

# LANCASTER UNIVERSITY **MASTERPLAN** 2007 – 2017

Front cover showing the campus in May 1971. From the book  
'Quest for Innovation' by Marion E. McClintock, 1974 (Page 63, by  
courtesy of Peter Joslin).  
Masterplan prepared by John McAslan+Partners in October 2007.



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Alexandra Square





## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many post-war British university campuses were conceived and designed in a spirit of rational Modernism. Their architectural and spatial order reflected an atmosphere of bold cultural and educational determinism. And that order broadly suited the tertiary teaching and learning methods for several decades. In the last decade, however, educational policy has become increasingly sensitive to social change and information technology; policies reflect and encourage a far higher level of educational inclusion, and less obviously pedagogic conditions. These new forces have made the longer term educational and functional effectiveness of these campuses (and their attractiveness to potential students and research funding) an urgent issue.

Lancaster University's campus is superbly sited on rising ground, surrounded by countryside. As a whole, it can be perceived almost as if it were a solid and continuous entity, and this is largely due to expedient building additions or extensions over the years – a common scenario. The challenge is to re-consolidate the campus without the need for massively costly and disruptive interventions. Our masterplan establishes a detailed, rational strategy for sustainable long term development.

We believe that the core layout of the campus need not be significantly re-cast. However, there is no satisfactory sense of 'arrival' at the campus. Its linear layout is not obvious, and it lacks cross-porosity. The existing green spaces do little to alleviate a feeling of micro-urban compaction. Our masterplan is driven by a fundamental aim: to break the physically solidified feel of the campus

by energising its main spine with six distinct crossing routes. These will not only improve movement, but also emphasise the presence of the surrounding landscape.

This strengthening of the spine would be anchored by a number of key interventions: a new campus reception building of genuine 'gateway' quality, landscaping, better access roads, and improved public spaces, such as a new plaza at County College, and a redefined square in front of the George Fox Building. A phased programme of demolition and newbuild would be tied to careful massing and reference to the architecture of existing buildings.

The masterplan identifies that up to 23 low rise academic, administration and accommodation buildings of no more than four storeys height are possible. These are indicative proposals of what could be built on campus. Each plot will need to be considered in detail at the appropriate time.

This architectural and spatial strategy would have the effect of opening the campus - unbuttoning it, as it were, releasing its atmosphere of containment. It will become more convivial to study and live in. It will look better, and be easier to navigate; faculties will seem less separate. It will become a campus with far more ability to respond to the change and experiment that characterises 21st century education policy – and student expectations.

**Lancaster University**  
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Aerial view of campus





The Masterplan from 1963

## 2.0 HISTORY

Lancaster University was established following the second world war between 1958 and 1961 as one of the last ‘new’ universities to be announced by the government. It was originally housed in existing buildings in the city centre, but it was clear from the start that this would be temporary accommodation until an appropriate campus had been built.

The Bailrigg site was chosen as the proposed location for the campus during Lancaster’s bid to win the University, because it was feared that an inner-town campus (the Royal Albert Hospital site) would lessen the chances to win as the competing town Blackpool offered a greenfield site.

The selection of the architects Gabriel Epstein and Peter Shephard took place in June 1963 and the planning of the campus started at once. By November 1965, work on the new site had begun. The first teaching and administrative buildings were opened a year later. In 1968, the students started to move into their new campus rooms, although the construction of the site was a gradual process. The architects designed the University and its buildings so that they would absorb as much natural light as possible. Greenery was also important, seen most typically in the designs of County College and Cartmel College.

The buildings were designed in order to be as multi functional as possible. According to Epstein, they would fulfill “a fruit salad of functions” and there would be no segregation of different buildings. With its white rendered top floors it was intended that the campus would look like a Mediterranean hill top village.

The Spine, the main pedestrian connection through the cluster of buildings, was designed so that it would follow the natural gradient of the land. Gabriel Epstein believed that steps would hinder the flow of conversation between pedestrians and the design integrated ramps wherever possible.

*‘The Spine is to be continuously flanked from end to end with public rooms, lively and inviting places lit up at night, where the students will go there to mix. These rooms will be more like the lively high street of a small town than part of a secluded campus...the first aim is to prevent the emergence of a “nine to five” university.’*

Charles Carter, the first Vice Chancellor of the University

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1799



1880



## 3.0 ANALYSIS WIDER CONTEXT

### 3.1 Relation to Lancaster city centre

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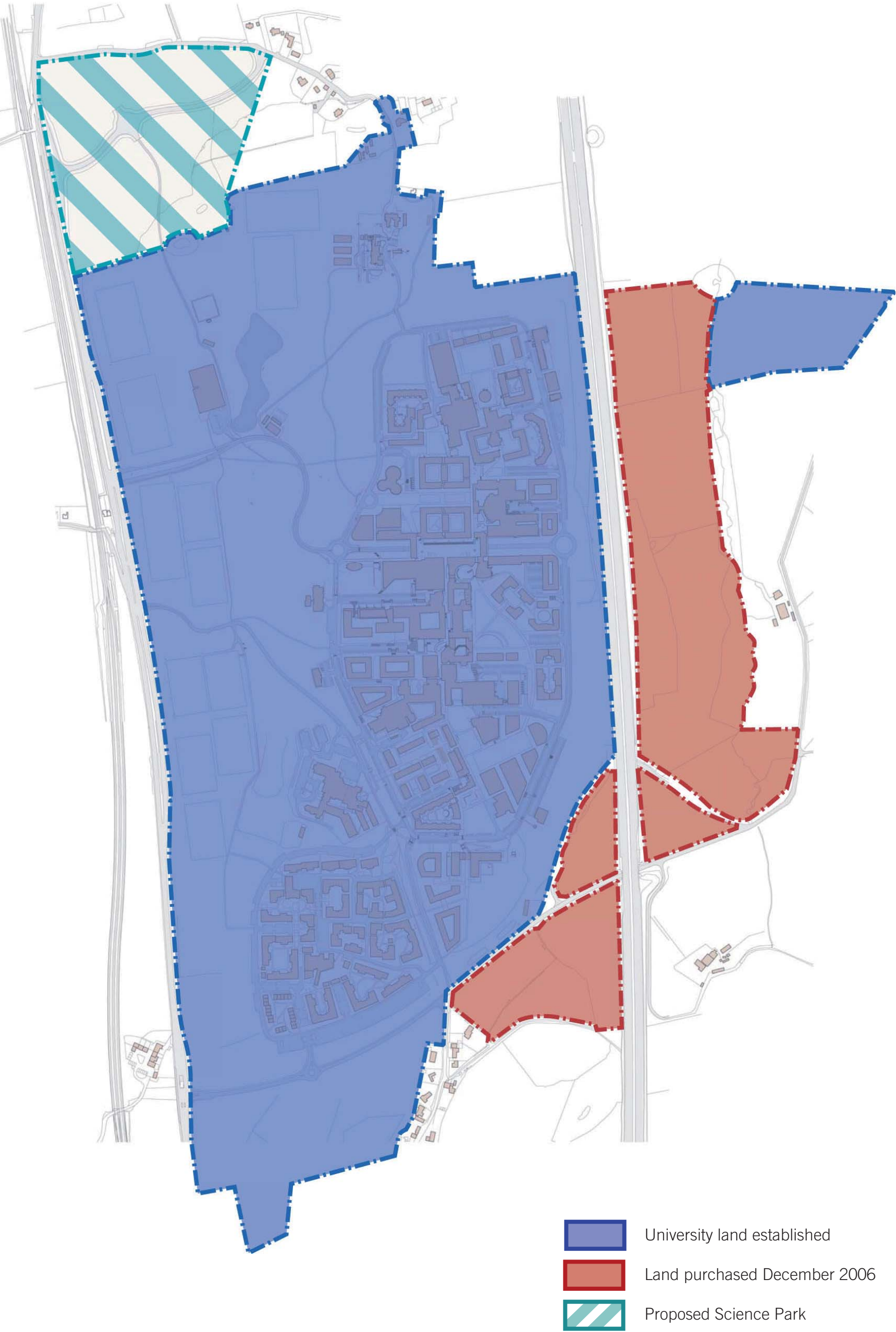
The city of Lancaster is a popular stop on the way to the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales and set in a rich and beautiful landscape close to the Irish Sea. The University campus lies about 3.5 miles to the South of the city and is set between landscape areas of outstanding beauty and the River Lune.

The campus is well connected to the country-wide transport network through the M6 and the A6 and through direct train links between London, Manchester and Birmingham going to Glasgow and the North. A bus runs every 5 minutes between the campus and the city centre, which is a 10 minute walk away from the train station.

The slight remoteness of the campus along with the size of the University (17,000 students and 2500 staff) imply that the campus is a small town or village in itself. There are independently run shops and restaurants alongside the colleges' cafeterias. A retail study is currently being undertaken to establish the required demand and provision.



3.2 Land ownership



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4.0 ANALYSIS

4.1 Location



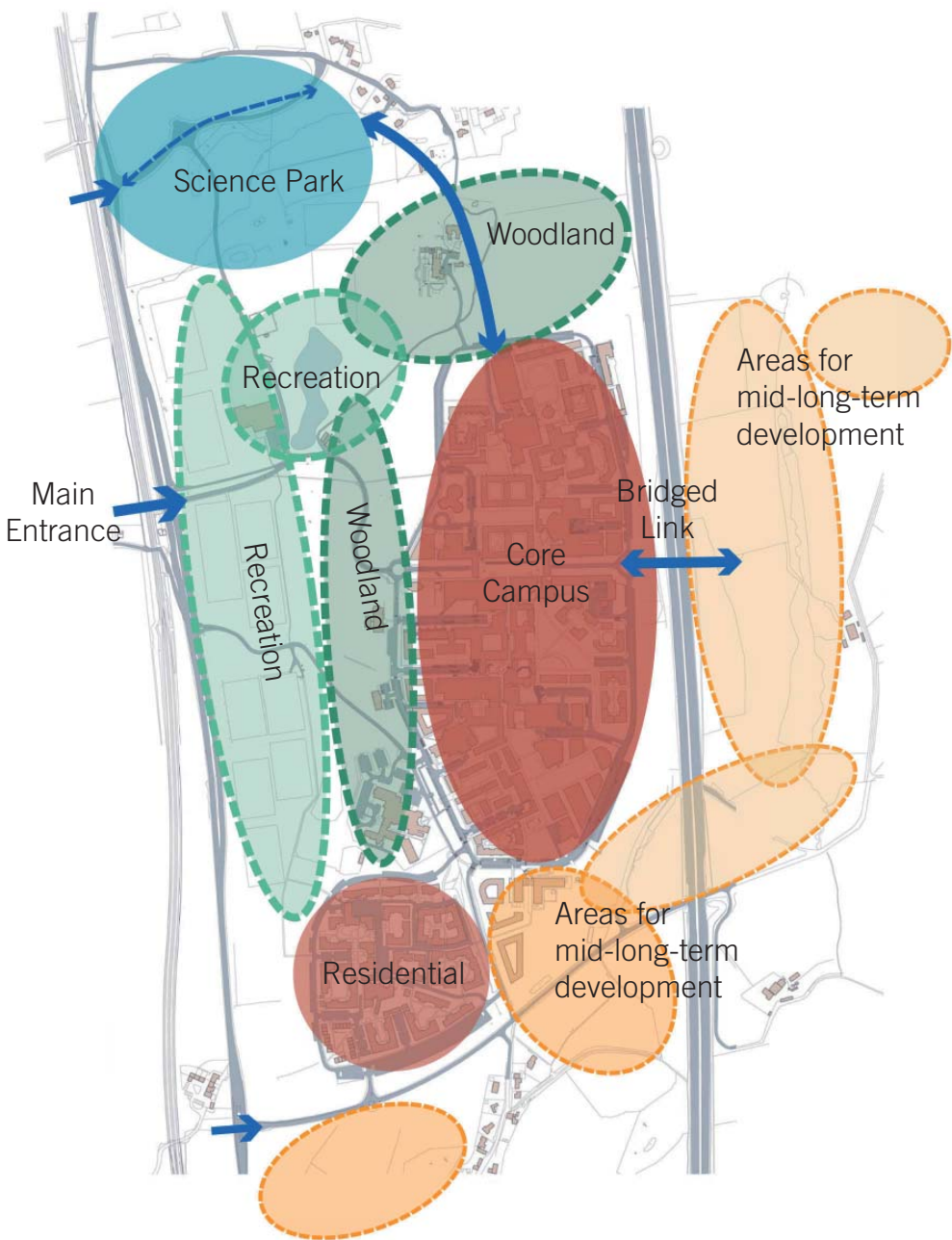
The campus lies about 3.5 miles on the A6 to the South of Lancaster. It has a stunning hill top location with wide views to the South and the Southwest and is surrounded by dense woodland to the East and North. The woodland creates a natural protection between the busy M6 motorway to the East.

By car the campus is approached via a winding road up the hill passing a lake and through woodland following which the view opens up to the Ruskin library and University House.

The main bus stop is situated in an underpass below Alexandra Square. The underpass is badly lit and the exits to Alexandra Square are small passages which are difficult to identify in the dark atmosphere.

From Alexandra Square the main pedestrian spine winds itself along the colleges, covered by a sheltering canopy for most of the distance.

Orientation and way-finding outside the main spine is difficult. Most of the East-West connections are narrow, have hidden access points or are difficult to identify.



Strategic diagram



## 4.2 Photographic Survey of the Campus





Assets



Constraints

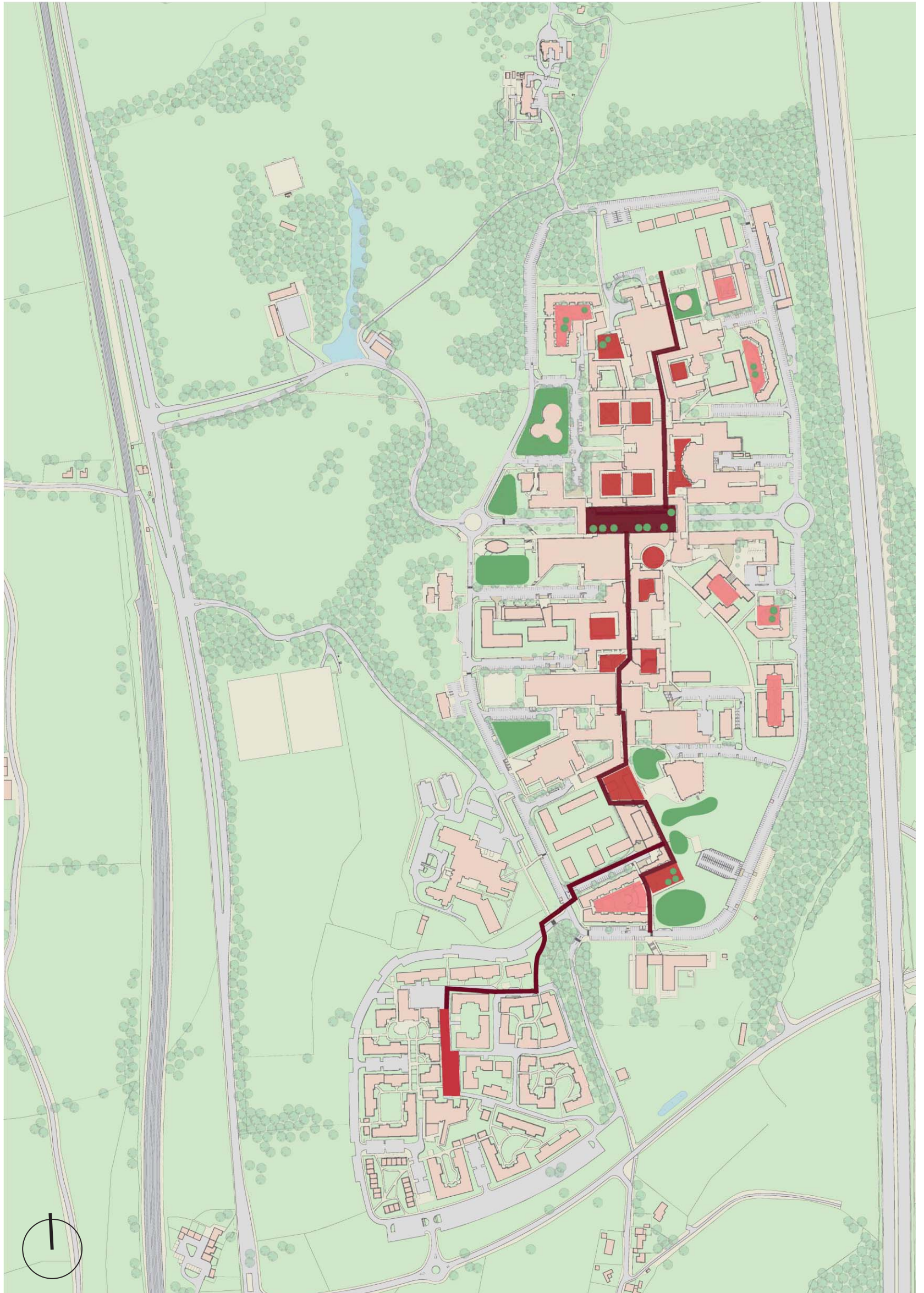








## 4.3 Public realm

### (a) Hierarchy of existing public space

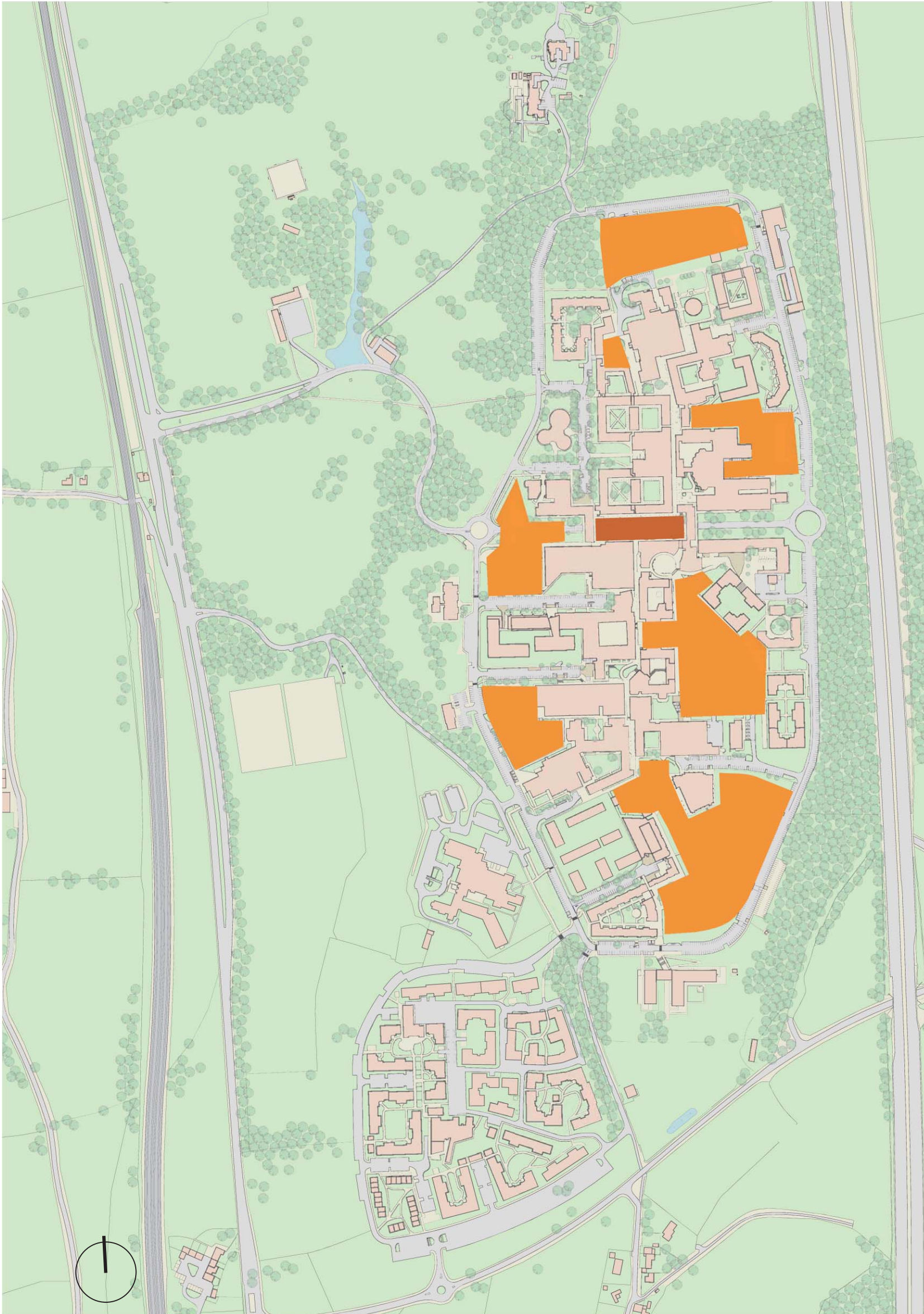
Lancaster University  
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-  Main public space and route
-  Secondary faculty/college spaces
-  Open spaces related to residential accommodation
-  Informal soft landscape spaces



## (b) Positive space



Lancaster University  
Masterplan  
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The existing campus has a clear structure of public spaces. The Spine builds the main route for pedestrian movement with the central Alexandra Square and secondary squares and courtyards relating to faculty buildings, colleges or residential accommodation. However, the connections from the central axis to the secondary spaces are poor and difficult to identify.

The built-environment lacks a clear structure in places and large areas of unshaped positive space leave confusing gaps. These areas provide a strong potential for new development which can help to re-establish a built-structure and clarify orientation on site.

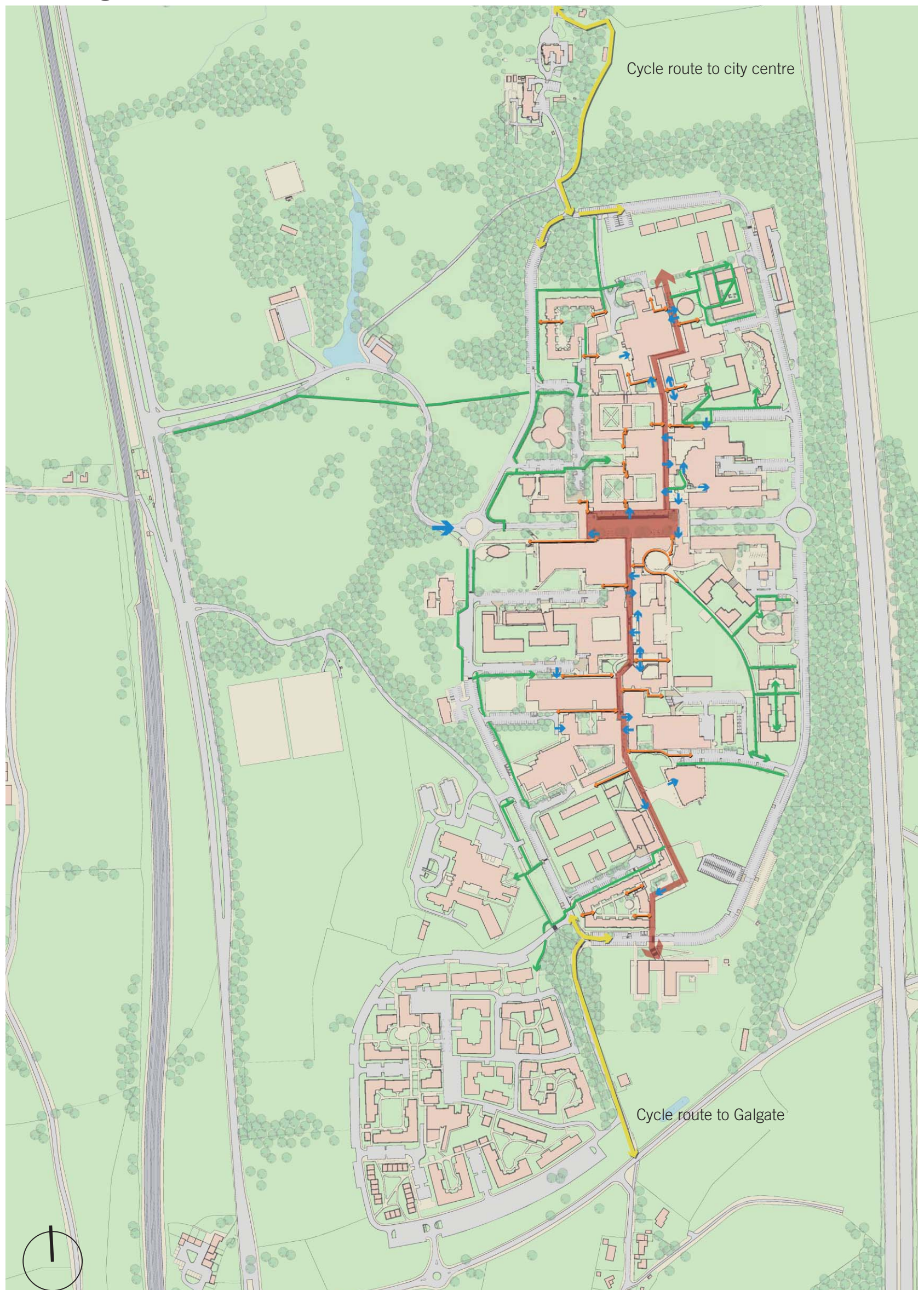
- Positive space
- Alexandra Square



## 4.4 Transport

### (a) Linkages

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- Main pedestrian route
- Existing linkages to the 'spine'
- Wider pedestrian network across the campus
- Important entrances to faculty buildings
- Cycle routes to wider cycle network

Orientation on the campus is difficult. There is no clear entrance point, the reception building next to the chaplaincy is inconspicuous. However University

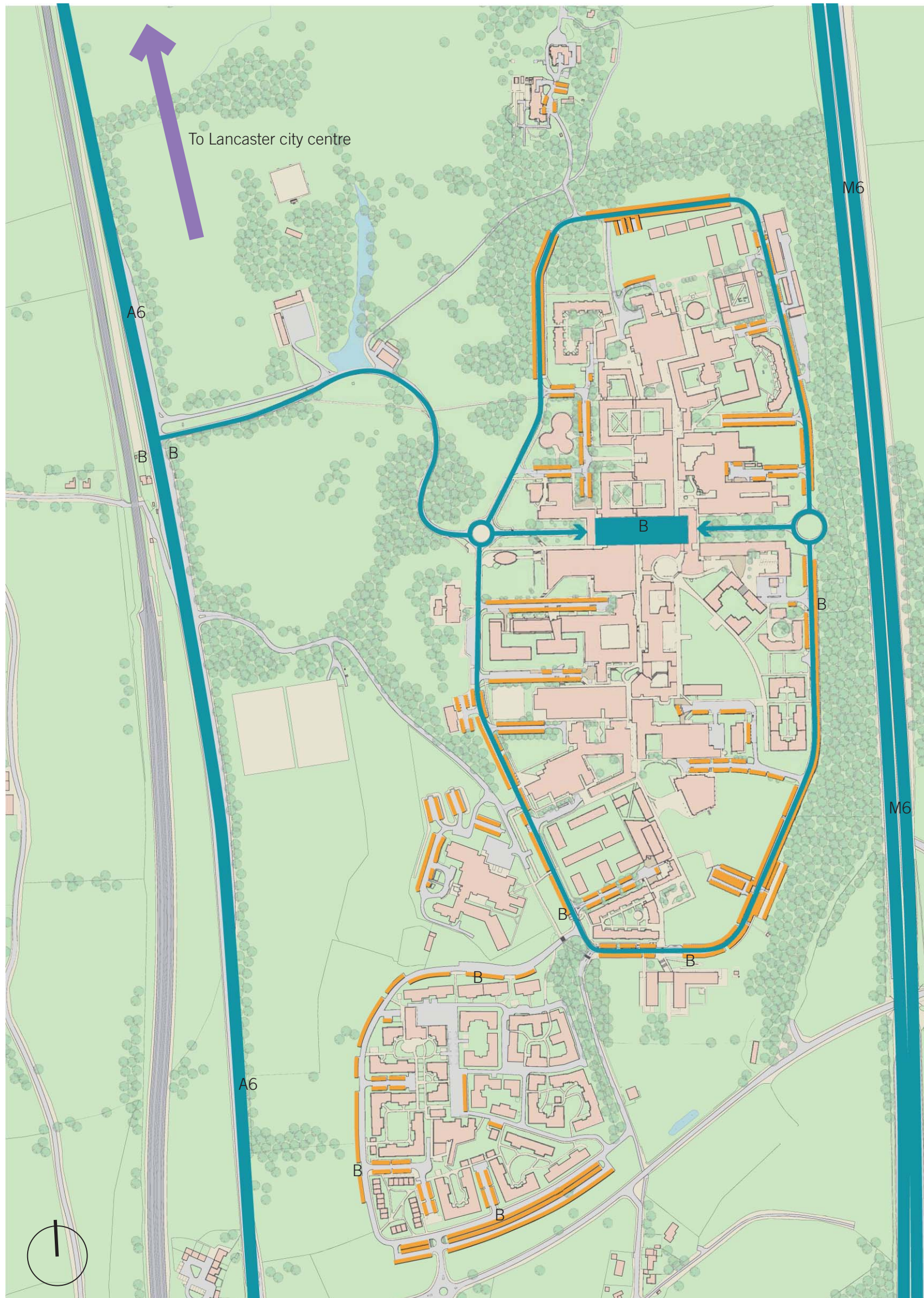
House has recently been refurbished with a new and better accessible reception area.

The East-West connections from the main spine are difficult to identify, they are often disguised by low walls and unexpected bends. Entrances to faculty buildings are often narrow and in dark places.

The wider pedestrian network seems subordinated to the vehicular system. Sometimes pavements along the parking spaces are narrow or missing and access to the Spine is blocked by buildings.



## (b) Transport and Parking



- Vehicular distribution
- Parking areas
- B** Bus stops

Main vehicular access is via the A6 to the west of the campus. A (simple) perimeter road surrounds the core built area with car parking along most of the road and providing access to car parking on short cul-de-sacs into the campus.

The main bus stops are situated in an underpass below Alexandra Square and make this an unattractive yet efficient arrival point by public transport. Two narrow staircases lead up onto the square. However, the bus routes have been improved recently with additional stops along the perimeter road.



## 4.4 Development potential (a) Areas

**Lancaster University  
Masterplan**  
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Various schemes were already in development when the masterplan was commissioned.

These schemes are:

- The Postgraduate Statistics Centre (PSC) building designed by John McAslan and Partners started on site in spring 2007 and is situated next to Fylde College (1)
- The extension of County College to the North of campus (2)
- The redevelopment of Grizedale College (3)
- The sports centre near the lake (4)
- The new Information Systems Services (ISS) building opposite Pendle College (5)

In addition some landscape schemes were in detailed development such as the entrance area next to University House and a small park adjacent to the PSC building.



Projects in design process



Potential sites for development



## (b) Buildings survey



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## 5.0 DEVELOPING THE MASTERPLAN

### 5.1 Built form and landscape

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The current built structure is perceived almost as a solid continuous building. The idea for the masterplan is to break this solid into different building 'blocks' in order to improve links to the spine and the East-West connections across the campus while at the same time drawing the surrounding landscape further in.