Oxford County

Study Purpose

The purpose of the Community / Urban Design Strategy is to develop a comprehensive and effective urban design policy framework and associated implementation strategy for Oxford County, which will reflect the planning structure of the County and the unique character and context of its 8 area municipalities and associated communities.
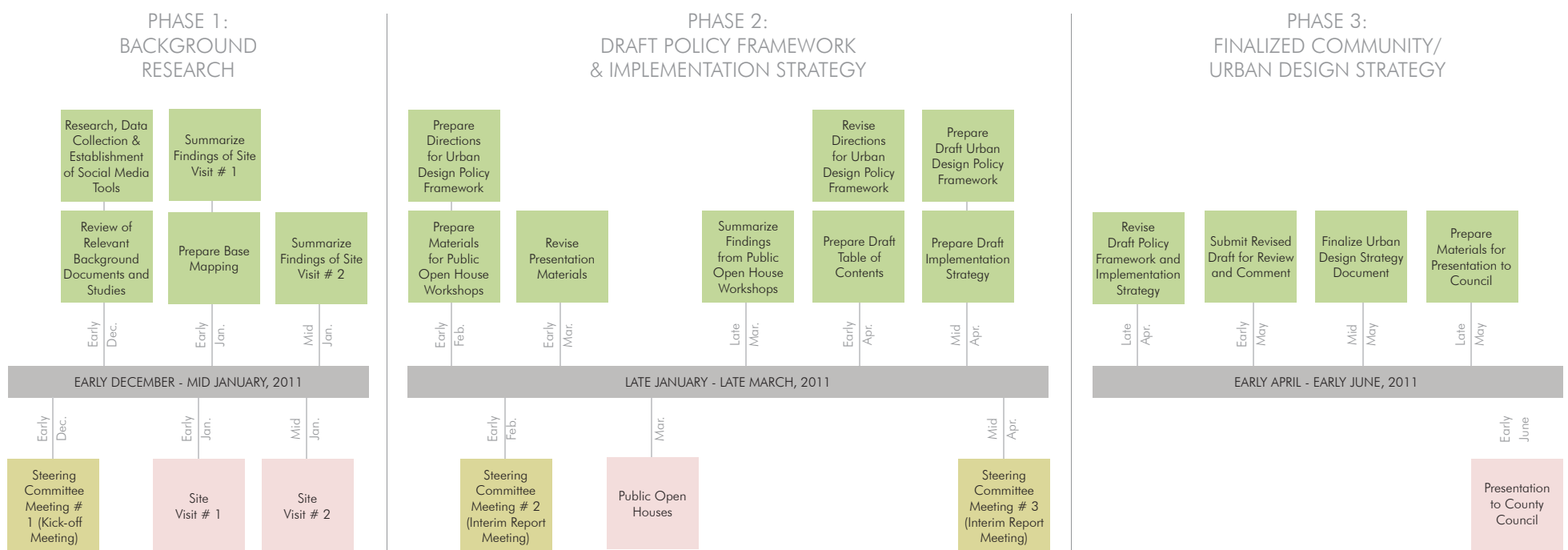
This framework will assist the County in implementing Provincial policy directions and will aid in achieving other planning objectives while ensuring that an overall high standard of urban design can be achieved throughout the County. The policy directions developed through this process will be incorporated into the Oxford County Official Plan as part of the current 5 year review process.

Draft Goals

1 Ensure Oxford County has **an urban design vision** that represents the character of each unique community

2 Define a community's character by its **architecture, open spaces and natural features**

3 Acknowledge, foster and protect Oxford County's **cultural and built heritage**

4 Create **vibrant places** by supporting **a mix of uses** where appropriate

5 Prioritize **sustainability** in design and construction of communities and buildings

6 Promote **compact built form** in urban areas

7 Preserve **farmland and other natural resources**

8 Ensure **positive transitions** between different land uses as well as urban and rural areas

9 Focus on **public health** by creating accessible, walkable and complete communities

10 Support a variety of **transportation choices** with a priority on pedestrians

Project Schedule

PHASE 1: BACKGROUND RESEARCH

- Research, Data Collection & Establishment of Social Media Tools
- Summarize Findings of Site Visit # 1
- Review of Relevant Background Documents and Studies
- Prepare Base Mapping
- Summarize Findings of Site Visit # 2

Early Dec. — Early Jan. — Mid Jan.

EARLY DECEMBER - MID JANUARY, 2011

- Steering Committee Meeting # 1 (Kick-off Meeting)
- Site Visit # 1
- Site Visit # 2

PHASE 2: DRAFT POLICY FRAMEWORK & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- Prepare Directions for Urban Design Policy Framework
- Revise Directions for Urban Design Policy Framework
- Prepare Draft Urban Design Policy Framework
- Prepare Materials for Public Open House Workshops
- Revise Presentation Materials
- Summarize Findings from Public Open House Workshops
- Prepare Draft Table of Contents
- Prepare Draft Implementation Strategy

Early Feb. — Early Mar. — Late Mar. — Early Apr. — Mid Apr.

LATE JANUARY - LATE MARCH, 2011

- Steering Committee Meeting # 2 (Interim Report Meeting)
- Public Open Houses
- Steering Committee Meeting # 3 (Interim Report Meeting)

PHASE 3: FINALIZED COMMUNITY/ URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

- Revise Draft Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy
- Submit Revised Draft for Review and Comment
- Finalize Urban Design Strategy Document
- Prepare Materials for Presentation to Council

Late Apr. — Early May — Mid May — Late May

EARLY APRIL - EARLY JUNE, 2011

- Presentation to County Council

Early June

Policy Overview & Implementation

1 INTRODUCTION

The policy framework that shapes the character of Oxford County consists of a number of plans, bylaws and guidelines. Within the County, the Official Plan provides over arching goals for the entire community; the Zoning Bylaws provide more detailed guidance, on a property by property basis, with an aim to implement the goals of the Official Plan; and, urban design guidelines provide more detailed design direction of the vision for specific land uses or areas.

This study focuses on future policy amendments to the Official plan that will have the potential to result in changes to the existing bylaws and the development of new guidelines and standards. Outlined below is a description of the documents that make up the County's Policy Framework and an overview of some of the potential outcomes from this study.

Study home page at http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/site/3181/default.aspx
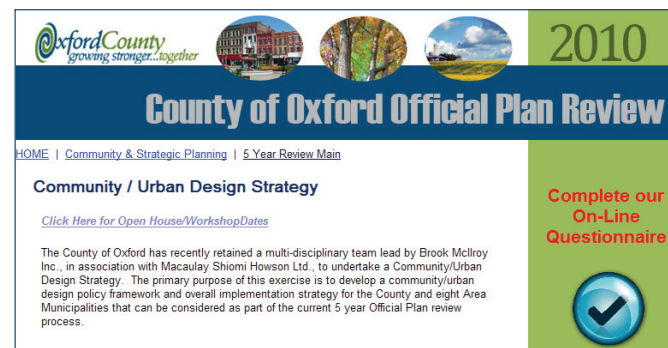
2 OXFORD COUNTY OFFICIAL PLAN

An Official Plan is a statutory document which sets out the land use policy directions for long-term growth and development for the County. The County Official Plan provides a land use strategy to balance growth and related housing, industry and commercial development with the protection of agricultural, rural and environmental resources. The Official Plan is used for assessing planning applications received by the County and its Area Municipalities and can also guide potential infrastructure investment decisions.

The Official Plan contains policies governing various land use designations, such as Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Agricultural and Open Space and Recreation. These designations are broadly established on a land use map.


SAMPLE OFFICIAL PLAN DIRECTION

Adopt a 'Pedestrian Priority' philosophy for new developments that will place more emphasis on the fine grain quality and inter-connectedness of public spaces.

3 ZONING BYLAW

A Zoning Bylaw contains provisions that regulate the use, size, height, density and location of buildings on properties within the municipality. The basic purpose of a Zoning Bylaw is to regulate what you can build and how big the building can be on a property. A typical zoning bylaw maps out the zones which show how the property can be used. That is, the property can be used for various land uses that range from residential to commercial to industrial and a whole host of other land uses. The Zoning Bylaw also identifies the density, massing, height and setbacks of buildings.
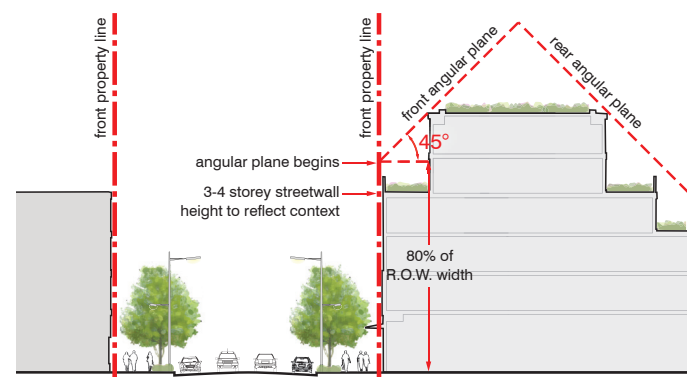

SAMPLE ZONING BYLAW DIRECTION

The massing of new buildings can not exceed 20m in height or exceed a lot coverage of 50%.

4 COMMUNITY DESIGN (URBAN DESIGN) POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Community design policies are an important tool for shaping the overall design and character of communities by establishing the community's overall design vision and providing associated planning and design direction for use in the review of development proposals. The community design policies being developed for the County are intended to address the full range of design considerations, including community/neighbourhood structure, context and placemaking, community focal points, public spaces such as parks and streets, site and building design, heritage and culture, accommodating pedestrians and other alternative modes of transportation, landscaping, signage, lighting and environmental sustainability.
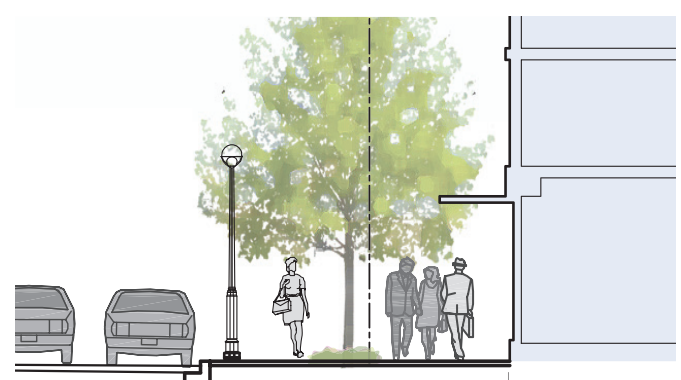
SAMPLE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINE

Organize streetscape amenities to ensure that the travel path of a pedestrian is not impeded.

5 POTENTIAL STUDY OUTCOMES

The urban design policy framework will address a full range of urban design considerations, and will provide planning and design direction for the County. The document will be geared to assisting development applicants in understanding the urban design vision for the County. The recommendations of this study will address the following listed items.

1. Provide a framework and directions on how to incorporate urban design goals into the County's Official Plan;

2. Provide draft policies to be incorporated into the Official Plan;

3. Identify key studies or design guidelines that will assist in achieving the Urban Design Goals developed through the process;

4. Identify potential Zoning Bylaw amendments and other implementation measures that would be required to achieve the identified urban design goals;

5. Provide specific design direction for urban centres, villages, rural clusters, and rural areas; and

6. Identify implementation time lines and other considerations.

Map of Oxford County

OXFORD COUNTY OVERVIEW

Oxford County is comprised of eight area municipalities, including three large urban centres and five rural townships. Each municipality has a distinct character, and presents a unique set of circumstances, which translates into a distinct set of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints.

The City of Woodstock is a focal point for employment, commerce, recreation and administration. The Town of Tillsonburg fulfills similar roles for Southern Oxford and portions of Elgin and Norfolk Counties. The Town of Ingersoll is also a major centre of employment and commerce.

The rural municipalities are known for agriculture and aggregate extraction. Rural settlements provide residential opportunities through rural clusters, villages, and serviced villages. They also provide population related services and employment functions on a smaller scale.
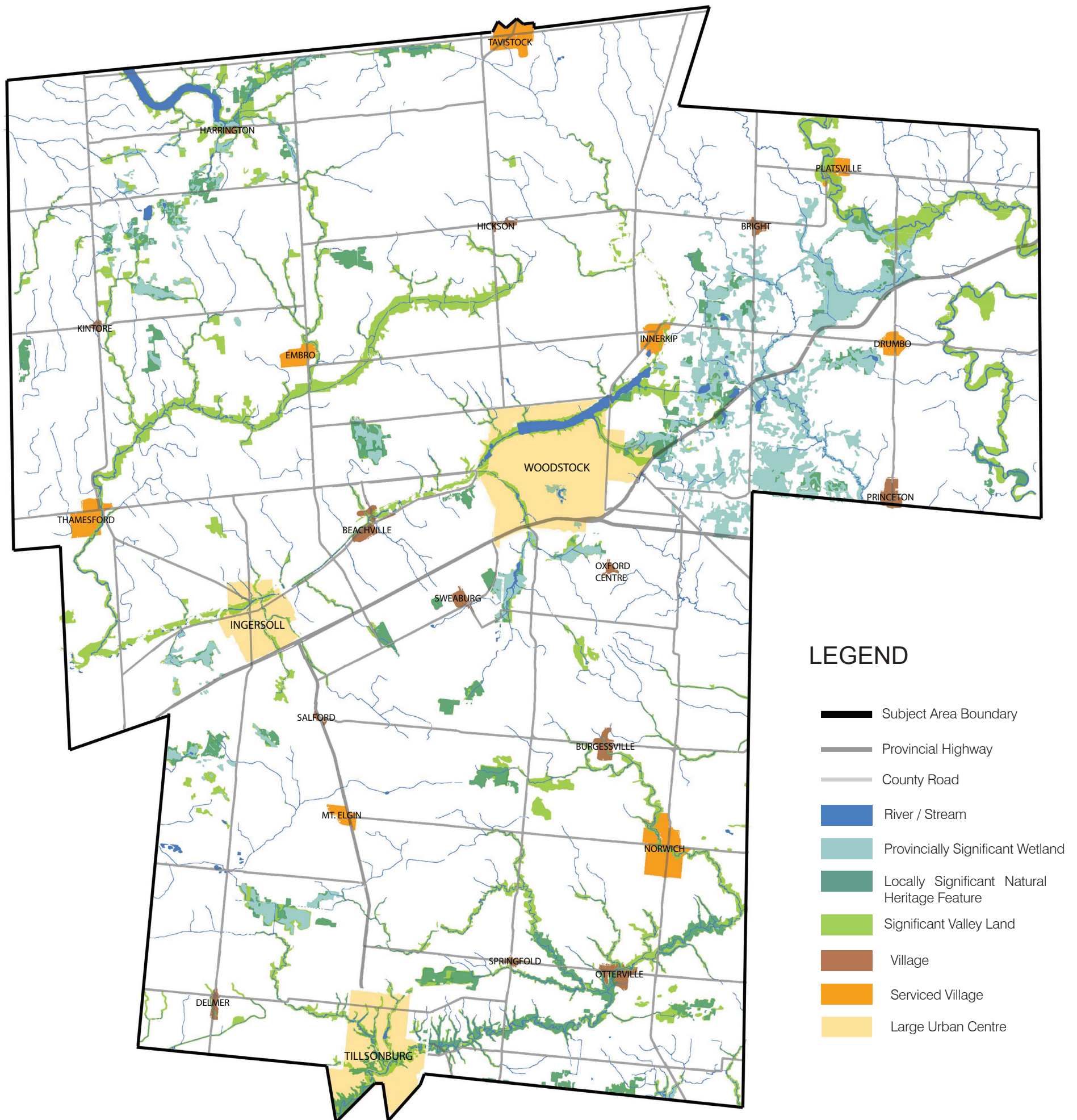
LEGEND

▬▬▬	Subject Area Boundary
▬▬▬	Provincial Highway
▬▬▬	County Road
▬▬▬	River / Stream
■	Provincially Significant Wetland
■	Locally Significant Natural Heritage Feature
■	Significant Valley Land
■	Village
■	Serviced Village
■	Large Urban Centre

NORTH
not to scale

Draft Urban Design Approach

1 DOWNTOWNS AND RURAL SETTLEMENT AREAS

In the most successful urbanized areas, residential uses are located near a diverse but compatible range of local services, including retail, commercial, light industrial, and other employment uses. A mix of uses, compact urban form, and a well-connected street and block system combine to promote efficient access to amenities and alternative modes of transportation, including walking, cycling, and transit. This mix of uses also contributes to vibrant and active streets and open spaces, especially when active, at-grade uses (e.g. shops and services) face the street.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Promote and enhance existing community improvement programs, and create new programs in areas where they do not exist.

- Explore the development potential of areas behind the main street and beautify the rear facades of main street buildings.

- Explore opportunities for streetscape improvements.

- Build on the strengths of the large inventory of heritage properties in the downtowns.

- Ensure context-sensitive and sustainable renovations, additions, and adjacent new developments

- Define and protect the unique character of all existing settlement areas by letting the positive elements of the community shine.

Mid-rise residential buildings can be an appropriate transition between low-rise residential and busy urban neighbourhoods.

Compact urban form promotes walkable neighbourhoods by mixing residential uses with a diverse but compatible range of local services .

The existing character of urban areas should inform the design, detailing and materiality of new development.
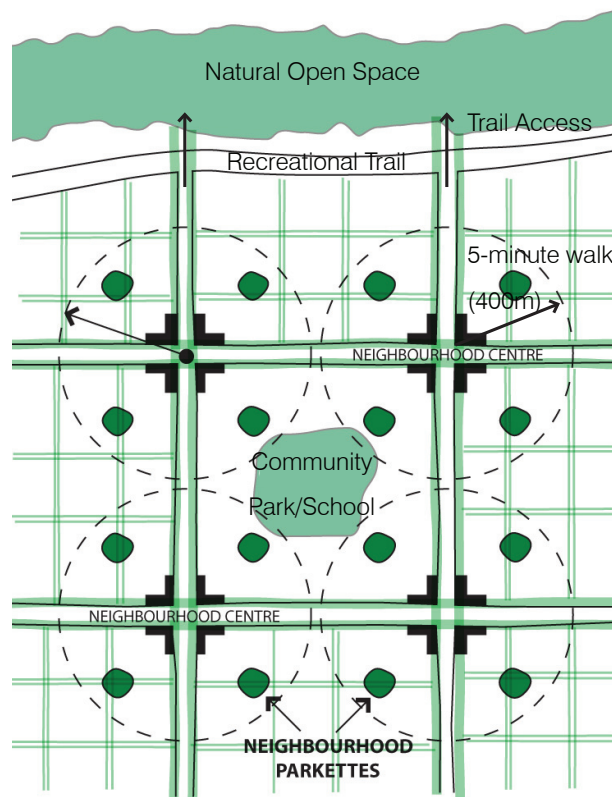
2 EXISTING AND NEW RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

Residential communities should generally include a mix of housing types. New community design should include the careful consideration of building design and siting with an aim to create complete communities with access to parks, transit, and convenience retail.

A mix, range and balance of housing types contributes to complete communities by offering choices to people at different ages and stages of life and with different economic circumstances. This in turn creates vibrant neighbourhoods because a diverse population supports local shops and services and creates active streets and open spaces at different times of day.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Organize new communities to prioritize active forms of transportation including walking, cycling and transit.

- Provide a healthy mix of housing options suitable for all ages, incomes, and lifestyles, in order to create complete communities.

- Create a sense of community identity through the design of new buildings, streets, parks and open spaces.

- Ensure the compatibility of intensification / infilling with the surrounding residential character.

- Prioritize sustainability through the design and construction of new communities.

- Design residential buildings to address the street and to encourage a safe and vibrant pedestrian environment.

Natural Open Space
Trail Access
Recreational Trail
5-minute walk (400m)
NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE
Community Park/School
NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE
NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKETTES

Neighbourhood centres designed on a 5-minute walking radius provide residents with easy access to parkettes, community parks and schools.

High quality new residential development with a strong connection between the interior of the house and the street contribute to a vibrant and safe community.

3 RURAL AREAS AND AGRICULTURAL USES

One of Oxford County's largest defining characteristics is the abundance of rural and agricultural lands that surround the urban areas. These rural areas represent a valuable resource and an important element of the County's cultural heritage.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Build on the strengths of valuable agricultural resources, including the livestock, poultry and tobacco farms which are prevalent throughout rural areas.

- Protect agricultural uses from outward urban expansion through sustainable urban growth.

- Encourage the continued development of agri-tourism and other agriculturally related business opportunities.

- Support sustainable farming practices and ensure the protection of the existing natural features and resources.

- Protect rural heritage elements such as important views and living landscapes.

The existing rural character should be protected and preserved while allowing the economic viability of the agricultural industries to thrive.

Rural roads are 'county streets' that connect agricultural areas.

Oxford County

Draft Urban Design Approach

4 COMMERCIAL USES

There are many types of commercial buildings and uses including strip and big box retail, downtown shops, and conventional shopping centres. For all commercial development, it is essential that a strong relationship between the streetscape and commercial buildings is facilitated through shallow setbacks, on-street parking and/or locating parking at the rear or at the side of the building and good pedestrian connections.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Improve the relationship between buildings and the street by locating commercial buildings closer to the front of the property.
- Reorganize surface parking to improve the streetscape and create clear circulation paths for pedestrians from the parking lots and the sidewalk.
- Explore opportunities for multi-storey commercial buildings.
- Emphasize the visual prominence of building entrances by consolidating and locating them in central locations.
- Explore opportunities for improved landscaping and signage.
- Follow sustainability best practices for both building and site design.

Within parking areas, clearly defined pedestrian paths enhance safety and improve area walkability.

*Multi-storey commercial buildings contribute to a more compact community.*

5 EMPLOYMENT USES

Similar to commercial uses there are many different types of employment uses within the County (e.g. industrial and large scale office uses). Employment sites and buildings should contribute to the positive character of the streets which they address. Buildings should be sited and designed to positively contribute to the character of the community and create streets that encourage walking and cycling even when located in less developed areas.

Industrial buildings can be utilitarian in design and because of their size, must be of a high quality design. Both building design and site layout should contribute to making these areas attractive and comfortable pedestrian environments.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Respect the historic significance of existing downtown employment buildings, which help define the character of some communities, and explore opportunities to better integrate them with their surroundings.
- Ensure that new employment buildings address adjacent streets and are developed with appropriate materials at appropriate densities and lot coverages.
- Explore opportunities for improved landscaping and appropriate screening elements.
- Provide an appropriate interface between employment buildings and sensitive land uses, such as agricultural and residential uses, or natural features.
- Prioritize sustainability for the design, renovation and construction of employment buildings.
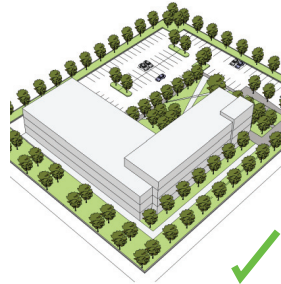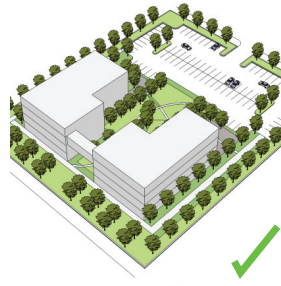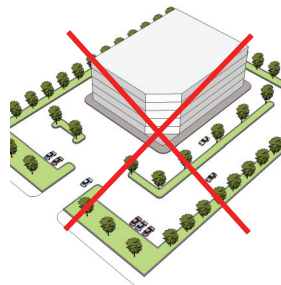
The large building (top) should be located at the street (with parking behind or to the side) and if possible divided into a group of clustered buildings to create a sense of community.

New employment facilities can use water treatment facilities as design opportunities instead of challenges.

Major office and institutional development contributes to complete communities and can help to revitalize areas.

6 INSTITUTIONAL USES

New institutional uses (e.g. schools, municipal offices, cultural facilities, etc) should be located within the urban areas in close proximity to the downtowns to make use of the existing infrastructure such as transit, servicing, etc. This will contribute to the development of complete communities and will help to revitalize these areas. Downtowns are appropriate locations for major institutional and employment uses (e.g. major offices) because of the proximity to transit and a wide range of complementary uses.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Build on the strengths of existing institutional uses, particularly in downtowns where they act as major anchors.
- Encourage the expansion of existing institutional uses.
- Consider the adaptive reuse of vacant institutional buildings.
- Direct new institutional uses to existing serviced areas.
- Design of major institutional buildings to be of the highest standards, as the buildings greatly contribute to a distinct sense of place and have the opportunity to become a design and sustainability benchmark for private development.

New institutional buildings provide a benchmark by which all new development can be measured.

Draft Urban Design Approach

7 STREETS

Streets are important public open spaces that serve a variety of purposes. Streets play an important role in community development by providing a primary open space for movement and travel, as well as places for social interactions and other activities. A compact, well-connected network of streets provides a number of benefits for transit users and pedestrians. This type of street network is important in all areas, including new neighbourhoods in brownfields, infill sites and designated greenfield areas. "Complete streets" are streets that are designed to provide safe, attractive, and comfortable access and travel for users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, people with disabilities and public transit users. Well designed complete streets also provide high quality public open space.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Design all urban streets to prioritize active forms of transportation, including walking, cycling and transit.

- Design urban streets to incorporate street furnishings, street trees, and other landscaping treatments.

- Design rural streets to maintain and reflect the surrounding context while meeting the transportation needs of the County.

- New communities should be constructed with an inter-connected grid of streets to improve access and enhance connectivity.
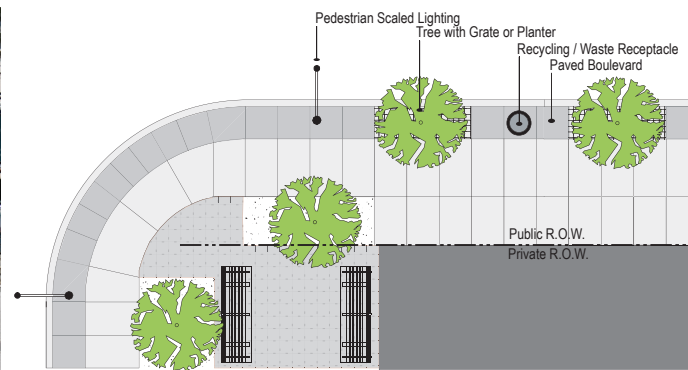

Bioswales provided at the street edge reveal and celebrate stormwater filtration.

A complete streets is a place that is well designed for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

Transitions between pedestrian areas, parking and streets can be distinguished with variations in paving.

Pedestrian Scaled Lighting
Tree with Grate or Planter
Recycling / Waste Receptacle
Paved Boulevard
Public R.O.W.
Private R.O.W.
Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate pedestrian amenities, such as seating and lighting, without disrupting pedestrian movement.

8 PARKS, OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL AREAS

Public open space includes all of the public space around and between buildings, including streets, parks, urban squares, courtyards, pedestrian walkways and natural areas. High quality public open space is attractive, comfortable and safe outdoor space that promotes active use and enjoyment. A public open space includes both natural heritage areas as well as active and passive parks. Their respective integration and access to the surrounding community will vary to reflect the specific design / protection requirements of each.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Expand upon existing natural features through the integration of parks and open spaces.

- Ensure that parks and open spaces are placed and sized appropriately given their intended use.

- Prioritize access to parks and open spaces in the design of new communities

- Encourage an appropriate balance of active and passive recreational uses.

Access to naturalized areas is encouraged, provided important features are preserved and protected.

To increase safety through casual surveillance, buildings should frame open spaces.

New development should include a variety of public open spaces to address the needs of the community.

9 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Heritage buildings and streets help to define the context and character of a community. The most desirable outcome for buildings and landscapes of cultural importance is that heritage features be retained or restored and that any changes bring heritage elements closer to their original appearance.

Urban Design opportunities for Oxford County include:

- Preserve heritage assets within existing communities to support and enhances community distinctiveness.

- Ensure development / redevelopment in heritage areas is designed to be sensitive to the area's heritage character.

- Discouraged the alteration of any historical architectural or landscape feature.

- Reduce dependence on new materials through remodelling or adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Adaptive reuse should be considered as part of the conservation and restoration of heritage buildings

An example of adaptive reuse where an existing building was redeveloped, while maintaining the original building structure, and adding new construction on the roof.

The infill buildings in a heritage context should apply a similar rhythm of articulation and/or windows.