



There is a trade-off to be struck between block size and biodiversity



'Pocket parks' of (say) 20 x 20m can be absorbed within the block structure to provide ecologically rich habitats and popular spots for relaxation



Orientate according to site contours



In Sausalito, San Francisco, buildings blend harmoniously with the landscape

All sites are habitats

Each site is an eco-system that is linked to other eco-systems beyond the site. Remnants of ancient and traditional landscapes are important relics that give meaning to a place. As such, woods, river valleys, heaths and commons, pastures, hedgerows, ponds and ditches should all be considered for retention. But similarly cemeteries, vacant sites, industrial areas and private gardens can provide man-made habitats of great ecological importance. Hedges, mature trees and grasses foster most wildlife in urban areas.

Consider all sites, both natural and man-made, as part of a district-wide web of habitats. Identify areas within a site that are of the highest ecological importance to be preserved, such as mature trees, hedgerows or streams, to be used as the basis for creating a landscape structure. This begins to define the land left over that is potentially developable.

Trade-off block size and biodiversity

Block size can effect biodiversity, as shown in the illustration opposite. Smaller blocks can limit the amount of green space available to support wildlife. Blocks of about 90m x 90m which include private or communal gardens provide a good trade-off between biodiversity and other considerations such as variety of uses that can be accommodated and ease of movement (see 3.7.2).

Designing for biodiversity can cut maintenance costs

We are not the only species who use out-door space. Plants and animals can be encouraged to thrive and the use of plants of many sorts, from grasses and flowers to shrubs and trees, provides opportunities for attracting a range of insects, birds and animals. Hedgerows encourage nesting and hunting opportunities for birds and small mammals alike and should be encouraged.

Large grassed areas that provide visual amenity can be given a much richer functional and ecological value, at lower cost, simply by changing the maintenance regime. Georger Park in Hanover, for instance, is mown only at certain times of the year and for the rest of the time is left as meadow. This not only provides a valuable habitat, but also reduces maintenance to one or two mowings a year, while creating a more varied and interesting place.

3.5.5 TOPOGRAPHY

Work with the earth

Working with the grain of the landscape, in topographical as well as climatic, hydrological and ecological terms, can have economic benefits as well as reinforcing the sense of place.

Wherever possible align building footprints, streets, sewers and other watercourses to follow slope contours. This allows building profiles to grow out of the ground, minimises cut and fill and enables natural gravity-flow drainage to be utilised.