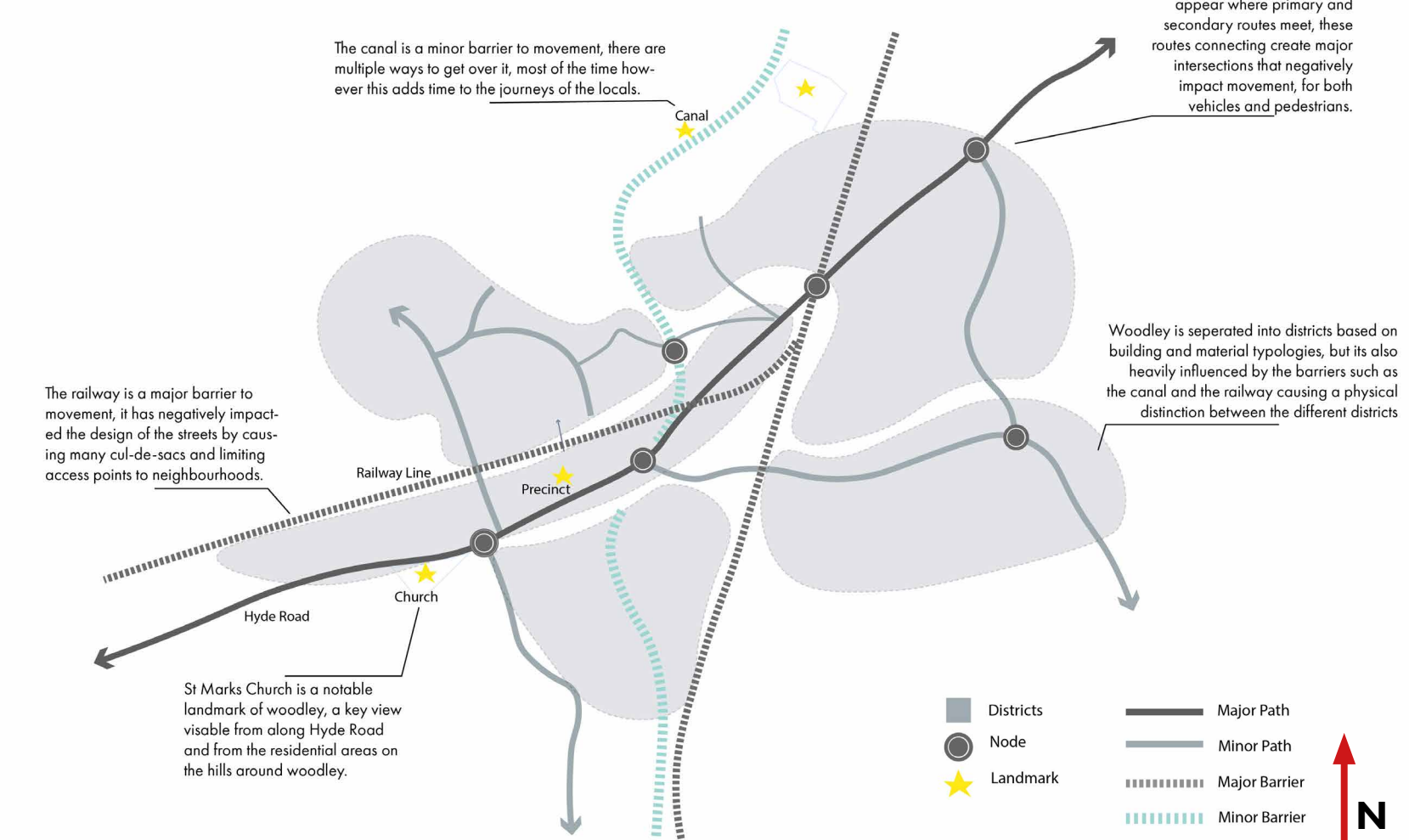
Secondary routes such as George Lane support traffic access to major junctions on Hyde Road. These routes are still very well used, highly trafficked routes which can become highly congested in peak travel hours. The pedestrian infrastructure on these routes is quite varied, with some paths being only 1m wide.

3. Local Route - Henbury Drive



Local routes in Stockport feature much smaller road widths and are predominately accessed by residents living in the area. Most dwellings are semi-detached properties and feature front drives to the principal elevation. These routes are relatively quiet during most hours of the day and are only used by the local population.

LEGIBILITY ANALYSIS



Landmarks



Woodley Precinct stands as a prominent landmark in the neighbourhood, offering a hub of amenities such as supermarkets, clinics, and retail shops all conveniently located in one place. This main square acts as the main centre of Woodley and if developed further could become a bustling hub for local residents.



The Peak Forest Canal, a narrow, lock-lined artificial waterway, meanders through Woodley, dividing the neighbourhood into two distinct sides. The canal serves as a scenic landmark, offering tranquil natural trails for pedestrians and local residents to access green and blue infrastructure on their doorstep.



St Marks Church, constructed in the 19th century and situated between Redhouse Lane and Stockport Road, serves the combined parish of Bredbury and Woodley. This Grade II listed building features dressed stone, ashlar, and slate roofs, functioning as a significant landmark and gateway into the Woodley neighbourhood.



Unity Mill, believed to have been built in the 1860's for cotton spinning, served as a manufacturing site for various products until its closure in 2003. The Mill is considered to be of archaeological and historic interest and stands as a prominent landmark in Woodley, showcasing its industrial heritage.



Woodley Train Station has poor visibility and convoluted access from Hyde Road which represents poor legibility in a major transit route. The wayfinding from the station onto the Hyde road is unclear, often confusing the commuters which provides a major potential for improvement.

Barriers

The Peak Forest Canals



The canals while being a major landmark that contribute to the character of the area, also act as a barrier dividing different areas in Woodley. While there are a few routes which provide access over the canals, vehicular access is still relatively limited.

Railway Line



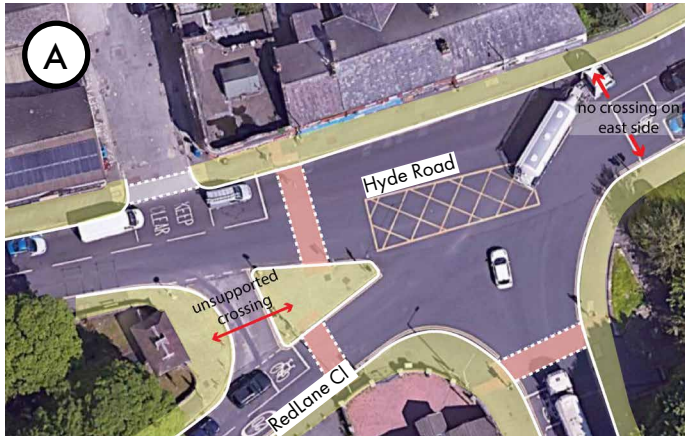
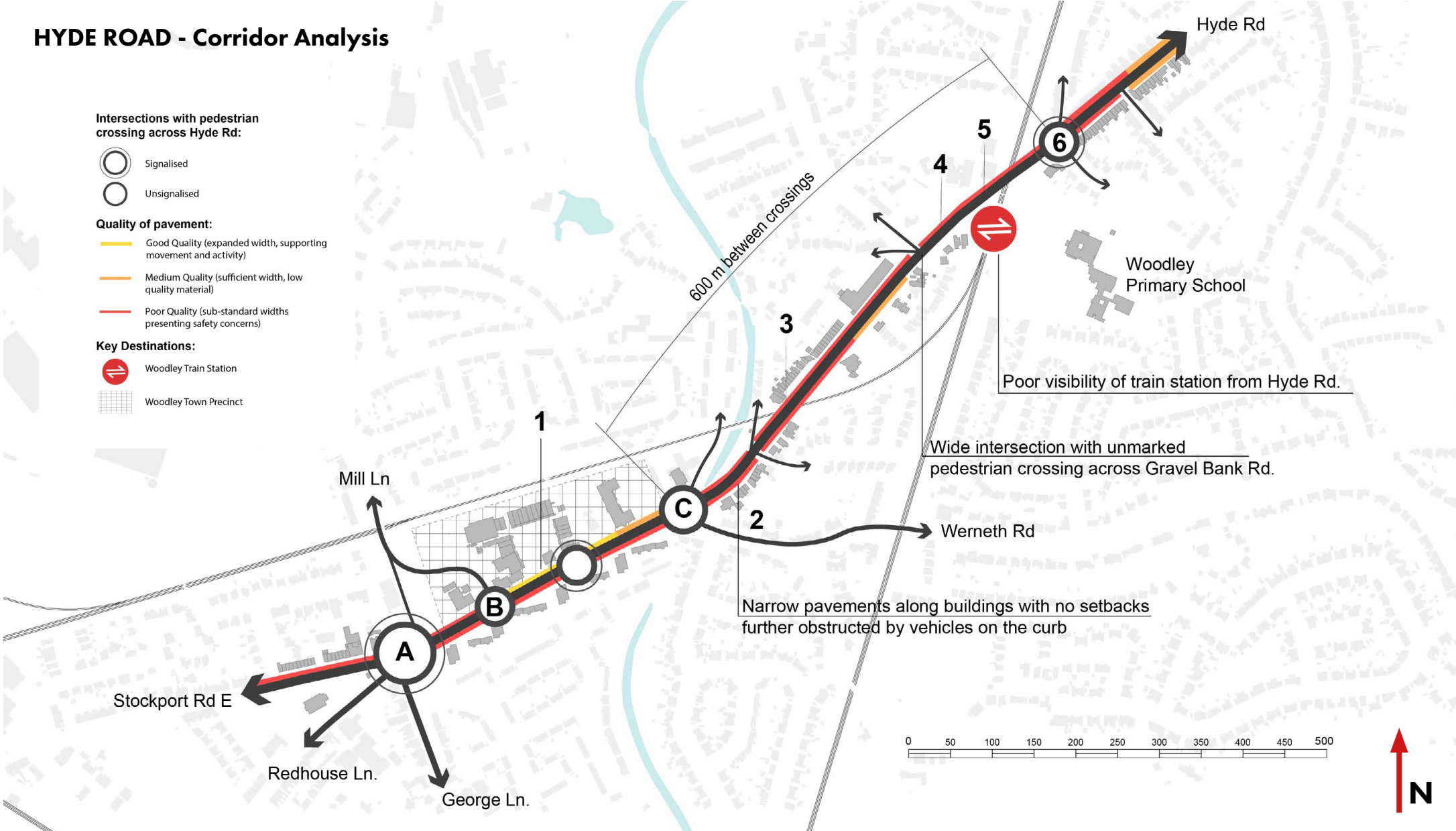
The main railway line splits into two and intersects through two different parts of Woodley. To the north of Woodley, the railway line segregates the main residential area from Hyde Road and the surrounding centre. The connections between these areas are very limited with two main access points across the railway, with one further pedestrian bridge across the tracks themselves. The railway can be seen as a major barrier to pedestrian and vehicular movement.

2b. TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY - Hyde Road

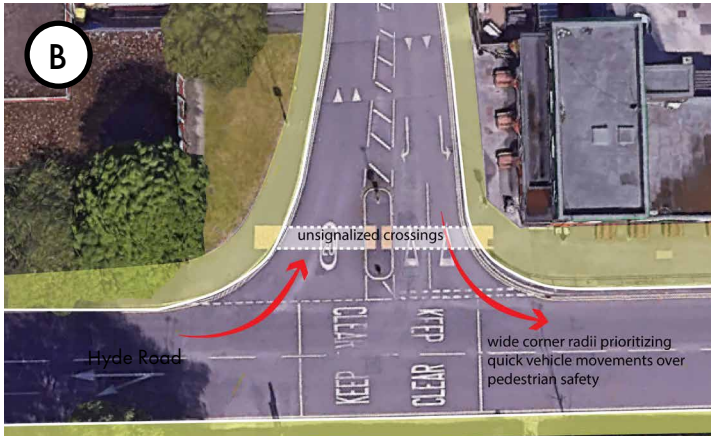
Hyde Road serves as a vital transport corridor through Woodley, accommodating all modes of travel, including cars, buses, cyclists, and pedestrians. It plays a central role in the town's connectivity, linking key destinations such as the train station, the retail precinct, and surrounding residential neighborhoods. As the primary east-west route through the town, Hyde Road also provides essential access to adjacent towns, supporting both local movement and regional travel.

The current state of the corridor fails to provide a safe or enjoyable experience for pedestrians or cyclists due to inconsistent and substandard pavements and wide, multi-stage intersections that favour vehicle movements over other users.

Its strategic importance makes it a key focus for infrastructure improvements aimed at enhancing mobility, safety, and access for all users, while also supporting economic and community development in Woodley. The section of Hyde Road that runs between the station and the retail precinct is of particular importance in order to support transit-oriented development objectives, which will drive new developments, and with it, increased active transport demand to the station. Potential key areas for improvement to enhance the mobility and to create a gateway into the site which transforms the route into an active corridor.



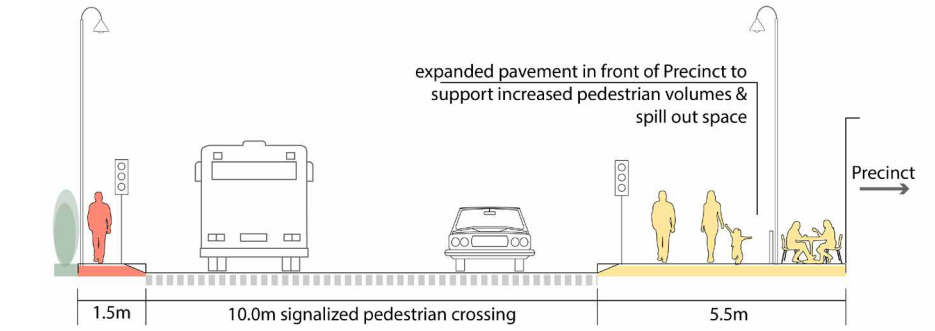
Wide, multistage intersection presents safety & accessibility concerns for pedestrians



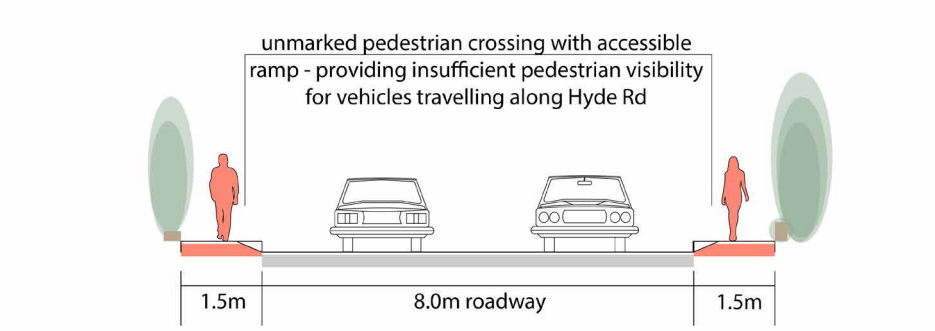
Marked and unmarked pedestrian crossing with swift vehicular movements and wide turning radii creates an unsafe crossing near the Precinct.



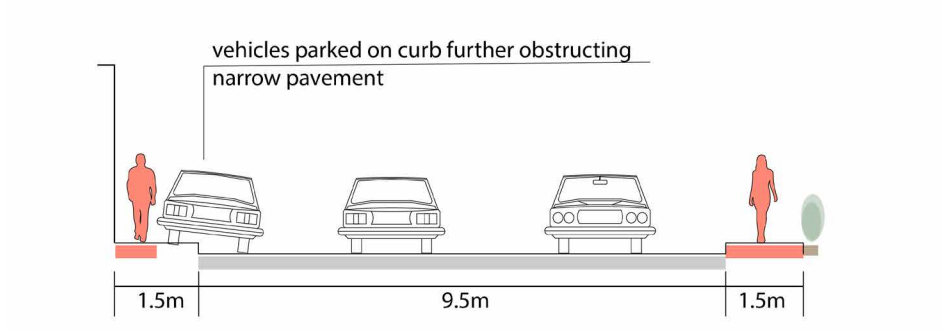
Intersection design encourages quick vehicular speeds around corners, while providing minimum protection for pedestrians crossing.



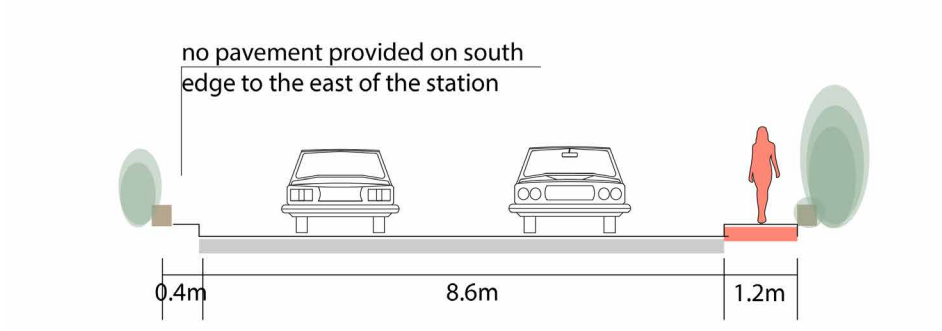
Expanded pavements along the Precinct support increased foot traffic and business activity, however poor materials and maintenance creates an unattractive space with significant potential for improvement.



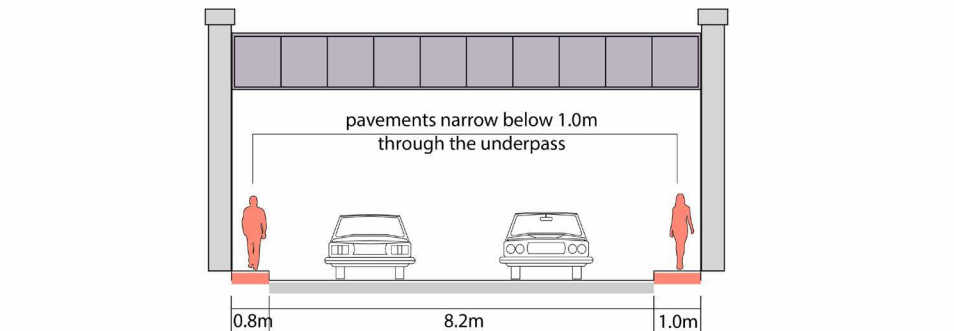
The pavements west of the station are too narrow to handle high pedestrian volumes. The unmarked north-south crossing connecting pedestrians to the station provides inadequate pedestrian visibility and protection.



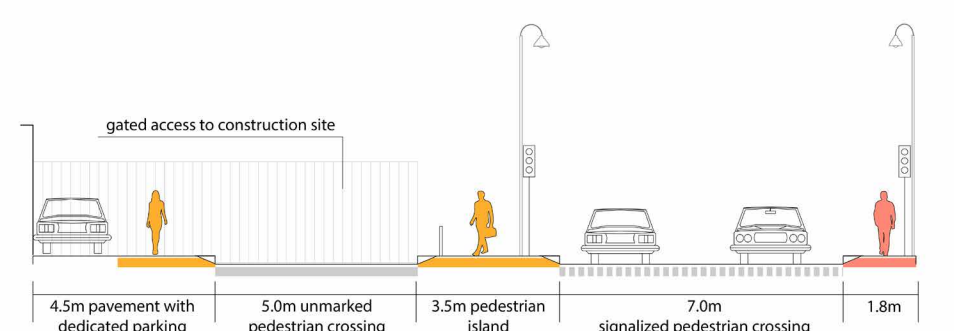
The existing pavement fails to provide adequate space for pedestrian movement and is further obstructed by cars parked on the curb. South-side buildings built up to the property line limit opportunities for widening and create an uncomfortable interface with the street.



Pedestrian connections to the train station along Hyde road are significantly limited to the east due to the absence of a dedicated pavement along the south side. Bridging this gap must be prioritized.



Pavements narrow below 1.0 metre through the underpass, creating serious safety and accessibility issues for pedestrians travelling along this key route.



The signalized intersection allows pedestrians to navigate the dead end pavement along the south side of the bridge to improve connections to the station, however accessing the crossing is difficult, as it is located on a poorly connected pedestrian island.

2c. TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY - Sustainable Mobility

Woodley is a fragmented neighbourhood characterised by a network of disconnected narrow paths and cul-de-sacs, with the train tracks further dividing the area into smaller, isolated sections. This physical barrier significantly limits integration and undermines overall walkability and neighbourhood cohesion. However, two key nodes—Woodley Train Station and the Woodley Precinct—serve as focal points, each offering a range of facilities within a five-minute walking radius.



This narrow path, though hidden, serves as a crucial north-south connection between neighbourhoods. Due to the cul-de-sacs at its northern edge, it functions as one of the few available shortcuts, making it an important route for local pedestrian movement.



This narrow path, though small and inconspicuous, plays a vital role for residents east of Woodley Train Station—particularly for primary school students and those accessing nearby amenities. However, its hidden and confined nature makes it difficult to find and reduces its effectiveness as a pedestrian route.



This path functions more like a semi-private road, with barriers that limit pedestrian access. Although it appears to connect two adjacent neighbourhoods, in reality, they remain disconnected. The resulting cul-de-sacs hinder permeability and make integration across the area more difficult.



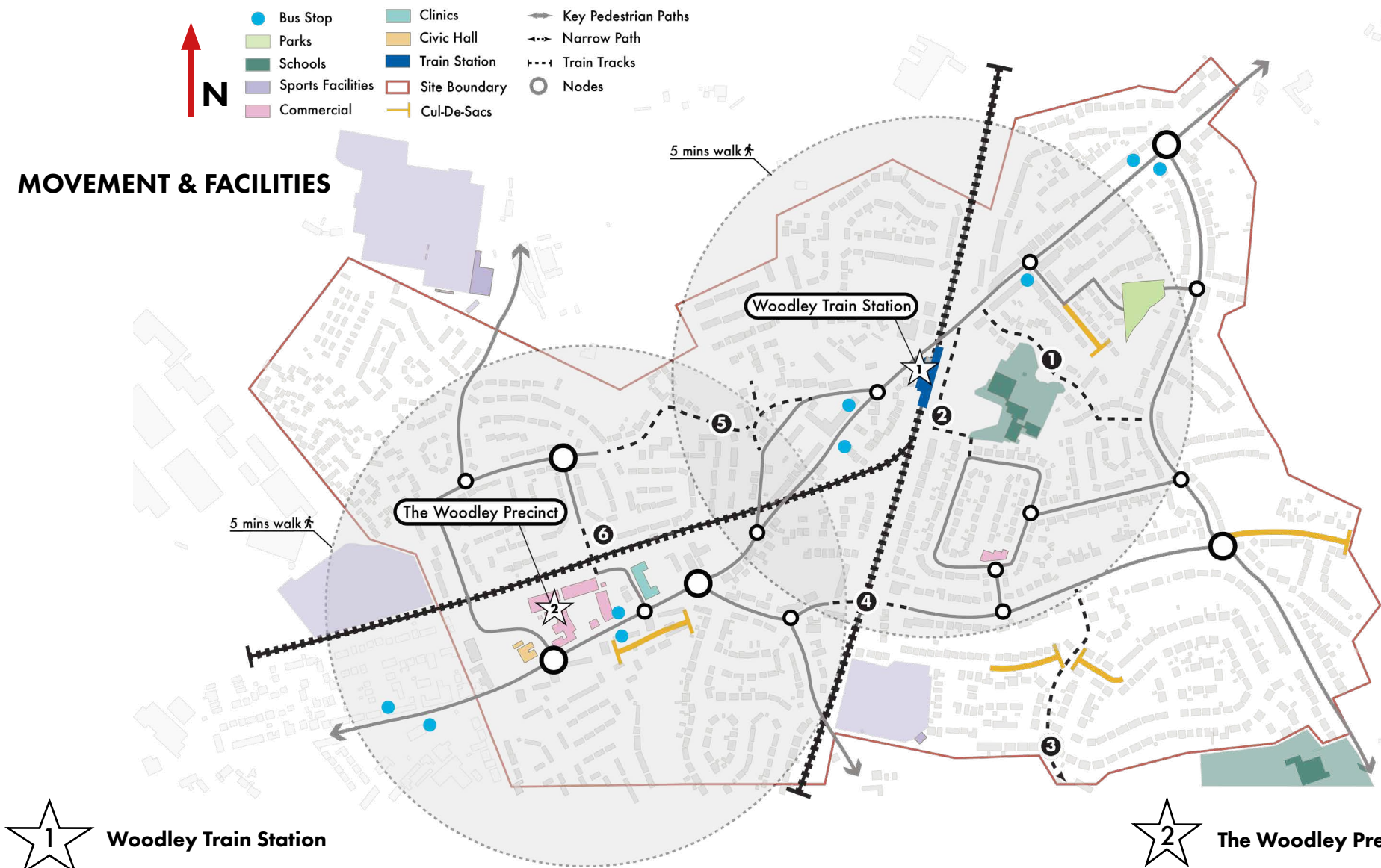
This path provides a narrow pedestrian crossing over the railway line, positioned alongside the main road. Despite its strategic location, the limited width reduces comfort and perceived safety for pedestrians.



Connecting the northwestern and northeastern neighbourhoods, this narrow path serves as one of the few links across the train tracks that fragment the area. However, the lack of proper lighting at night makes it feel unsafe and unwelcoming for pedestrians.



Serving as a key connection between the Woodley Precinct and the northwestern neighbourhood, this path provides vital access for daily commutes and essential services. As one of the few pedestrian crossings over the train tracks, it plays a crucial role in maintaining neighbourhood connectivity.



1 Woodley Train Station

Located centrally within the site, Woodley Train Station serves as a key transportation node. However, its entrance is poorly signposted and obscured from view, making it difficult to access and visually uninviting. Despite its proximity to important local destinations such as the park and Woodley Primary School, the station feels both physically and perceptually detached from the rest of the neighbourhood. Its potential as a mobility hub is therefore underutilised.

2 The Woodley Precinct

The Woodley Precinct functions as the main commercial and civic centre, hosting a concentration of shops, healthcare facilities, and public services. Despite its importance, the precinct is relatively isolated from adjacent residential areas and lacks direct, legible connections to the train station. The pedestrian network is fragmented, characterised by dead ends, narrow alleys, and poorly defined routes. These conditions diminish walkability, confuse wayfinding, and undermine the overall accessibility and coherence of the neighbourhood.

Accessibility to Walking Trails

Woodley is situated in amongst areas of great natural value and boasts greater access to nature than most of Stockport. Therefore, it follows that residents of Woodley should have the ability to benefit from their local environment. This map charts the public rights of way that fall on Woodley's boundary as well as the recognised significant walking trails that pass through or near to Woodley in order to understand how effectively residents can enjoy their surroundings and take walks into nature.

Elements such as visibility, signage, inclusivity and maintenance will be considered in this section in order to assess the accessibility of Woodley's entry points to nature.

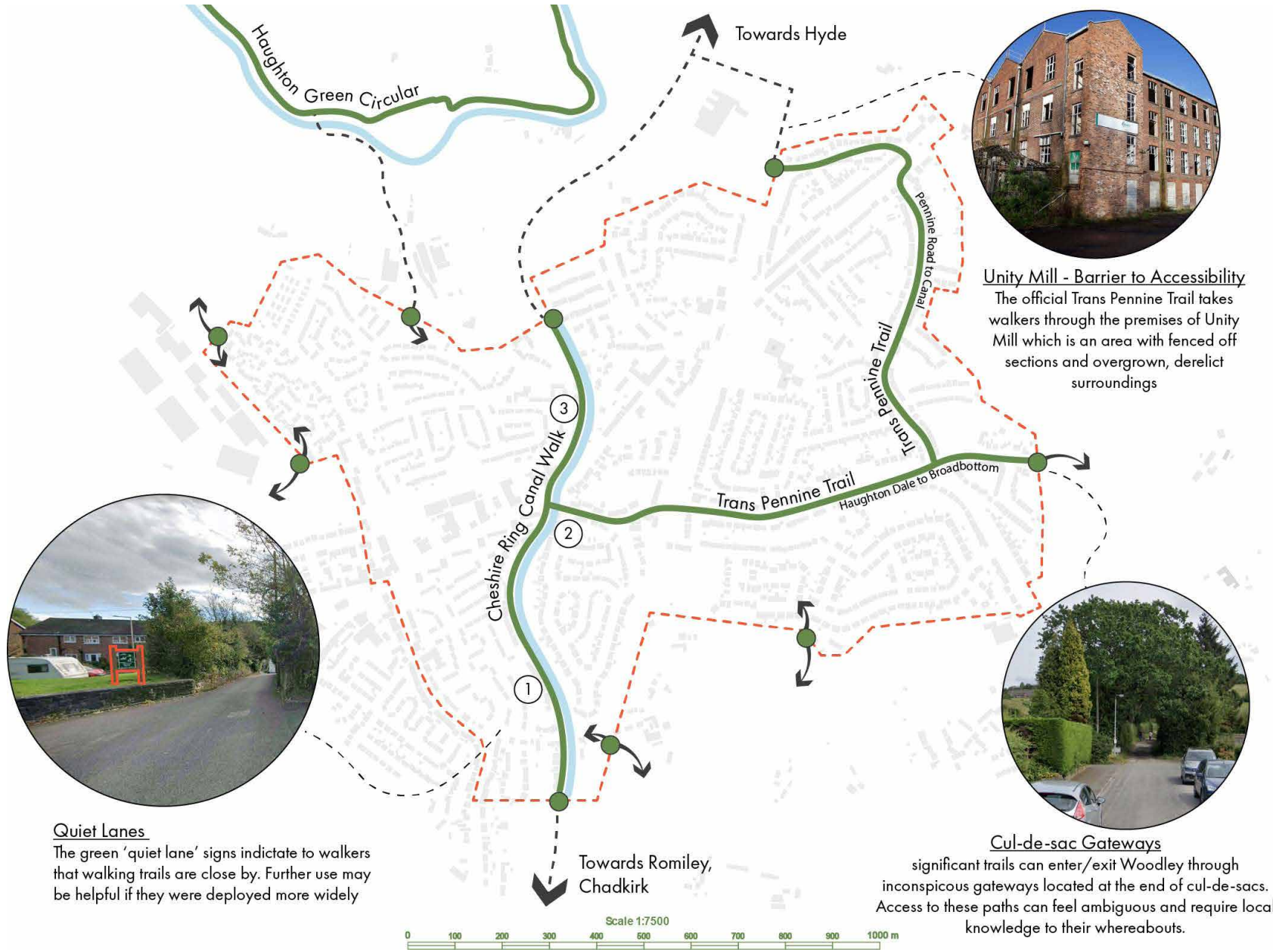
In a broad sense, Woodley feels reasonably connected to larger trails as both the canal trail and Trans Pennine Trail (TPT) cut through the centre of Woodley. The TPT may go unnoticed as it follows residential routes within the site boundary, however it allows many households to easily join the trail. When we examine the human scale, there are barriers to entry that are characteristic of many Right of Way trails as well. Addressing these issues would result in greater access to and knowledge of the natural assets that Woodley benefits from.

Issues with Signage

Throughout Woodley, access points into nature are inconsistently signed resulting in often unclear access points. Routes recognised on wider trails like the TPT sometimes meet roads claiming to be private. Often, no signage at all, and in areas with lots of vegetation, paths can become hidden unless they are explored.

Peak Forest Canal Accessibility

The Peak Forest Canal is a central nature walk for Woodley. Assessing its access points can be indicative of the challenges facing other trails.



Quiet Lanes
The green 'quiet lane' signs indicate to walkers that walking trails are close by. Further use may be helpful if they were deployed more widely.

Cul-de-sac Gateways
significant trails can enter/exit Woodley through inconspicuous gateways located at the end of cul-de-sacs. Access to these paths can feel ambiguous and require local knowledge to their whereabouts.



Poor Quality Access

- Unmaintained path with missing slabs and chipped painted railing
- Narrow entry between houses back onto the streets of Woodley
- Overgrown Vegetation



Reasonable Quality Access

- Steps kept in good quality however steep climb may limit accessibility for some
- Placement alongside bridge makes for legible point of entry
- Lack of signage indicating canal entrance/exit



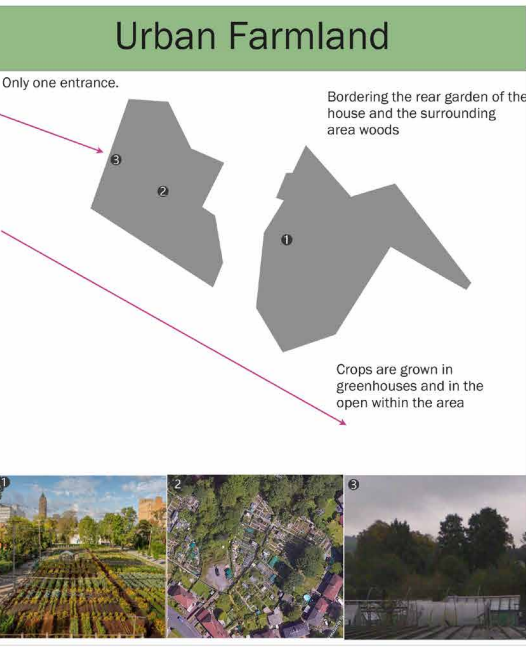
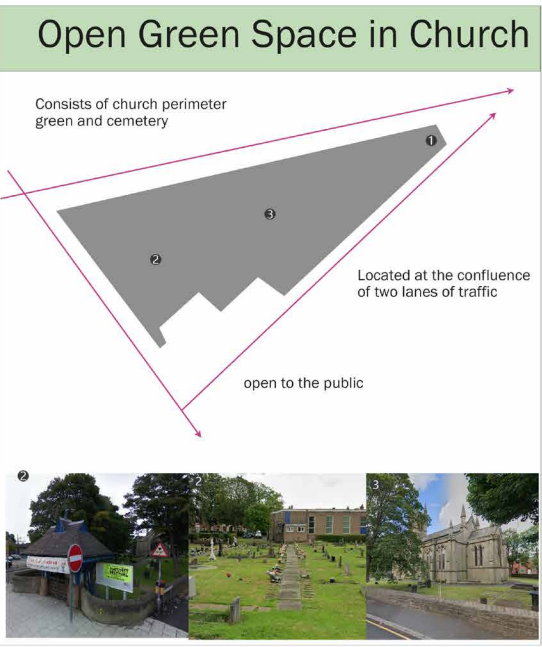
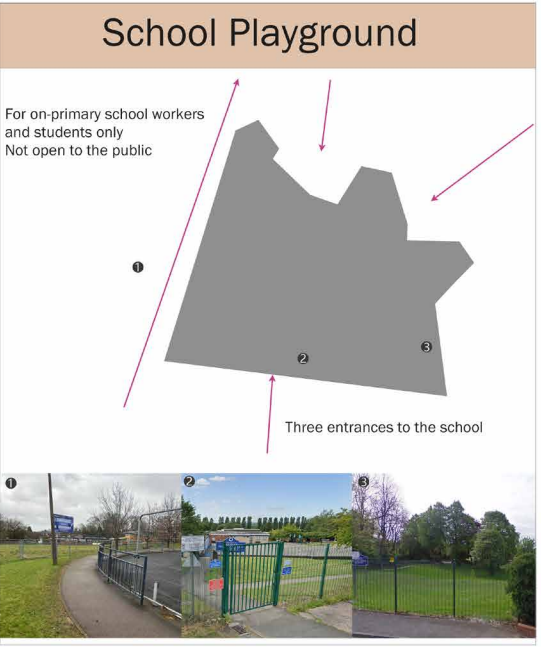
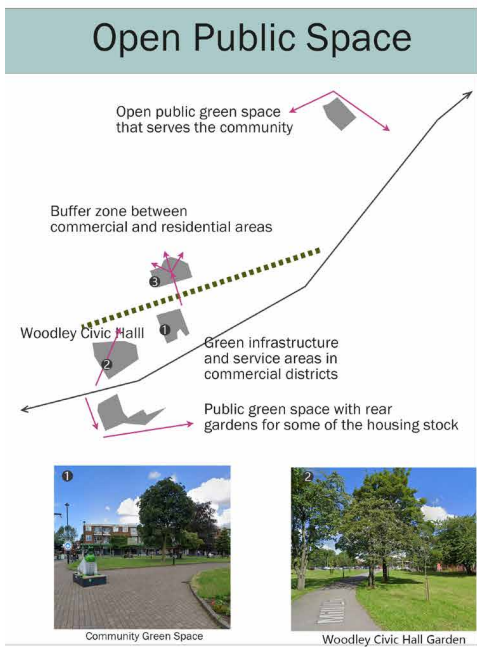
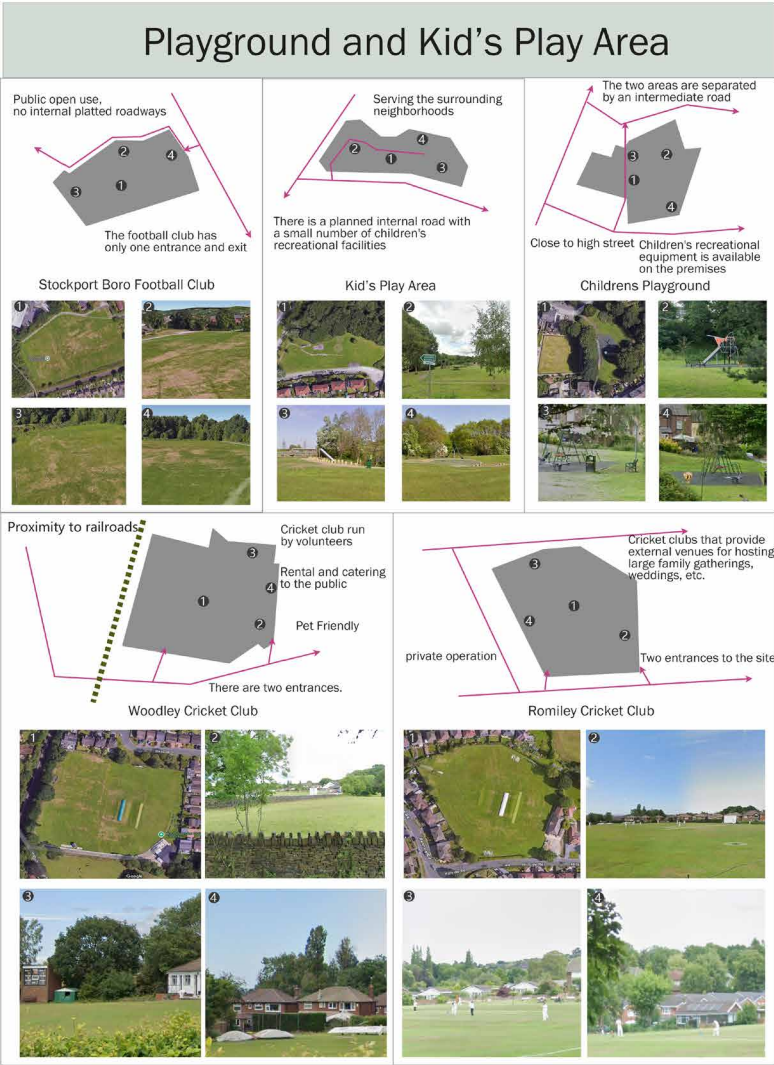
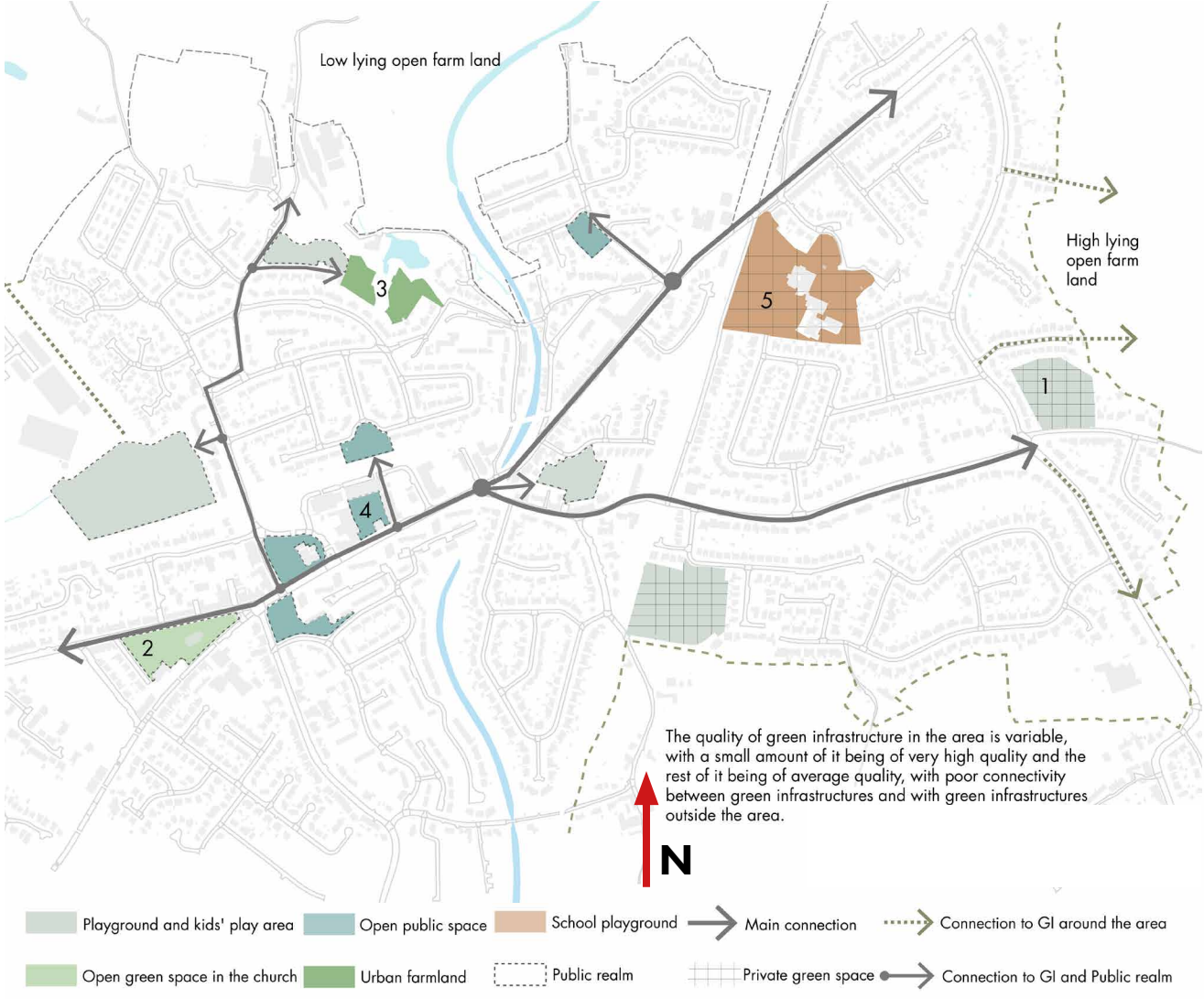
Better Quality Access

- Gradual incline makes the path more inclusive
- Well positioned along busy movement route
- Still a lack of clear signage

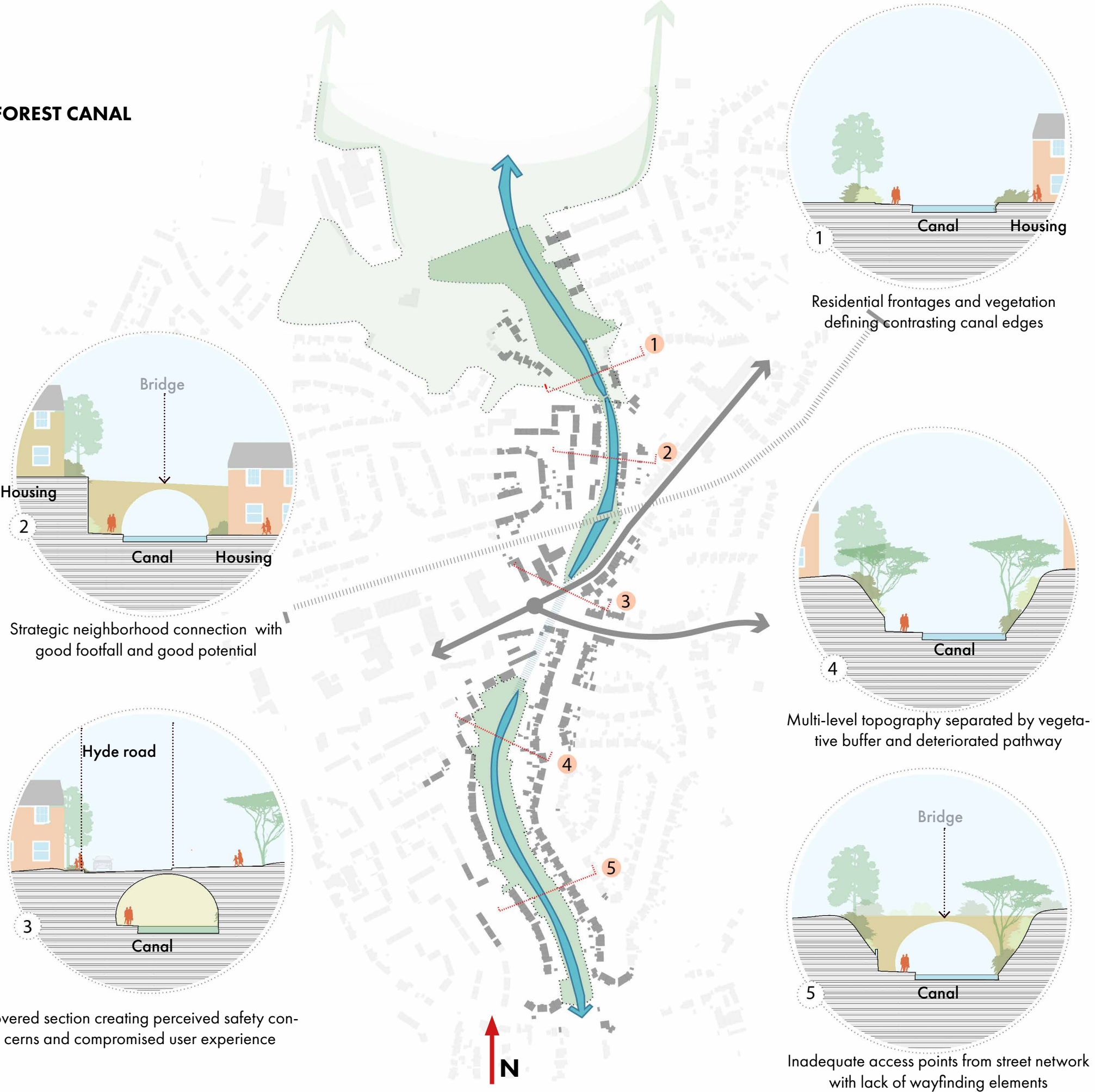
3. GREEN/BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC REALM

1. The green space within the site mainly consists of grass and is bordered by low-maintenance shrubs, creating an open and accessible landscape. The flat terrain makes it particularly suitable for informal sporting activities such as football or running. In addition, part of the site functions as a private area that is frequently used for large family gatherings and wedding ceremonies.
2. The green space in this area is primarily composed of grassland, with the space located behind the church serving as a burial ground. This area is surrounded by tall, mature trees that provide shade and a sense of enclosure. Due to its function and setting, the site is not designed for active recreational use. Instead, it maintains a quiet and respectful atmosphere, offering a space for reflection and remembrance rather than social or physical activity.
3. As a newly developed area of the city in recent years, there are greenhouses and open-air planting inside the site, which caters to the needs of the local residents.
4. Green space within the site of the Green infrastructure as a commercial district The plants are ornamental, trees, shrubs and herbs are arranged in different levels, and there are many infrastructures, such as seats and art statues, which are convenient for people to rest and stay for recreation, and the quality is high.
5. This site is accessible only to individuals affiliated with the school, such as students, staff, and faculty. Despite its limited access, the site is relatively large and includes open areas that are well-suited for student recreational activities.

These spaces illustrate the functional and spatial diversity of urban green and public areas. Depending on their location and users, the openness, configuration and use of these green spaces vary significantly, ranging from high-quality public spaces that are open to the public and support a variety of activities to more closed and exclusive spaces that serve specific groups of people. Overall, these green spaces and public spaces fulfill different social functions while demonstrating the multiple roles and values of green infrastructure in urban development.



PEAK FOREST CANAL



Wayfinding and Clarity
Presently it is not easy to navigate along the canal or figure out where you are. Simple, human-scale interventions like clear signage, maps, and landmarks could make it more inviting and help people feel confident exploring the area.

Pathway Comfort and Connectivity
The pathway adjacent the canal feels neglected—it is uneven, poorly maintained, and does not connect well to the surrounding neighbourhoods. It requires a smooth, well-lit path that invites people to walk, jog, or cycle, with benches and resting spots where they can pause and enjoy the views.

Access for Everyone
The canal feels closed off, with only a few entry points. Adding more access points and creating clear connections to nearby streets and communities would make it easier for people to reach and enjoy the space. It should be a natural part of the neighborhood, not a hidden or isolated feature.

Celebrating Its Unique Character
As you move from north to south, the canal changes dramatically—its topography, landscape, and surroundings shift. This diversity is a strength. By designing spaces that highlight these unique characteristics, it is possible to create a journey along the canal that feels dynamic and engaging, with something new to discover at every turn.

Best Practice Case Study - Marple Wharf



Marple Wharf's transformation from a neglected industrial site to a vibrant community hub showcases how thoughtful urban design, heritage preservation, and community engagement can revitalize waterfronts, creating inclusive, sustainable, and connected public spaces.

4. DEVELOPMENT

Land uses within Woodley are predominantly residential, emphasizing its suburban and housing-oriented nature. The majority of the area is low density residential, creating a quiet residential environment. However, some complementary land uses are also incorporated to meet local needs.

A small but significant cluster of mixed uses are located in the west central part of the neighbourhood. This social centre brings together retail, healthcare, community services, parking, limited commercial activity, and a small area of green space. Despite its compact size, it serves as the centre of the community by providing daily amenities and facilitating social interaction.

Other major land uses - such as schools, recreational areas, and other community facilities - are more dispersed throughout the area. This dispersed distribution reduces accessibility and can create challenges for residents, especially those without access to private transportation.

There is some small commercial land to the east, which limits the provision of local services and may inconvenience nearby residents who must travel further for their daily needs.

There is an inadequate supply of green space across the site. However, a number of green spaces are either poorly maintained, under-utilized or appear to be awaiting full redevelopment. This deficiency affects both the quality of the environment and recreational opportunities for the community.

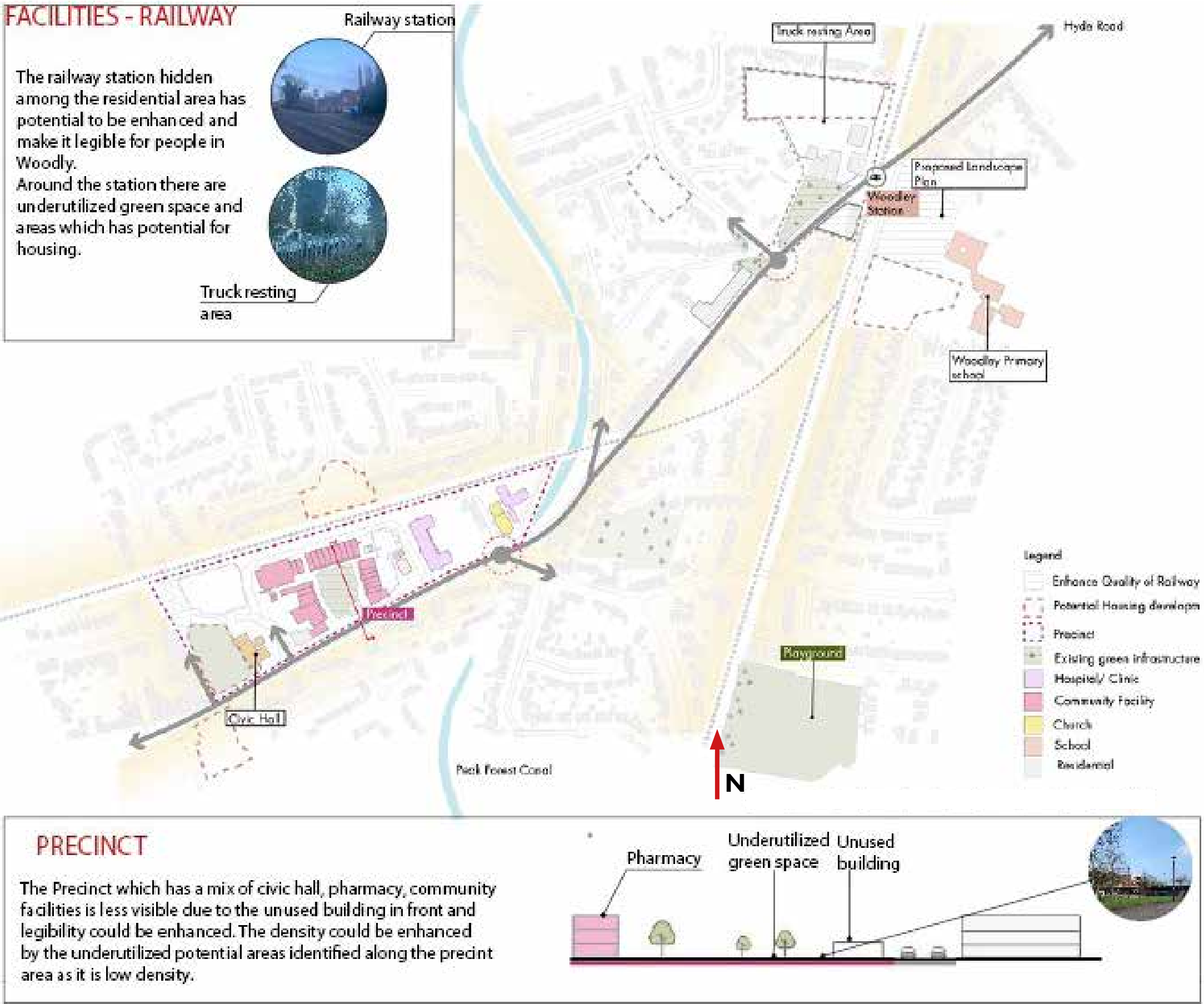
Edge conditions can also affect the spatial experience of Woodley. Along some major streets, land uses vary on both sides, for example, one side may have residential buildings while the other contains retail or institutional functions. These contrasting edge conditions can be energizing, or lead to disjointed transitions, depending on the quality and degree of integration within the built environment.

Overall, while Woodley provides residential and social infrastructure, the spatial distribution, scale and quality of non-residential land uses (including green space and commercial areas) is limited, affecting the overall function, accessibility and livability of the site.

LAND USE



LOCAL FACILITIES



Woodley's Hyde Road is the spine of the local centre, with important facilities such as the precinct, the railway station and the civic hall of the neighborhood anchoring community life. However, the neighborhood has potential to enhance legibility and coherence, especially in the vicinity of the train station, which is still underutilized and not well incorporated into the larger public space. The station's function as a sustainable transportation hub and local gateway is limited since, despite its advantageous location, it is obscured from view and lacks pedestrian access and visual links.

The railway station could be enhanced to be more accessible and legible, which could develop into a more lively and interconnected within the neighborhood. Its function as a major anchor may be strengthened and more public transportation use encouraged with improved signage, lighting, and an altered arriving experience. More residential density in the nearby neighborhood could bring in more housing development to meet the demand.

The precinct itself presents a chance for significant revitalization. With landscaping, seating, and active frontages to accommodate both daytime and evening use, its central courtyard could be transformed into more vibrant communal area - increasing residential use around this centre .

An essential community resource, the Civic Hall, has potential to be more visible and physically connected to the station and the wider area. Wayfinding, public realm quality, and pedestrian pathways could all be improved to create a town centre that is more legible, attractive, and delivering a local sense of identity.

Woodley's main street has significant design potential to further develop the existing active local centre - better connecting the precinct, the railway, and the local community.

5. WOODLEY PRECINCT

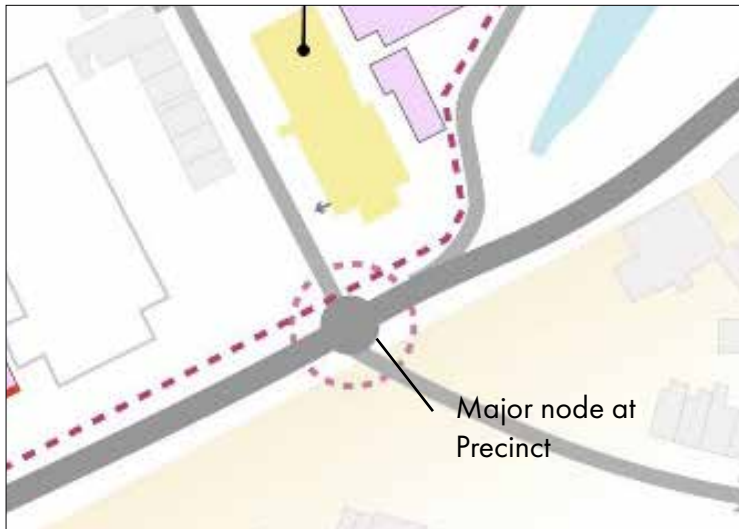
1. Frontage & Visibility

The site presents an inward-facing retail configuration, arranged around a central courtyard-like space. While the main frontage aligns along Hyde Road—a primary arterial route offering high potential for commercial visibility—the current setup is compromised by a standalone eye clinic situated at a critical junction. This structure obstructs direct visual and pedestrian connectivity from Hyde Road to the internal retail core. Enhancing permeability and improving lines of sight from Hyde Road through strategic demolition, façade transparency, or reorientation would significantly increase the commercial viability and vibrancy of the area.



2. Movement & Connectivity

The site's primary access point is via Hyde Road, but current pedestrian access and visual permeability into the courtyard retail zone are limited. Introducing additional pedestrian crossings along Hyde Road can improve safety and enhance walkability. Furthermore, integrating lighting elements, wayfinding signage, and visual corridors from the street into the retail core would improve orientation and attract more footfall. Consideration should be given to unobstructed pedestrian spines and maintaining continuity between Hyde Road and the inner courtyard.



3. Land Use & Built Form

The predominant land use is retail, characterized by ground and ground+1 storey structures, organized around a central plaza or courtyard. A civic hall, possibly used for community events or gatherings, anchors part of the site and is surrounded by low-rise residential units. This mix promotes passive surveillance and foot traffic, but lacks strong connectivity to external flows. Encouraging active edges and increasing the mix of uses (e.g., cafés, services, and local amenities) on the ground floor could enhance functionality and liveliness throughout the day.



4. Public Realm & Green Infrastructure

The internal courtyard functions as a semi-public open space, offering significant green infrastructure potential. It currently supports an inviting green environment, which could be further activated through landscape furniture, shaded seating, pocket gardens, and interactive elements. Enhancing this green space would provide both ecological benefits and a sense of place, encouraging community use and extended dwell times in the retail precinct.

5. Spatial Hierarchy & Urban Form

The spatial organization lacks a clear urban hierarchy due to visibility barriers and a somewhat introverted retail layout. The civic hall could serve as a spatial landmark and anchor if its design and location are emphasized more strongly within the urban fabric. Strengthening the axial connections between the civic hall, residential units, and retail spine—potentially through paving articulation, lighting strategy, or visual framing—would support a more cohesive and legible urban form.

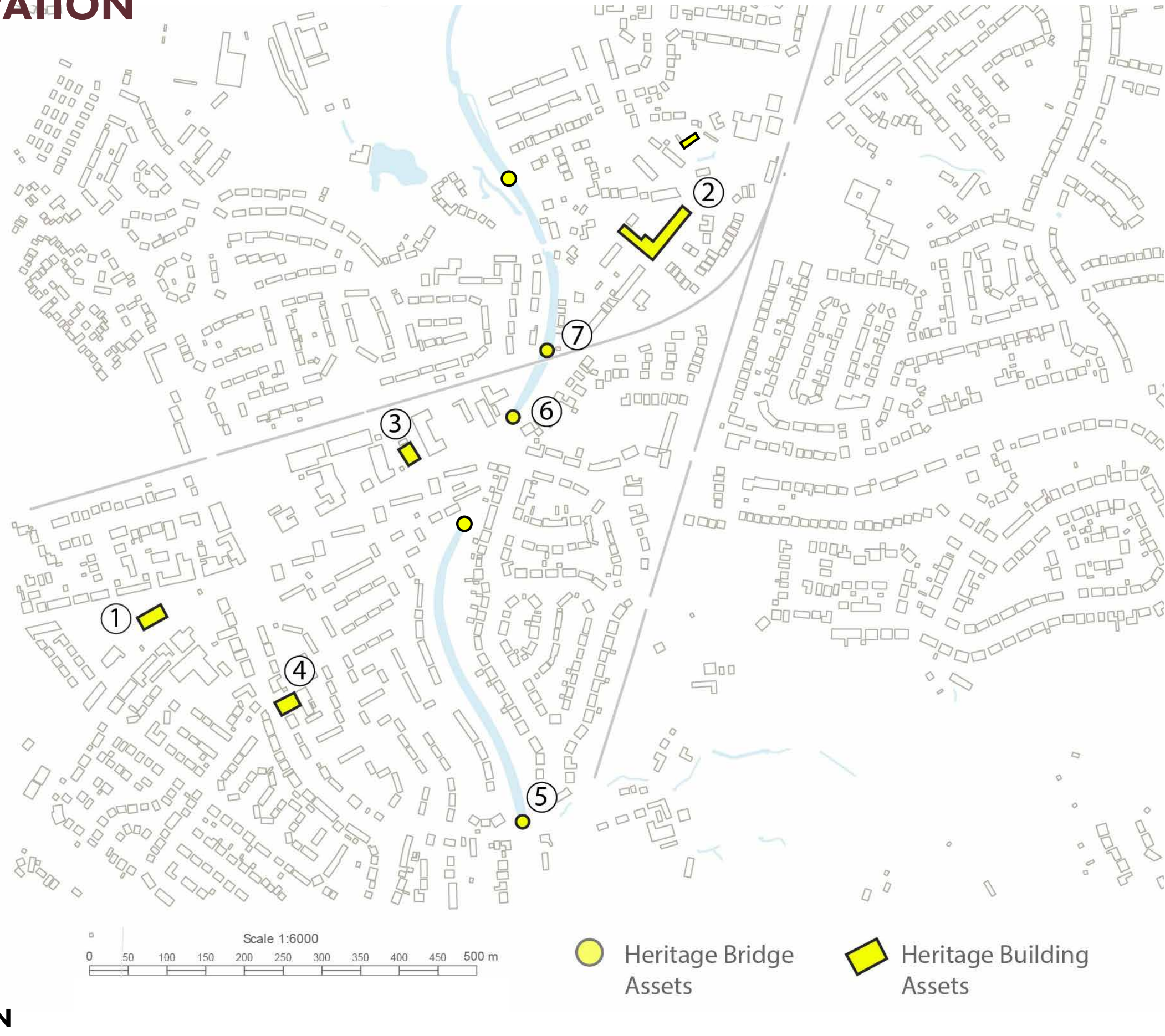
6. HERITAGE & CONSERVATION

Woodley's heritage is rooted in its evolution from a rural settlement to an industrious mill village, similar to other settlement areas surrounding Mancheser, shaped by the Industrial Revolution and 'cottonopolis'. The Woodley Mills are a great example of this, once thriving hubs of cotton spinning and weaving, stand as clear symbol of this transformation. Their robust red-brick architecture, small narrow windows and riverside locations embody the industrial character that helped define Woodley's identity. While many mill buildings have been repurposed, their enduring presence continues to anchor the historic, industrial landscape and shape the town's heritage.

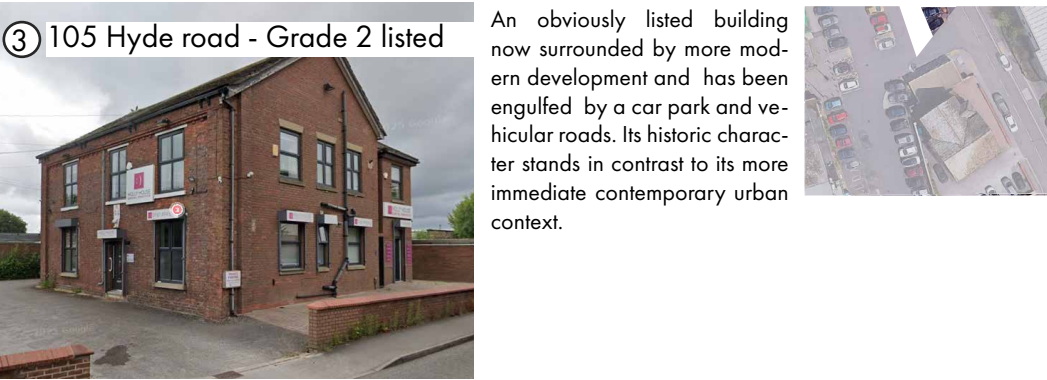
Domestic listed buildings such as 105 Hyde Road echo this industrial architectural style, as does the red-brick George Lane Church, with its simple rectangular plan. Together, these structures contribute to a clear and coherent heritage character across Woodley.

Heritage plays a fundamental role in shaping design, ensuring that new development respects and enhances the town's unique historic character. The rich industrial legacy, anchored by the surviving mill buildings, listed canal bridges, and historic churches—forms a tangible narrative that informs community identity.

Design guidance in Woodley emphasises the importance of retaining key heritage assets and their setting, encouraging architectural responses that reflect the materials, scale, and detailing of existing historic structures. This approach fosters continuity within the streetscape, supporting both visual harmony and the preservation of local identity. The inclusion of residential heritage (buildings like 105 Hyde Road) should guide the careful transition into new development, new housing must respects the scale and character of its historic context.



St Mark's Church showcases early 20th-century Gothic Revival architecture. It features characteristic pointed arch windows and a steep slate roof. The church stands as a significant heritage asset within Woodley and almost acts as a vista at the end of Hyde road that runs directly through the centre of Woodley. It serves as a key landmark in woodley and dontributes to the heritage and character of the area.



The structure exemplifies late 19th to early 20th-century domestic architecture. Constructed in red brick with stone detailing, it features traditional sash windows and a pitched slate roof. This building contributes to Woodley's historic streetscape by continuing the architectural style of the period's mills and illustrating the area's residential expansion during the industrial era.



Key part of the Woodleys industrial heritage, reflecting its 19th-century development as a mill village. The surviving mill buildings are characterised by red brick and narrow windows set in repetitive rows across multiple storeys. The mills anchor the historic, industrial character of the area. Their adaptive reuse for residential and commercial purposes maintains the character and heritage of Woodley, offering continuity in the townscape while supporting contemporary needs.



George Lane United Reformed Church was originally established as Woodley Congregational Church in 1882. It is not a listed building but has served as a spiritual and social hub for over 140 years and has played a significant role in shaping the local identity. It closed in April 2023. This heritage building uses red brickwork with minimal ornamentation and is designed with a simple rectangular plan, quite similar to the style of the mills and housing in the area from the industrial era.

The listed canal bridges in Woodley—on the Peak Forest Canal—are often overlooked in terms of woodleys heritage, yet they are vital elements of the town's industrial heritage. They reflect late 18th-century engineering with their stone arch construction and use of local materials. They contribute significantly to the continuity of the historic landscape, linking the canal corridor with the wider mill infrastructure. The bridges enduring form provide visual and material coherence, while their integration into present-day pathways and roads ensures they remain functional.

7. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Retaining Identity and Enhancing Opportunities

Woodley exhibits a rich variety of character areas, from the vibrant and well-maintained precinct to the leafy residential zones and canal-side heritage assets. The precinct serves as a strong social and commercial anchor, with active frontages and a well-maintained 70s architectural charm. It is an ideal candidate for sensitive densification, along with the underutilised train station and adjacent old mill, whose early Victorian character remains a local asset. Improvements to the station's visibility and accessibility - potentially through small-scale retail development - would significantly enhance place identity and active transport links.

Key Challenges and Strategic Interventions

Conversely, Hyde Road and Werneth Road pose substantial challenges to movement, legibility, and local character. Both are car-dominated corridors with poor pedestrian infrastructure, especially along Hyde Road, where narrow pavements and damaged kerbs present safety issues. Despite this, Hyde Road's historic setting with the viaduct, canal and older buildings presents a compelling opportunity for place-making. Reclaiming space from cars through incremental public realm improvements, reducing on-street parking, and providing greater views of the canal edges could transform this route into a locally-defining asset. Efforts should also focus on enhancing the underutilised canal paths, ensuring they are well-lit, accessible, and safe, contributing to biodiversity and encouraging active travel for residents.

Preservation Priorities and Densification Strategy

Preservation efforts should prioritise the heritage character of the edge and Hyde Road, the consistency of the Leafy Council Homes, and the successful structure of the precinct. Densification should be focused on the train station precinct and surrounding areas where mixed-use development and walkability are currently lacking. Enhancing lighting, conserving architectural detail, and introducing a greater mix of land uses between the precinct and the station will support a distinct, sustainable, and cohesive local identity, setting the town up for a future that the residents can continue to be proud of.



CHARACTER AREAS

1

Town centre of Woodley, active shopping area, predominantly 70s parade precinct, 1 storey and flat roofs, with two 3-storey apartment buildings. Mixed use, predominantly retail, healthcare centre and dentist present.



2

Prevalence of larger buildings in footprint and may 3 storey buildings, consistent style and large amounts of green space. Highly walkable and well kept, convivial neighbourhood.



3

Pre-Fab residential park for over 55s - providing an annex of modern affordable homes, with access to great local amenities.



4

Canal and historical buildings with good bones, poor upkeep, streets obstructed, overgrown and muddy surrounding canal - mixture of render and red-brick. Poor environment of the main road, creates a poor first impression



5

Area west of Woodley, predominantly heritage assets, a quaint village-like area, with shops along the main roads, predominantly red-brick Victorian terraces.



6

Large detached new build homes, mock Tudor suburban style, high amount of paved surfaces, area on hill, but hidden from street, area for residents only, mainly by car.



7

A typical post-war suburban area, notable for having the only shops that are not on Hyde Rd - this parade is also one of the more characterful buildings.



8

Larger homes, a few historic, from many eras and styles especially large 90s homes. Good architectural quality, well kept gardens, street uninviting, with fast cars, and small pavement. Large trees within Woodley, often blocking access



9

Area with most consistent architectural style, bungalows, semi and detached homes all in cohesive style with dark wood or light render accents - a comfortable area, with mature leafy alley through.



10

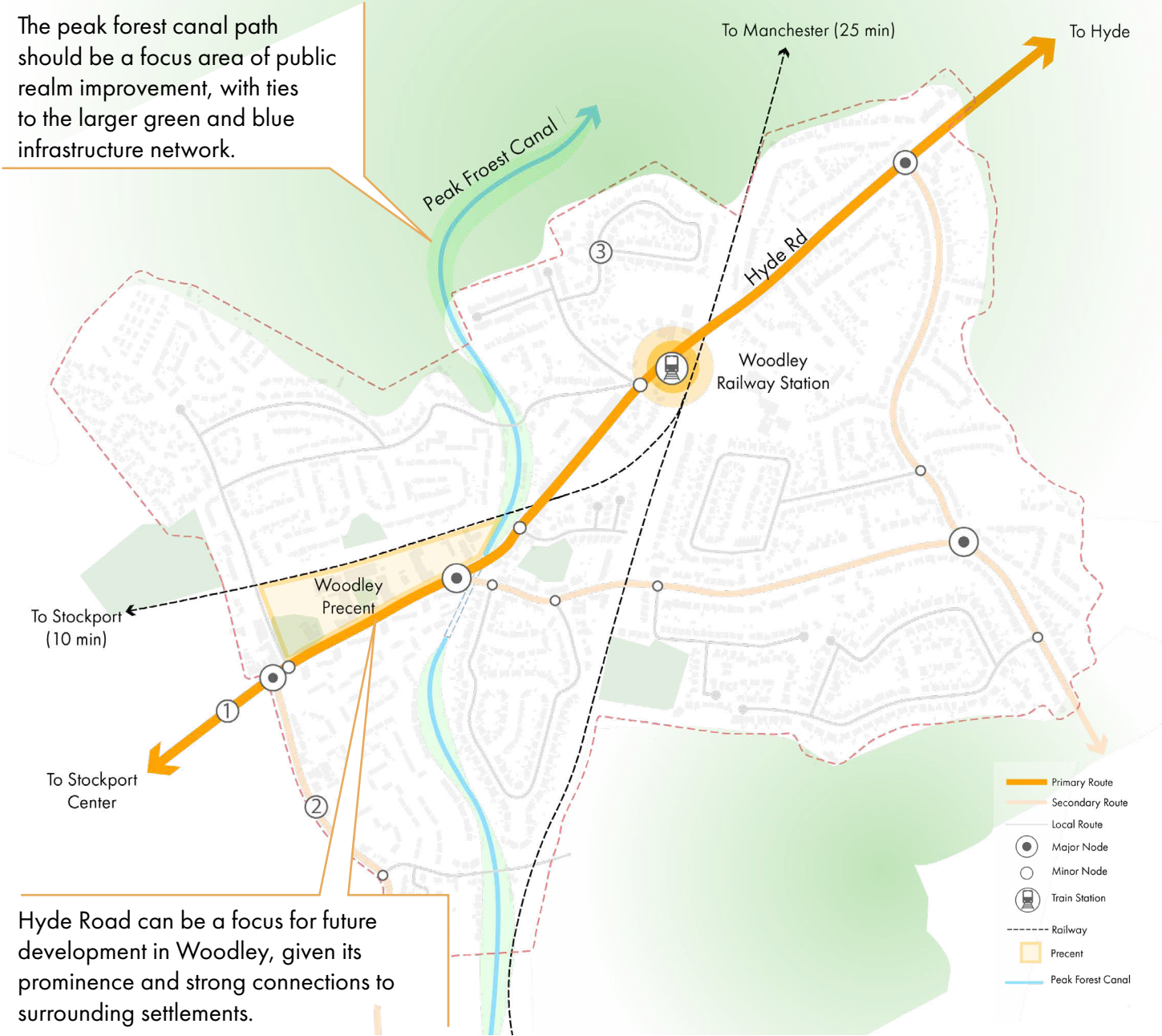
A good mix of 40s-late 50s homes, with bay windows, varying architectural quality, with well kept front gardens and street scapes and nice neighbourhoods.



8. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

OPPORTUNITIES

The peak forest canal path should be a focus area of public realm improvement, with ties to the larger green and blue infrastructure network.



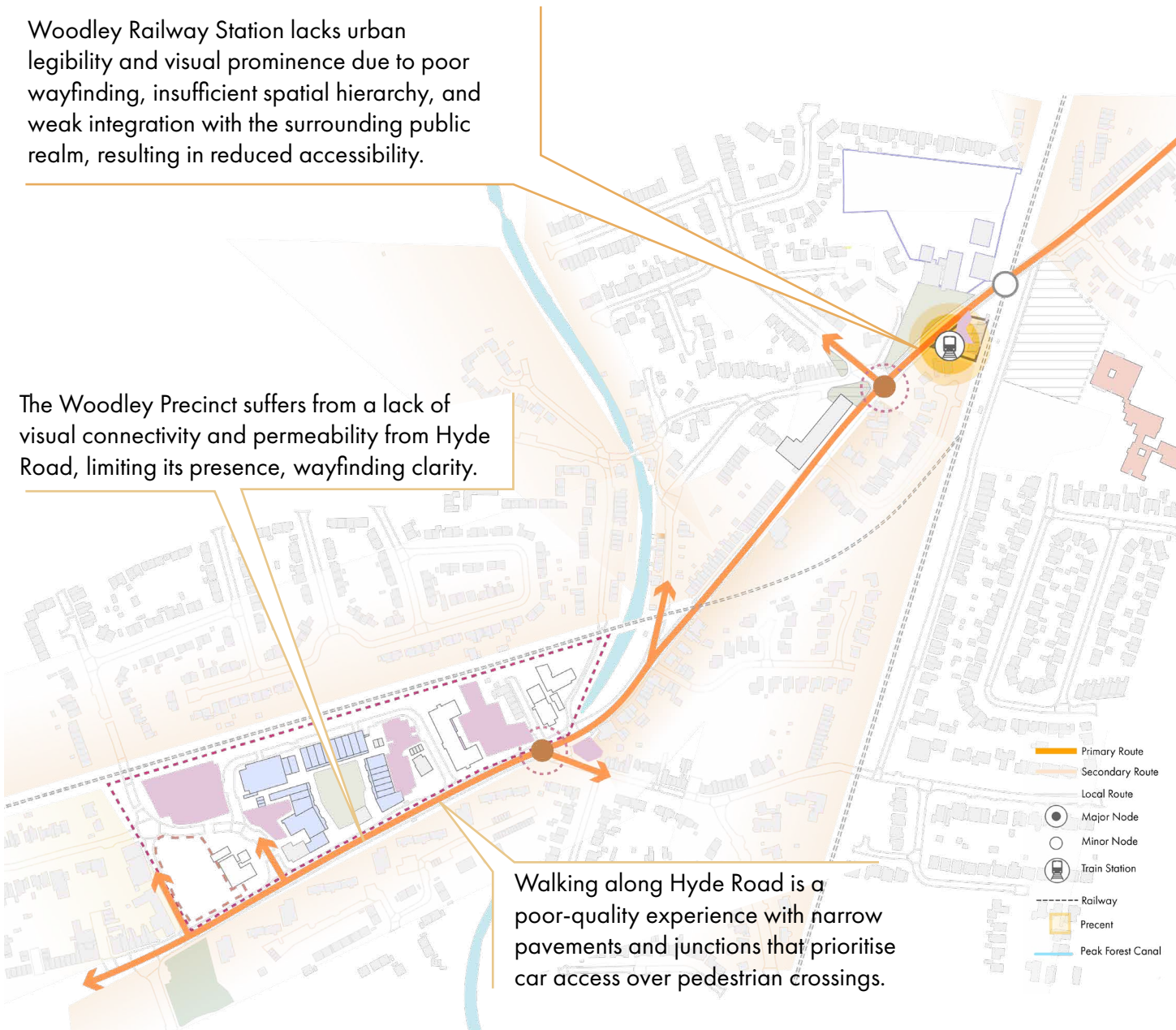
Hyde Road can be a focus for future development in Woodley, given its prominence and strong connections to surrounding settlements.

Opportunities:

- Right now, it's not easy to navigate along the canal or figure out where you are. Simple, human-scale interventions should focus on improving this link.
- There is significant potential for Woodley to build density around the Precinct and the train station in order to amplify the benefits of these key locations. Further development in these key areas can allow residents to become less car dependent.
- Design inspiration from local heritage can be taken from areas with historical and characterful residential properties.
- Enhancing the public realm and the significance of the train station as a key transport node can create closer ties to major nearby locations like Stockport and Manchester.
- The existing activity of Woodley's Precinct and Civic Hall could be capitalised on by improving walking connections into and around the area to enhance the local centre of Woodley.

CONSTRAINTS

Woodley Railway Station lacks urban legibility and visual prominence due to poor wayfinding, insufficient spatial hierarchy, and weak integration with the surrounding public realm, resulting in reduced accessibility.



The Woodley Precinct suffers from a lack of visual connectivity and permeability from Hyde Road, limiting its presence, wayfinding clarity.

Walking along Hyde Road is a poor-quality experience with narrow pavements and junctions that prioritise car access over pedestrian crossings.

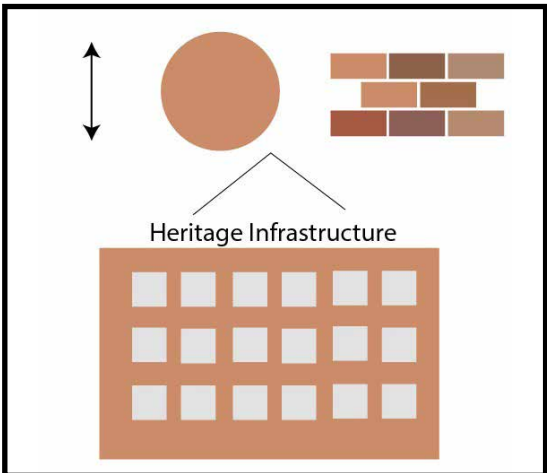
Constraints:

- Woodley is divided through the centre by large barriers of the railway and canal, with limited crossing points.
- Residential areas are characterised by low-rise housing, limiting the opportunity to increase housing density.
- Space constraints on certain points of Hyde Road would make it difficult to reallocate road space to other forms of travel.
- The network of local roads is fragmented, given the abundance of cul-de-sacs in residential areas.
- Enhancement possibilities of the Woodley precinct are limited by the dominance of roads and car parking surrounding the area.
- There is a lack of adequate wayfinding elements guiding pedestrians to Woodley's significant locations, transport hubs and walking trails.
- A limited number of heritage landmarks remain with a strong sense of character.

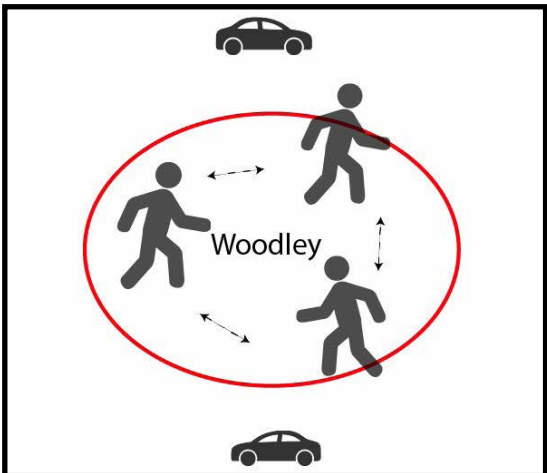
Design OBJECTIVES

- 1 Open up and improve access to viable connections to the Peak Forest Canal and the surrounding green belt.
- 2 Improve the pedestrian experience throughout Woodley, particularly along Hyde road to the precinct.
- 3 Connect and integrate Woodley's existing green infrastructure to promote ecological connectivity, sustainability, and create a well-connected green network.
- 4 Preserve and enhance Woodleys' industrial heritage by designing sensitively around its architectural style.
- 5 Sensitively increase density within Woodley, with Hyde Road as the main focus, growing the community.
- 6 Maintain and improve upon existing local character and identity as with its Early-Victorian and post war characteristics.
- 7 Join Woodley Train Station to the Precinct along Hyde road to create a more functional, distinct and cohesive town centre.

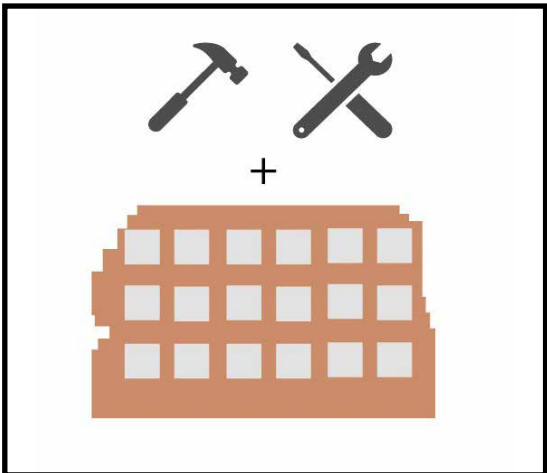
Design ACTIONS



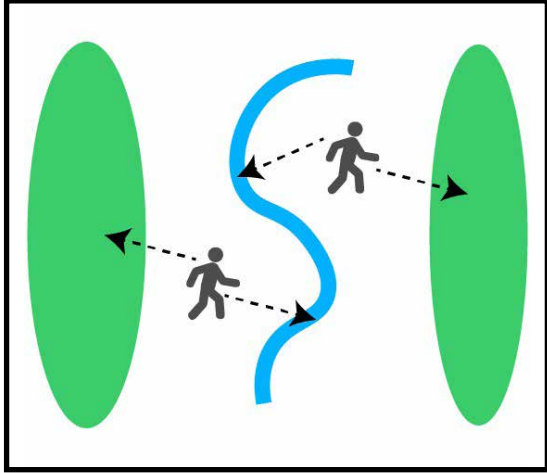
Design new developments contextually around Woodley's heritage assets, adhering to massing, heights, materials and palletes.



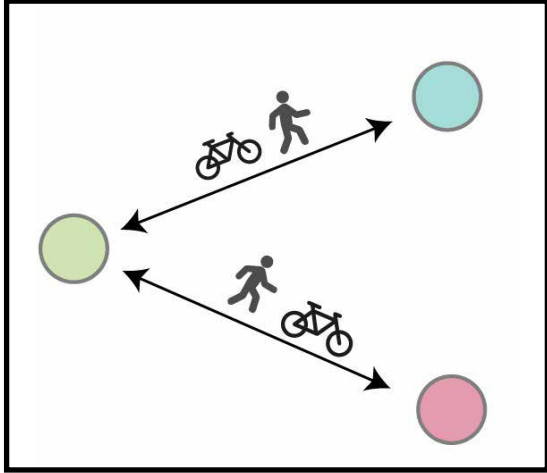
Prioritise pedestrian-oriented street design, taking away highway from the car, creating a more walkable, human-scaled urban environment.



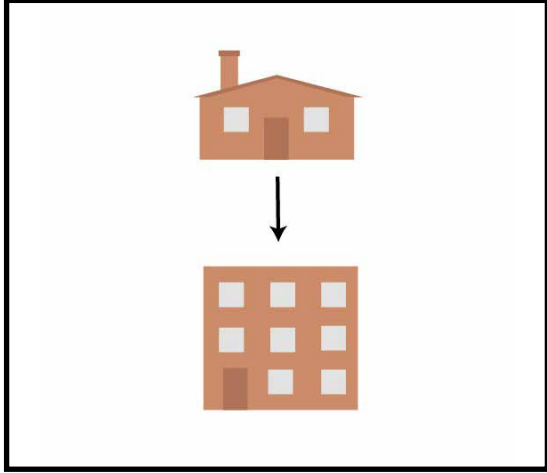
Apply conservation-led design principles to retain and restore key heritage assets, integrating them seamlessly with new development.



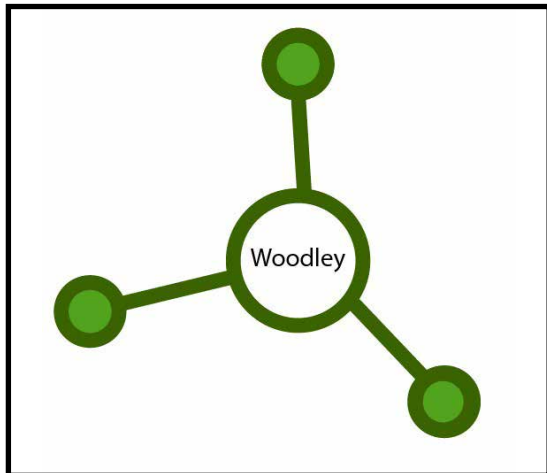
Open up the central canal and outward connective footpaths to universal accessibility standards, activate these routes to encourage recreational use and connectivity.



Develop and activate direct, accessible pedestrian and cycle corridors that physically link key town centre destinations.



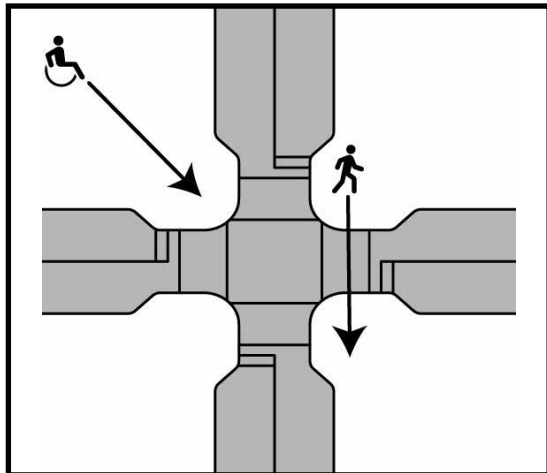
Increase building heights along hyde road and around the precinct, creating a more legible town center.



Establish green corridors and linkages, by creating continuous and accessible multi-use green spaces.



Enhance wayfinding systems and public realm amenities to support legibility and encourage active travel.



Resize intersections and implement appropriate materials to enhance pedestrian accessibility and safety and calm vehicular traffic.



PROJECT SUMMARY

MANCHESTER URBAN DESIGN LAB

Team

Dr Philip Black	Director
Rachel Kerr	Lecturer
Dr Taki Sonbli	Technical Manager
Dr Rob Richardson	Research Lead

STOCKPORT MBC

Team

Hannah Mitchell	Senior Planning Policy Officer
Richard Wood	Planning Policy Manager

CONSULTANCY

Team

Katja Stille	Tibbalds
Ketki Mudholkar	Tibbalds
Jamie Wilde	Design Yorkshire
Robbie Ormond	Design Yorkshire
Jaimie Ferguson	Lucid Design

MANCHESTER URBAN DESIGN LAB

Student Team

Zainab BANU
Jinmingzhu CAI
Seamus CAZABONE
Elena LEA
Qing MA
Rithika MATHI
David McGOVERN
Bhushan PARDESHI
Noah SPENCER
Chun Yu Bryan SZE
Abinash TRIPATHY
Evelene VAN ELSBERG
Alfie VESSEY-BARNES
Xinyu WANG
Jiayu ZHANG



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