

**CONNECTIVITY AND EXCHANGE:
WHY WE BUILD SETTLEMENTS**

In a book entitled ‘The Eco City’ (1992) author David Engwicht reminds us why we bother to build settlements and live as communities however large or small, in order to:

“facilitate exchange of information, friendship, material goods, culture, knowledge, insight, skills and also exchange of emotional, psychological and spiritual support. For a truly sustainable environment, we need to maximise this exchange while minimising the travel necessary to do it”

The key point is that exchange is at its most efficient if it involves minimum energy and time. Technology has always helped, be it a telephone or the internet but exchange also takes place socially in public places. Technology never took that need away. In the 1960’s some foolishly believed it did. But even today, it is very noticeable that when people leave large cities and large office blocks because technology allows them to, they still want and need public life in the smallest of places and if it is not there, they drive everywhere trying to find it.

How towns are laid out has a profound effect on this interaction, by not only allowing planned encounters to happen more easily but to facilitate unplanned or incidental ones; just the presence of other people in the same street or square. Some scholars call this the ‘movement economy’ and traditional towns were incredibly successful at this because the people who built them naturally understood what was necessary for the pedestrian. Years ago they had no choice but to be pedestrians, so it is hardly surprising that some of those towns give us clues to a more sustainable future. In short, they were designed so that almost everyone could get to almost everything on foot.

In so far as it is possible today, Sherford recreates those conditions.

Almost any settlement started at the most strategic position it could. Often this was at a key junction or crossing point of the most important routes. These are the routes that link most directly to the world beyond the town. They are where local people and visitors come together. They develop into high streets, major cross roads, great squares, or village greens and they then need space around them to allow the place to grow. See Figures 10, 11 and 12.



Figure 10
Paris



Figure 11
Richmond, North Yorkshire

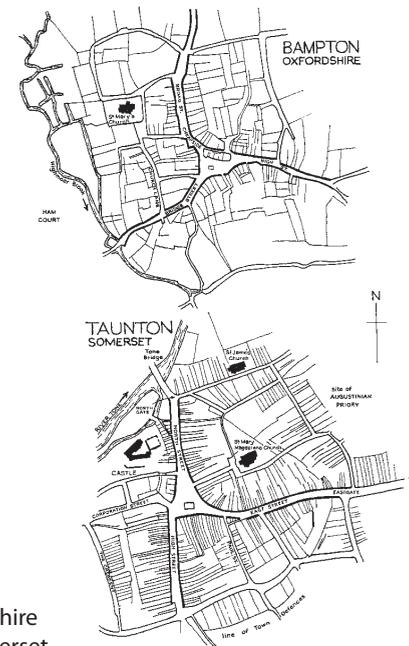


Figure 12
Bampton, Oxfordshire
and Taunton, Somerset

From capital cities to small villages, the meeting of routes from the wider landscape gave them their logic and structure

Figure 13
Northampton



*Figures 13 and 14:
Towns culturally and
geographically remote
from each other have the
same characteristics*

Figure 14
Bologna



As a result, many traditional towns have plans that look like a 'deformed wheel' because people tend to want to move in straight lines, directly to the centres but for reasons of topography, landscape elements, land ownership and the varying importance of certain spaces and buildings, settlements tend to modify this basic requirement.

This is such a common characteristic that a 'deformed wheel' has become an accepted way of describing many settlement plans and it is because the key routes make radial lines to and from the surrounding countryside into the heart of the town to get there as directly as possible, but bend and mould to the landscape and land ownership. See Figures 13 and 14.

Sherford like any town needs both local people and visitors in the same place if it is to be successfully mixed-use and vibrant.

There is one logical and crucial place for this to happen in Sherford. The South Hams District Council (SHDC) Sherford New Community Area Action Plan (AAP) clearly shows the logic of the need for a strategic link allowing people to move along a clear desire line from Deep Lane junction to Elburton and then onto the heart of Plymouth via the A379.

Another more local link exists from Brixton heading north across the site, but it still connects to the wider world. These two principle movement patterns create a cross roads in the middle of the site around which the town is centred. See Figures 15 and 16.

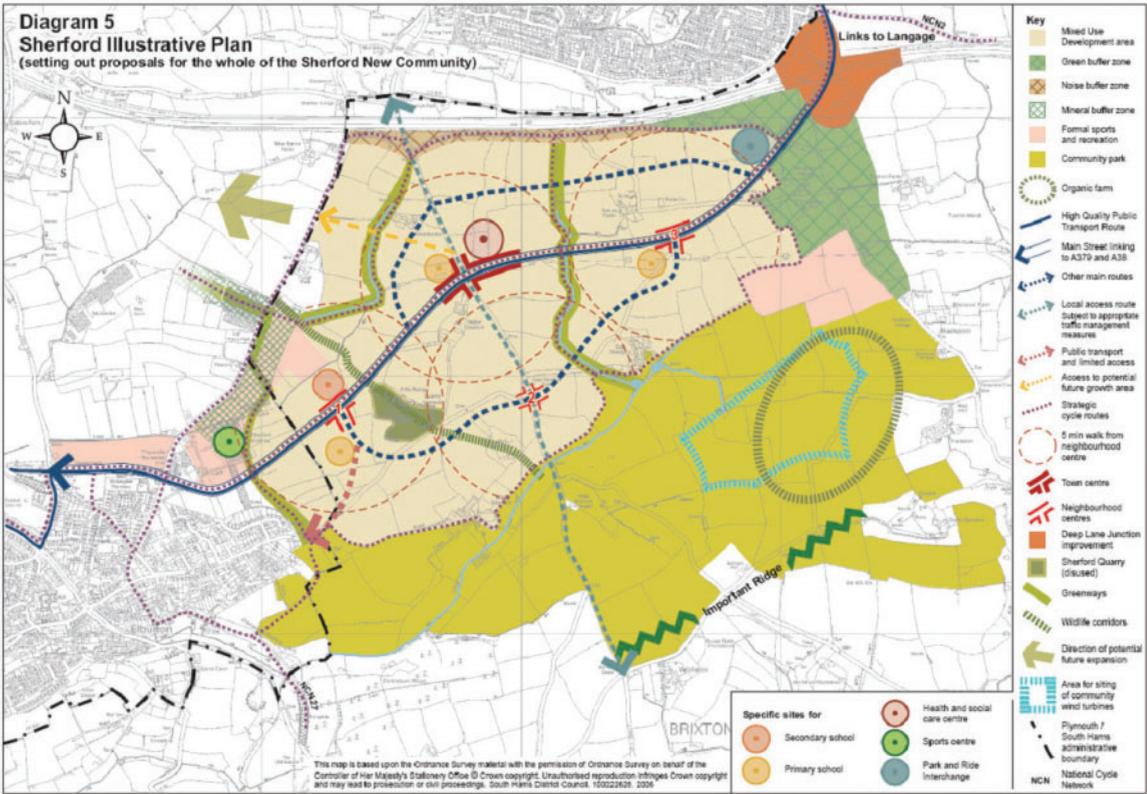


Figure 15
The SHDC Sherford AAP

Figure 16
The logical heart of Sherford and the 'wheel plan' that results

