3.01 Project Brief & Design Approach

Project Brief

Following earlier pre-application submissions by Linea Homes, Amin Taha Architects were appointed to develop a new design for the site. Camden Planning Officers made it clear that they sought a high quality architectural response for the site.

Design Approach

Amin Taha Architect's approach to the brief was to completely re-appraise the site in terms of the scale, character and typology of the new building. We felt that the site deserved a building of architectural quality constructed with high quality materials that responded to the area's particular character and heritage buildings. The prominent location next to the Overground station merited a marker building that could signal the local transport interchange and at the same time deliver improvements to the immediate public realm around the site which was at present in a poor condition.

The emerging concept designs were welcomed by Camden Planning and Design Officers, which led on towards wider consultation and ultimately the preparation of this planning application scheme.

Amin Taha Architects sketch proposal - Finchley Road frontage

3.02 Design development - Massing

The massing of the scheme responds to a variatey of factors that give rise to the unique building form and arrangement.

Daylight and Sunlight Envelope

The building envelope is constrained by the Daylight and Sunlight amenity requirements to the surrounding properties at Petros Gardens and Lithos Road to the south of the site. These factors result in the need for the building to significanntly reduce in height to the southern boundaries to 4 storeys.

Response to Townscape

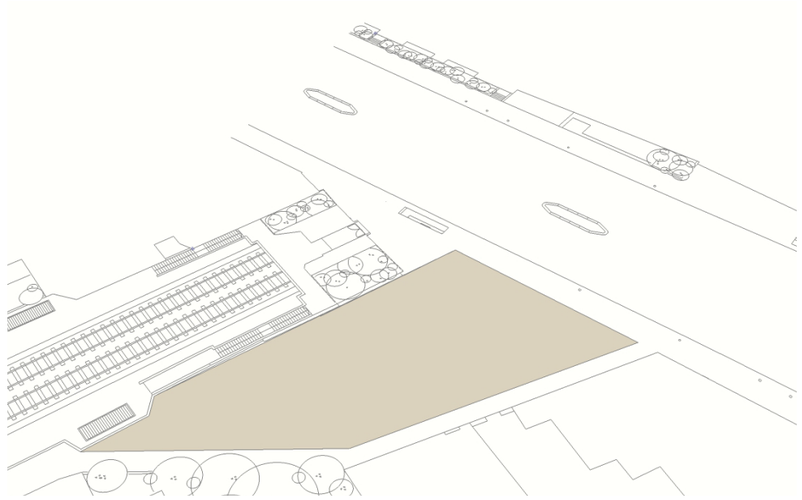
The building increases in height on the Finchley Road elevation adjacent to the station and is intended to act as point of reference on the street, signalling the local transport node and associated urban centre. The block adjacent to 315 Finchley Road steps down by 3 floors to reflect the smaller scale of the Victorian terrace to the south.

Split Blocks

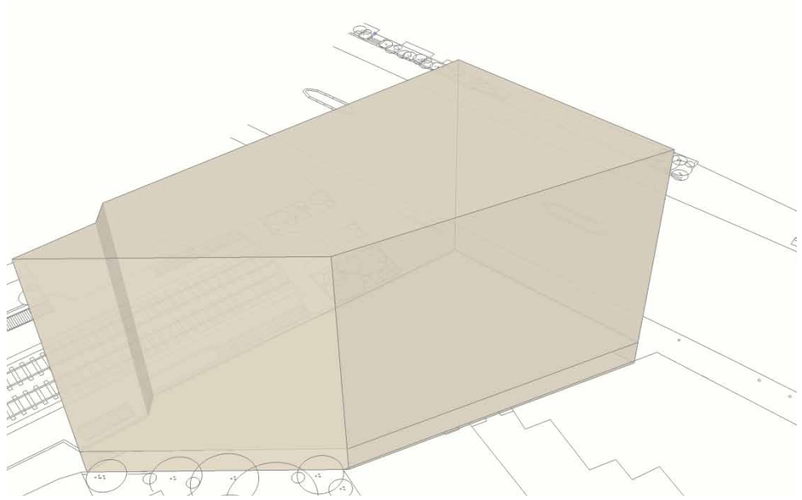
The building mass has been broken down into a series of individual blocks that reflect the scale of the typical plot size of the surrounding Victorian terraces. This approach not only breaks down the scale of the building as a whole but also allows the common circulation spaces between to benefit from natural light, through ventilation. and views out between the blocks.

Landscaping and Amenity

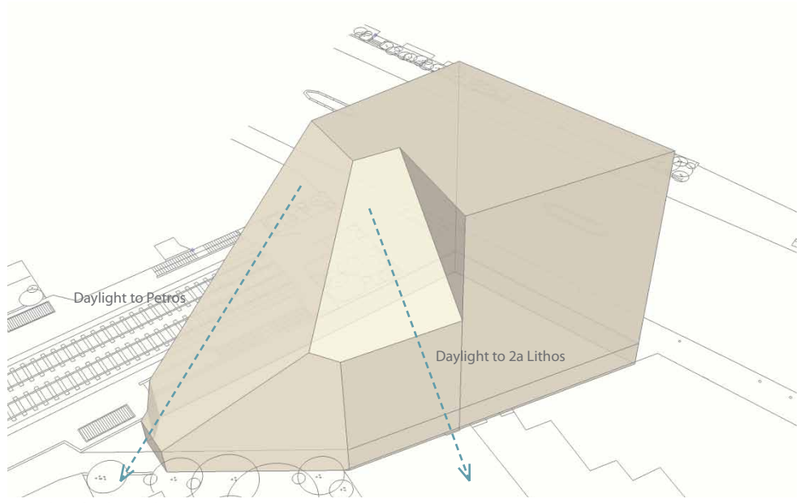
To the rear of the site the arrangment of the blocks allows for a significant new landscaped garden space off Billy Fury Way. In addition to this, further amenity spaces are provided by a series of roof terraces arranged accross the top of the blocks as the scheme sets back from the southern boundary.



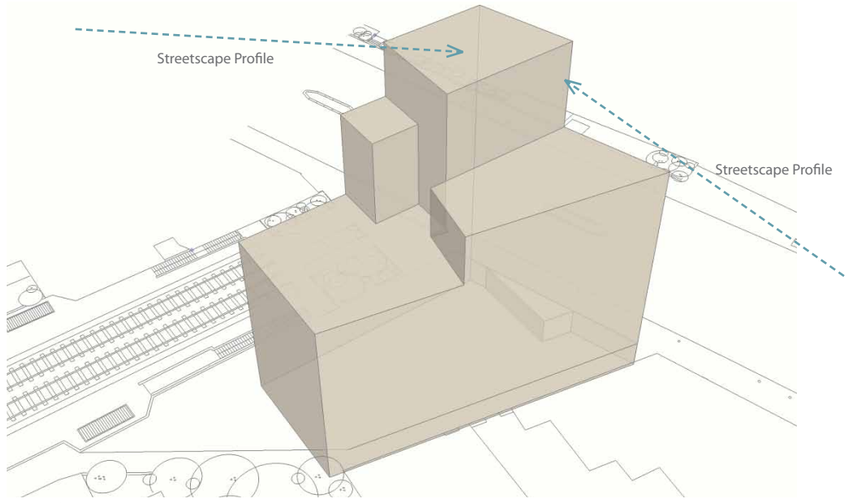
01. Site Boundary



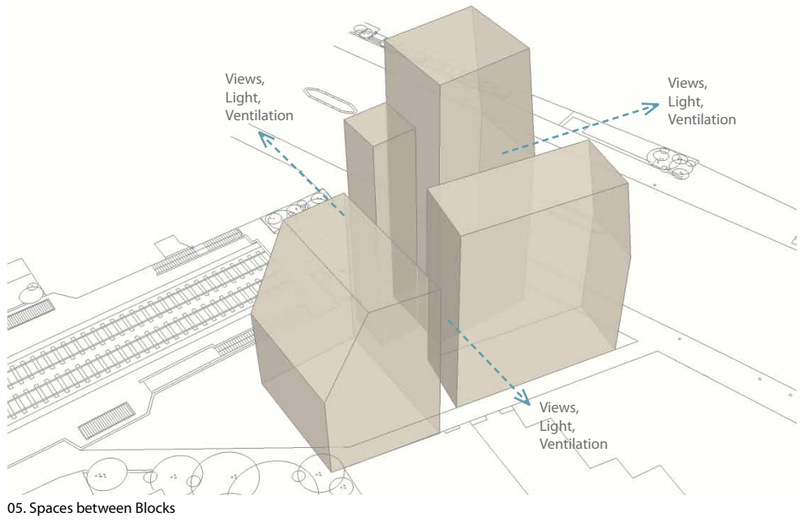
02. Total Site Envelope



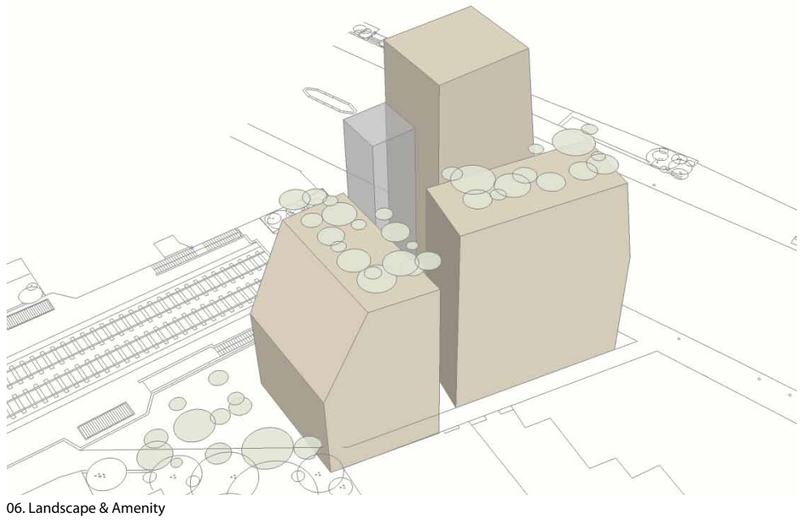
03. Rights of Light Envelope



04. Envelope response to Townscape



05. Spaces between Blocks



06. Landscape & Amenity

3.03 Design Development - Site Response

Site Arrangement

Due to the constraints imposed by the proximiity of the adjacent Overground railway line the residential accommodation on the northern boundary is orientated away from this boundary to the south.

Split Blocks

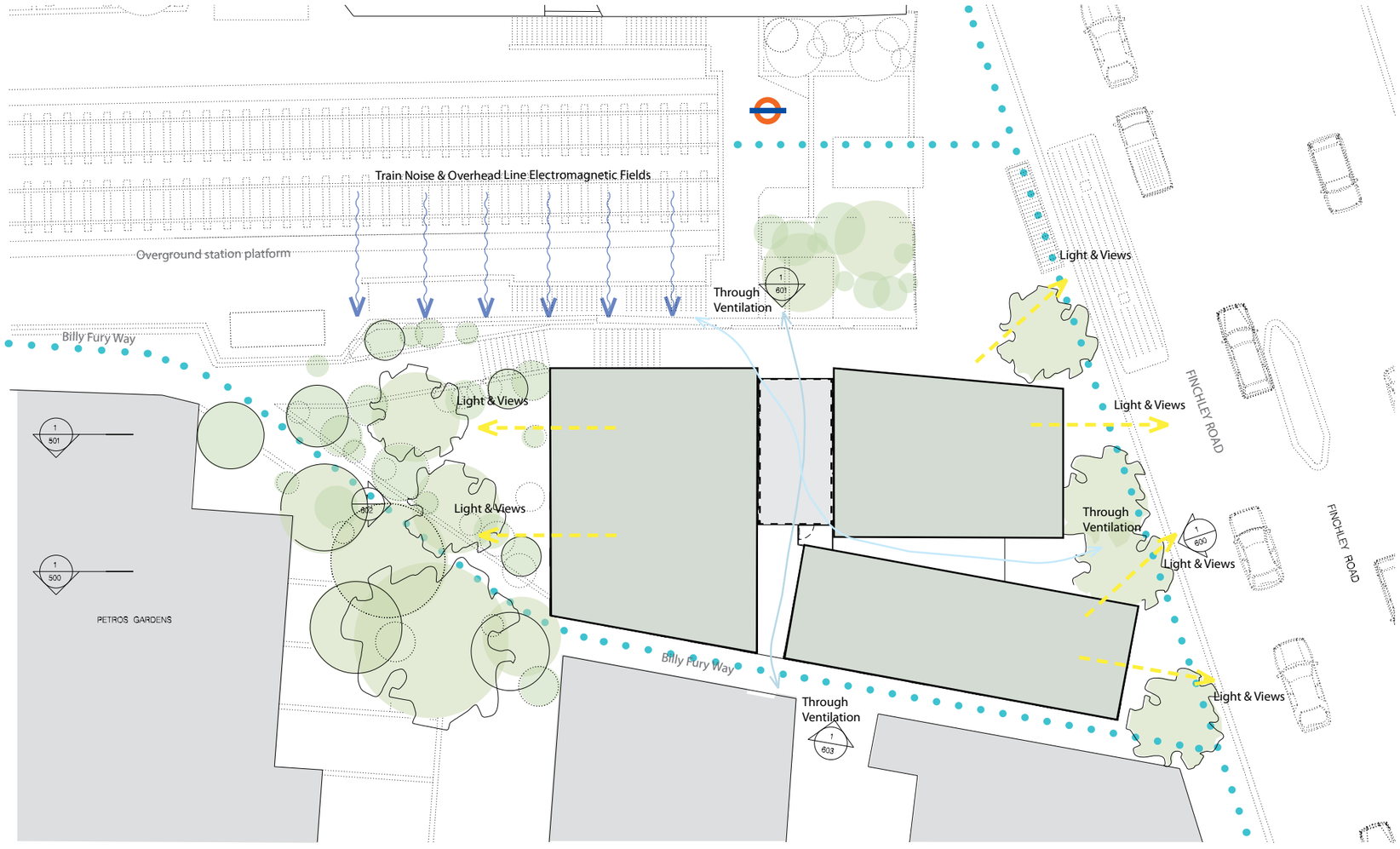
The building mass has been broken down into a series of individual blocks that reflect the scale of the typical plot size of the surrounding victorian terraces. This approach not only breaks down the scale of the building as a whole but it also allows the common circulation to be positioned in the spaces between the blocks of accomodation. These shared common areas will benefit from natural light, through ventilation. and views out between the blocks to the surrounding gardens and townscape.

Access & Circulation

The main residential core is positioned against the northern boundary with the residential entrance located adjacent to the station on Finchley Road. From this stair /lift core horizontal access to individual apartments is via deck access walkways positioned between the principle blocks of accommodation. These areas are treated as unheated, semi external spaces, protected from the weather but with natural ventilation and views out through the gaps between the blocks.

Outlook and Aspect

The majority of residential units benefit from dual aspect outloook. The units facing Finchley Road have winter gardens that act as an accoustic buffer to the traffic noise on the highway. The units to the rear of the site are orientated towards the west with views over the new landscaped garden areas off Billy Fury Way.



Site Response - Typical Upper Floor Arrangement

3.04 Urban Strategy & Public Realm

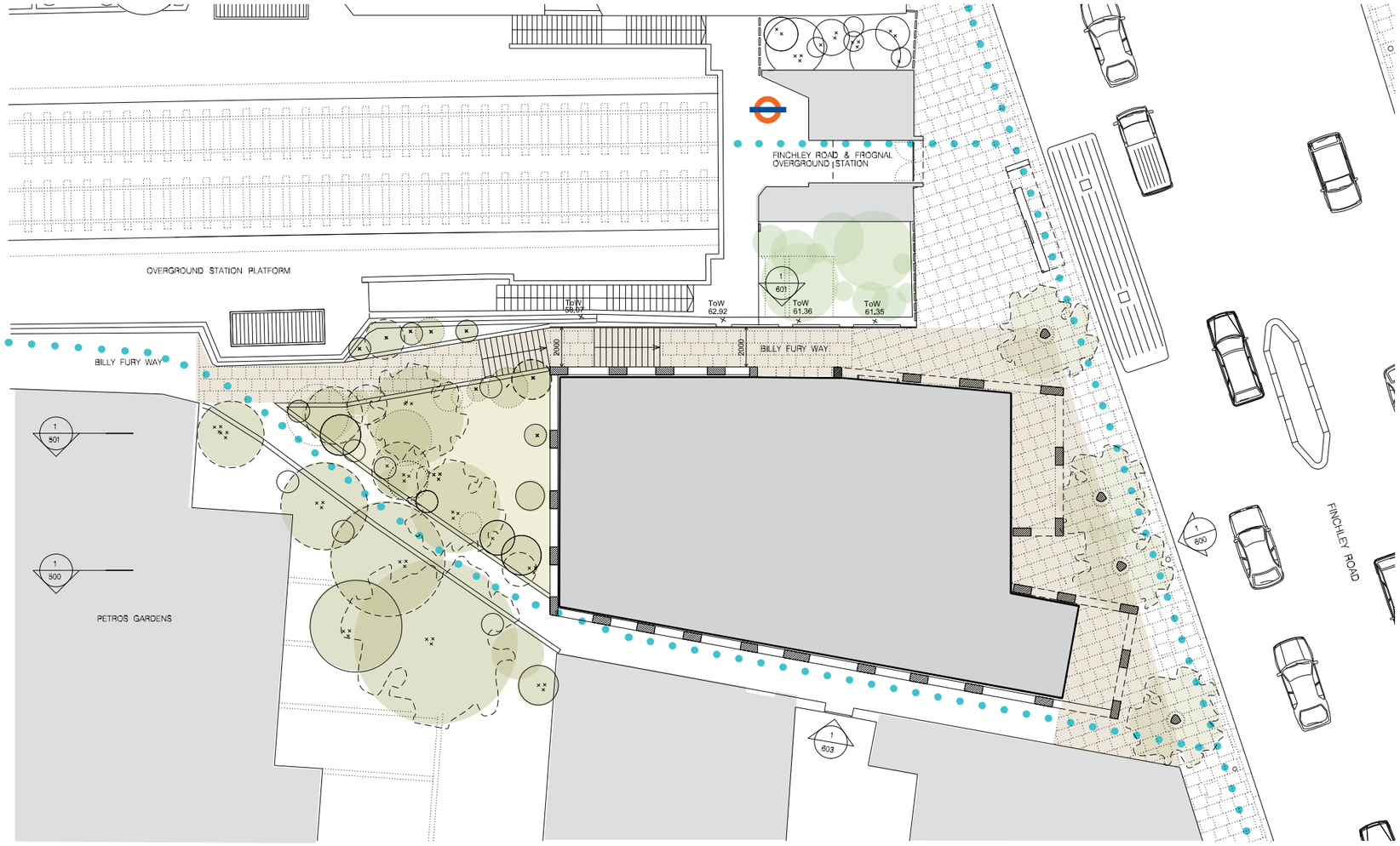
Our design strategy for the urban environment at street level has been to significantly enhance and improve the existing public realm conditions to both Finchley Road and Billy Fury Way.

Following feedback from Camden Planning & Design Officers and local residents during the public consultation period we have incorporated a new section of Billy Fury Way that runs along the northern boundary of the site. This new route offers a more direct, overlooked and open route than the current dark and narrow alleyway that runs to the south of the site. The new route incorporates ambulant-disabled accessible steps due to the significant change in level from the front to rear of the site. It is proposed that the existing southern section of Billy Fury Way will be retained as an alternative accessible route for wheelchair and buggy users.

On Finchley Road the building frontage is stepped and set back from the predominant street building line providing significant new areas of public space. The building envelope is further set back behind the building line creating a colonade in front of the new ground floor retail unit and residential entrance adjacent to the Overground station. It is proposed that these spaces will allow the planting of specimen trees that will further soften the streetscape and add much needed greenery to this stretch of Finchley Road.

Along the northern boundary with Billy Fury Way a new landscaped garden and amenity space has been created. This space will be heavily planted with specimen trees and shrubs, and changes in level that provide privacy for the lower ground level units that open onto the garden.

Both the ground floor retail unit and the residential units that overlook the southern section of Billy Fury Way are designed to provide neighbourly overlooking to a currently oppressive alleyway which is intended to make the existing section of footpath a much safer and pleasant place to pass through.



Proposed ground floor footprint

3.05 Streetscape, Height and Distant Views - Design Tools

This section is intended to set out the Urban Design Tools employed to firstly survey and analyse the current street scene and surrounding urban network. The origins of these tools and how they are used to enhance the immediate district by adding coherence and legibility to the townscape and our experience of it. These tools were used to inform the appropriateness of height in this location.

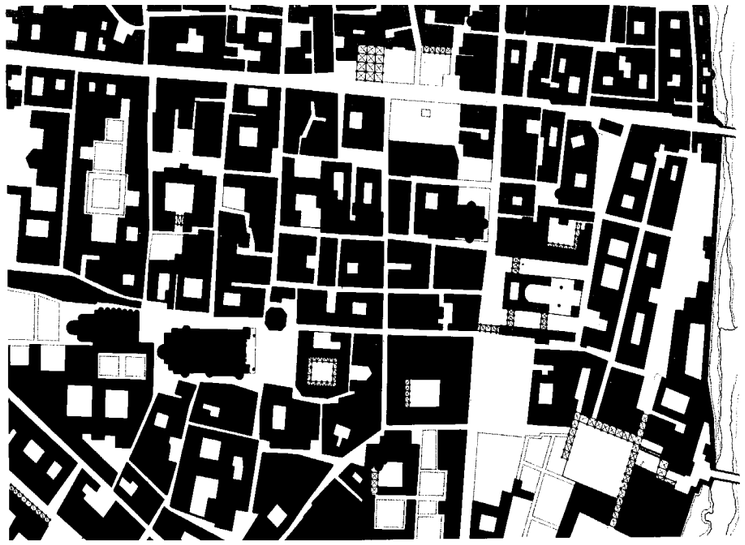
Hierarchy + Legibility in Urban Networks

Prior to WWII all urban expansions and new developments followed classical grid block methods even if these were laid out in radial form as with Ebenezer Howard's 1902 Garden Cities. A grid of streets forming a circulation network whose edges would define private land and therefore building edges. With public spaces simply being the removal of some private plots/blocks and public buildings either bordering these or set-back from the grid/block line to provide space for a larger group of citizens to pass or assemble than immediate adjacent private plots.

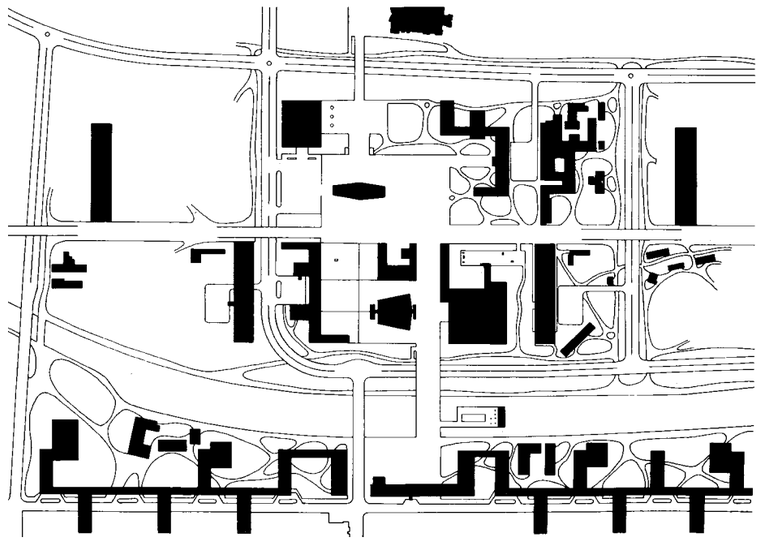
This model remained the same from the earliest Mesopotamian cities ((5300BC) to Egyptian new towns (Akhenaten's New City 1353 BC) and Greek new colonies (Ionia and Thrace 800BC) through imperial Roman, British and American settlements. Super grids direct and circulate horse and cart traffic, their sub-division into smaller grids directs pedestrians and mules to front doors of courtyard houses. Set-backs from the grid or deliberate misalignments and aberrations signal public buildings of special significance. These are mostly shared buildings and squares for commerce, religion and of course dominating, observably observing fortified palaces. Developed over 7000 years it appears from further archaeological evidence in South America (pre-Columbian Terra Preta mega cities) and East Asia (canal cities) to be somewhat intuitive. Forming legible urban networks that allow good connectivity and give clear hierarchy and definition to geographical districts.

Modernism, Experimentation + Reappraisal of past Urban Models

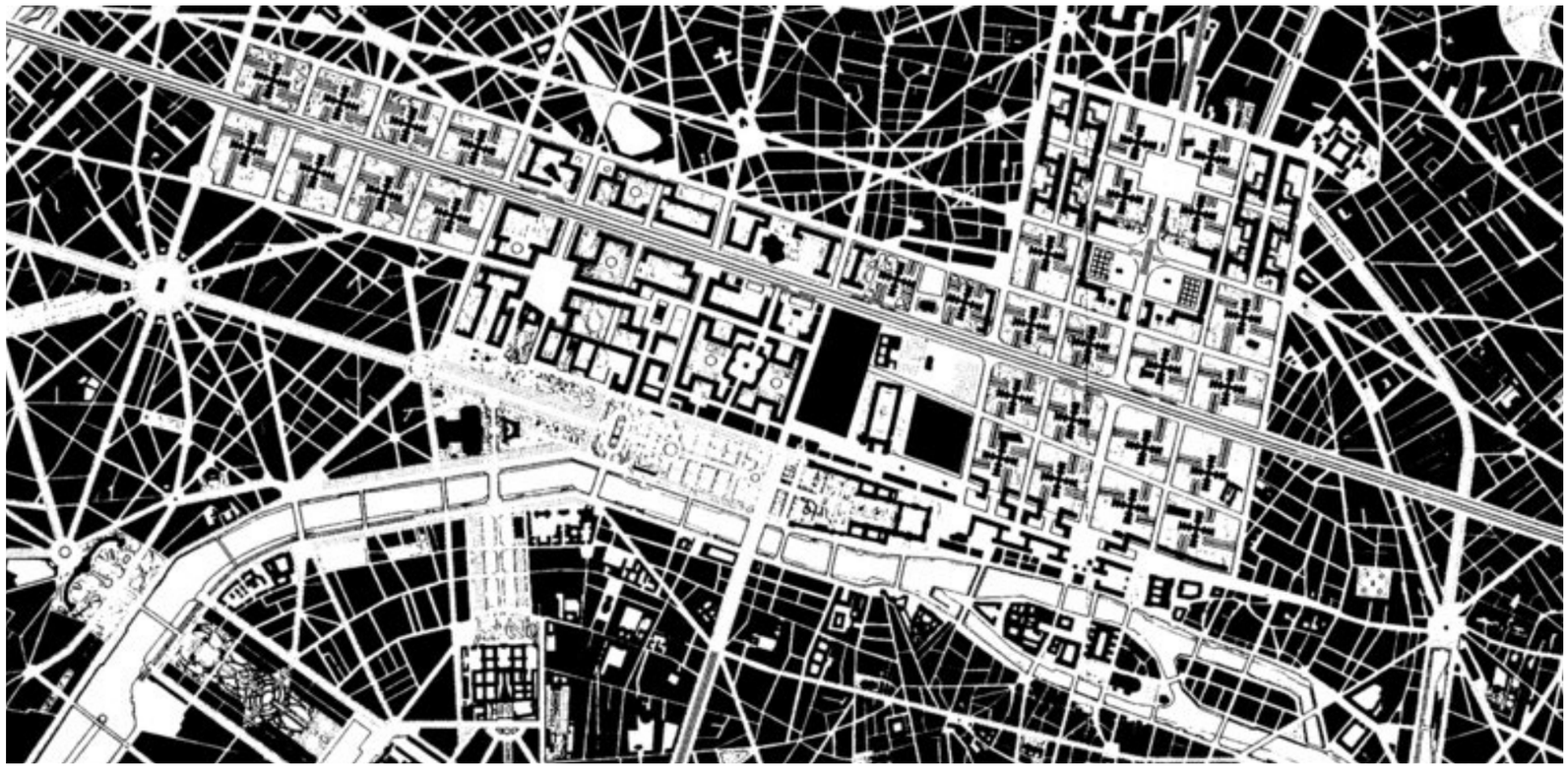
Late 19thC and early 20thC demands for universal suffrage lead initially to the gradual collapse of Central and Eastern European empires and with them the wholesale rejection of their traditional values. Replacing what was perceived as symptomatic of a corrupt past with Modern political systems, philosophies, culture, art, music, architecture and urban design. Well into the mid 20th C untested point and ribbon blocks in free parkland became the standard future vision across the globe. Where established city grains were in the way they were either cleared or ignored leading to awkward disjunctions still suffered across many towns and cities. However within one generation of post-second world war and arguably utopian based urban development, analysis of its failings by a generation without a memory of war lead in no short part by Jane Jacobs (The Death and Life of Great American Cities) reintroduced urban planners and architects to the richness and complexity of traditional urban growth.



(Giambattista) Nolli Plan_analysis of Rome's public spaces and buildings 1784



Saint-Die 1945_generator for Harlow New Town 1947



Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse_Plan Voisin for Paris 1925

3.05 Streetscape, Height and Distant Views - Design Tools

Understanding Hierarchy + Legibility

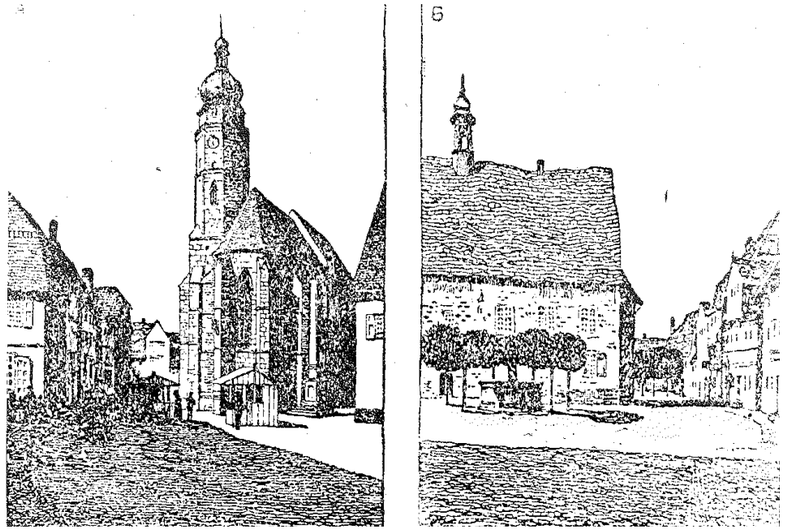
Kevin Lynch's *Mental Mapping* highlighted the importance of landmarks for navigating towns and cities and giving the urban web of streets their hierarchy and legibility. Building on the work of Raymond Unwin, Gordon Cullen's *The Concise Townscape* used an illustrated technique to demonstrate the same theory through sequential spatial experiences that *'deflect'* and *'punctuate'* our journey. Aldo Rossi and Colin Rowe gave a deeper theoretical understanding to our need for the picturesque underpinned with technical justification and reasoning.

Rob Krier reminding us that four thousand years ago the Greeks and Egyptians planned New Towns with a hierarchy of public spaces and enough flexibility to allow for successful growth and development. Then how these models were carried forward by the Romans, rediscovered for 17th and 18th century imperial expansion into the new world and entirely dropped in the post war period for understandable associations with a failed political past.

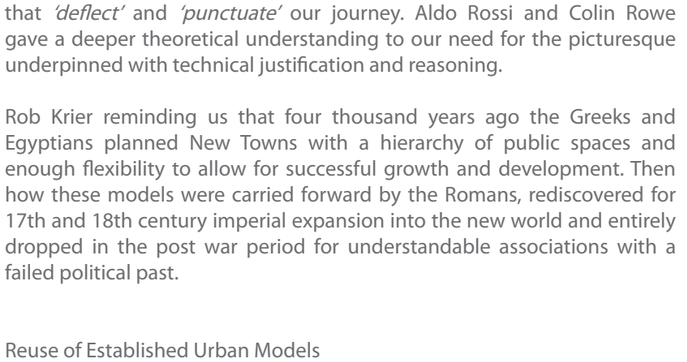
Reuse of Established Urban Models

The late 20th and early 21st century brought with it a post-structural reform unshackling urban designers and architects from such associated meanings. Allowing the application of proven solutions, the use of the picturesque and townscape models able to add to and further enrich existing streetscapes without the need to imagine the new additions contingent of the entire street being bulldozed to replicate the new.

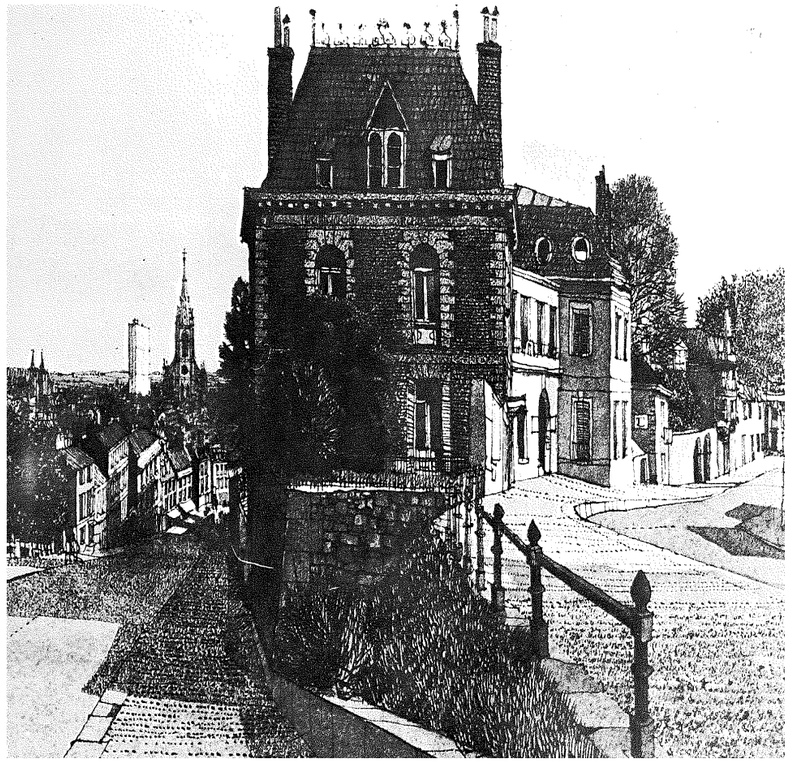
The site is immediately adjacent to both public rail and bus transport nodes offering an opportunity to signal the location with a public landmark similar to traditional district libraries, town halls, banks, religous buildings or rail stations. In order to form and integrate an appropriate addition to Finchley Road and its immediate neighbourhood our intention is to use these tools to firstly define the site as a public transport 'node', study the broader context, measuring the roofline, streetscape 'paths' and building 'edges', before gauging both appropriate height and potential edge conditions.



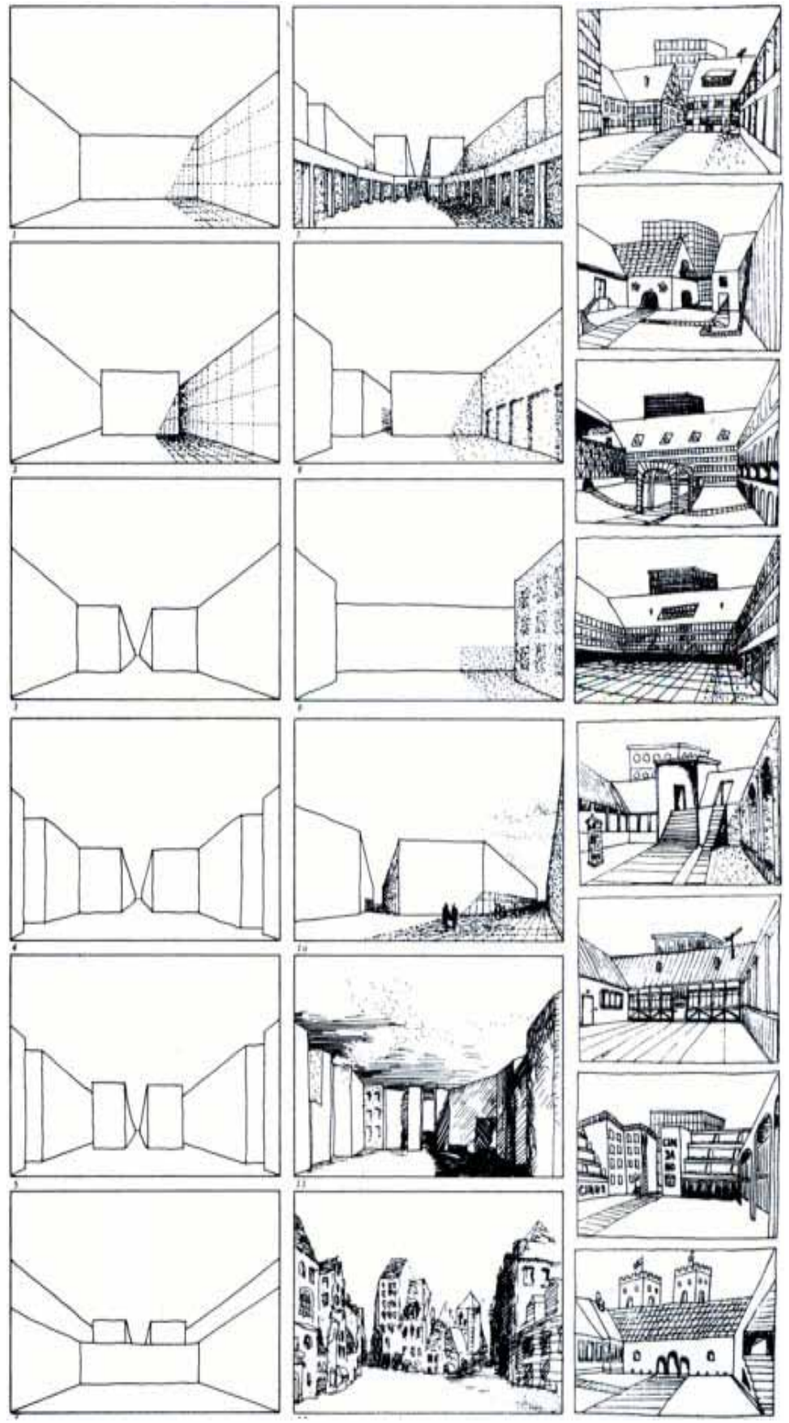
Raymond Unwin's original 19th century drawings highlight definition, hierarchy and direction of urban space.



Kevin Lynch defining the urban vocabulary



Gorden Cullen illustrating deflection, punctuation and direction within streetscape.



Rob Krier's macro to micro leading to definition and refinement.

3.05 Streetscape, Height and Distant Views - Design Tools

At microscale (Site Footprint + Environs) the influences of outlook, noise, daylight/sunlight and servicing are analysed and begin to give early and logistical form and massing to the site, the description for which is given in the chapters with the Design + Access Statement. At the macroscale the site needs to be understood within the wider urban context to define a subservient, equal or dominant role giving purpose to it within the streetscape.

Surveying the Streetscape for Townscape View Assessment

This analysis begins with a physical and pictorial survey of building types, uses, heights, materials, elaboration of details as celebration of use or wealth and modulation from kerb edge. Pedestrian, bus and car journeys were undertaken to and from the site north and south along Finchley Road and into adjacent streets and public spaces. Photographs and notations of the survey criteria taken and included within different sections of the Design+Access Statement with strategic urban analysis included within this section. Namely streetscape, rooflines, and building to kerb edges (section 2.0 Site+Context)

To the top right are three photographs highlighting both roofline and building edges using the townscape analysis tools discussed on the previous page. The photographs illustrate that from a distance of more than 75m if the site were to be at the same height as neighbouring buildings or two floors taller it would still be perceived lower or the same as the adjacent projecting gables. To signify the station location as a landmark it would need to rise to ground plus nine floors in order to be meaningfully noticed within the roofline and therefore mark the location as a public space and transport node. At this scale becoming similar in height to the residential tower marking the location of the Jewish Community Centre and therefore not dominating it or the immediate neighbourhood. The mid placed illustration is a key to photographs in Appendix A, also illustrating the proposal at ground plus nine floors, taken along Finchley Road and neighbouring streets. These were used to again gauge possible heights and broken down massing to ensure only part of the footprint (15%) rises to ground plus nine floors to become a slender pinnacle instead of extending over the full site. Additionally, these viewpoints ensured that the landmark is only effective as such once you arrive on Finchley Road and is not a looming presence on any neighbouring residential roads or conservation areas.

Street + Pavement Modulation

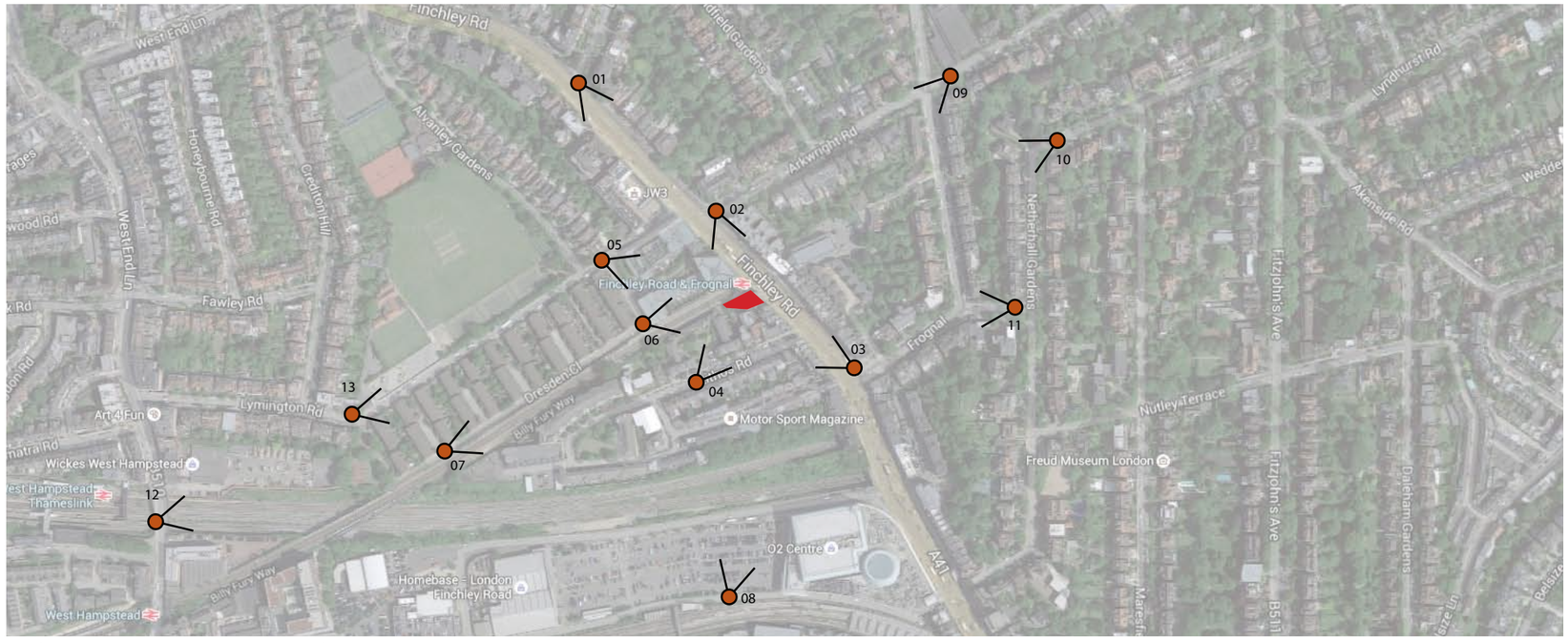
As illustrated in the previous pages the use of set-back, colonnade and punctuation can be used to modulate the pavement edge and streetscape in order to deflect and direct view lines and pedestrian movement. Giving significance to an enlarged public space immediately adjacent to the station entrance and bus stops and therefore signalling this circulation/transport node within the locality.

In conclusion the urban analysis encouraged massing and height to serve as a slender landmark when on the arterial road and seeking direction while at the same time limiting height and mass to ensure any potential development does not create an unwelcome presence across the surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

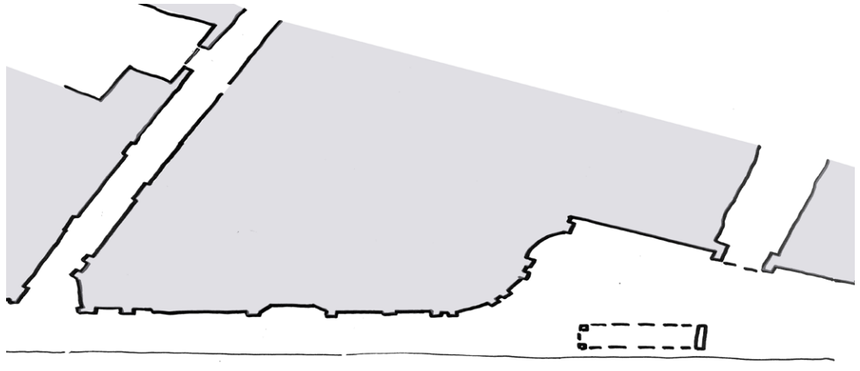
Finchley Road Streetscape, looking south

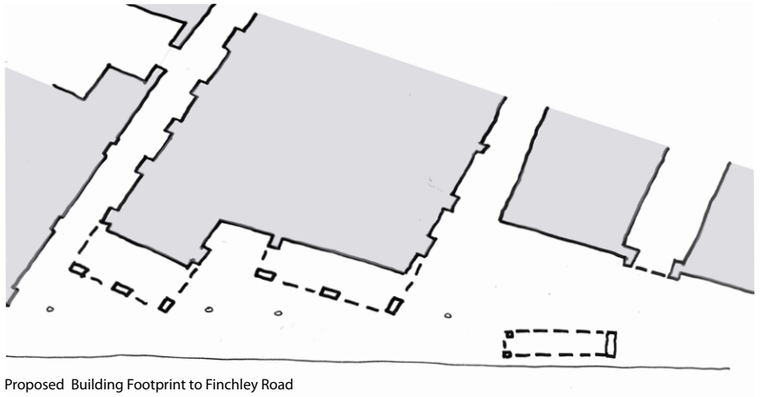
Finchley Road Streetscape, looking south


Finchley Road Streetscape, looking north



Key Plan - Townscape View Assessment - See Appendix A


Existing Building Footprint to Finchley Road


Proposed Building Footprint to Finchley Road

3.06 Streetscape & Transport Node Signal

Existing Finchley Road Context Elevation

Proposed Finchley Road Context Elevation

3.07 Design Development since Pre-Application

Site Arrangement & Massing

Although the principle massing of the scheme is unchanged from the pre-application scheme, we have re-appraised the rear of the building and simplified the form of the rear block which now follows the building line of the block to the immeadiate south of the site at 2a Lithos Road. By doing this we have been able to enlarge the area of new garden space to the rear of the building and reduce the proximity of the proposal to the neighbouring properties at Petros Gardens. The rear facade has a sloping profile across the upper floors which reduces the scale of the building when viewed from the west of the site and maintains good levels of daylight and sunlight to the neighbouring properties at Petros Gardens.

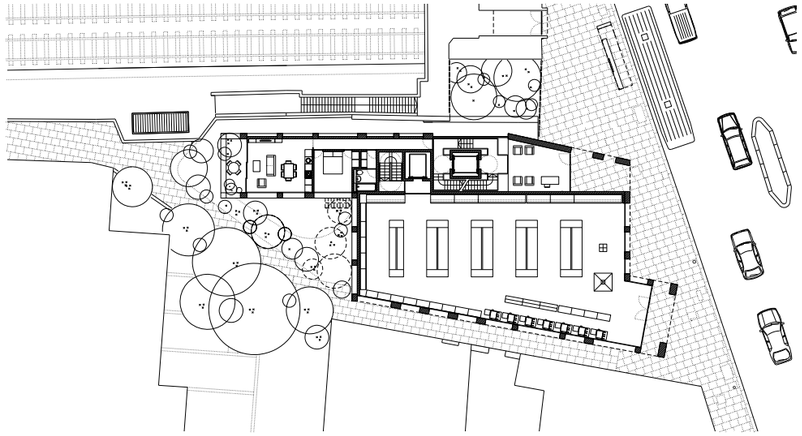
The two blocks at the front of the site are differentiated in height by 3 storeys to respond to the scale of the Victorian terrace to the south of the site and the station to the north. The lower southern block, at 7 storeys, although higher than the adjacent terrace , is set back from the predominant building line and separated from it by the existing Billy Fury Way alleyway. This block therefore reads as distinct from and secondary to the Victorian terrace when viewed from the south on Finchley road. The set back of the building and the raking form of the upper 3 floors further softens and reduces it's scale within the wider streetscape.

Billy Fury Way

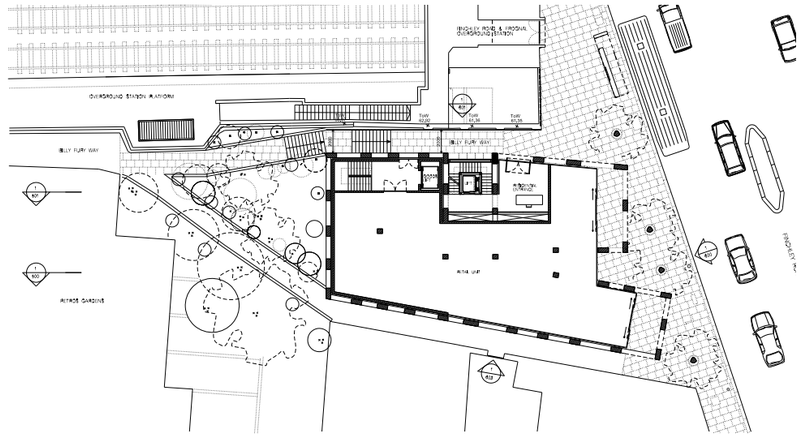
Following feedback from Camden Planning Officers and local residents during the public consultation period we have incorporated a new section of Billy Fury Way that runs along the northern boundary of the site. This new route offers a more direct, overlooked and open route than the current dark and narrow alleyway that runs to the south of the site. The new route incorporates ambulant-disabled accessible steps due to the significant change in level from the front to rear of the site. It is proposed that the existing southern section of Billy Fury Way will be retained and improved as an alternative accessible route for wheelchair and buggy users.

Access & Circulation

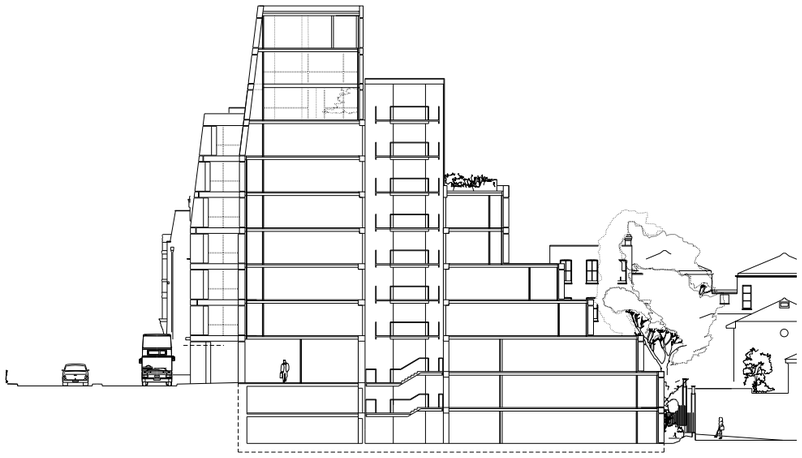
Following feedback from Camden Planning Officers we have incorporated a goods lift that allows bins to be brought from basement level, by the building concierge and retail operator, directly out to ground level for collection. This lift will also serve the ground floor retail unit allowing for goods to be delivered directly to the back of house areas at lower ground floor level. The goods lift is accessed from the new section of Billy Fury Way to the northern side of the building.



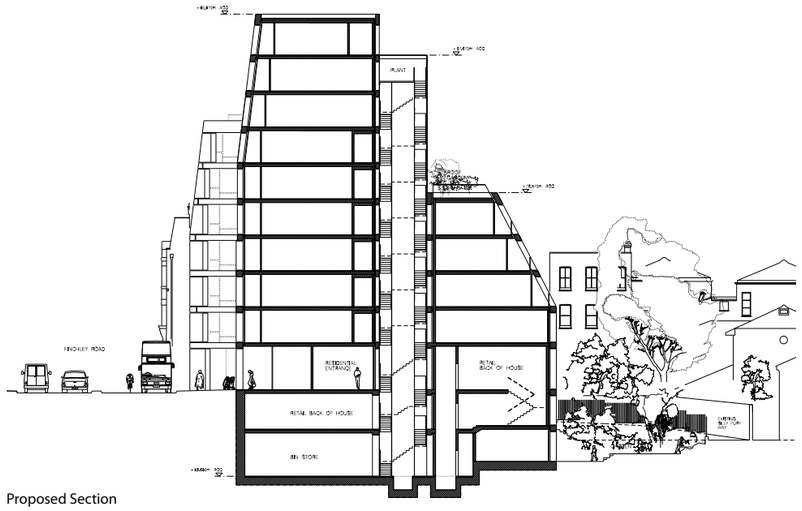
Pre-Application Scheme - Ground Floor Plan



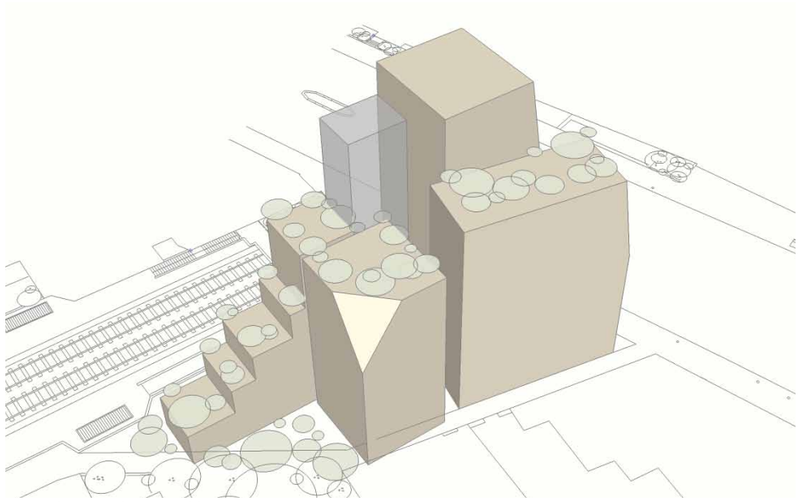
Proposed Ground Floor Plan



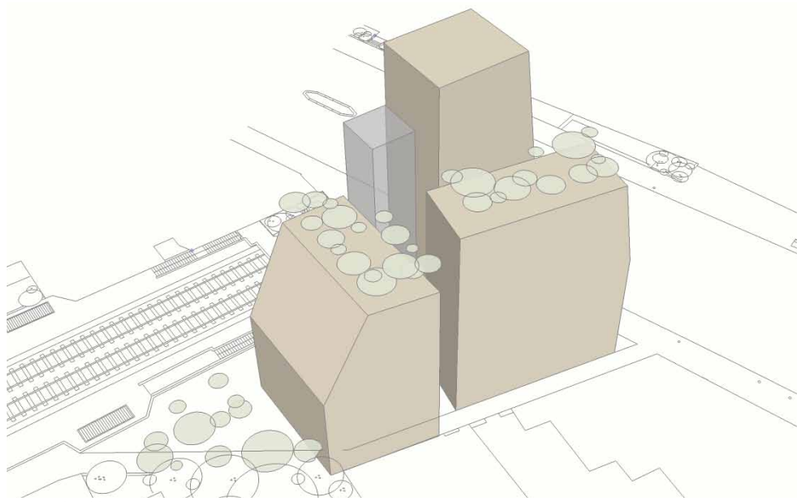
Pre-Application Scheme - Section



Proposed Section



Pre-Application Scheme - Building Massing



Proposed Building Massing