



Clanricarde Gardens, Kensington & Chelsea
1067 Habitable Rooms per Hectare (HRH) (834 gross)



Tredegar Square, Tower Hamlets 412 HRH (225 gross)



Wakehurst Road, Wandsworth 400 HRH (267 gross)



Woodgrange Estate, Newham 307 HRH

Urban density ranges

Research suggests net densities of 100 persons per hectare (pph) are necessary to sustain a good bus service (LGMB, 1995). Taking the 800m (10 minute) walking distance as a starting point (generating a walkable neighbourhood of 97,5 ha - see 3.1), this equates to 45 dph if the average UK household size of 2.2 persons is applied. In more central locations, 240 persons/ha (or 60dph) will sustain a tram service.

Suburbs are not in themselves 'bad'

Modern suburbs, the peripheral edges of our towns and cities, are often equated with car-oriented sprawl. Yet there are many historical precedents that illustrate that this need not be the case. Many of the classic Garden City suburbs exemplify this, such as Hampstead or Letchworth. They were built at about 30 dph. Where local context requires more suburban forms, the basic tenets of good urbanism still apply.

3.3.2 DENSITY AND FORM

Vary the density profile

Within the higher density levels which sustain urban life, variations in the net density of built form profiles will occur naturally. This can be enhanced by building up the mass around centres, public transport access points, parks and riverfronts, for example. Shape the mass of built form to frame positive public spaces (see 5.1).

In contrast, much recent development, which may have exactly the same population density of its traditional counterpart, is characterised by flat, featureless density profiles. This is the product of building down to imposed standards or density levels, such as 25-30 dwellings or 150 - 200 habitable rooms per hectare. Built form is distributed and density bumps ironed out.

Planning and highway design standards are partly responsible. Many are mandatory measures rather than performance criteria. Generally, the panoply of standards leads to developments that are designed to comply and thus win approval. The resultant development forms generally fail to have a distinctive identity, are wasteful of land and infrastructure and lead to car dependency.

Urban density does not mean town cramming

Density is a measure. How comfortable a place feels is a matter of the design and its social characteristics. The average density of many well-loved Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian terraces exceed by considerable margins the density limits in many local plans and would generally not obtain planning permission today. High density is often equated with high rise. However, the tower blocks of the 1960s were built to low densities in ill-defined and poorly used space. The challenge to the designer is to:

- ensure buildings, streets and places are of a human scale;
- moderate the mass of a building or group of buildings so that it steps up or down to its neighbours;
- use high quality landscaping to soften perceptions of a place.