

I felt like a slight impostor when asked to talk about retailing. I'm an urbanist not a retail planner and the latter is a specialist field as any retail developer will tell you. Us urbanists simply don't understand the needs of retailers, the way that units need to be configured, the relationship of road to parking to shopfront etc...

Then it occurred to me that this is the problem - retailing is such an important part of all urban areas that it can't be dictated solely by the needs of retailers, or indeed their customers - we need to understand the relationship between retailing and urbanism



Market Place

You could argue that retailing was what made the first city a city - the development of settlements as a marketplace where goods are exchanged is probably the earliest function of towns and cities and the thing that differentiates them from a random collection of homes.



The earliest picture that I can find of what looks like a shop - I think it's a shop.



The Market in Cirencester a role that has been central to the town since it's foundation



Likewise in Chesterfield where the fine market place has existed for a thousand years.



Retailing is also vital in other areas - the main high streets such as Stroget in Copenhagen



Another type of retailing close to my heart is the radial route - I grew up near the Stratford Road in Birmingham and would travel into the city along its 12 miles of continuous retailing - the picture is of the Stockport Road in Manchester which is similar.



And not to forget the corner shop - this is Roupell Street in Waterloo but all streets used to be like this with local shops and pubs.



Likewise the suburban shopping centre that gave shape and character to otherwise sprawling communities.



In many places on the continent this diversity of retailing still exists - this street in the Spanish Quarter of Naples has been a retailing street since Greek time, a continuous existence of some 3000 years.



So diverse can retailing become over such a period that Naples now has an entire shopping street devoted to nothing but Christmas Nativity scenes!



But eventually people tired of bustling streets and the rot set in! This is the Galleria in Milan, the worlds first covered shopping mall - notice that the only retailer you can see is a McDonalds!



How we messed things up Part 1

So how did things go so wrong? The first set of culprits are planners and architects....

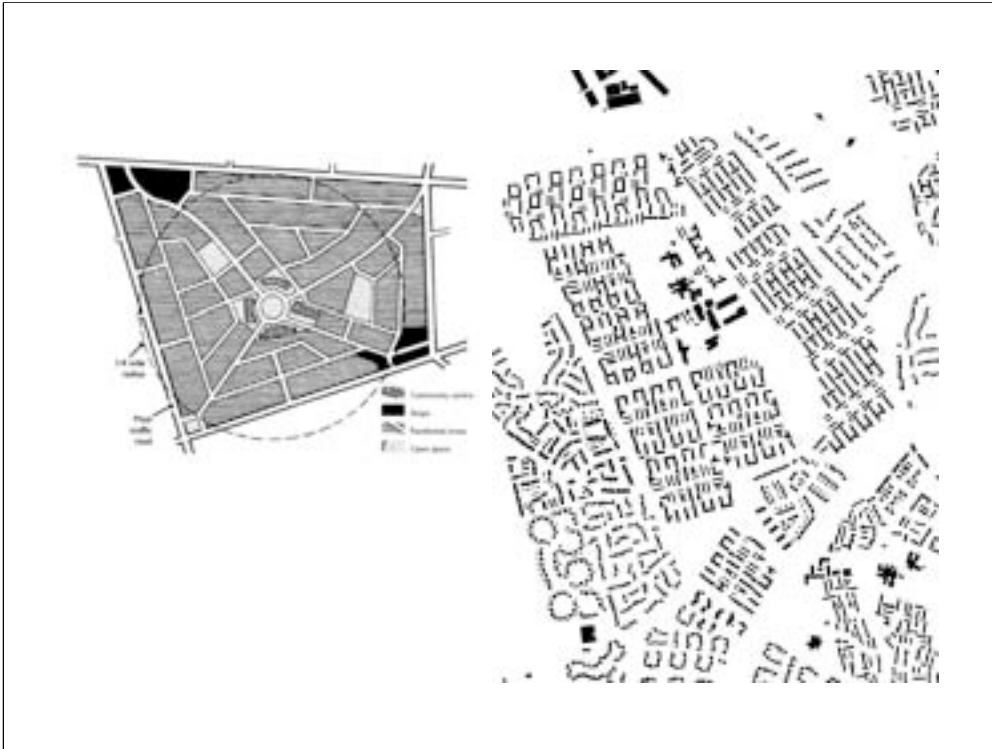


Who decided that shops should be organised in shopping precincts on pedestrianised walkways where they were deprived of passing trade. Has somewhere like this ever busstled?



Bracknell

Who redeveloped town centres like Bracknell into shopping precincts with elevated walkways and multistorey car parks.



Who took shops off the great Arterial roads in order to help the traffic flow more smoothly and put them in the centre of neighbourhoods where no one could find them unless they lived locally. The plan to the left is from Clarence Perry's plan for New York in the 1920s and shows a typical neighbourhood. The community facilities are in the centre but crucially the shops in Black are on the main road junctions on the edge of the neighbourhood.

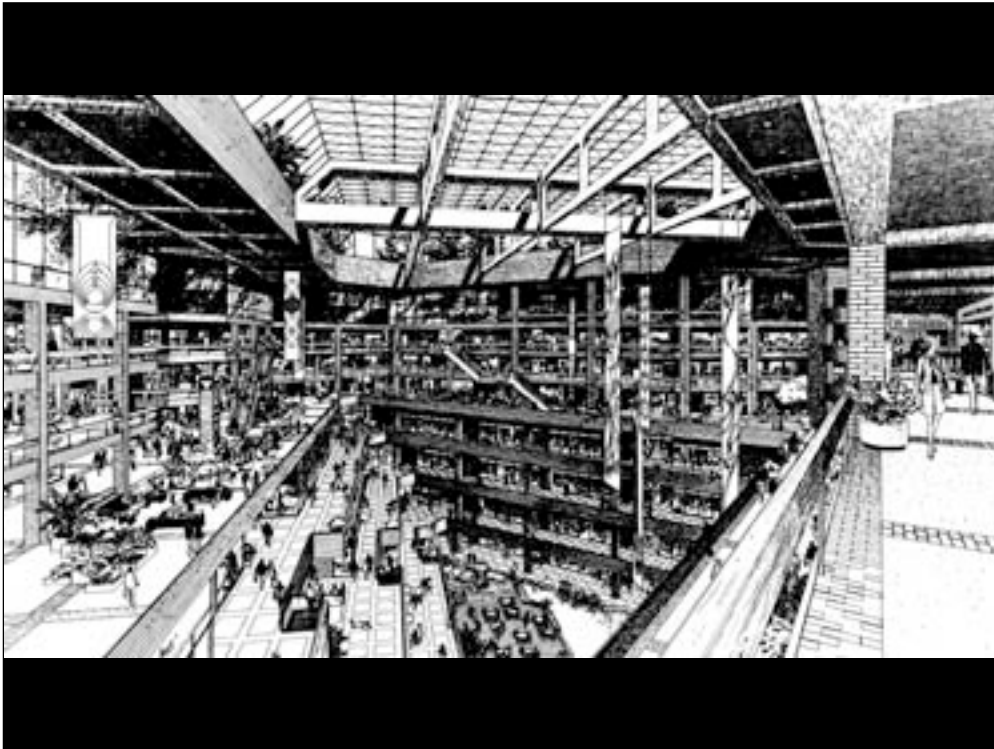
The plan to the right is a neighbourhood in Bracknell where we are currently working - Same idea of neighbourhood except that the shops are put with the community facilities in the centre of the neighbourhood. Where as arterial routes like Stratford Road and Stockport



This is a fantastic picture of Park Hill in Sheffield that shows how the traditional retailers initially survived in these new precincts - here we can see a haberdashery, a butchers, a bike shop and an electrician.



But today these retailers no longer exist - instead we have betting shops and tanning salons, there is always a tanning salon and the 60s precincts are windswept and uninviting. Meanwhile many of the high streets that survived the bulldozer are doing much better.



And lets not forget that planners also had designs on city centres, the mall wasn't an invention of the private sector, it was something that every modern council aspired to for its town or city centre.



How we messed things up Part 2

The influence of the planners in messing things up ran to the late 1970s - after that the private sector took over and, as we were told by Thatcher, they were so much more efficient at messing things up!



These are a series of pictures in a book by Rem Koolhaas. I bought it in a wonderful architecture centre in Bordeaux called Arc en Reve, however I assumed that the pictures were of America until I realise that the signs were in French. Then a couple of days later I drove past one of the scenes and realised that they were pictures of Bordeaux. It shows retail sprawl worse than anything in the UK.









So the instinct of the private sector has been to abandon cities and to create controlled environments where all the impediments between the shopper and the shop are removed. In the US the Mall has eclipsed downtown as the main retail destination.



In the UK this almost happened - The Trafford Centre (this was the scariest picture I could find) and Meadowhall (next slide) were developed in the 1990s and for a moment looked as if they would undermine city centres. Sheffield city centre lost 30% of its turnover when Meadowhall opened and would have collapsed had retailers not been tied into long leases. However Manchester showed how a city centre could fight back and now outperforms the Trafford Centre and Sheffield too has recovered its retail role.





Then of course there are the supermarkets that now dominate comparison shopping. We did a job in Bilston a few years ago where the turnover of the delicatessen counter of the main supermarket was greater than the combined turnover of the rest of the shops in the centre!



And then there's retail parks. Left to itself this is where the private sector would put all of the shops - it is only the much maligned planning system in the UK that stops it from happening.



Whats to be done?

Part 1

So what's to be done? I want to show two examples, the first briefly is a plan we have recently done for Prestwich, a suburban centre in North Manchester. The second a scheme of ours in Brighton.



Prestwich is a suburban centre along a high street choked with traffic with an unpleasant precinct from the time of the planners in the 1970s.



This was the plan initially put forward by developers for the centre - this essentially meant knocking it down and building an out of town scheme that might as well have not been in Prestwich, the important thing was proximity to the motorway.



This was the plan that we eventually agreed with them - designed to meet the retailers requirements while creating a proper local centre. It is possible.



Whats to be done? Part 2

I want to finish with a longer example of a masterplan that we did in Brighton.



This started off as a traditional supermarket - opposed by the local community and refused by the planners.



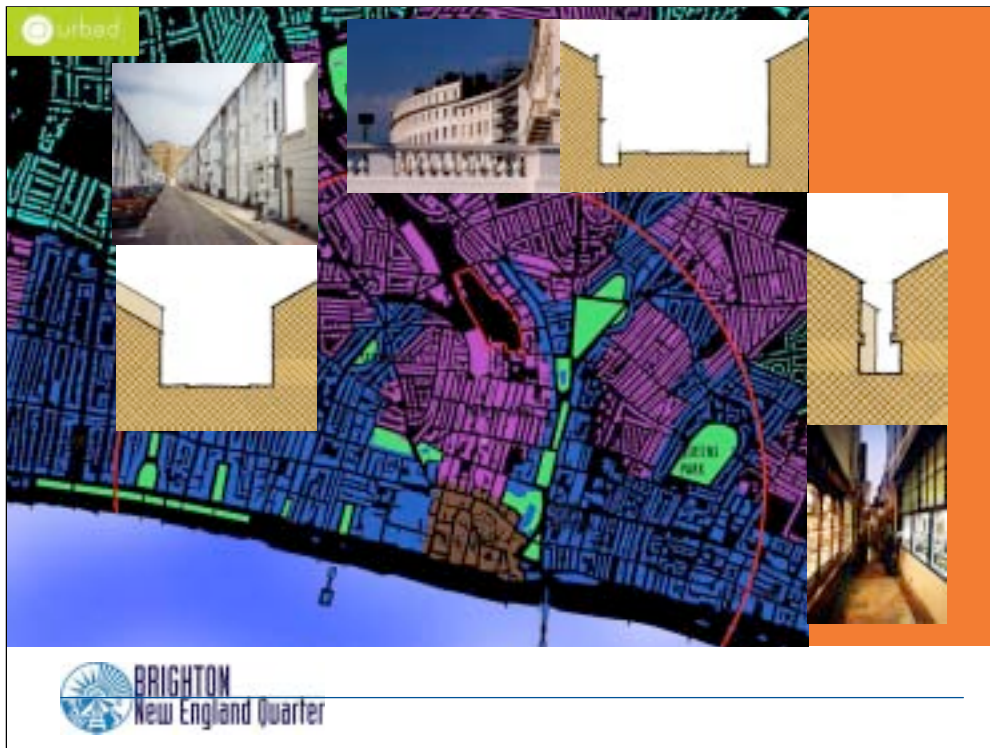
The site is a former goods yard just next to Brighton Station that had been vacant for 30 years.



Our plan was to cunningly conceal a supermarket in a mixed use neighbourhood that integrated with the surrounding area.



This sequence of slides shows the design process.... Starting with the Figure Ground plan to understand the structure of Brighton.



Then understanding the historical phases of growth and the character of these.



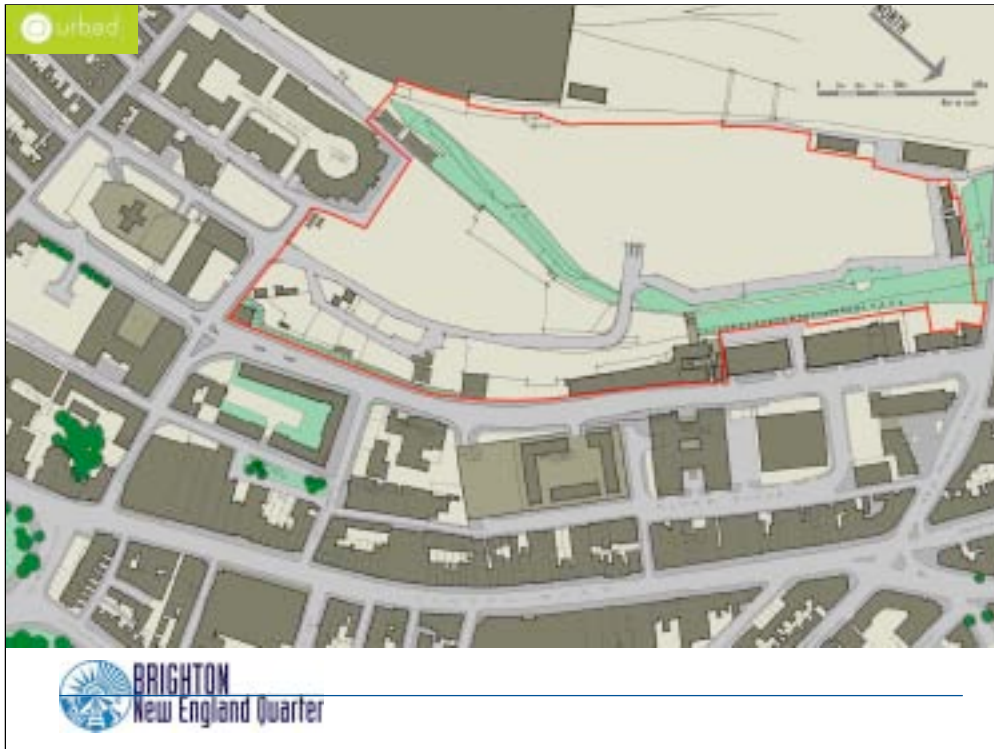
The Saxon Field Boundaries that have shaped the towns (called the Laines).



And the curves of the railway infrastructure.



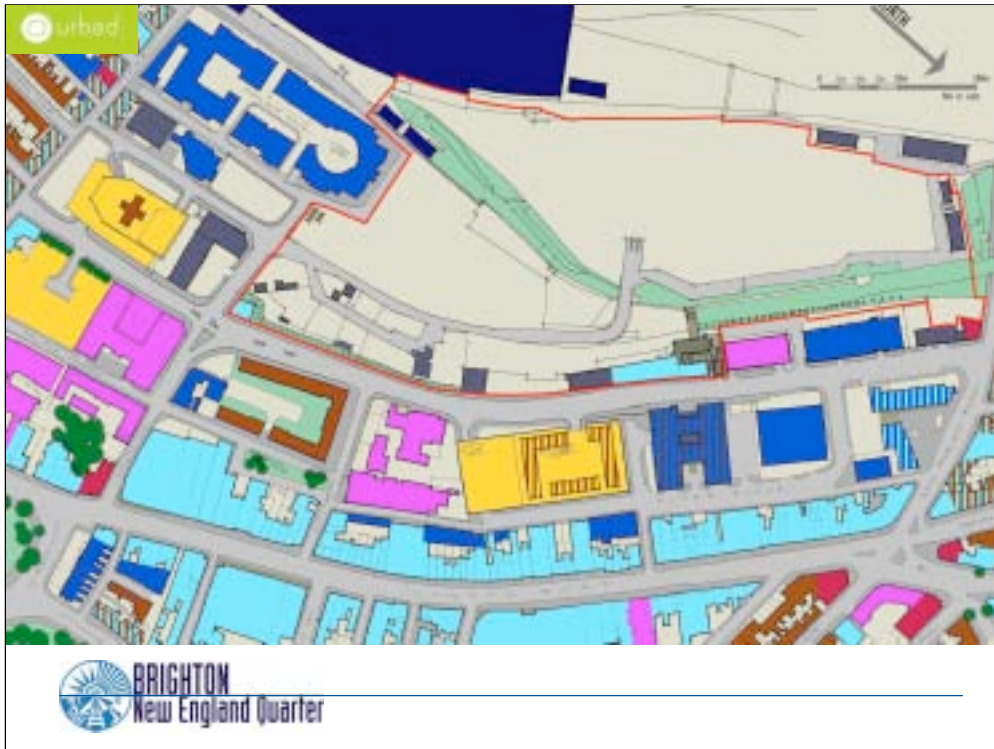
The site as it was



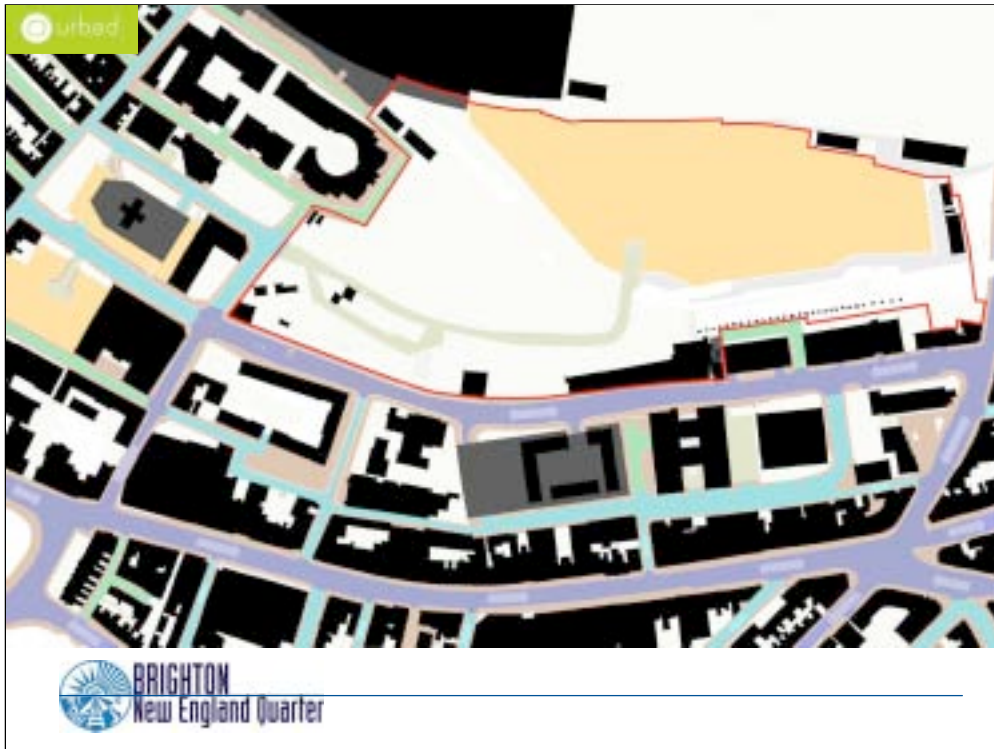
Site plan



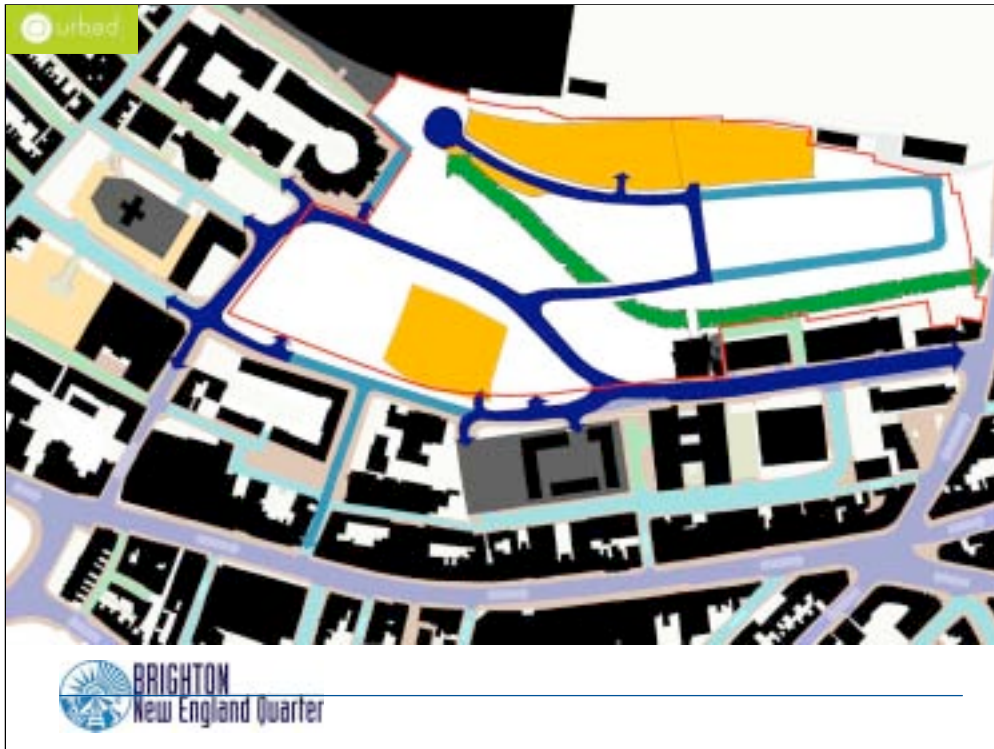
Figure Ground



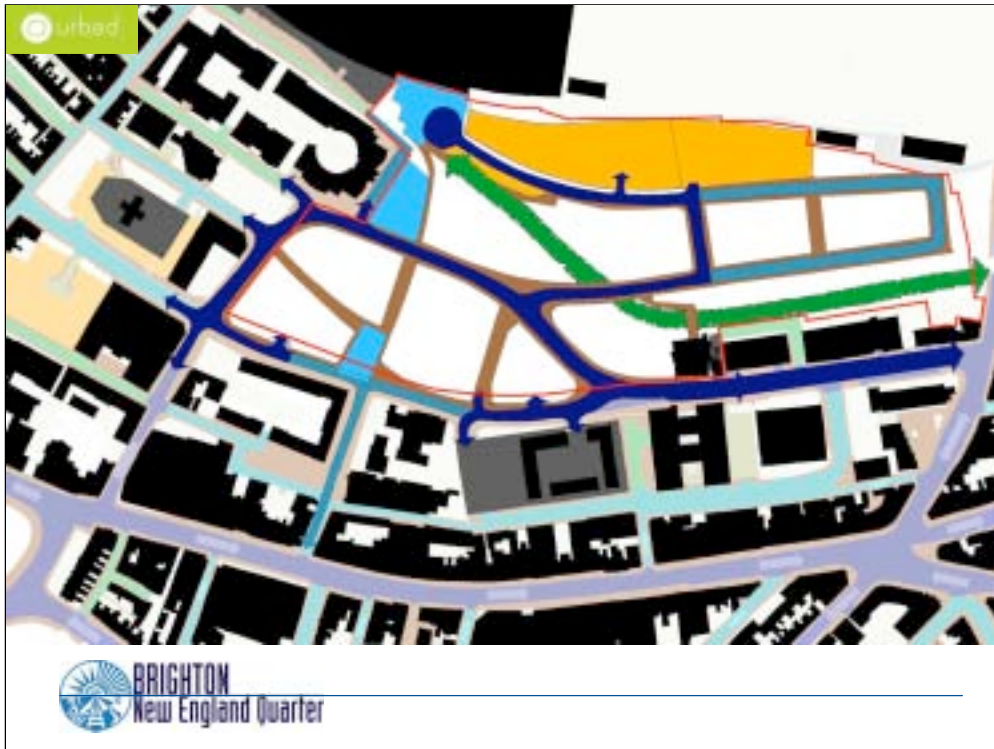
Land use



Starting point



New roads and parking



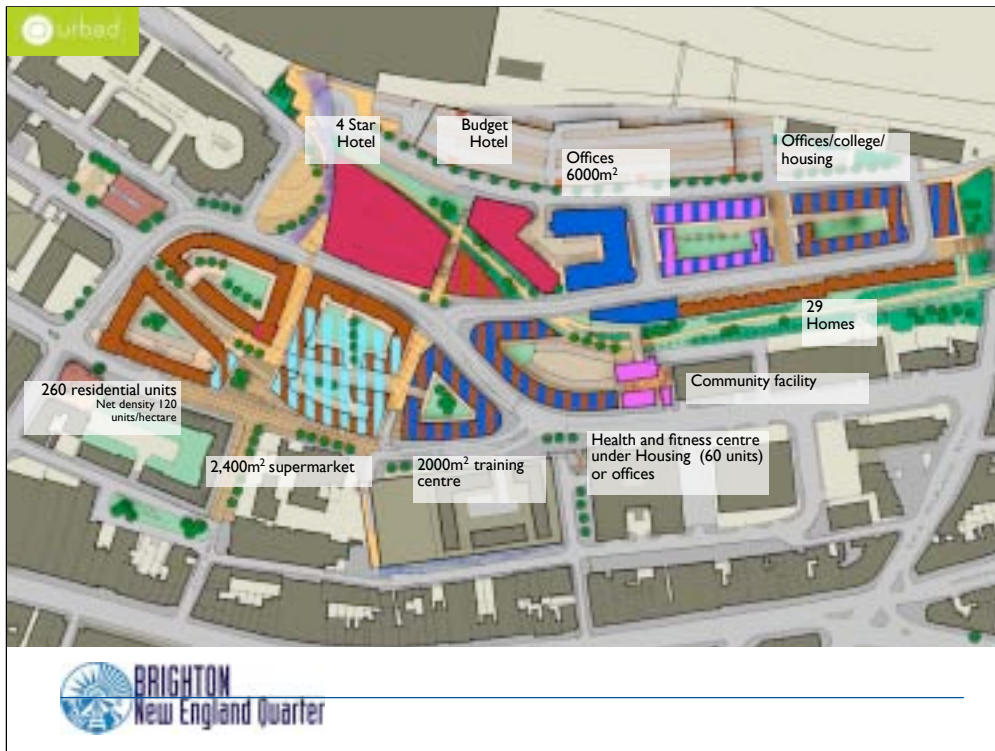
New pedestrian routes and squares



New buildings



'Repaired' figure ground



Uses - Note the Supermarket under a residential block



The supermarket is hidden by using the slope



Approved masterplan

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 **BRIGHTON**
New England Quarter





Original illustrations and completed scheme







The back of the supermarket on the new road



The front of the store



The store is 40,000 sqft - not the largest supermarket but a full sized store.



Entrance to the car park





Travelators from the car park to the store - these have transformed the rules of supermarket design because parking and the store no longer need to be on the same level



A street over the roof of the store



The street on top of the store



The scheme under construction









Description of the wider scheme



We would all like I'm sure to return to those 3000 year old streets of Naples or to the market place in Chesterfield and Cirencester. The dilemma for planners dealing with shops is how far you resist the 'needs' of retailer who if left to their own devices will turn every town and city centre into a clone town. Resist too hard and we will just drive shops and their customers out to Meadowhall undermining the historic function of the city centre. Our approach has been to seek to reconcile the needs of retailers with the tenets of urbanism. In doing so we risk being accused of selling out as we were in Brighton but for lack of a better alternative it seems the only responsible thing to do.

David Rudlin - November 2008