

## Setbacks

The setback of dwellings from the street is a key consideration in terms of:

- defining the character of the street;
- determining the degree of privacy given to ground floor rooms;
- accommodating storage and service requirements at the front of the dwelling.

It is no exaggeration to say that the success or failure of a street can often depend on the design of a one or two metre setback between the dwelling and the footway.

Where dwellings are serviced from the rear, such as at Poundbury, Thorley Lane and Friars Quay, dwellings can be pushed forward to the 'back of footway' with no or very little setback to create a very intimate environment without compromising either the storage space for bins and utilities or ease of access by service vehicles. Where this is done, careful consideration needs to be given to the design of front door and threshold areas, particularly in relation to security. At Poundbury the use of recessed porches helps to enhance the threshold to the dwelling.

The other case studies show that even a very modest setback of a metre or so can be sufficient to accommodate bin and cycle storage and provide privacy to front rooms, while a setback of three to five metres can provide for a small front garden. Issues of detailed design in relation to setbacks and thresholds are considered further in Chapter 7.



**A zero setback. Poundbury, Dorchester**



**A minimal (1-2 metre) setback. Thorley Lane, Bishops Stortford**



**A small front garden (within a 3 – 5 metre setback) provides privacy and a buffer to the street. Stanstead Road, Lewisham**



**A larger front garden (within a 5 – 7 metre setback) provides a landscape structure and setting for the house. Jesmond, Newcastle**

## Solar orientation

The orientation of dwellings in relation to the sun is important, not only in relation to the arrangement of gardens and principal habitable rooms (see Chapter 6), but also in influencing the potential to reduce energy requirements within the home. For example, daylighting reduces the need for artificial lighting and passive solar gain reduces the need for internal space heating. Emerging technologies involving the use of photovoltaic cells can convert solar radiation into electricity, while solar panels can provide a source of hot water for washing and heating.

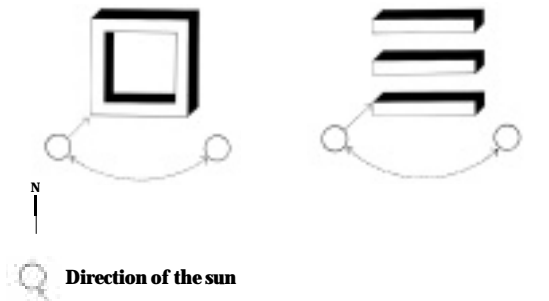
The optimum orientation in terms of maximising solar potential is for dwellings to face southwards, with streets arranged in an east-west pattern and with a generous separation between dwellings to provide for full solar access. However, strict adherence to these principles can result in trade-offs against other planning and urban design objectives. For example:

- the orientation of the street pattern also needs to be considered in relation to pedestrian desire lines and connections to existing places and routes;
- orientating all dwellings towards the south can undermine the relationships between the fronts and backs of dwellings and reduce natural surveillance of the street;
- very wide spacing between dwellings can result in an inefficient use of land and weaken a sense of street enclosure.



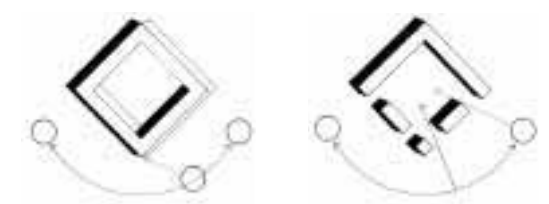
**Denser urban apartment blocks require careful consideration to ensure good solar penetration to the interior of the block. Here a break in the building block at the third storey allows good sunlight penetration to an attractive communal space. Narrow Street, Tower Hamlets, London.**

In fact, with careful orientation of streets and the arrangement of dwellings within the block structure, it is possible to provide good opportunities for solar gain and daylight penetration to habitable rooms, while at the same time addressing other key principles of good urban design. Once again, design decisions need to be made in the round to reach a considered balance between competing design objectives.



**Standard perimeter block creates areas of overshadowing**

**South-facing terraces maximise solar gain but can compromise other design objectives**



**Orientating blocks to the sun's path reduces overshadowed areas within the block**

**Breaks in the building form or reduced storey heights increase solar penetration of the block**

## Public, private and communal space

Most residential environments comprise a mix of, public, private and communal spaces. It is important that the role of each space is clear and that the boundaries between different types of space are clearly defined. Left-over space is wasted space which in time is likely to become a source of nuisance.



**Rigid adherence to highway design standards, in this case sight lines between front driveways and the street, undermines the quality and utility of front gardens and blurs the distinction between the public realm of the street and the private realm of the dwelling. Residents or visitors still find it more convenient to park on the street despite generous off-street parking provision**



**Here cars are parked on the street and public and private space is clearly defined by walls, hedges and gates. Valley Drive, Harrogate**

Public open space is potentially one of a community's greatest assets. The best open spaces are those which not only cater safely for play, exercise and relaxation, but which also provide an area with a sense of identity and community. In many cases this will involve drawing the open space to the heart of the neighbourhood to create an important structural element within the overall urban design strategy (see Chapter 4).



**Open space can bring character and quality to a neighbourhood and provide residents with a pleasant outlook. Park Mews, Hulme**

Where communal space is provided as internal gardens or courtyards in higher density housing, care needs to be taken to protect privacy and amenity to the rear of ground floor dwellings. This is successfully achieved in parts of Greenland Passage where the ground floor of townhouses and apartments opens into a small patio area, which provides a buffer to the attractive communal garden beyond.



**The addition of planting helps to define the boundary between private and communal space and creates a degree of privacy for private patios. Greenland Passage, Southwark.**

## Designing for privacy

Privacy is an important design objective in ensuring that residents feel at ease within their home. It is also an area where general planning standards prescribing minimum separation distances between habitable rooms can frustrate the creation of attractive residential environments by denying the ability to provide privacy through careful design.

Design can help create privacy in a number of ways:

- street design can influence the relationship between facing dwellings. A varied building line (such as at Thorley Lane, Bishops Stortford and Poundbury, Dorchester) can create oblique views, allowing the fronts of dwellings to be brought closer together than where facing views are direct, such as at Jesmond;
- rooms needing less privacy, such as living rooms and kitchens, can face the street with bedrooms and bathrooms located towards more private parts of the home;
- windows can be designed in relation to the function of the room: generous windows for living rooms overlooking the street or a garden; frosted windows for bathrooms; and smaller windows for bedrooms. Bay windows provide oblique views down a street;
- the careful orientation of primary and secondary windows can enable dwellings to be drawn close together while still providing surveillance of the public realm;
- screening and landscaping can limit overlooking between facing rear windows.

Thus, while there are well established rules of thumb (such as a minimum 'back-to-back' distance of 20 metres), these need to be applied flexibly in relation to the specific context and in the recognition that the objective of privacy can often be better secured through careful design rather than by physical separation alone.



**Smaller kitchen windows balance the need for surveillance with privacy. Isledon Road, Islington**



**A varied building line creates oblique views across the street. Thorley Lane, Bishops Stortford**



**A failure to consider the need for privacy can result in curtains and blinds being permanently drawn**

'Local planning authorities should adopt policies which . . . promote design and layouts which are safe and take account of public health, crime prevention and community safety considerations.'

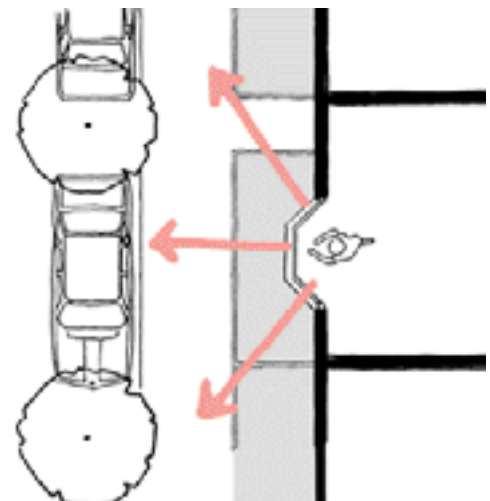
PPG3: Housing paragraph 56

## Creating a feeling of safety

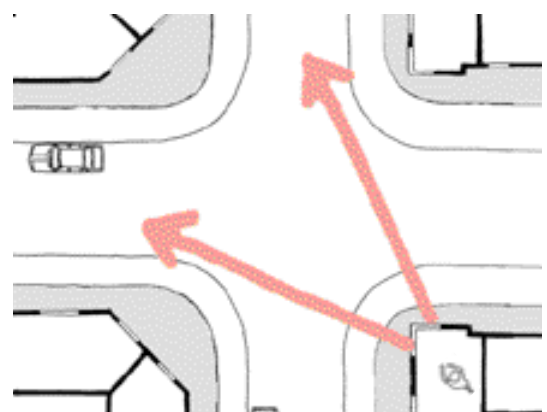
Design has a crucial role to play in delivering and creating a sense of safety and security. A key issue is that of natural surveillance. Streets which are well overlooked and which have activity in them throughout the day and evening benefit from the presence and surveillance of residents and visitors.

Good planning and design can help by ensuring that:

- dwellings fronting the street have their principal entrance on to it;
- windows are designed to maximise overlooking of the street;
- continuity of frontage and aspect is maintained on corners;
- blank facades and areas which are not overlooked are avoided;
- the mix of dwelling types and sizes encourages activity in the street throughout the day and evening (see Chapter 4 on dwelling mix and neighbourhood).



The archetypal 'safe street'. Windows overlook it, doors open onto it, enabling people to see and be seen. Ideally, shrubbery would be managed to a height which allows privacy but still provides for natural surveillance. Jesmond, Newcastle



Corner windows can provide views in several directions. Rolls Crescent, Hulme