

Spectrum of Visual Density



From left to right: Rural situation, Arcadia, Boulevard Planning, Unsatisfactory Suburbia, Urban Situation, Large Town/City Centre scale
The increase in visual density from an uninhabited landscape to a built-up urban centre may be viewed as a spectrum.

At one extreme is the truly rural situation, where a single dwelling or small group of dwellings is isolated within the landscape. Such development constitutes so small a proportion of new building that detailed consideration of it falls outside the scope of this document. **In such instances, building siting and the relationship of structures to the landscape should receive the same level of care and attention as would a proposal in a Conservation Area.**

The next type of development sees a greater quantity of housing laid out according to landscape-dominated principles, creating the illusion of a rural environment in a residential area. This is called ‘Arcadia’, and cannot usually be achieved at densities of more than eight houses per hectare (three per acre).

Then come developments in which trees still predominate and enclose the public space but a more formal arrangement of houses permits higher density – for example, ten to 20 houses per hectare (four to eight per acre). This is called ‘boulevard planning’.

At the centre of the spectrum is ‘unsatisfactory suburbia’, which sees houses set on plots in such a cramped fashion that there can be no illusion of their existing within a landscape setting. The houses are also too loosely grouped to contain spaces satisfactorily: frontages are fragmented by

gaps and public space is dominated by estate roads and driveways. Space can therefore not be organised effectively, and this is the fundamental reason most suburbia is a failure in visual terms.

At the further end of the spectrum are urban situations, in which space is enclosed by more or less continuous building frontages. Such developments are focused on delivering housing at densities above 20 houses per hectare (eight per acre). Such groupings are characteristic of most historic towns and villages in Essex.

Finally, the 'large town centre' scenario relates to the mixed forms and uses that can create a varied urban character within larger, more densely populated urban settlements.

In a large development, it is desirable to mix a variety of the aforementioned densities of development, from Arcadia to urban groupings.