

Better Quality Townhouse Developments in Merri-bek

Exemplar Designs for a growing community



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Revisions

REV	DESCRIPTION
-	Final draft

DATE
January 2026



Merri-bek
City Council

Why Exemplar Designs?

Merri-bek is changing quickly as more people are choosing to make our community their home. This rapid growth means we must find ways to increase the supply of quality homes that are well planned and improve the liveability of our city.

In line with our **draft Council Plan 2025-2029**, we aim to facilitate high-quality built form outcomes. The **State Government's Housing Statement** set ambitious targets to boost housing supply, with a strong emphasis on increasing density near existing transport routes and services.

This document responds to the **multifaceted challenges** of housing growth today - including rising construction and labour costs - and explores how to deliver quality outcomes within this environment.

The **Exemplar Designs** in this document are intended to guide and encourage designers, developers and applicants to deliver better-quality developments in Merri-bek. The Exemplar Designs demonstrate layouts that:

- comply with **Clause 55**,
- consider **better use of the ground plane**,
- feature **efficient and repeatable built forms**, and
- have **broad appeal** within the Merri-bek context.



Tarakan Street Housing, NH Architecture / Bird de la Goeur Architects with Openwork- 2024 (photo: Diana Snape)

What are Exemplar Designs?

The Exemplar Designs demonstrate **practical, well considered design responses** to typical townhouse development scenarios in Merri-bek. They showcase **best practice approaches** to site planning, dwelling configuration and architectural expression - illustrating how quality design outcomes can be achieved with **Townhouse and Low-Rise Code** compliance.

Council engaged architectural practice, **Six Degrees Architects** to prepare exemplar designs for guidance tailored specifically to Merri-bek's urban context.

Eight exemplars represent **five typical and commonly occurring lot widths** between 12.2m and 20m. Each exemplar is **simple, scalable and adaptable**, responding to varying lot depths, orientations and contextual constraints. **Lot width is the critical metric** in selecting an appropriate exemplar, with individual lot depth determining the potential yield.

The Exemplar Designs are **tested against Clause 55 Deemed to Comply standards**. Car parking provision assumes **1 parking space per dwelling** is required.

They are practical examples of how planning scheme requirements and Merri-bek design objectives can be met to deliver better quality development for everyone.



How to use the Exemplar Designs?

Applicants are encouraged to use these **Exemplar Designs**, in part or in full, to develop **context-specific proposals**. Not all designs will suit the site dimensions shown as each individual site has unique conditions. While based on eight typical lot configurations, **the principles can be adapted** to a broad range of sites and settings.

All applications will be **assessed against Planning Scheme requirements**. Design proposals must always consider:

- site orientation
- site and street topography
- existing site features
- existing streetscape character
- surrounding context including impacts on neighbouring properties

The **Design Principles section** includes **images** for additional visual description and design inspiration.

This is a **Better Quality Developments document** and should be used in conjunction with the **Good Design Advice Sheets**.



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18.3 x 42m, 769m²

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20 x 40m, 800m²

Design Principles

Analysis of recent townhouse developments in Merri-bek revealed a lack of ambition in terms of supply and quality, in areas well serviced by public transport.

In response to recurring development trends, the Design Principles outlines opportunities to improve key aspects of townhouse developments.

While the Design Principles highlight specific opportunities to improve design outcomes, the accompanying images help to portray ideas and solutions which cannot be expressed in plan form.

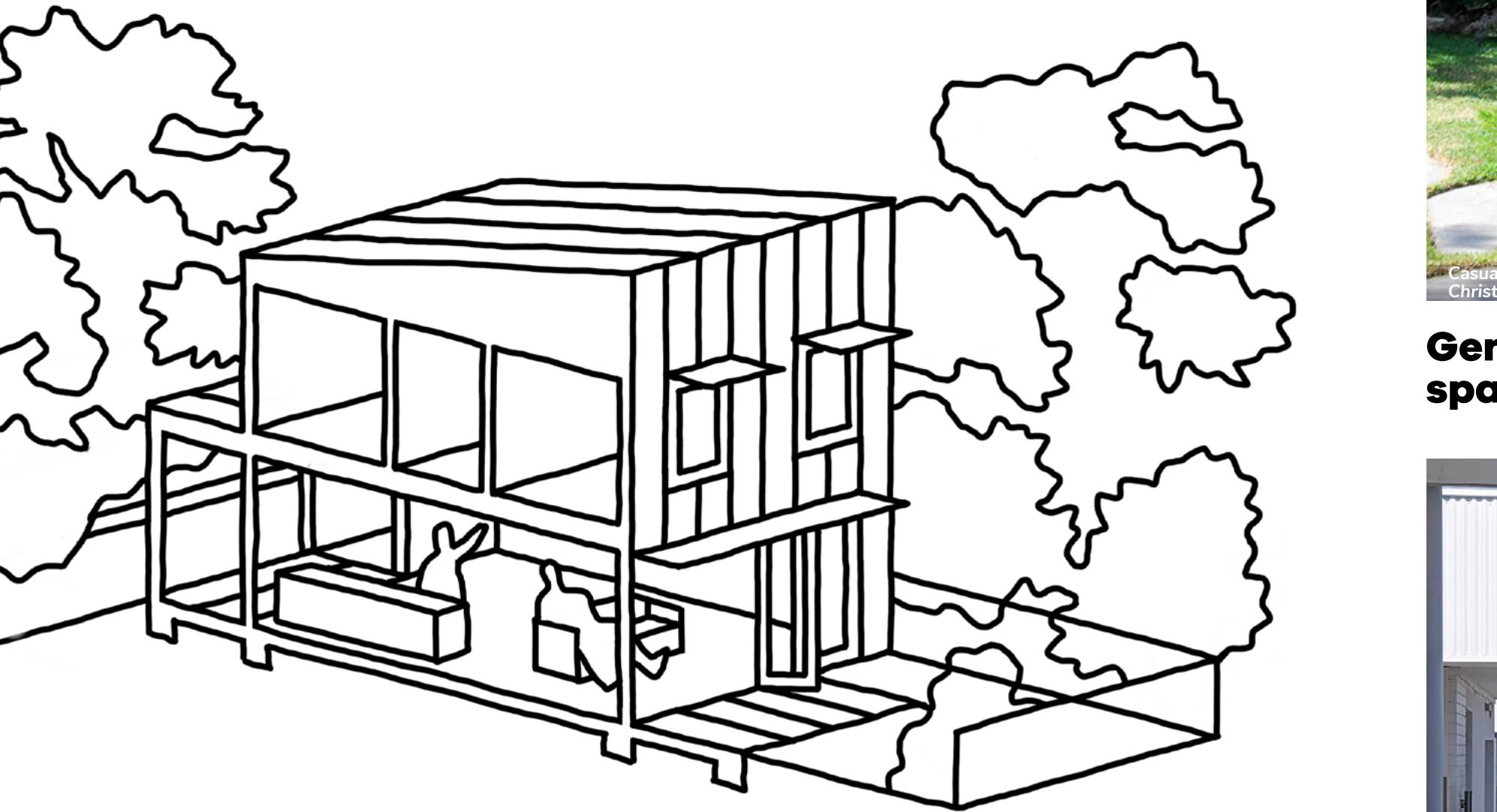


Better use of the ground plane

The ground plane is the ideal level for a number of competing uses such as living space, open space and vehicle circulation.

Better use of the ground plane considers reducing the area dedicated to vehicles and increasing space for higher value ground floor living, open space and canopy trees.

By minimising costly vehicle infrastructure and thoughtfully arranging open space, all dwellings can benefit from improved access, outlook and connection to quality landscaped environments.



Casuarina Garden, Prandium Studio with Vokes and Peters - 2018 (photo: Christopher Frederick Jones)



56 Shaftesbury, Neometre / Common Ground - 2019 (photo: Shannon McGrath)

Generous ground level open space



Hamilton Hill Affordable Homes, MDC Architects - 2024

Balancing access with green



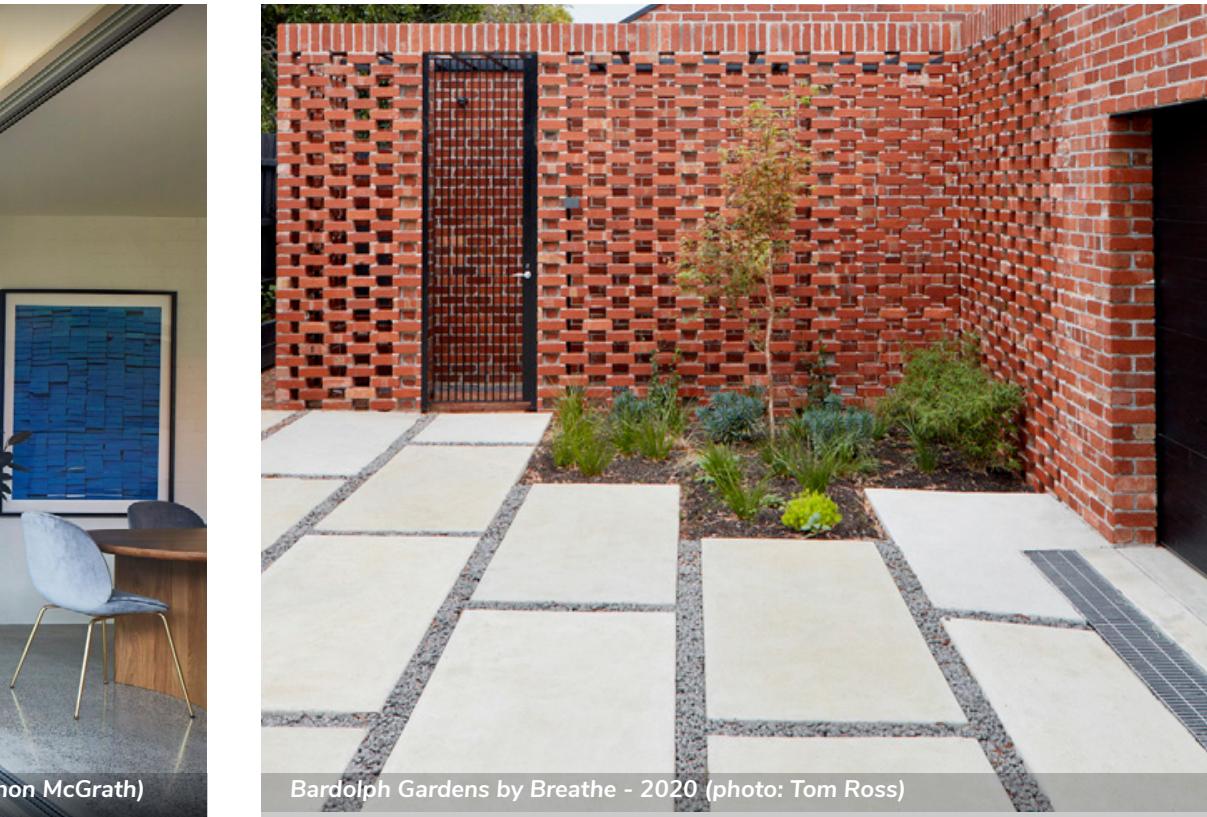
56 Shaftesbury, Neometre / Common Ground - 2019 (photo: Shannon McGrath)

Living spaces that connect with the outdoors



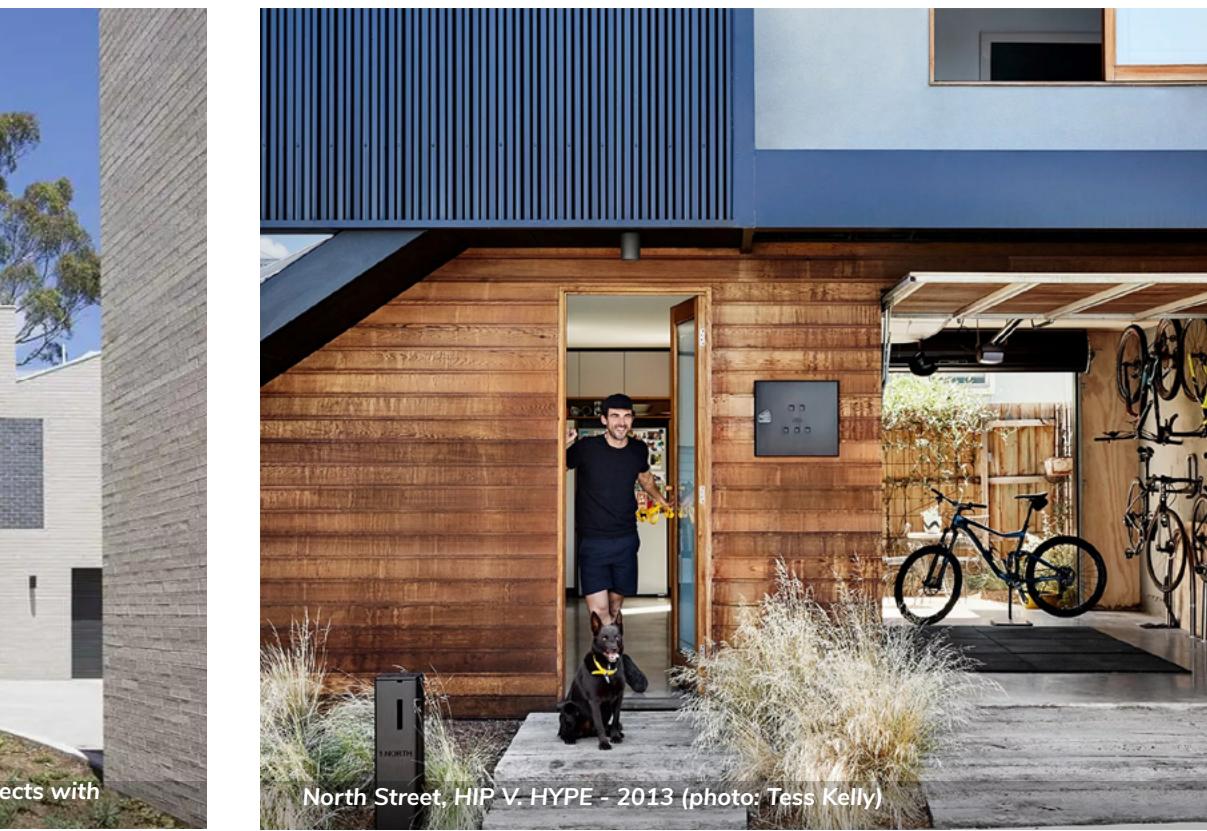
Tarakan Street Housing, NH Architecture / Bird de la Coeur Architects with Openwork - 2024 (photo: Diana Snape)

Room for canopy trees



Bardolino Gardens by Brueckle - 2020 (photo: Tom Ross)

A welcoming communal driveway space



North Street, Hove, VICT 2013 (photo: Tess Kelly)

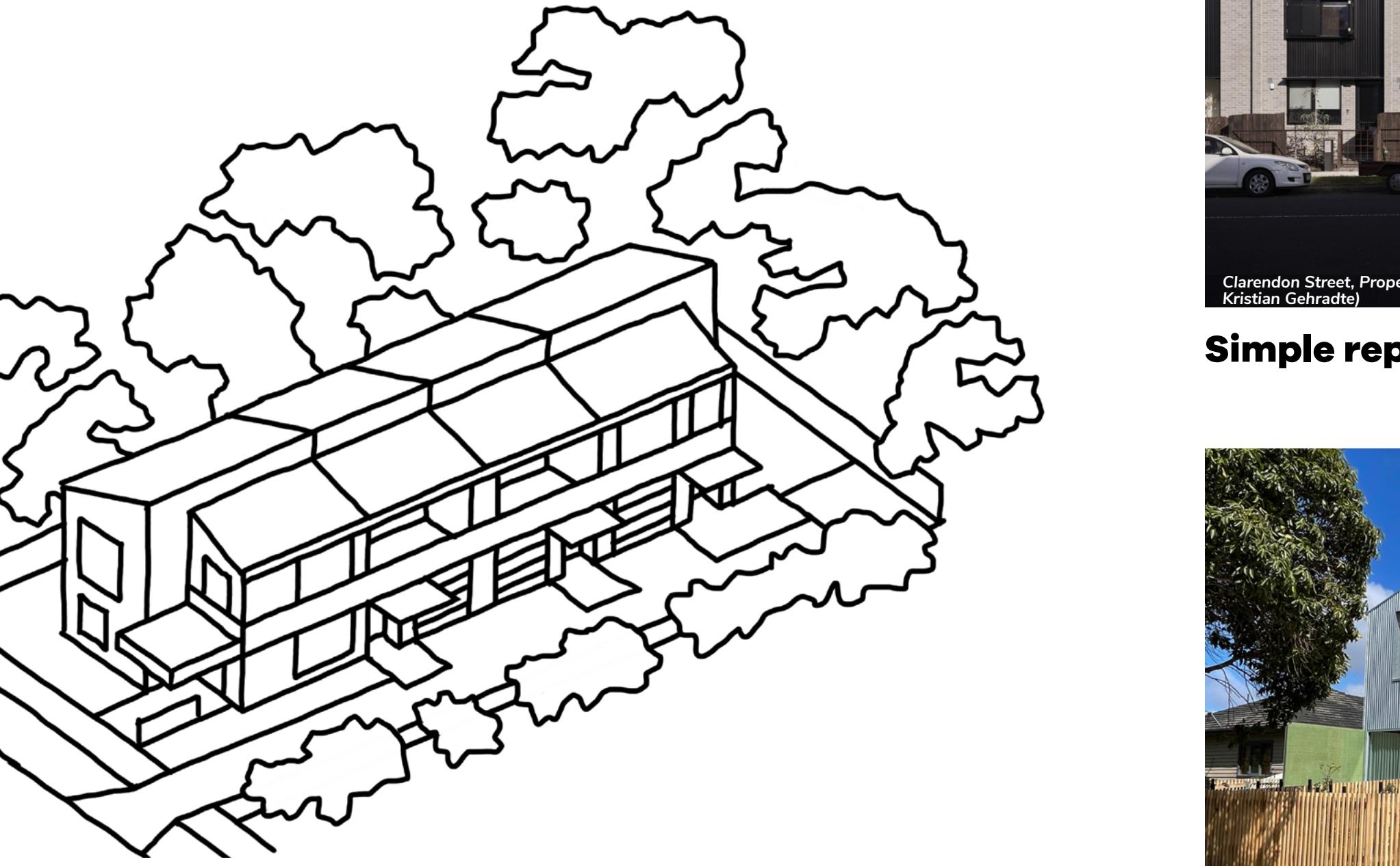
Carspaces allowing flexible use

Efficient and repeatable built forms

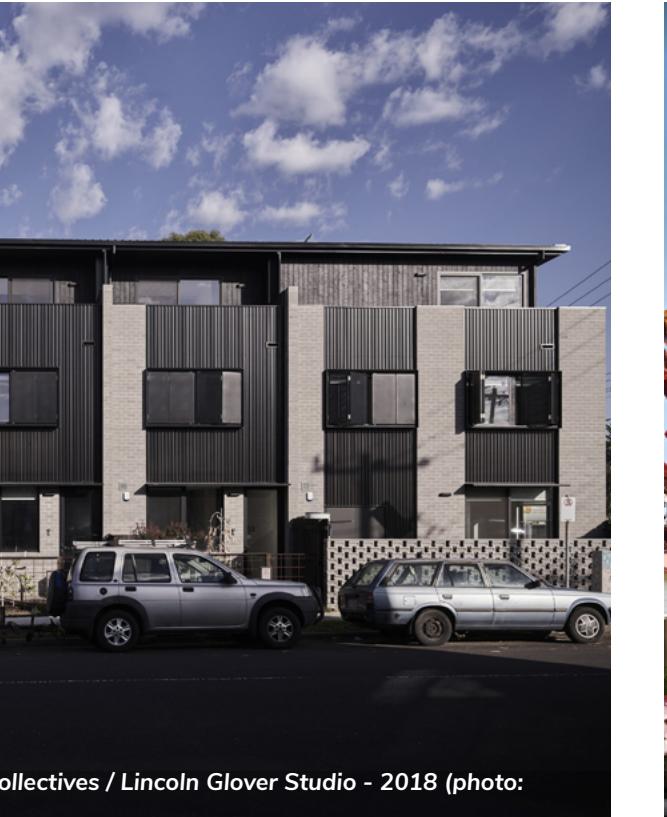
Complicated building forms increase construction costs and can lead to delays, so simple, well-proportioned forms using high-quality materials are recommended.

Efficient and repeatable built forms should consider a strong primary massing, complemented by secondary elements such as shading devices, window and doors that enhance the overall expression.

A coherent architectural language that responds to its context helps to reduce complicated detailing and minimise maintenance issues over time.



11 St Georges Grove, Fieldwork - 2017 (photo: Peter Clarke)



Clarendon Street, Property Collectives / Lincoln Glover Studio - 2018 (photo: Kristian Gehradte)



56 Shaftesbury, Neometro / Common Ground - 2019 (photo: Shannon McGrath) [View Gallery](#)



11 St Georges Grove, Fieldwork - 2017 (photo: Peter Clarke)

Simple repeatable forms

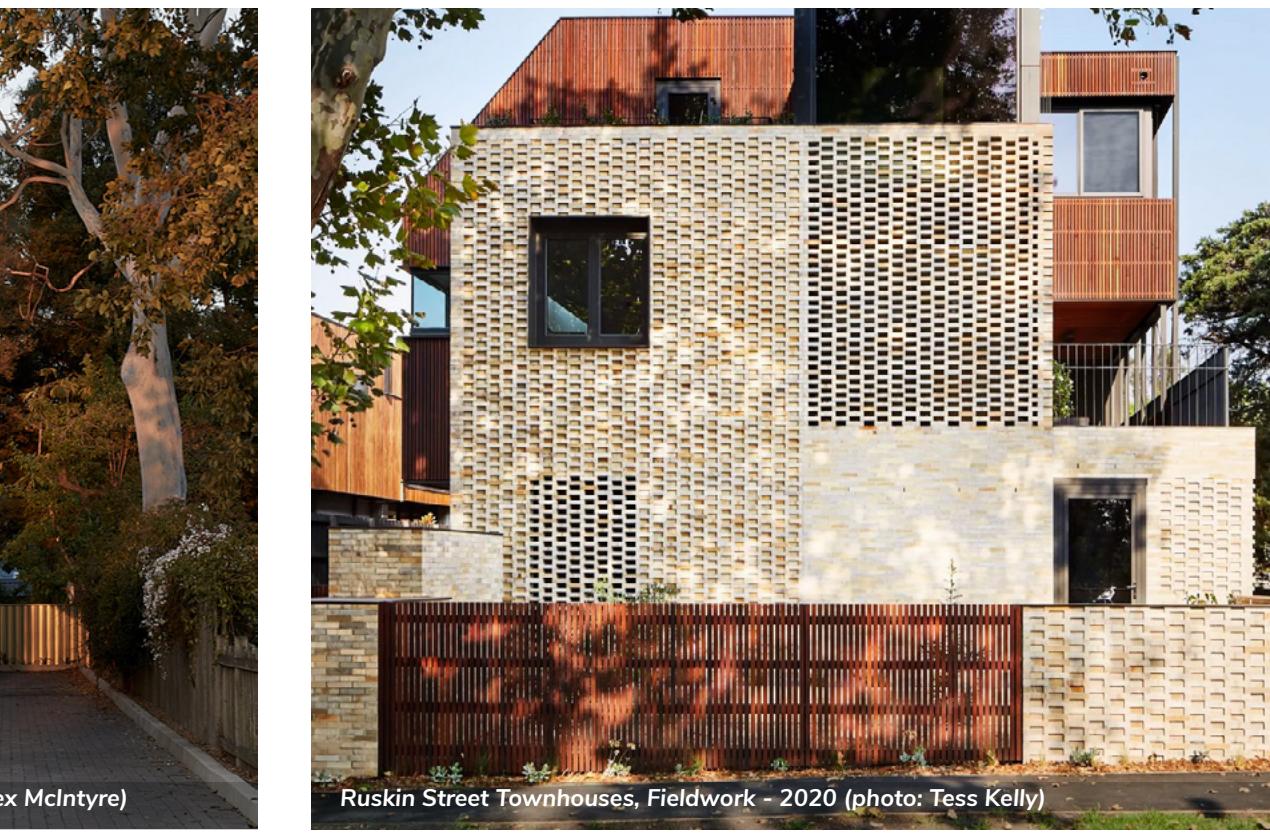
Primary forms with secondary elements for climbing plants



Four Townhouses - Shand Street, Ys Housing - 2023 (photo: Tim Rodgers)



Maggie Street, Curious Practice Architects - 2023 (photo: Alex McIntyre)



Ruskin Street Townhouses, Fieldwork - 2020 (photo: Tess Kelly)

Forms punctuated with deep recesses

Sheer forms with high quality finishes

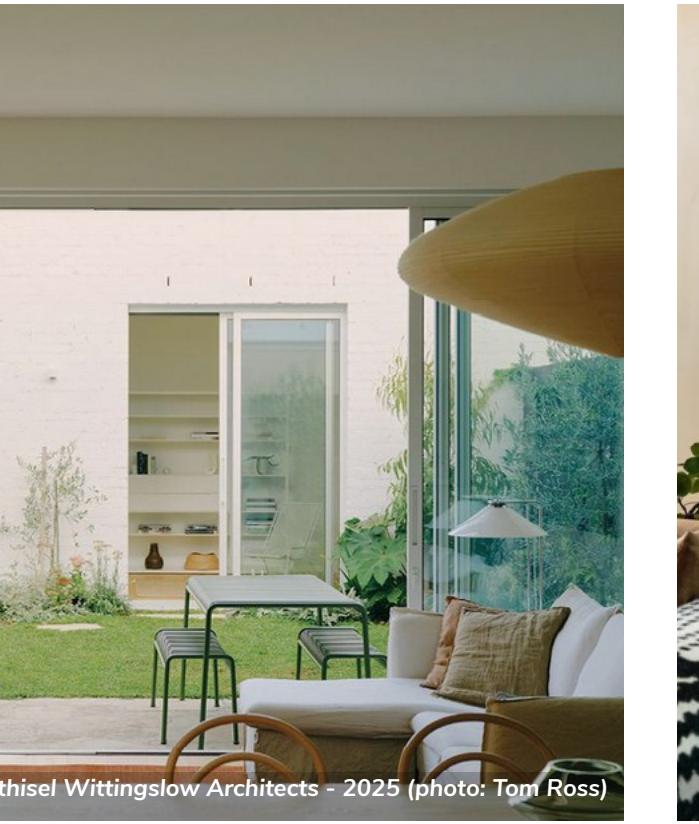
Using texture to add interest to simple forms

Broad appeal

The exemplar designs are configured to appeal to a broad cross section of potential purchasers in Merri-bek.

Broad appeal is achieved through mostly 2 or 3 bedroom layouts featuring ground floor living and strong visual connections to green space and canopy trees. Interior layouts respond to current market expectations, balancing larger dwellings with generous master suites, retreats and studies, alongside more compact configurations.

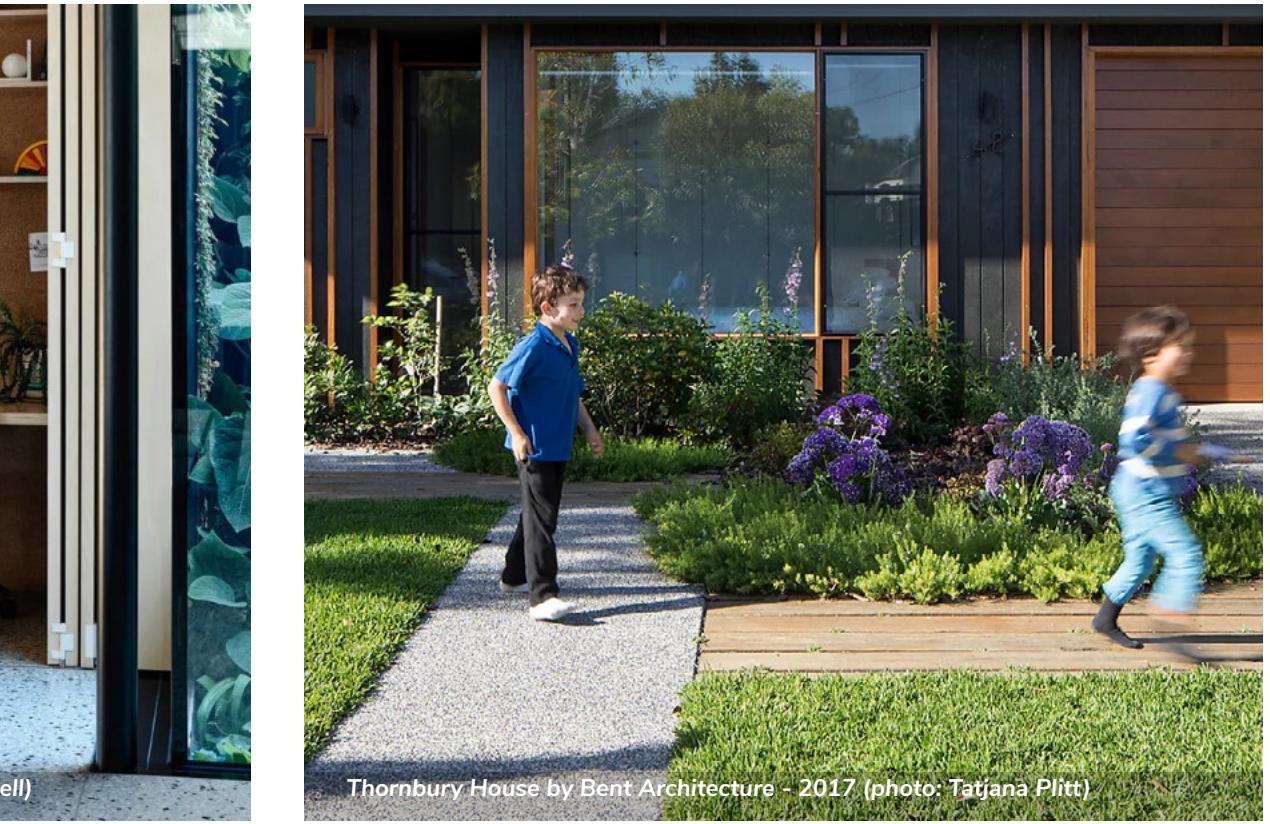
The Exemplar Designs offer a range of dwelling typologies that can be drawn upon to develop contextually appropriate proposals across different sites.



Seamless connection to the outdoors



Integrated working from home space



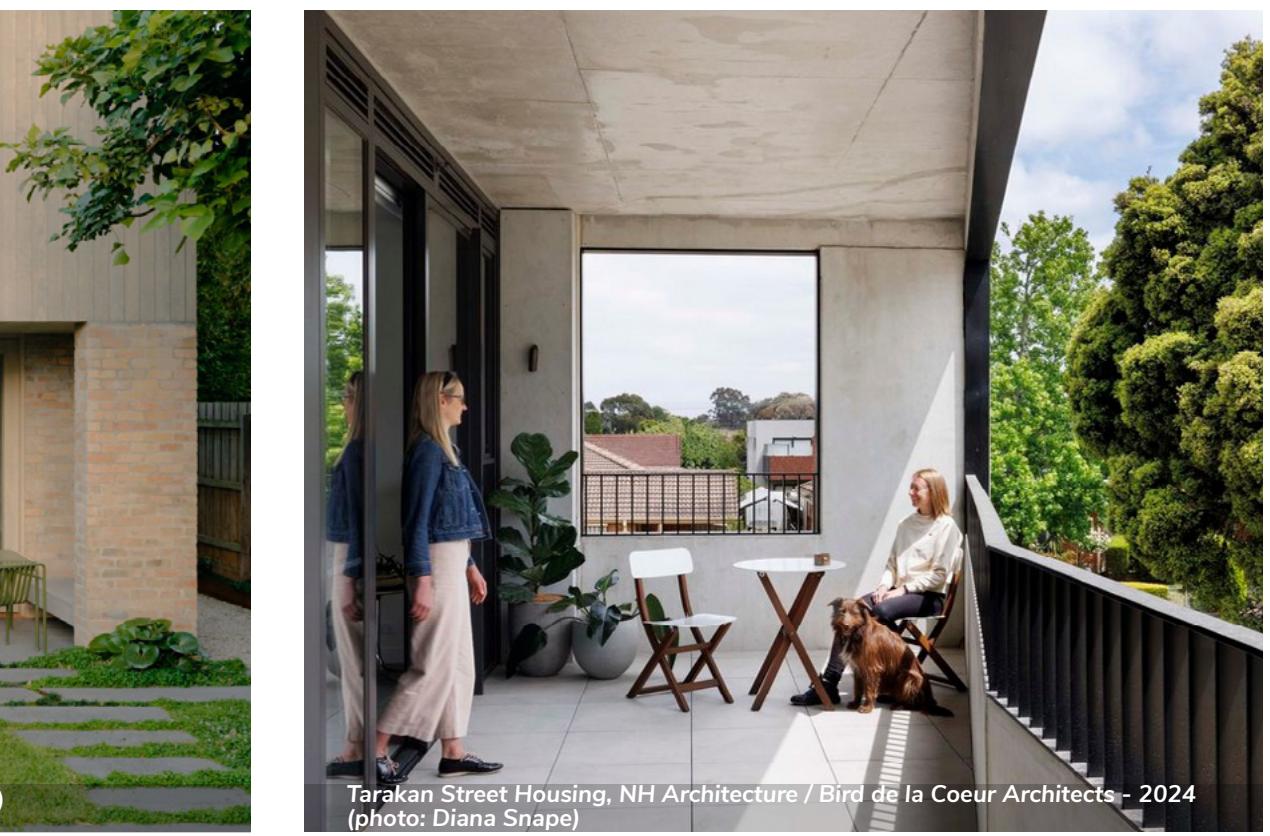
Spaces for families



Street appeal



Spacious ground floor open space



Elevated views to spaces that support canopy trees

Exemplar Designs

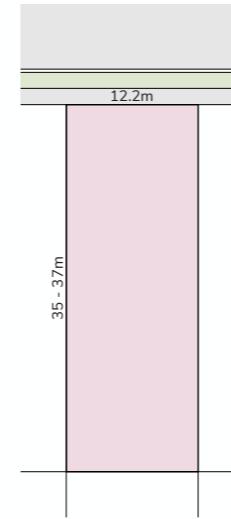
The lots selected for this suite of designs reflect the range of sizes most common in the Merri-bek context, in areas that allow for 1 parking space per dwelling.

While lot depths vary considerably across Merri-bek, lot widths remain relatively consistent, reflecting the rational pre-metric standards of 40, 50, 60 feet etc.

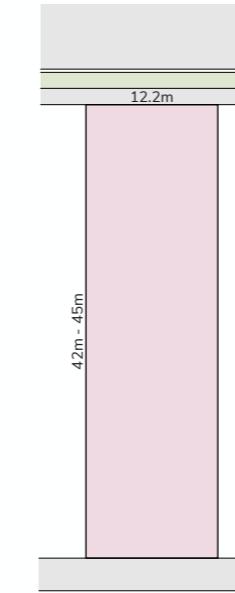
Lots narrower than 12 metres are generally considered unsuitable for standardised townhouse development due to vehicle access constraints. Lot 8 (20 metres wide), however, demonstrates how a layout might work for two smaller consolidated lots.

The focus on repeatable layouts illustrates how each exemplar can be applied and adjusted to suit varying lot depths.

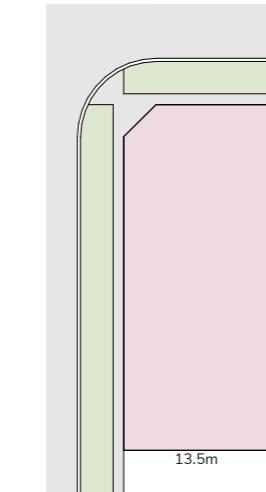
Lot 1
12.2m x 35m, 415m²



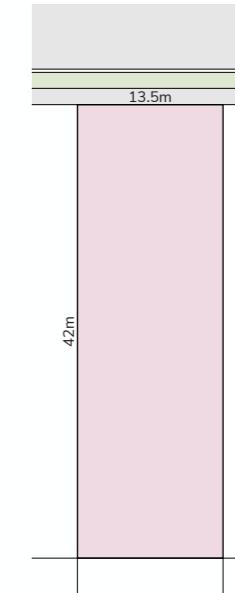
Lot 2
12.2m x 42m, 512m²



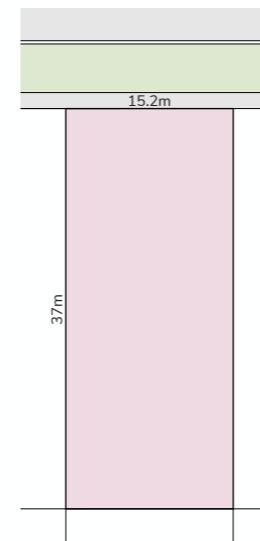
Lot 3
13.5m x 35m, 473m²



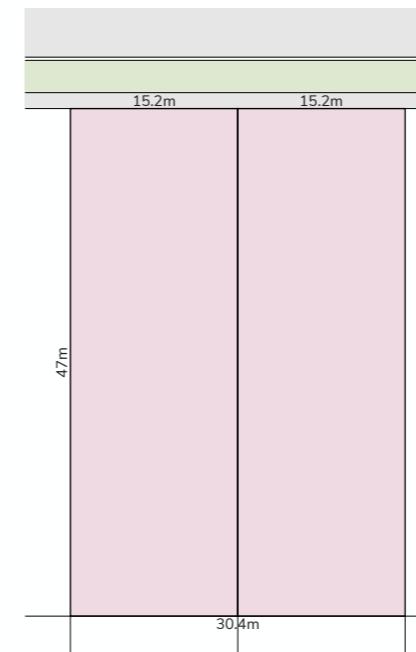
Lot 4
13.5m x 42m, 567m²



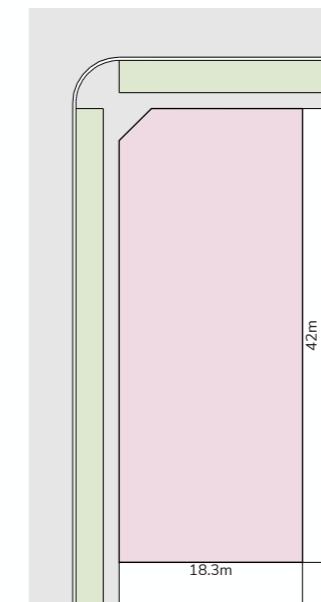
Lot 5
15.2m x 37m, 562m²



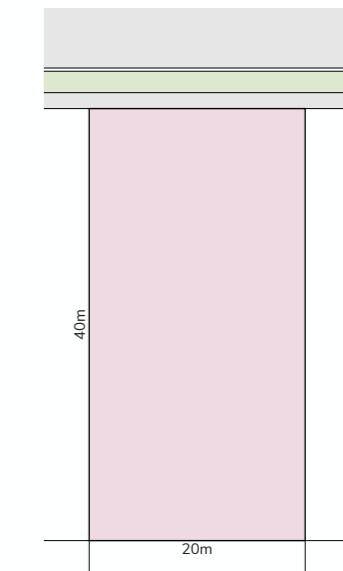
Lot 6
**30.4 x 47m, 1,216m²
(consolidated 15.2m wide lots)**



Lot 7
18.3m x 42m, 769m²



Lot 8
20m x 40m, 800m²



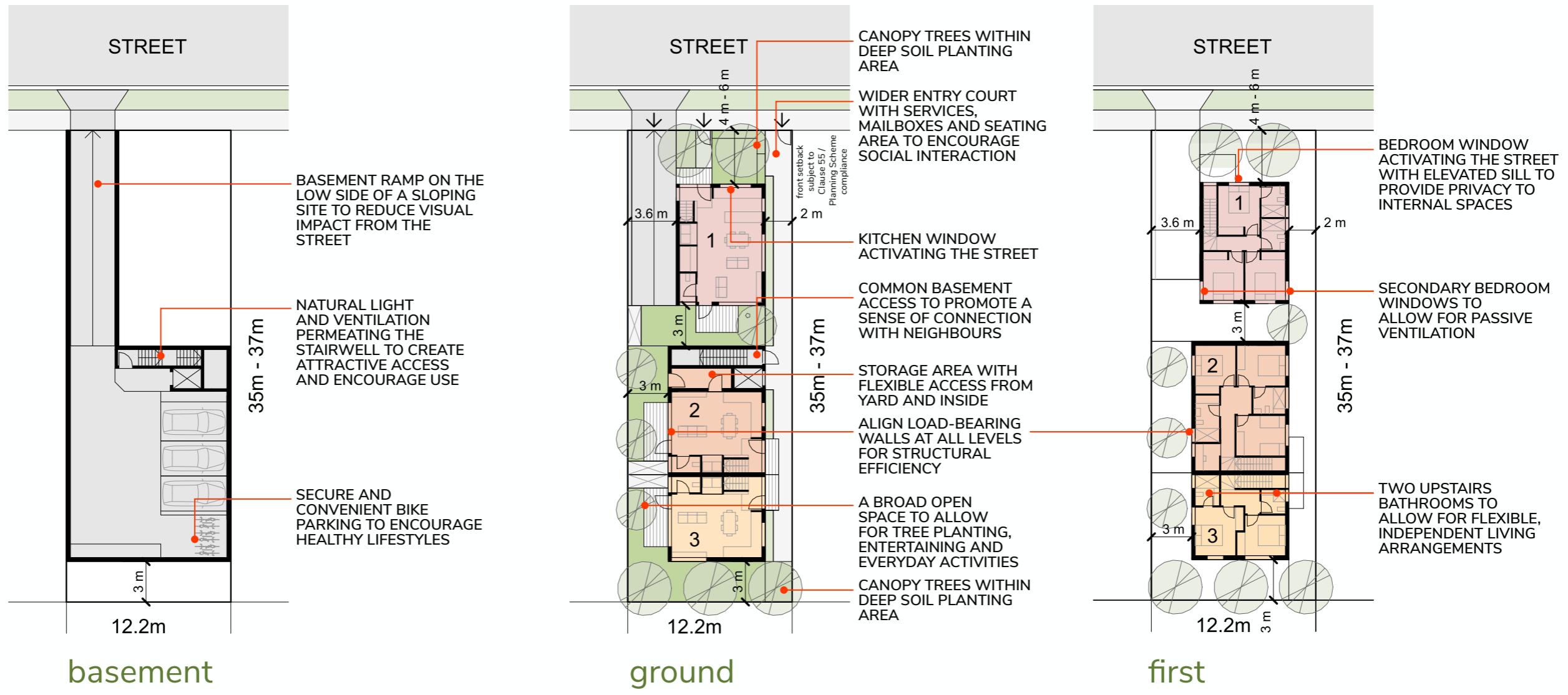
Lot 1: Exemplar on a 12.2m wide lot with shared basement parking

12.2m x 34m = 415m² / 2 storeys / 3 dwellings / 2-3 bedrooms

This exemplar maximises ground floor living space with parking, services and storage tucked away in the basement.

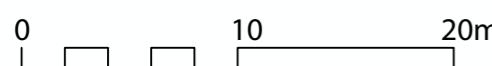
The straight forward form is an elegant solution for a constrained site.

The common access and stair help to build a sense of community within the development.



Opportunity to vary

Car stackers could be used where additional parking spaces are required.



Locate the north point within the shaded area for better solar access

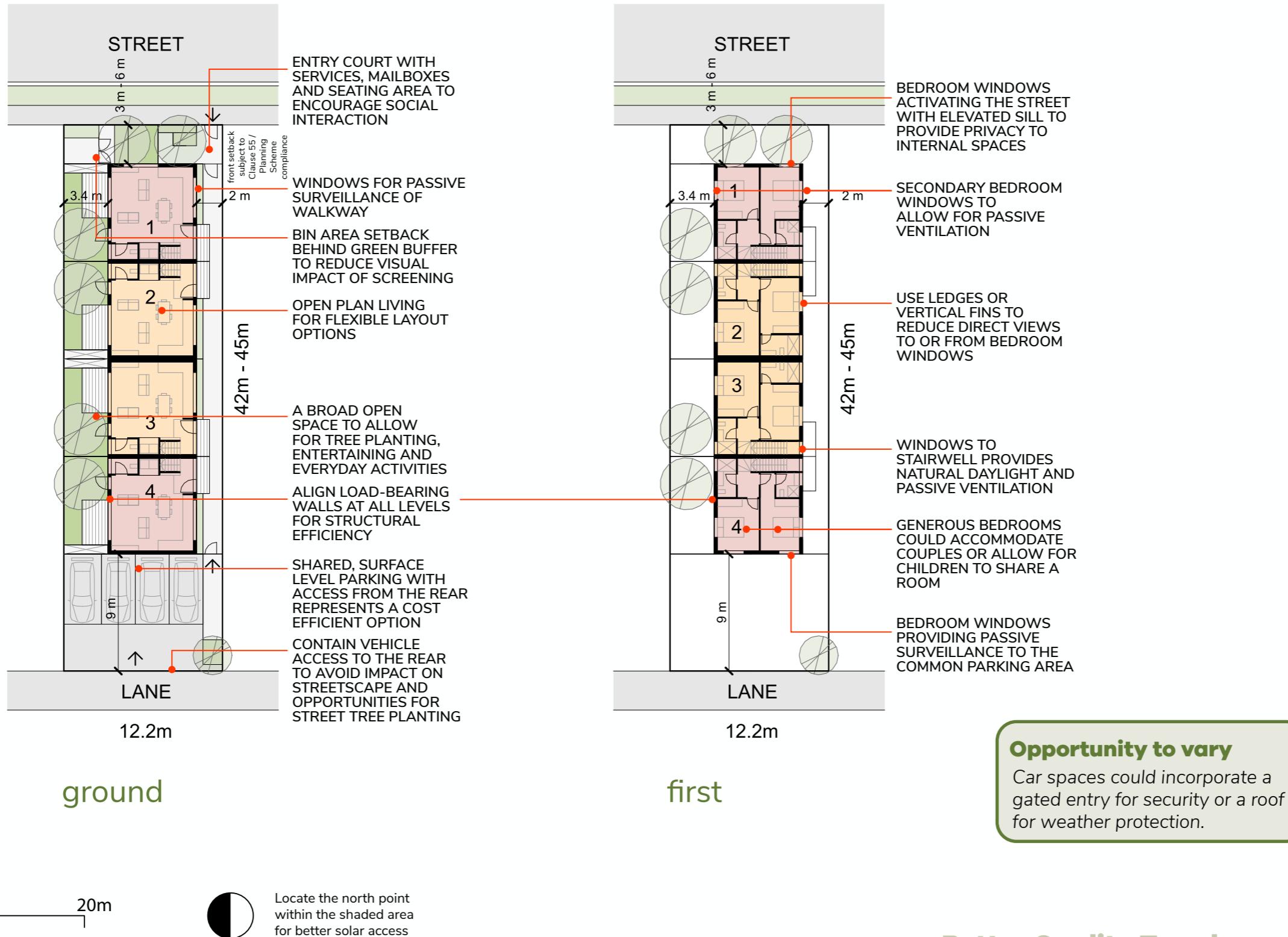
Lot 2: Exemplar on a 12.2m wide lot with shared parking from laneway

12.2m x 42m = 512m² / 2 storey / 4 dwellings / 2 bedrooms

This exemplar reduces dependence on ground floor parking and access, allowing all dwellings to enjoy ground floor open space and living.

The uncomplicated layout and efficient use of the site make these modest townhouses attractive and easy to build.

Rear parking access allows for attractive presentation to the street.



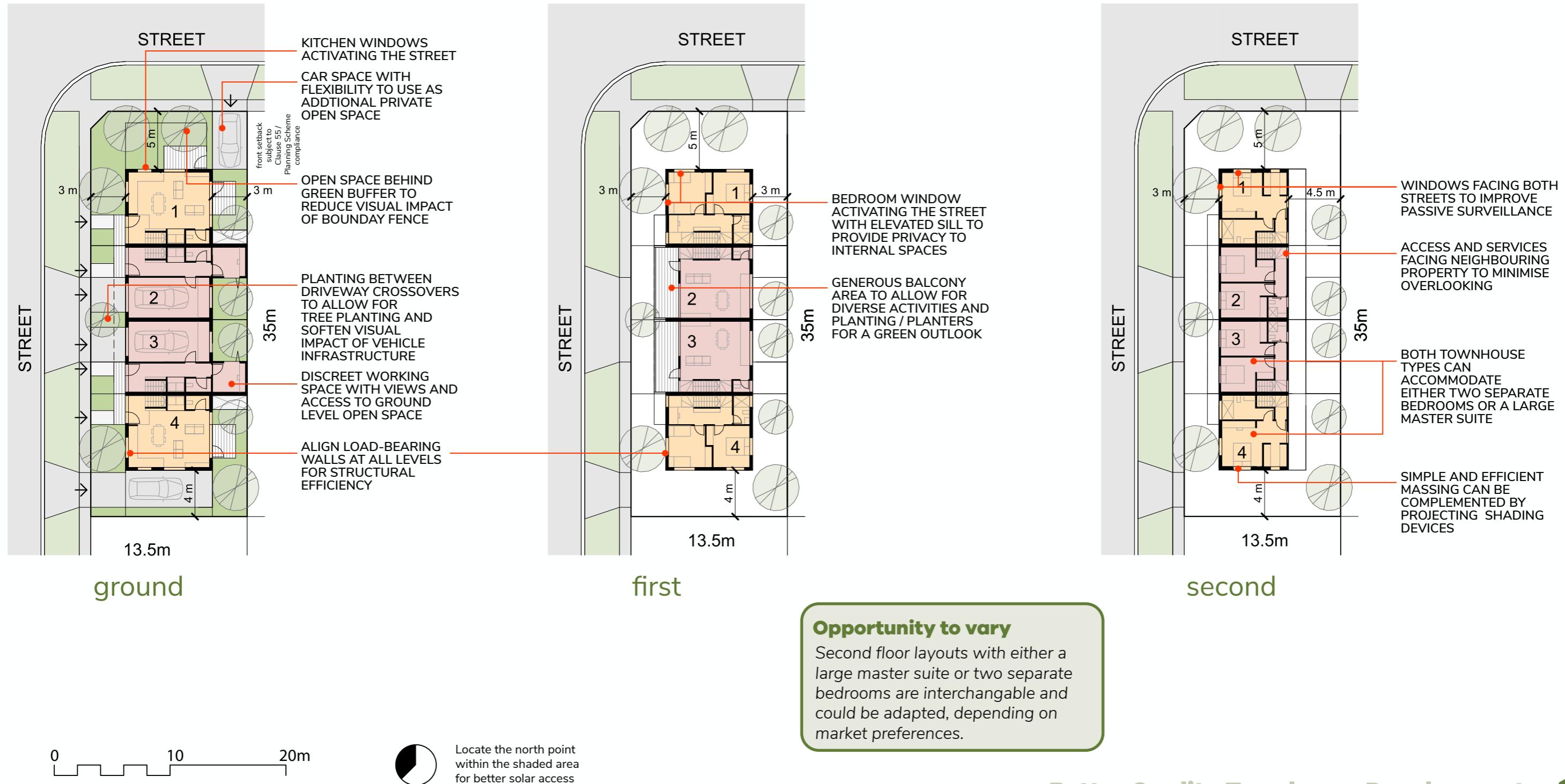
Lot 3: Exemplar on a 13.5m wide corner lot with private garages

13.5m x 35m = 473m² / 3 storey / 4 dwellings / 2-3 bedrooms

This exemplar optimises its corner position to provide a ground floor open space for all dwellings.

The building form is efficient and rational while balcony articulation helps to modulate the form and provide outlook / activation to the street.

A mix of ground floor living and reverse living will appeal to diverse demographics.



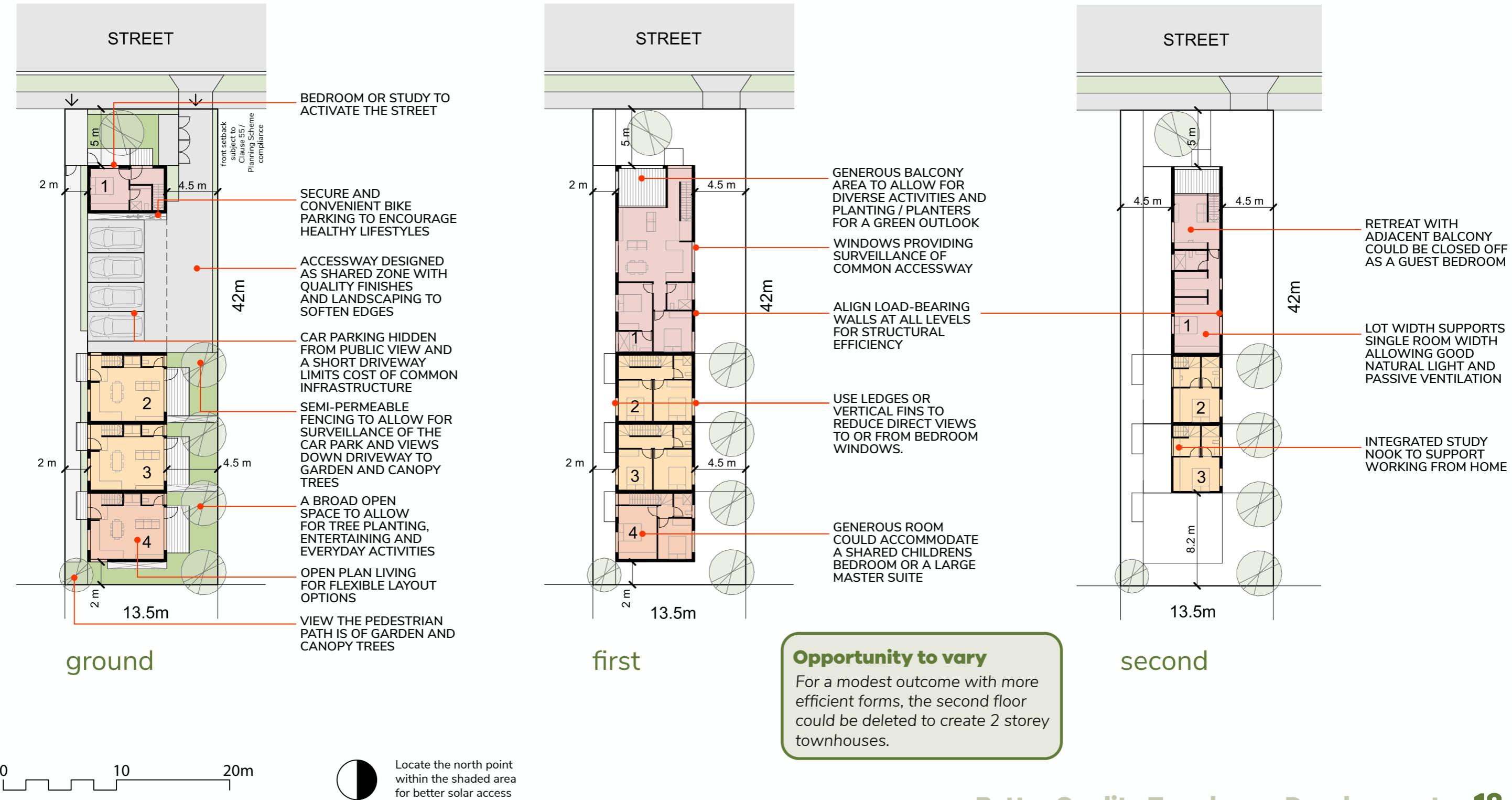
Lot 4: Exemplar on a 13.5m wide lot with covered parking from common accessway

13.5m x 42m = 567m² / 3 storey / 4 dwellings / 2-4 bedrooms

This exemplar minimises driveway length by up to 50% allowing more ground floor open space to the rear townhouses

The form maximises the available building envelope while incorporating undercover parking for all dwellings.

The configuration shows how a variety of dwelling sizes can be provided within a simple footprint, depending on needs and context.



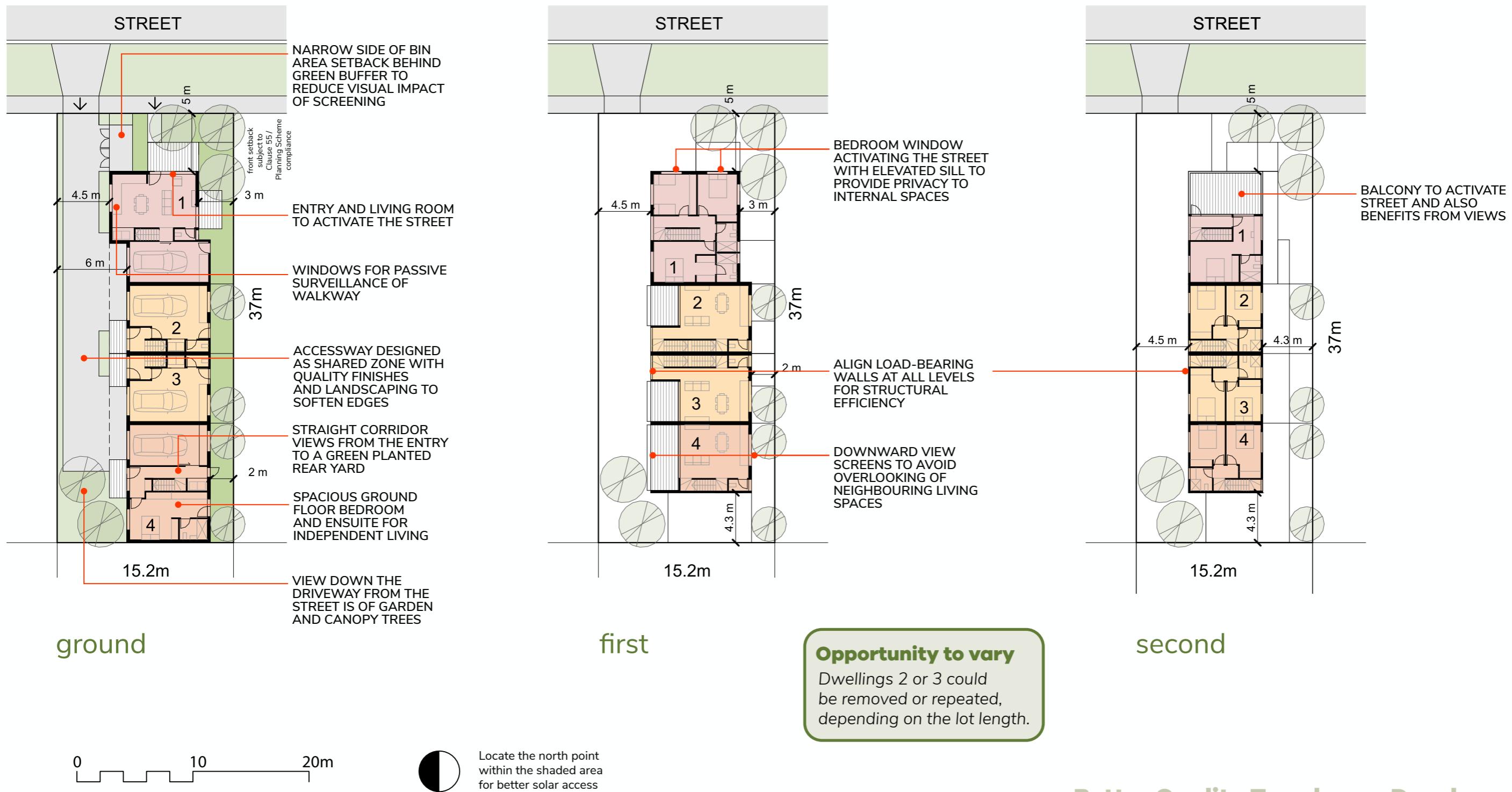
Lot 5: Exemplar on a 15.2m wide lot with private garages from common accessway

15.2m x 40m = 608m² / 3 storey / 4 dwellings / 2-4 bedrooms

This layout provides ground floor open space for the larger dwelling (1) and direct views from the entry to rear yards from other dwellings.

The forms are well setback from side boundaries, minimising need for overlooking measures and dwellings 2/3 + 4 could be interchangeable, depending on lot length.

The different ground floor bedroom, ground floor living room and reverse living configurations will appeal to diverse demographics.



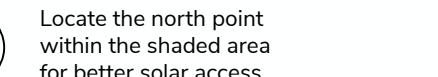
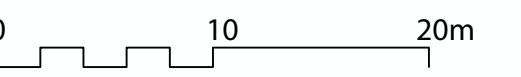
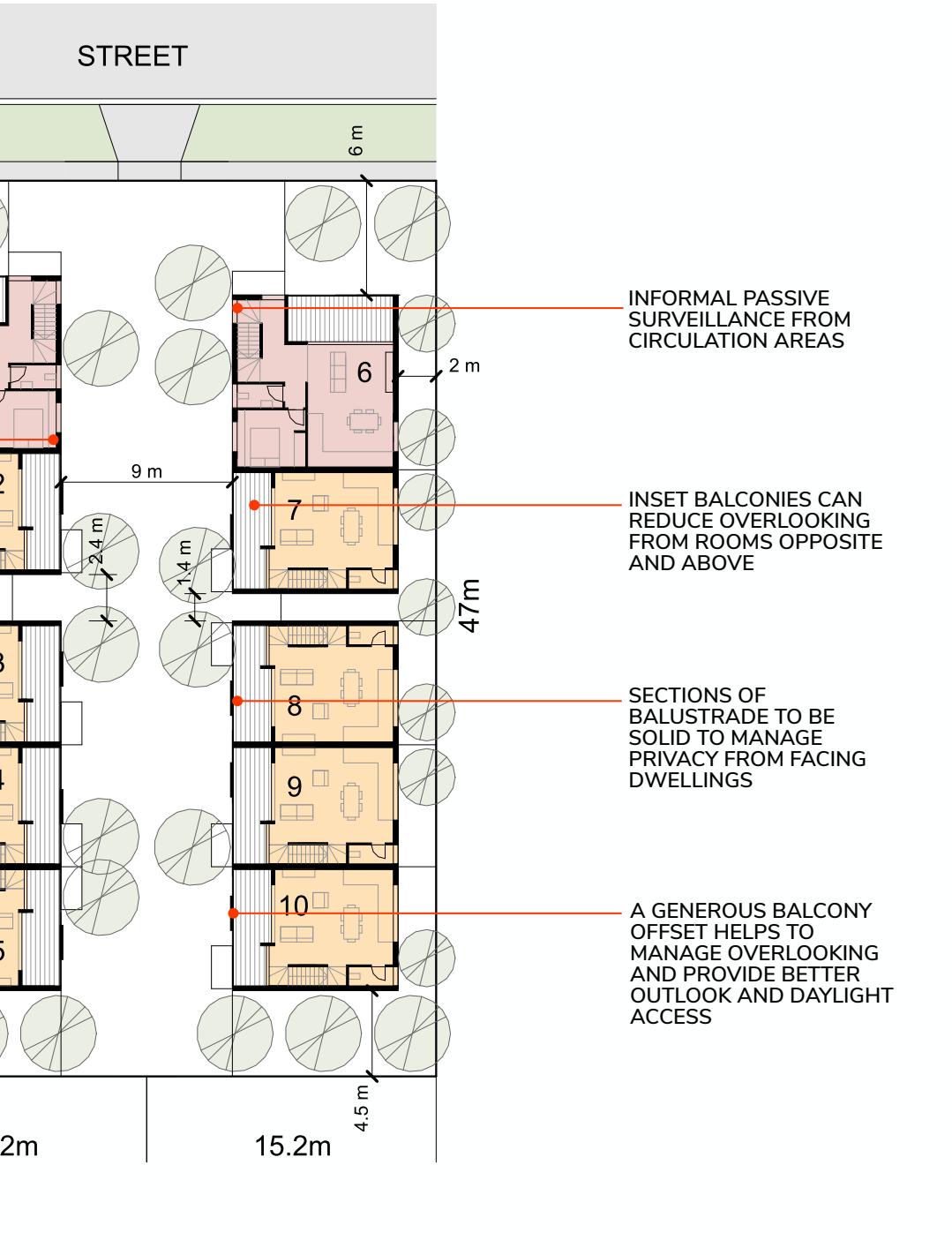
Lot 6: Exemplar on consolidated 15.2m wide lots with private garages

30.4m x 47m = 1,216m² / 3 storey / 10 dwellings / 2-4 bedrooms

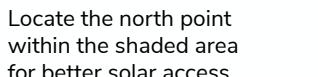
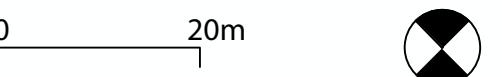
This exemplar turns its primary spatial constraint into an asset, by making the driveway a 'place' with activation and space for canopy trees.

The simple, repeatable form will appeal to those wanting to increase yield through lot consolidation, while maintaining high amenity.

The rear townhouses have modest layouts and will appeal to those wanting to be part of a community and build relationships with neighbours.



Locate the north point within the shaded area for better solar access



Locate the north point within the shaded area for better solar access

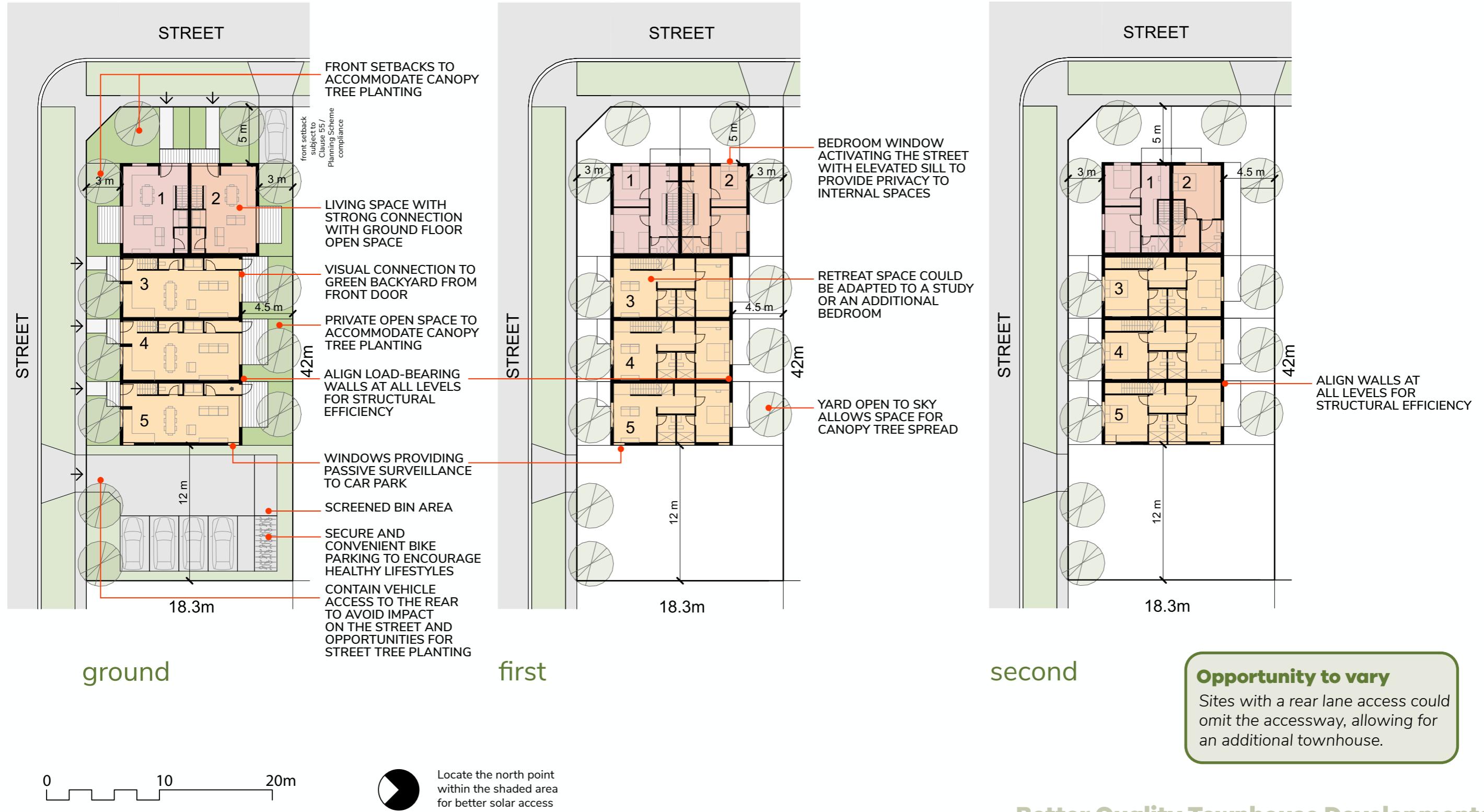
Lot 7: Exemplar on a 18.3m wide corner lot with shared parking

18.3m x 42m = 769m² / 3 storey / 5 dwellings / 3-4 bedrooms

This exemplar minimises vehicle crossovers, allowing for green, treed outlook to the rear (dwellings 3, 4 + 5), and frontages to the street.

The form is very simple and efficient, allowing all dwellings to have private yards and surface level parking as cost effective option.

Each townhouse feels private, with its own sense of address. Consolidated car, bins and bikes will encourage neighbourly interactions.



Opportunity to vary

Sites with a rear lane access could omit the accessway, allowing for an additional townhouse.

Lot 8: Exemplar on a 20m wide lot with private garages + shared accessway

20 x 40m = 800m² / 3 storey / 4 dwellings / 3-4 bedrooms

This exemplar consolidates vehicle access to the centre of the site to free up space for private and common yards, and canopy tree planting.

The symmetrical forms are subtly articulated to achieve more generous yards, outlook from balconies and private deck areas.

These larger townhouses are distinctive with generous layouts and a shared yard area to encourage group socialising or gardening.

