Option B: Urban Intensification

Make more intensive use of sites within the existing urban areas by:

(a) Relaxing amenity standards and reducing off-street parking provision in existing neighbourhoods close to District and Neighbourhood Centres, resulting in higher overall densities (meaning smaller houses and apartments would make up a greater proportion of the new homes built in those locations).

(b) A further emphasis on City Centre living as a part of a strategy for mixed use within the area bounded by the Inner Ring Road and Kelham/ Shalesmoor (this could include some taller buildings in certain locations).

(c) Relaxing policies for the protection of open space to enable some surplus urban green space to be developed, with the money generated being invested in improving the quality of remaining areas.

This option involves making more intensive use of land within the existing urban areas through a combination of building at higher densities, building more housing, (including taller buildings) in the City Centre and developing surplus open space. It has much in common with Option A but would also involve some changes to current policies.

The URBED report suggests that this type of higher density development could also be achieved as part of urban remodelling (see Option C below). Furthermore, it suggests that the Handsworth urban extension (an extension to the Waverley development already taking place in Rotherham borough, see Option D below) could also be developed at higher densities than currently required under the existing Local Plan.

URBED suggest that where there is demand for development, neighbourhoods tend to intensify. However, there can be a considerable degree of misunderstanding about what modern high-density housing looks like or should look like. The tower blocks of the 1960s and 1970s are often to blame for this with poor design and housing types inappropriate to people's needs and aspirations. However, without higher density development we will need more land for the homes we need and some of our communities are less likely to have commercially sustainable services such as local shops and public transport.

There are a number of features popular with residents and house builders that often lead to lower density housing. These include:

- Parking strategies with the majority of spaces provided on the plot rather than on the street.
- Housing typologies such as semi-detached houses, rather than apartment or terraced forms.
- Larger gardens including space in front of properties for car parking.
- Street types and privacy distances controlling the separation of fronts and backs of properties from their neighbours.
- On–site public open space and the inclusion of existing landscape features.
- Larger property sizes.

Contemporary approaches to developing at higher densities seek to address these attributes in new ways with innovative house types, high quality public space, and alternatives to private car ownership. The Plan should be seeking to promote this balance and achieve an optimal density for each site. This should take into account the neighbourhood type (City Centre, urban, suburban, and rural), the local character of the area, and the accessibility to public transport and community facilities and services.

Whilst apartment living can be preferable for some groups (for example young professionals, students and older people), others such as families with children, often prefer housing with ground floor access to outdoor spaces and accessible car parking near to the home. There are a number of developments around the city addressing these different demands and achieving higher densities without incorporating large proportions of apartments. Examples of high density developments in Sheffield are shown opposite and the layouts on pages 57 and 58 show how higher densities could be achieved on a more suburban site.

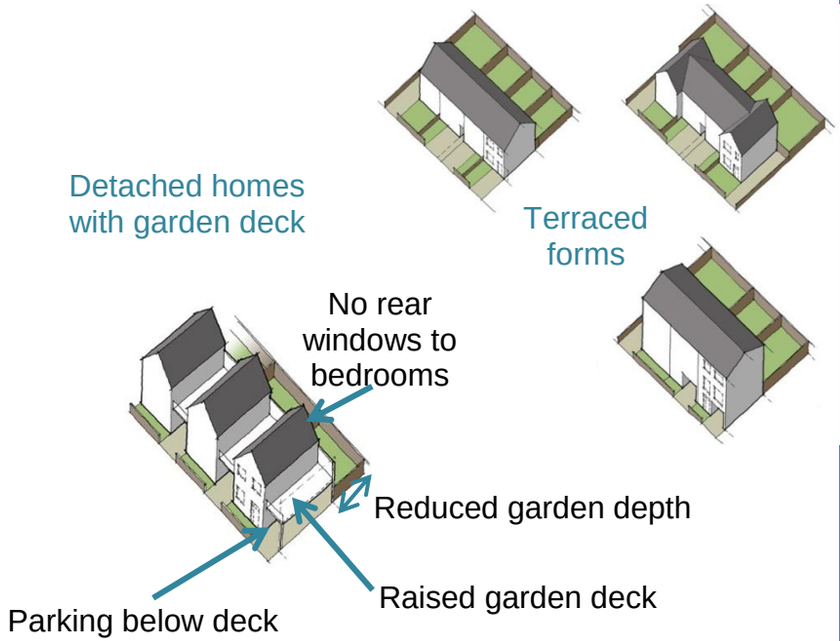
Scowerdons Developer: Home, 45+ homes per hectare

Little Kelham Developer: CITU, 80+ homes per hectare

Elevate Developer: Kier Living, 40+ homes per hectare

The images opposite and overleaf illustrate what three different higher density scenarios would look like on a suburban site. The following specifications would be the same for all three density scenarios:

- Layouts that achieve a more efficient structure with no leftover spaces or single sided highway.
- Homes that meet the Government's space standards.
- A combination of short terraces (4-8 homes), and semi-detached or detached homes with gardens decks and reduced rear garden depths.
- Parking on-plot: 2 spaces for 3/4-bed homes, if possible to the side of properties.
- 16m back-to-back and 14m front-to-front of new properties; 21m back-to-back of existing properties.
- A minimum of 50 square metres of private garden per property.
- Rear gardens backing on to other rear gardens to enable better security.
- Development which follows contours to enhance access and reduce the need for split-level properties.



175 homes at 37 homes per hectare

- 20% 2-bed, 80% 3-4 bed houses at 2 and 3 storeys.
- 10% of the site designed as open space with homes fronting on it.

215 dwellings at 45 homes per hectare

- 45 dual-aspect apartments at 3 storeys high which is in scale with surrounding housing.
- No open space on site.

- 2 bed terrace (2 storey)
- 2&3 bed terrace (2 storey)
- 3/4 bed terrace (3 storey)
- 3&4 bed detached (2-2.5 storey)
- 2 bed flats (3-4 storey)

260 dwellings at 55 homes per hectare

- 120 single-aspect apartments are introduced in less noisy locations. Blocks are larger in scale.
- Undercroft and courtyard parking for the apartments.
- 10% of the site designed as open space with homes fronting onto it.
- 95% of houses are in a terraced forms.

City Centre Intensification

Over the period 2005-2008, Sheffield was able to deliver approximately 1,000 new homes per year through densification in the City Centre (see Figure 8). The latest Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA, 2015) identifies capacity for around 7,700 homes on sites within the City Centre.

The URBED report suggests that a further 10,000 homes could be delivered in the City Centre, over and above the 7,700 already identified in the SHLAA. This would be achieved by replacing single-storey employment uses in areas such as the St Vincent's Quarter with more intensive employment and residential uses.

In the City Centre there is an opportunity to significantly increase densities as part of a strategy to maximise urban potential and promote tall buildings in certain locations, with only some alteration to the current policy approach[58]. Such a strategy may rely on a sustained student housing market and/or a growing market amongst young professionals attracted by growth in financial and professional services. This type of development may also necessitate reconfigured retail provision to redevelop previous retail land use (indeed, such conversions might also lead to housing at a smaller scale, e.g. flats above shops).

Our view is that delivering 17,000 homes over 20 years (an average of 850 per year) could be too ambitious. Whilst that level of delivery was achieved in some years before the economic downturn, it was heavily dependent on the boom in apartments and student accommodation. We think that it could be difficult to sustain that rate of delivery over the period of the new plan because the demand for further student flats is likely to level off, and moves to introduce more family houses in certain areas the City Centre will mean that some sites will be built out more slowly and at lower densities. However, we think it is reasonable to estimate that a further 2,300 homes (in addition to the 7,700 already identified in the SHLAA) could be provided in the City Centre by 2034. This equates to 10,000 homes with an average build rate of 500 homes per year.

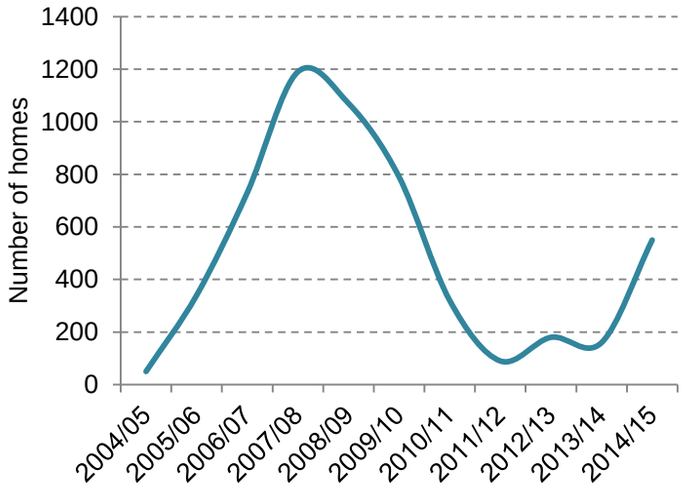


Figure 8: Home completions in the City Centre, 2004- 2015[59]

[58] Building heights in the City Centre are currently guided by the Urban Design Compendium which the Council intends to review.

Allowing Development of some Open Space

The URBED report suggests reviewing the quantity, quality and utility of public open space, particularly on lower density Council estates which have generous open space provision. A separate report identified 18 such estates in Sheffield[60]. URBED's assertion is that quality is more important than quantity and the money generated from the sale of the land could be invested in improving the quality of remaining areas (which may be of poor quality).

URBED's conclusion is that 4,000 new homes could be provided by redeveloping up to a third of the land in Council estates. To some extent this is already happening in Sheffield through, for example, the work of the Sheffield Housing Company in the Parson Cross area of the city.

Our view is that URBED's assessment potentially includes some overlap with the urban capacity already discussed under Option A above. However, we think there could be potential to develop some surplus open space for housing. The most recent citywide assessment of open space[61] showed there are 3884.72 hectares of open space in Sheffield. Developing just 1% could provide about 1,550 more homes[62], although this would only be acceptable where open space is surplus, and could generate income which could be used to improve the quality of the remaining areas.

We think that Option B could deliver:

- 1,200 extra homes provided through a combination of raising density requirements on sites already identified in the SHLAA (but excluding sites in the City Centre, Kelham, and areas undergoing urban remodelling (covered under other Options).
- 10,000 homes in the City Centre and Kelham.
- Approximately 1,550 extra homes by building on surplus open space (assuming 1% of existing open space were to be developed).

There are some additional **advantages** of creating a compact city through more intensive development:

(a) People are more likely to live close to local facilities and services.
(b) More smaller homes would mean meeting the growing need for smaller homes, partly in relation to the growing older population.
(c) Increases the viability of local businesses and facilities and the vitality of local centres.
(d) Increases the viability of public transport for higher densities in City Centre or close to district and neighbourhood centres.

[59] Data from Annual Monitoring Reports and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments
[60] Northern Way Residential Futures (HCA, 2009)
[61] Assessment of Open Space, Outdoor Sports and Recreational Provision for Sheffield (October 2008)

[62] 38.8 hectares developed at an average density of 40 homes per hectare

(e) Reduces journey lengths and the need to travel, particularly by car, and promotes more walking and cycling and the use of public transport.
(f) Money generated from the development of surplus of open space could be invested in improving the quality of remaining open spaces.
(g) Reduces the land needed for development.

There are, however, some further **disadvantages** which are:

(a) Greater pressure on existing infrastructure and difficulty accommodating additional schools and health facilities in urban areas.
(b) It would result in the loss of some open space in the existing built-up areas, potentially leading to adverse impacts on health and air quality, and surface water runoff and climate change resilience.
(c) A potential over-supply of smaller homes (particularly apartments) which might not meet housing needs.
(d) Possible harm to the character of some established residential areas.
(e) Many of the larger house builders prefer to build lower density housing and may be unprepared to build higher density homes (because they perceive there is lower demand for that type of housing).
(f) It could give rise to higher levels of traffic congestion and road safety issues due to an increase in on-street parking.

Overall, our conclusion is that Option B could provide additional 4,550 homes. This comprises:

- 3,000 extra homes in the City Centre and Kelham.
- 1,200 extra homes provided through a combination of raising density requirements (by about 10%) on sites outside the City Centre and relaxing planning standards on existing sites
- Approximately 1,550 extra homes by building on surplus open space.

Consultation questions

Q26: (a) Should the densities required by the current Local Plan on sites outside the City Centre be increased?

(b) If so, by how much?

Q27: Will there be sufficient demand for higher density housing in the locations suggested (City Centre, around District Centres, close to railway stations and other public transport hubs)?

Please provide reasons for your answer

Q28: What are the main barriers to delivering higher densities?

Q29: What would encourage people to choose to live in higher density housing?

Q30: (a) Do you agree with our estimate that 10,000 more homes could be provided in the City Centre by 2034?

(b) If not, what evidence do you have to justify a different figure?

Q31: Whereabouts in the City Centre should tall buildings be located?

Q32: Should parking policies be changed so that less off-street parking is required (meaning more parking on-street)?

Please provide reasons for your answer

Q33: Subject to fitting in with the local character and site conditions, should developments on greenfield or Green Belt sites generally be required to a higher density such as above 40 homes per hectare?

Please provide reasons for your answer

Q34: Do you agree that surplus open space should be developed for housing, with the proceeds of development invested in improving remaining open space?

Please provide reasons for your answer