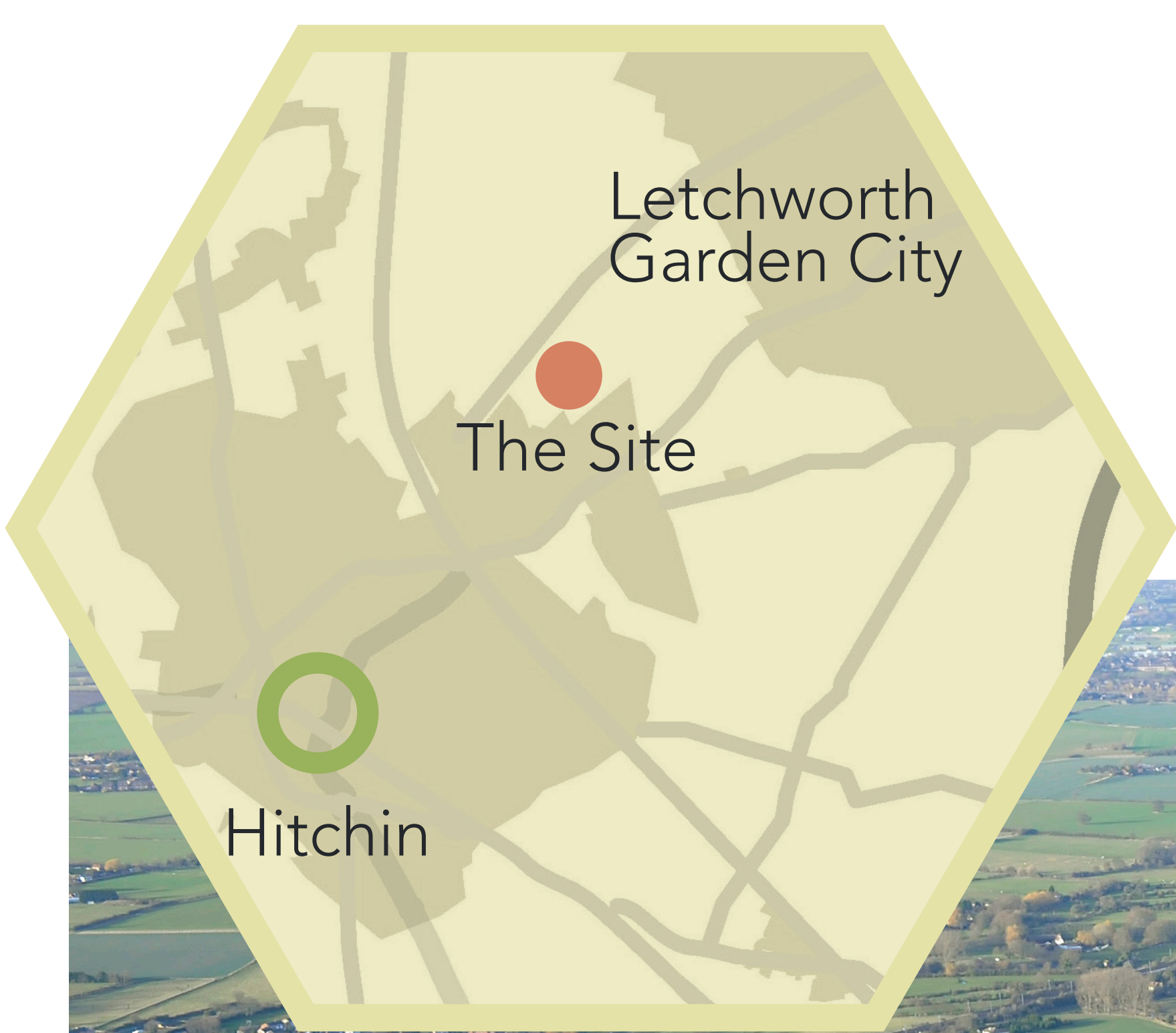


# Welcome

This exhibition presents emerging plans for land at Highover Farm, Hitchin. We welcome your feedback on the plans.



Bellcross Homes is putting together plans for the development of up to 700 new homes, neighbourhood/retail facilities, green infrastructure and open space at land at Highover Farm, Hitchin.

As you may be aware, North Hertfordshire District Council is currently reviewing its adopted planning policies and have allocated the land as a Strategic Housing Site for up to 700 homes to meet local housing need in their Proposed

Submission Local Plan 2011-2031.

Detailed pre-application discussions are taking place with planning officers to deliver a shared vision for the site and we welcome your views. The proposal has taken into account the local neighbourhood and landscape, and hopes to add to the character of the area whilst delivering substantial economic, social and environmental benefits in the long and short term.



## THE SITE

## PROJECT TEAM





# Planning Context and Benefits

## PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is a discrete plot of land, well placed in the context of the built-up area of Hitchin and as such, is a highly sustainable location for new housing.

Under the Council’s currently adopted 1996 Development Plan, the site is designated as Green Belt, where residential development should only be permitted in very special circumstances.

To address the District’s significant shortfall of housing, the Council has undertaken a Green Belt Review to inform its emerging local plan, and the site is now allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for up to 700 new homes (Policy SP17: Site HT1) within the Proposed Submission Local Plan 2011-2031.

The site will therefore play a significant role in ensuring that the Council’s strategic vision and five year housing land supply is met.

The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that, where the development plan is out of date, the permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

The forthcoming planning application will therefore demonstrate that residential development at this site would be a discrete release of land with a more defensible boundary to the Green Belt than exists currently.

## BENEFITS



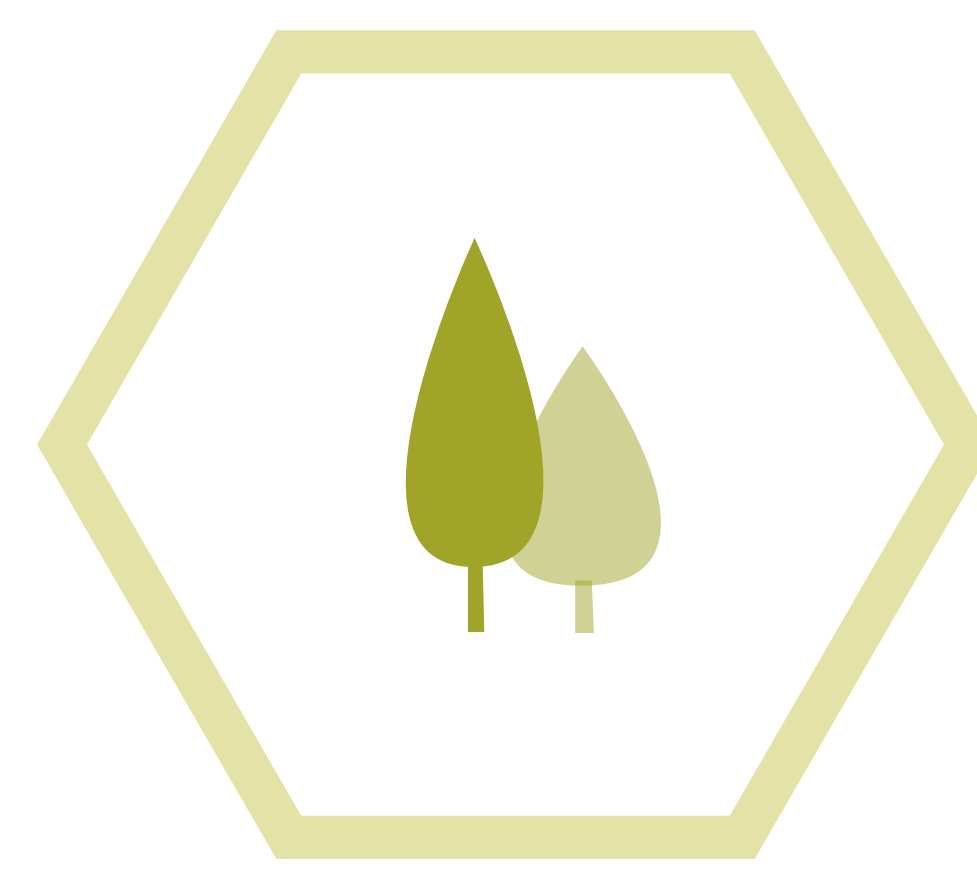
### ECONOMIC

- Direct/indirect local employment and business opportunities during construction and after development to the benefit of Hitchin and District more widely.
- Attraction of new households to live in the area, resulting in additional local expenditure in shops and facilities within Hitchin.
- Delivery on a range of planning obligations, including affordable housing.



### SOCIAL

- Substantial level of social infrastructure including an accessible local neighbourhood centre, primary school and open space to serve existing and future residents.
- Social interaction and mixing between new and existing households to create a strong, diverse and vibrant community.
- Opportunities for sport and recreation and sustainable modes of transport to promote healthy communities.
- Extensive choice of high quality homes and provision of affordable homes to assist the Council in meeting its five year housing land supply.



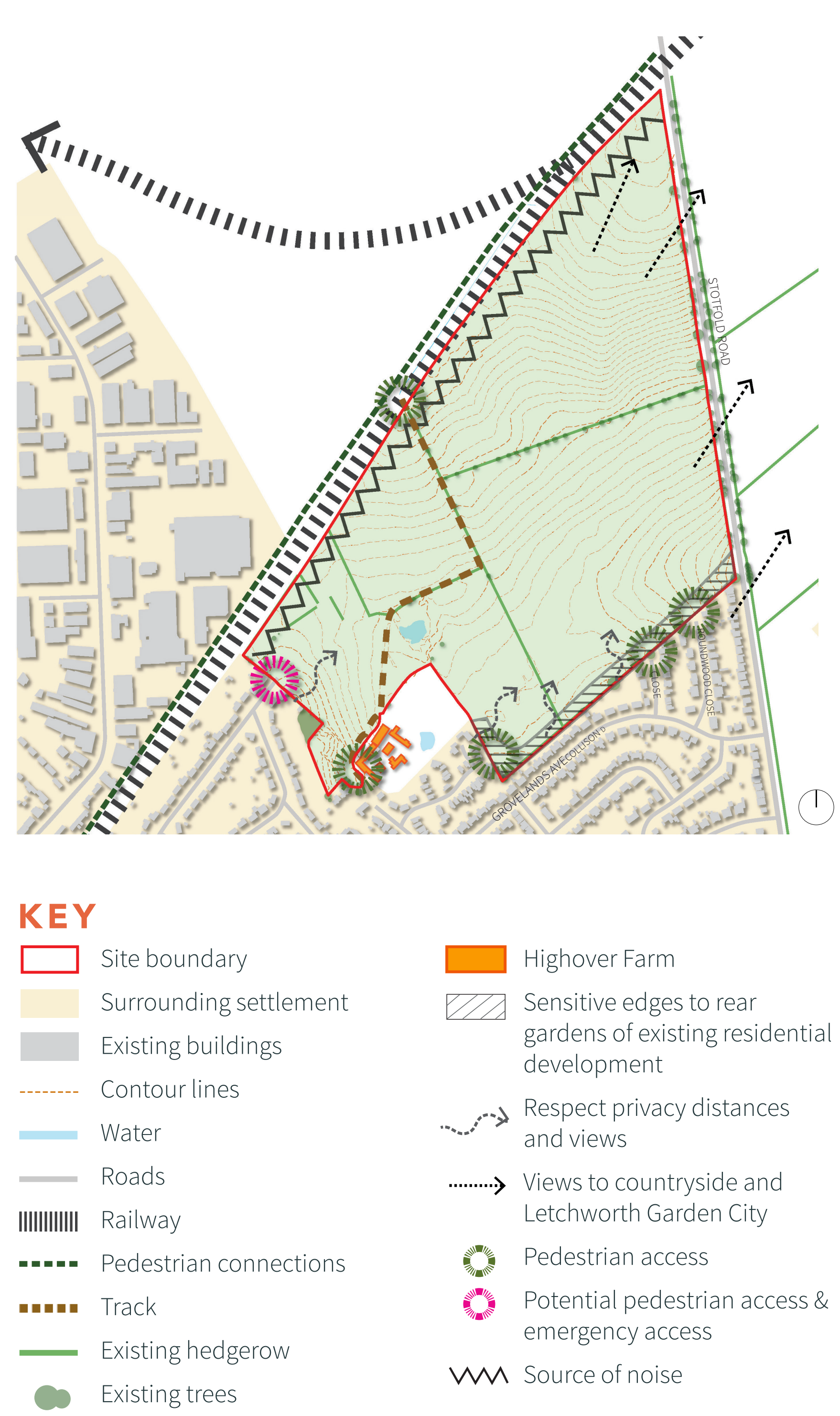
### ENVIRONMENTAL

- Sustainable, high quality building design of buildings to address climate change, including use of local materials where possible.
- Enhancement of biodiversity and ecological features/ mitigation where possible.
- Protection of visual and residential amenity of existing and future residents to be demonstrated through the Environmental Impact Assessment, submitted as part of the future planning application.
- Retention and improvement of existing landscaping features.



# Site Considerations

Initially we have looked at the opportunities offered by the site and any features that may influence the form and content of the new development.



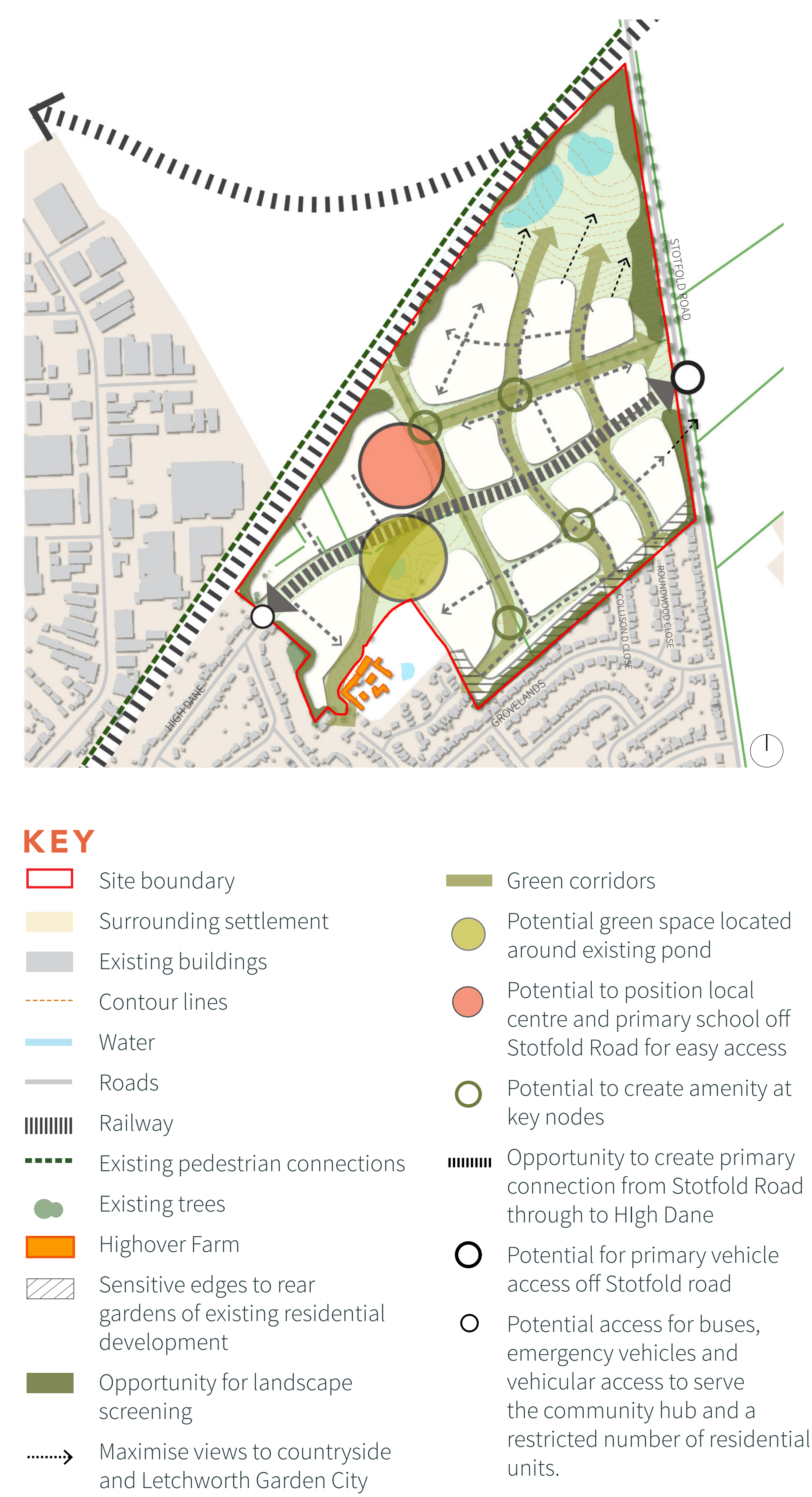
## KEY FEATURES AND CONSTRAINTS

- The railway forms the northern boundary of the site. This could be a potential barrier to movement and a source of noise;
- Rear gardens of existing surrounding dwellings address the site to the west and south. Privacy distances will need to be respected within the proposals;
- Existing hedgerows and trees will need to be enhanced and retained where possible;
- Existing ponds will need to be incorporated into the development proposals;
- The pedestrian track that runs north to south through the site will need to be incorporated into the proposals; and,
- The topography is gently sloping.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The existing site features and constraints have presented the following opportunities to:

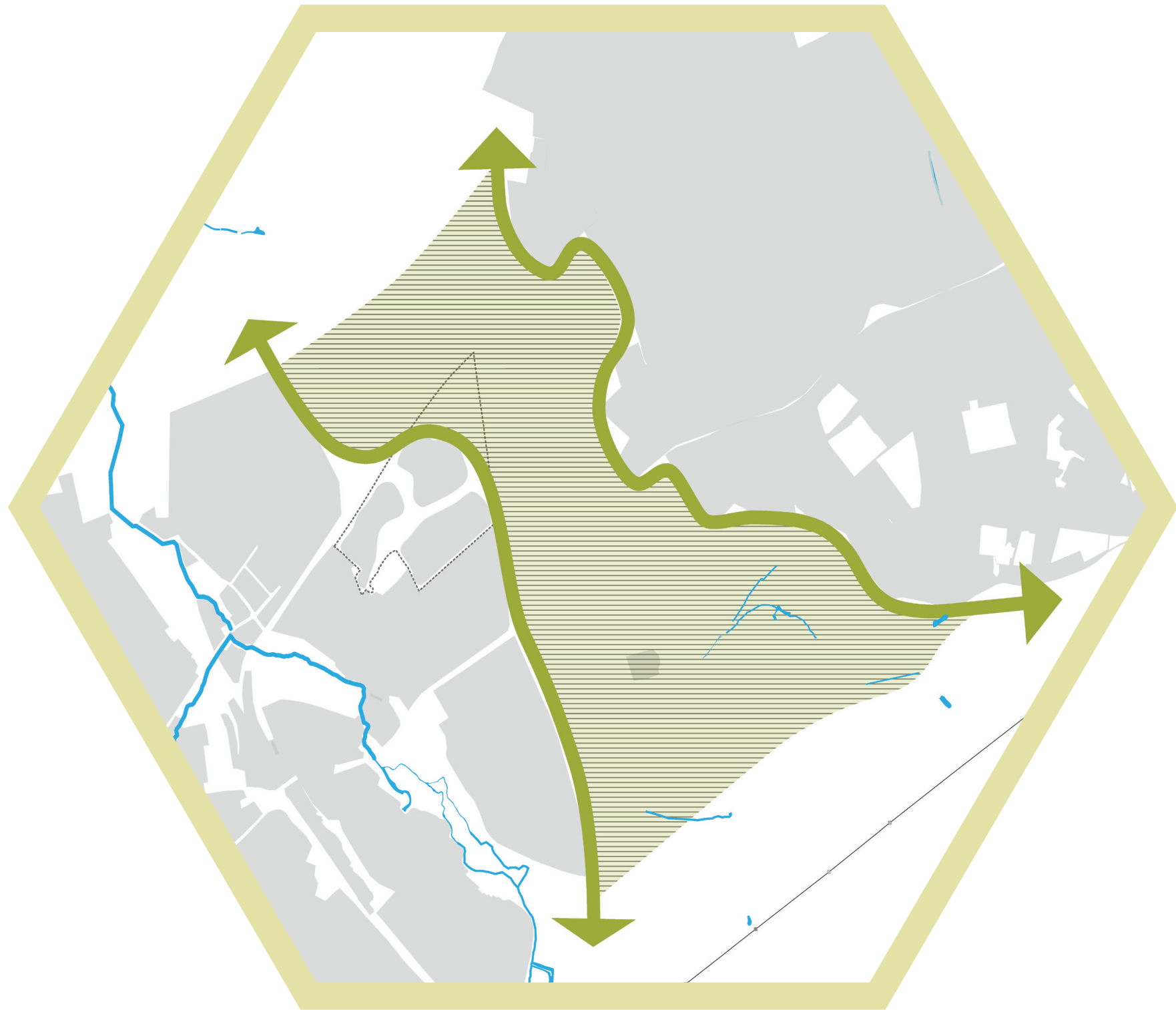
- Mitigate potential noise from the railway with landscape screening;
- Create a parkland and recreation area to the north enhancing biodiversity and wildlife habitat;
- Provide attenuation ponds and landscape screening within the new parkland and recreation area to the north;
- Create perimeter blocks to adjoin to existing surrounding development providing secure rear boundaries;
- Create pedestrian and cycle routes which will connect with the wider surrounding movement network;
- Create green corridors along existing landscape features;
- Provide a new community hub that will include local facilities for residents and the wider community;
- Provide a new neighbourhood green located adjacent to the community hub;
- Allow the topography of the land to inform the structure of the development layout and roads;
- Create a gateway and arrival space at the site entrance, off Stotfold Road; and,
- Provide a pedestrian and cycle connection from High Dane through the site to Stotfold Road.





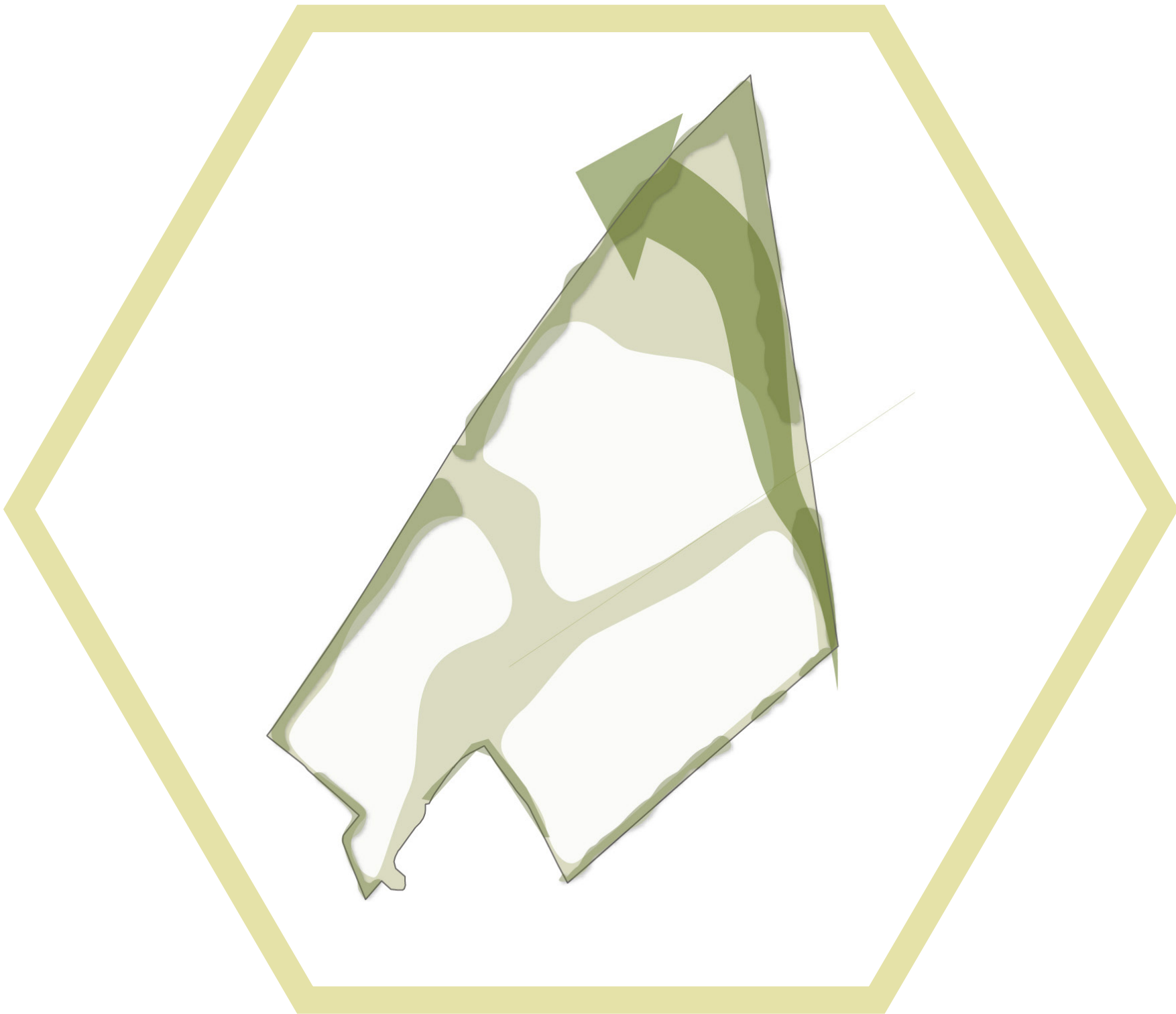
# Masterplan Drivers

A series of key masterplan drivers have been established which have informed the design principles for the masterplan. The following diagrams illustrate how the key drivers shape the overall masterplan proposals.



## PREVENT URBAN SPRAWL

The development will be sensitively designed to prevent urban sprawl between Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City.



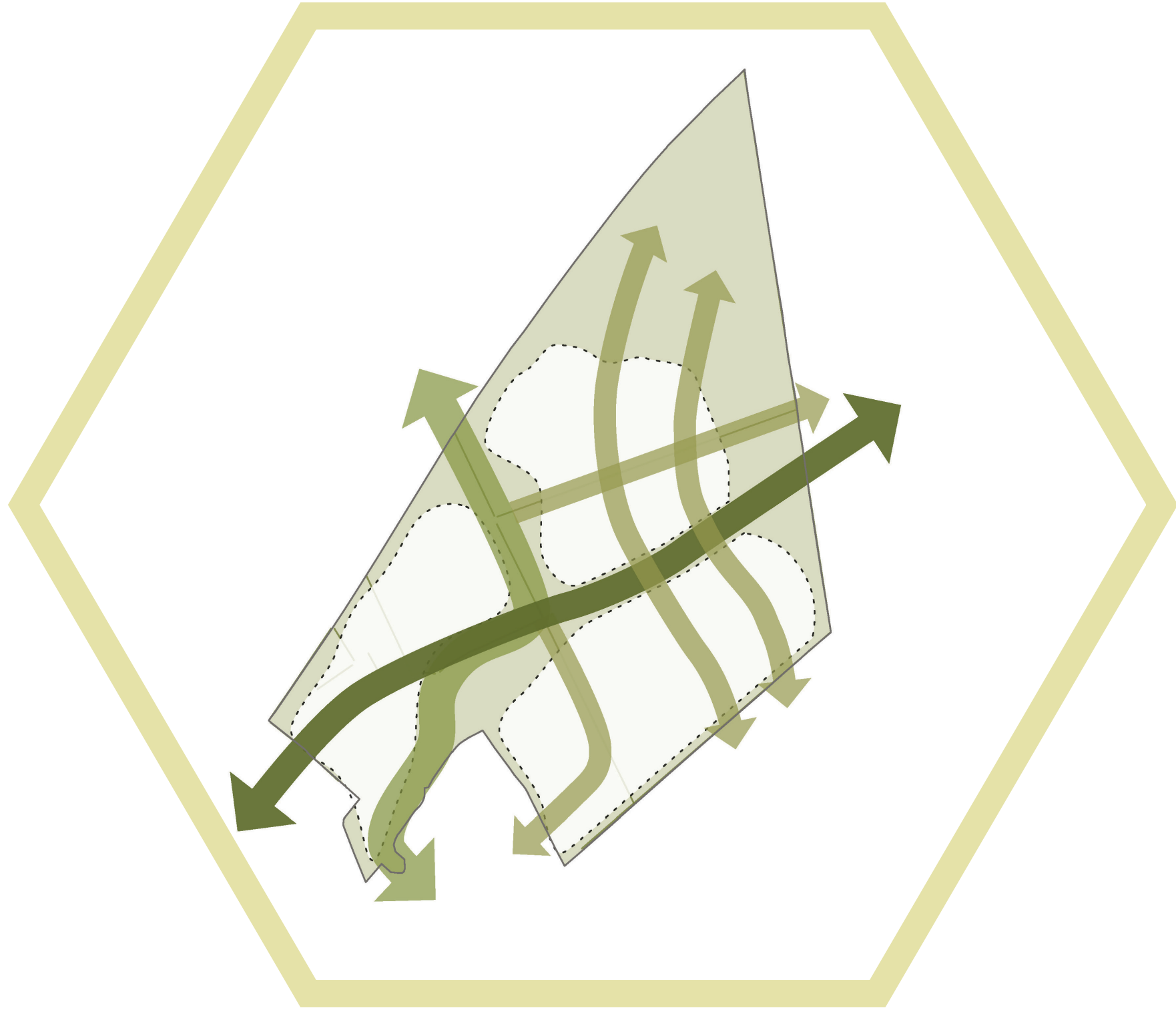
## DEVELOPMENT SET BACK

Development will be set back from Stotfold Road whilst responding to the existing building line of the properties to the south.



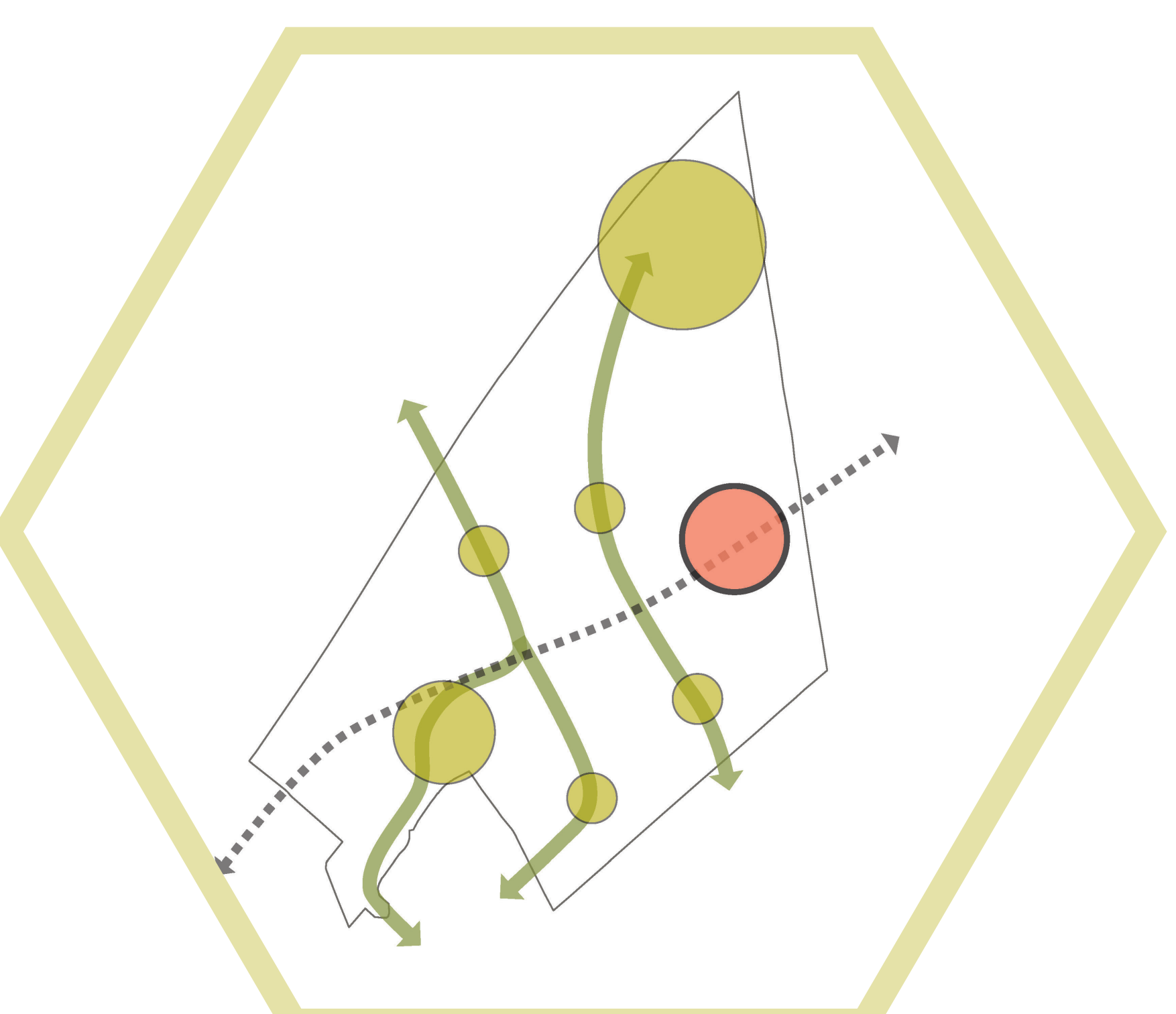
## LANDSCAPE

The existing landscape features will be retained and enhanced to provide attractive pedestrian connections and green corridors.



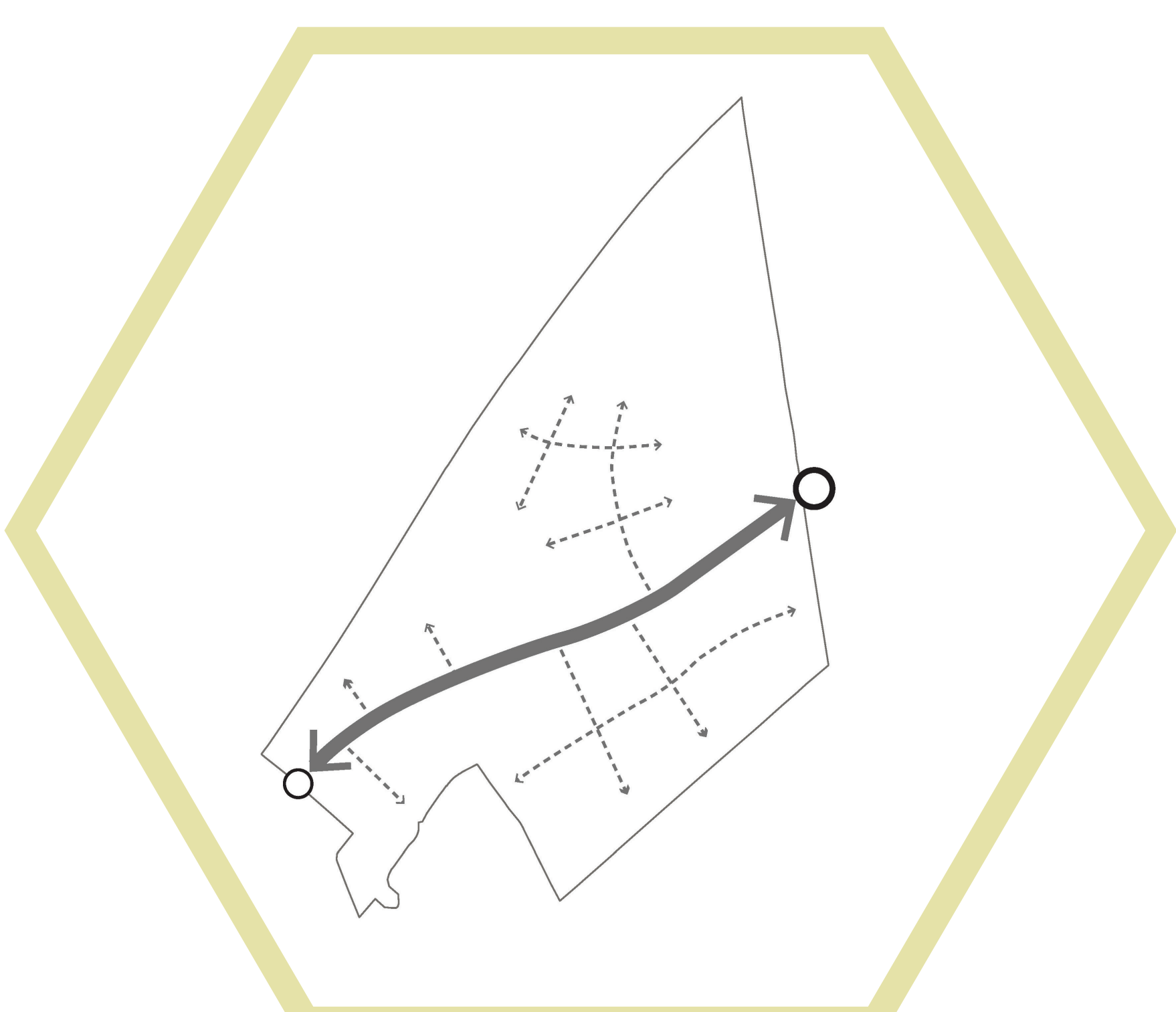
## GREEN CORRIDORS

Nature will be allowed to penetrate through the development with proposed green corridors that will provide glimpses and views to the countryside.



## CREATING PLACES

New green spaces and squares will be created at key nodes and gateways creating events and focal points within the development.



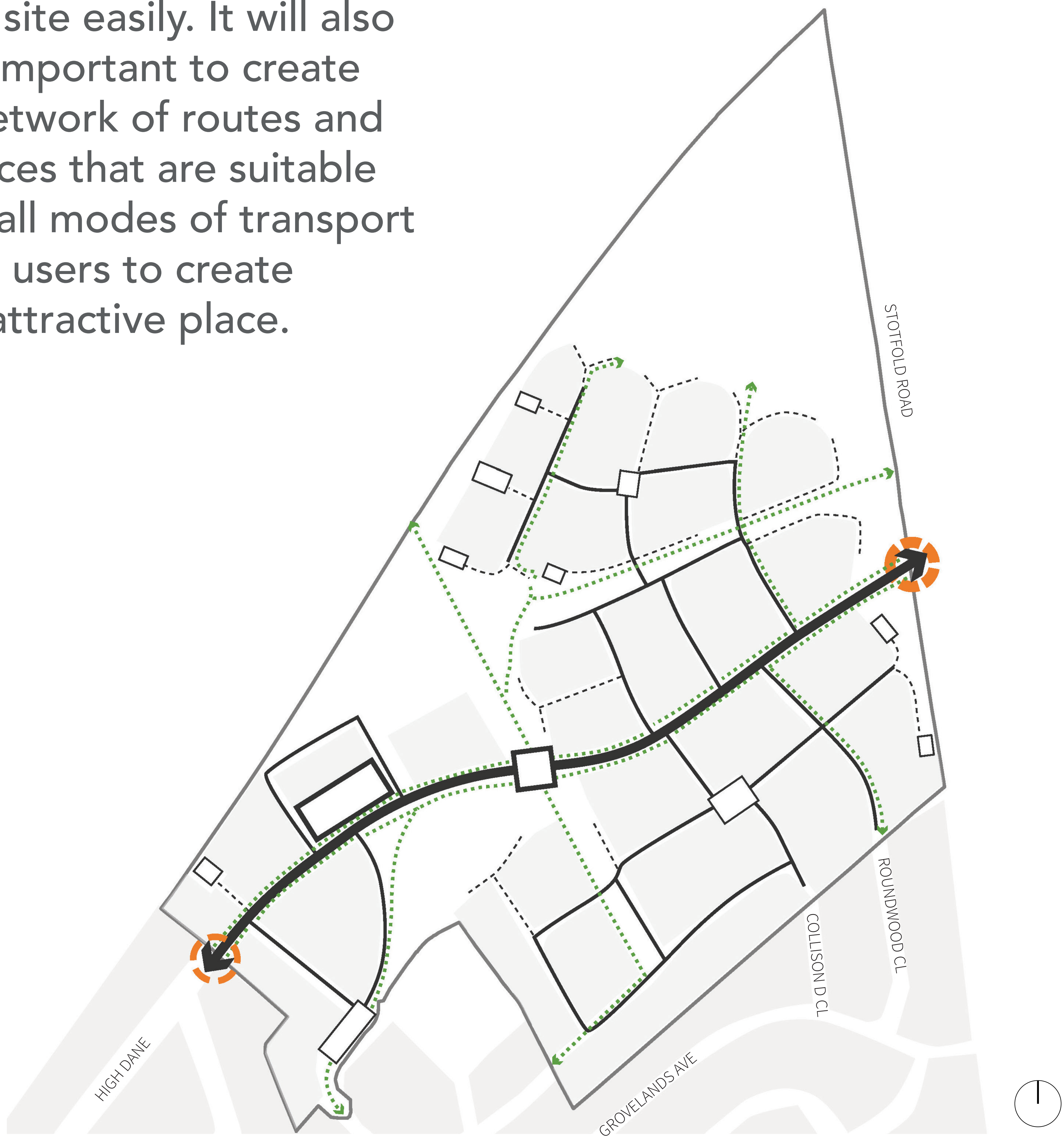
## STREET HIERARCHY

It is important to create a clear street hierarchy featuring connections with varying character, including a primary connection from Stotfold Road to High Dane.



# Movement and Connections

Movement through the site is important so that people can access facilities in the rest of Hitchin and move around the site easily. It will also be important to create a network of routes and spaces that are suitable for all modes of transport and users to create an attractive place.



- KEY**
- Primary vehicle movement
  - Secondary vehicle movement
  - Private drives/lanes
  - Pedestrian connections
  - Mews court
  - Key junctions and public spaces
  - Vehicle access
  - Emergency vehicle access

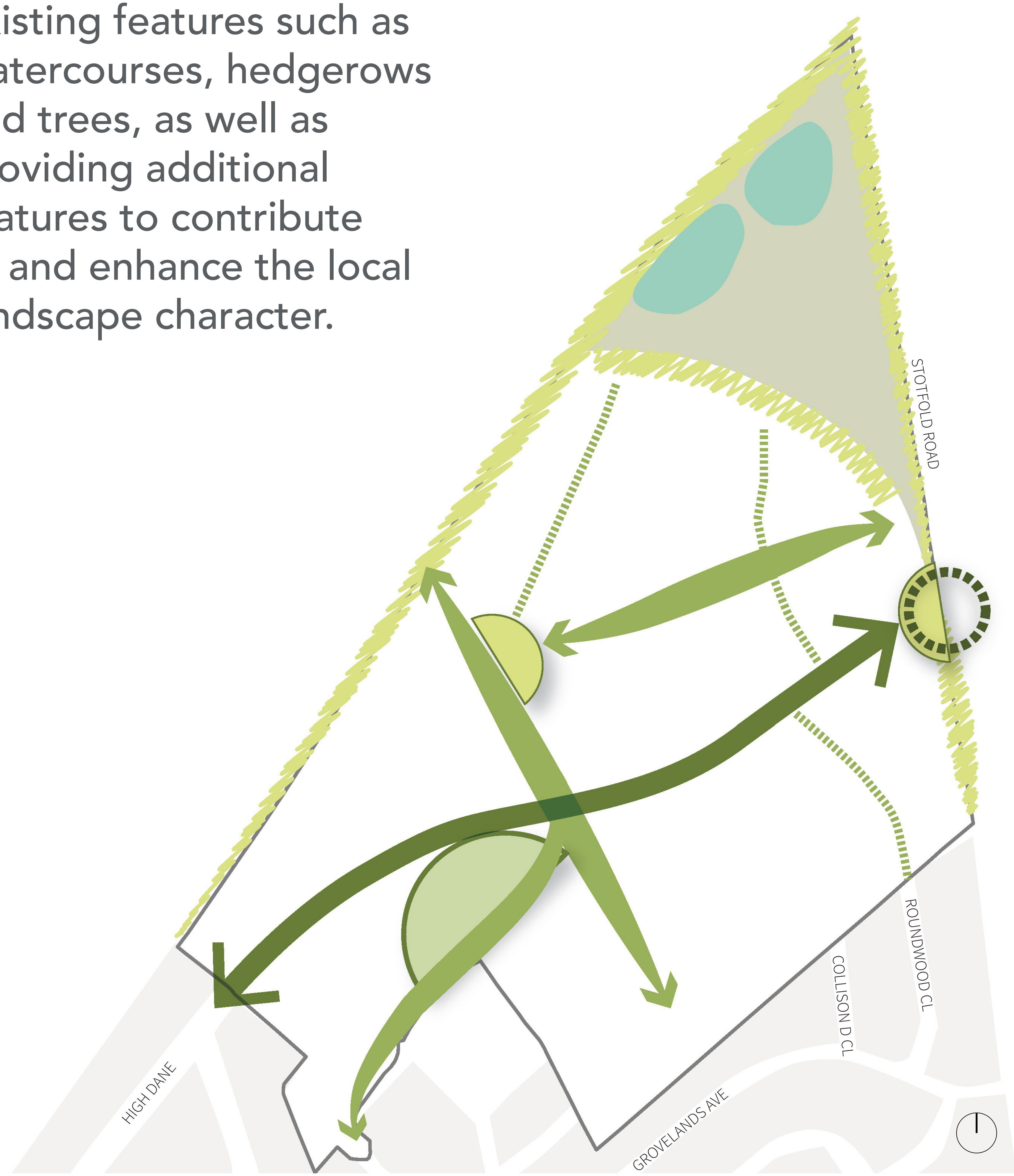
## KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE MASTERPLAN ARE TO:

- Retain the existing pedestrian track within the site and incorporate into the strategic movement network;
- Create a primary road through the development (including measures to control speed) with vehicle access from Stotfold Road.
- Access from High Dane would allow buses and emergency vehicles to serve the Site, it could also allow vehicular access to the community hub and to a restricted number of residential units.
- Provide a bus service to serve the development, with a bus stop located within 400m walking distance from new homes, allowing easy access for residents;
- Provide green streets and corridors to connect to the wider movement network, Walsworth Common, Hitchin and the countryside to the north east;
- Create attractive and safe pedestrian/ cycle links to local amenities and facilities;
- Soft landscape to provide an attractive environment for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Shared surfaces and pedestrian/ cyclist priority streets, to help reduce traffic speed; and,
- Well connected roads that create a permeable development, avoiding cul-de-sacs and the need for over engineered turning heads.



# Green Infrastructure

The development will create a new attractive network of green spaces incorporating existing features such as watercourses, hedgerows and trees, as well as providing additional features to contribute to and enhance the local landscape character.



- KEY**
- Green corridors
  - Highover green
  - Secondary green spaces
  - Primary green street
  - Secondary green street
  - Gateway and arrival space
  - Parkland and recreational area
  - Parkland edge and landscape screening
  - Attenuation ponds

## THE LANDSCAPE FRAMEWORK EMERGES FROM THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Retain existing hedgerows and trees of ecological value and contribution to the distinctive local character;
- Drawing the wider countryside into the development through green corridors;
- Creation of a central neighbourhood green;
- Creation of strong visual and physical green links, in the form of green streets and corridors, which link together the green spaces, and draws the adjacent planting/landscape character into the site;
- Creation of a hierarchy of spaces and variety of open space;
- Neighbourhood play areas to be provided within key locations of the development.
- School playing fields and community sports pitches will form part of the public open space strategy.
- Existing ponds will be retained where possible and incorporated as appropriate Sustainable Drainage System (SUDS). Attenuation ponds are integrated into the landscape design to form positive features within the masterplan.



Vision

The vision for the development is to create a vibrant sustainable community that knits into Hitchin and strengthens links to the countryside with a series of green corridors and parks. Up to 700 new high quality homes and local facilities will be designed to create a place that compliments its setting.



ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN

- 1

Main vehicle access off Stotfold Road is located between existing trees to minimise impact on the landscape.
- 2

Pedestrian and cycle access from High Dane. Access would also allow buses and emergency vehicles to serve the Site, it could also allow vehicular access to the community hub and to a restricted number of residential units.
- 3

Pedestrian/cycle routes connect to existing streets.
- 4

Local Area of Play (LAP).
- 5

Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP).
- 6

Perimeter blocks are arranged to work with the topography.
- 7

Arrival square provides setting for existing farm buildings.
- 8

A new neighbourhood green incorporates the existing pond, with new homes addressing the green.
- 9

Existing pedestrian track to be retained and enhanced,providing a green corridor through the development.
- 10

Existing hedgerow to be retained.
- 11

Existing landscape retained and enhanced to provide screening to the railway.
- 12

Tree lined avenue consists of a grass verge and footpaths on both sides of the carriageway.
- 13

Bus hub and visitor car parking to serve the Local Centre.
- 14

New parkland and recreation area provides habitat for wildlife and amenity for the community.
- 15

Proposed location for new sports pitches.
- 16

Primary School strategically located to form part of the new central hub. Associated playing fields provide a buffer to the railway.
- 17

The Local Centre is centrally located within the development and positioned adjacent to the school and the neighbourhood green.
- 18

Existing hedgerow that runs along Stotfold Road is retained and enhanced.
- 19

Sides of dwellings are orientated to address the railway to minimise potential noise issues.
- 20

Green edges to the development provide a gradual transition to the wider countryside.
- 21

Change of surface at key locations provide traffic calming.
- 22

New attenuation ponds proposed within the parkland.



# Neighbourhood Character

The masterplan will create different character zones as a result of the relationship of buildings, different forms of public realm space and the use of materials to differentiate one area from another.



Density and scale will inform the character of each area. Increased densities will create a sense of enclosure at the centre of the development, whilst lower density housing will provide a gradual transition to the countryside, with soft edges to the development.

The development at the land at Highover Farm is broken down into a series of neighbourhoods, each with its own unique identity and character. The identity and character of each neighbourhood has been informed by the landscape, setting, land use, density and scale. The neighbourhoods are broken down as follows:

- 1 Parkland and Recreation Area
- 2 Stotfold Road
- 3 Parkland View
- 4 The Avenue
- 5 Groveland Row
- 6 Community Hub
- 7 Highover Green
- 8 High Dane/Highover Farm

## CHARACTER AREA PLAN





# Examples of Key Features

A series of key features are integrated into the development which will help to shape the masterplan and create the vision of a vibrant sustainable community and high quality new homes for Hitchin.

## Natural parkland for recreational use

A natural parkland area will be provided for enhanced biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Recreation and sports pitches, as well as attenuation ponds will also be incorporated within the area. The location of the parkland is strategically located to provide landscape screening to the development from higher view points to the north.

## Neighbourhood green

Highover Green is positioned adjacent to the community hub, ensuring it will be frequently used by both residents of the development as well as the surrounding community. The green space will provide an opportunity for community events to take place such as fetes or fairs. There is an opportunity to create a childrens play area within the green.

## Central community hub

The community hub will include small retail units and a primary school as well as a designated area for a bus stop. The retail building and primary school are centrally positioned within the development to allow both new residents and the surrounding wider community to benefit from new amenities and facilities.

## Tree lined avenue

The Avenue forms the primary street within the development providing pedestrian and cycle connection to Walsworth Common to the the south west and the countryside to the east. The avenue will be formal in character with tree planting and grass verges proposed along both sides of the carriageway. Shared surface areas will be incorporated at key intervals providing safe crossing points for pedestrians.

## A new primary school at the heart of the community

The school site and associated playing fields have been positioned at the heart of the development to form part of the community hub. The school will be part of the overall green network to optimise biodiversity/wildlife corridor opportunities.

## Pedestrian friendly squares and spaces

Creating sequences of squares and public spaces of varying shapes and sizes will assist with creating place and variety.

Integrated traffic calming features will help reduce vehicle speeds in sensitive locations such as the school. The junctions themselves will act as 'events' where direction and priorities are altered to make interesting and safe places within the development.

## Distinctive neighbourhoods

The masterplan will create different character areas, each area will have its own distinctive qualities. The identity and character of each area will be informed by the landscape, setting, land use, density and scale. A hierarchy of streets types within the development will also inform the character.

## Children's play facilities

Children's play facilities will be incorporated at key pedestrian nodes within the green network to ensure play areas are well used and accessible.

Play areas will be designed to be safe and secure environments and proposed dwellings will be orientated to address the play areas to provide natural surveillance.



# Pre-application Consultation & Next Steps

## PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

Bellcross Homes has pursued a “front loading” approach with the following parties in the interests of promoting collaborative working at the pre-application stage:

### THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

- Planning
- Environmental
- Environmental Health
- Housing Supply
- Waste and Refuse
- Parks

### HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

- Countryside Access
- Development Services
- Education Services
- Fire and Rescue
- Ecology
- Historic Environment
- Lead Local Flood Authority
- Highways

### STATUTORY AND OTHER BODIES

- Anglican Water
- Highways Authority
- Historic England
- Environment Agency
- Sports England

To date, the principle of development is supported by Planning Officers at the Local Authority, and ongoing supporting technical work is being carried out by Bellcross Homes’ project team in consultation with the above parties.


As part of this pre-application engagement, Bellcross Homes is seeking the views and comments from local residents at this public exhibition.  
  
A final Statement of Community Involvement will be submitted with the future planning application.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We would welcome your feedback on the draft masterplan by 3rd July 2017. After that date all of your feedback will be considered before finalising the masterplan planning application for submission to North Hertfordshire District Council for consideration.

Please let us know your thoughts by completing a questionnaire, or contact us on the email/address below:

 [HighoverHitchin@rapleys.com](mailto:HighoverHitchin@rapleys.com)

 Rapleys LLP  
51 Great Marlborough Street  
London  
W1F 7JT

**Thank you** for  
taking the time to  
visit our exhibition.