

towards  
**Superbia**  
**Superns**

A RENEWED FOCUS  
ON OUR SUBURBS



# Contents

04

Cities are changing  
and now, so must  
our suburbs

06

What is changing in  
our cities and how is it  
impacting our suburbs?

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# 08

**Four challenges at the heart of the transformation to Superbia**

- 10 Evolving the suburban main street
- 14 Reimagining the out of town centre
- 18 Planning a healthy suburban TOD
- 22 Opening up the dormitory suburb

# 26

**Five recommendations to bounce forward into Superbia**



Can we, in our  
collective response to the  
challenges facing our cities,  
not just ‘bounce-back’  
but *‘bounce forward’*?

## Cities are changing and now, so must our suburbs

Although it is not yet clear what the precise consequences will be of the virus in the medium or longer terms, and how it will be managed going forward, big questions are being asked about our urban future. How will I get to work? Where will I work? How will working and living be combined?

These questions are being asked not just by professionals in the built environment but by everyone. We are all experiencing our cities differently in this crisis and wondering what will stay the same, what will change, but also what should change and how we might fund and deliver these changes in a challenging economic context.

The debate we are all having about how we work and live is fundamental and it leads us to ask not just ‘what should we restart?’ but also ‘what should we re-think?’

A key part of this urgent civic debate is about the urban form of our cities after this crisis. Beyond the rhetoric of the partisans of the compact city, or the passionate advocates of low density living, people everywhere are asking how, from this point, can we better balance the economic benefits and jobs of urban agglomeration of the ‘global city’, with the social and health benefits of the ‘local city’. This leads to

a new and welcome focus on our regional centres and their potential, but also on the future of where most of us in this part of the world live: our suburbs and urban villages. A renewed focus on suburbs has been one of the key, if unexpected, consequences of this crisis. And it is very welcome because there has been little professional and technical discussion about where millions of us now live and where most new arrivals to our region will be living.

The discovery, forced on many of us by homeworking, is revealing the virtues but also challenges of our local suburbs – as we source our everyday coffee and groceries in retail centres we didn’t really know existed, access local green spaces not previously frequented or share conversations with neighbours we now know much better so that the words ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘community’ have even greater resonance and reality than before – has, we think, prompted a long overdue rethinking of their potential.

In this document, we choose at this moment to both celebrate the strengths of these places, in their various forms and differing contexts, and to lay down some suggestions for further strengthening. This can include ways of improving walkability, creating new green spaces and tree canopy, accessing public transport or of adding new capacity for local centres to support retail and indeed jobs.

**This rediscovery of our suburbs is an opportunity not to look back, but forward to a new future for an old idea whose day has come again. Suburbs of the future based on the virtues of the past and the values of the present: we call that Superbia.**

## What is changing in our cities and how is it impacting our suburbs?

Suburbs are evolving, driven by environmental issues, digital connectivity and different expectations of quality of life – COVID-19 has accelerated this – and brought some of these changes into much sharper focus.

We have all to some degree discovered a new city, strange at one level and yet familiar at another, disturbing yet full of possibilities and problems. Many of us have perhaps rediscovered the community in which we live and even the streets and the parks around us, walking to local shops as seldom before for our daily coffee run or groceries. At the same time, as our city is not experienced by all in the same way, many will have not been able to realise their desire to access such amenity because where they live is not walkable to shops, cafes or public spaces.

Professionally and in terms of public policy, enabling more people in our cities to access such benefits and to maximise the potential of our suburbs and villages should, in the Arup perspective, be the way forward. The challenge is both to reinforce the virtues of our suburbs, and when building them anew, to build on great foundations towards a more sustainable and inclusive suburbia. Some of the challenges, different focuses and emerging themes we have observed, will shape this further. They include:



### A renewed focus on walking and cycling

The period of lock-down has reconfirmed some of the benefits of the ‘slow walkable city’: less traffic, more active modes of transport, better air quality and the opportunity to address obesity and public health challenges particularly in suburbs.



### An emphasis on the value of community cohesion

It is well documented that feeling part of the community is good for your mental health. Local support networks, the sharing economy and small acts of kindness and collaboration have become even more important and valued within our communities – this will require continued support.



### Rethinking how and where we work

With the acceleration of use of remote working tools and the potential for a new live/work balance, fewer people will either need or want to commute to the office and either work from home or locally. This trend is likely to continue as both a health and lifestyle choice.



### **Funding and delivery of projects and programmes**

Many of the established models of growth and development will be challenged in the coming months and years. Emerging from the current crisis will require continued innovation in how we deliver city projects at all scales.



### **Greater need and demand for public space**

Even before COVID-19, our growing cities have recognised the importance of public spaces and connection to the natural environment. Recent events have reinforced this and we must act swiftly to retrofit, redeploy and reprioritise our public spaces and public services to be safe, healthy and equitable both as we deal with the crisis and emerge from it.



### **The need for flexibility in our places, spaces and systems**

COVID-19 has served as a 'pressure test' for urban planning processes and systems. It has highlighted the importance of planning, managing and operating our places in a more resilient and flexible way in order to adapt for today and be ready for future shocks and stresses.

## Four challenges at the heart of the transformation to Superbia

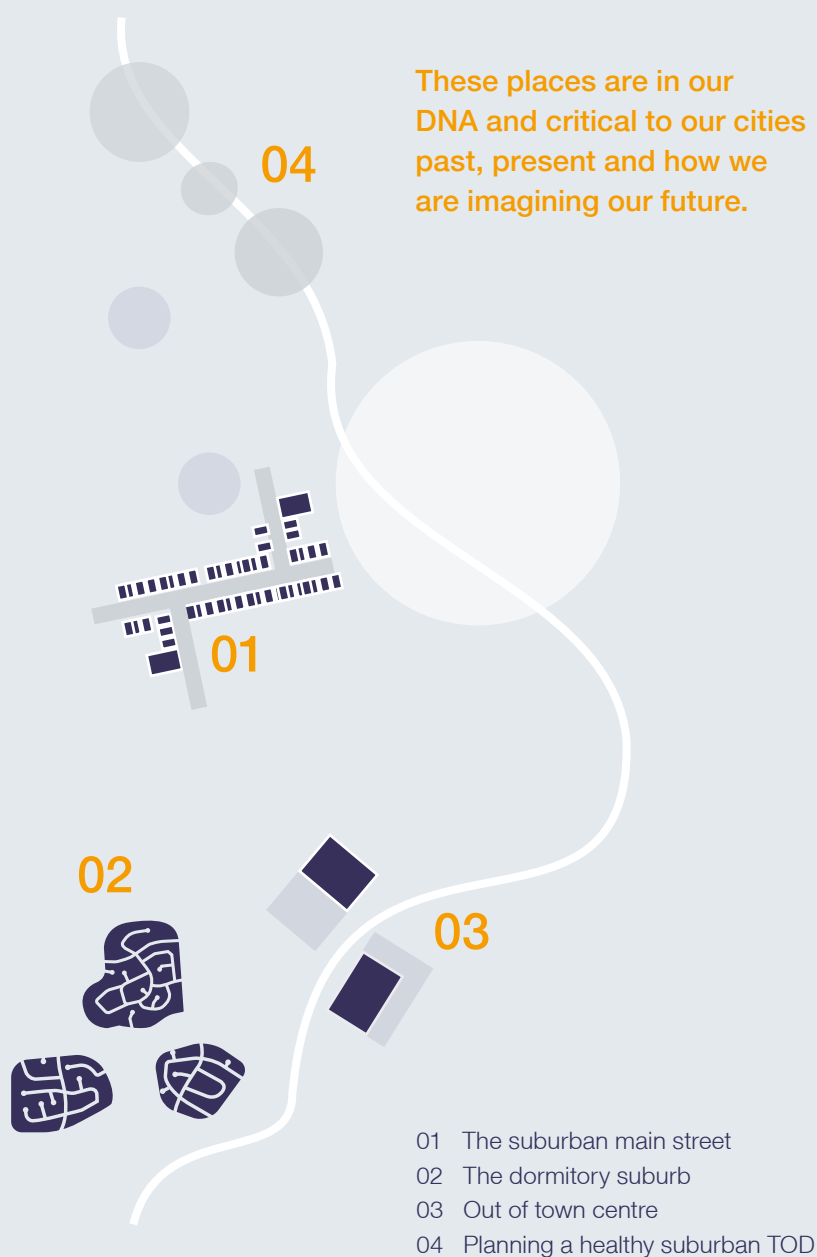
For many of us the idea of 'suburb' has a particular cultural resonance and often a contested one.

It can, to different groups, represent either freedom and prosperity, security and leafiness or sprawl, dreariness and car dependency. Indeed for an individual it can at various stages of their lives include all the above.

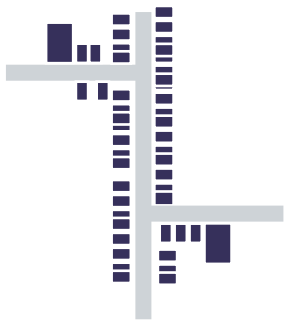
Love them or loathe them, aspire to them or seek to escape them, they are part of our identity and are much more varied and complex places than the collective noun describes. From the city villages of historic street grids, to car-based commuter belts with big box retail and a vision of backyard bliss, to the planned visions of new suburbs stretched out along around rail corridors that promise quick connections to new jobs and opportunities.

It is therefore the right time to look once more at how they work for us and how they might adapt to meet our changing needs, both at this time and going forward. We imagine four of these suburban places, reflecting the different characteristics of our cities, how their existing conditions and recent events have challenged how we live together within them.

We have set out some of these places here, and in the following pages we will explore some of the interventions and changes which could deliver immediate improvement and long term transformation.







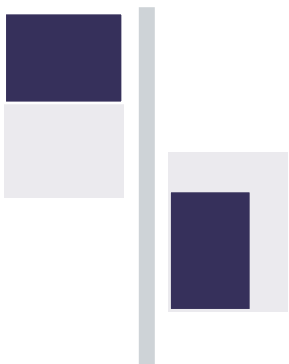
## 01 Evolving the suburban main street

The busy heart of our older suburbs, grew up along the roads which connect back to the city centre, and home to local shops, businesses and services, well connected by public transport and private parking. They have been hit hard by the economic and health challenges of COVID-19, and now must be reprioritised as the future engine of walkable communities.



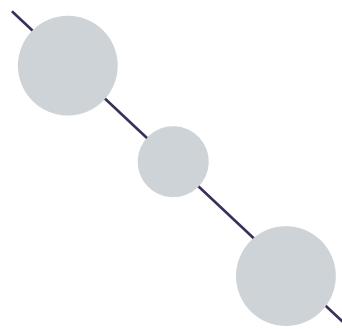
## 02 Opening up the dormitory suburb

These popular, largely residential areas are the main way in which our cities are growing. Connected to urban centres by arterial roads and inconsistent public transport. Housing spreads out along unconnected cul-de-sacs with little walkable connection and little provision of local services. Evolving these places is critical to a new vision of superbia.



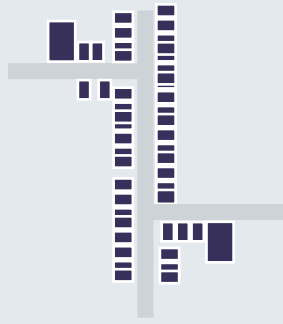
## 03 Reimagining the out of town centre

Part of the system of dormitory suburbs, these places contrast the suburban main street of older suburbs. Larger retail, cinema and light industrial workspaces will continue to be challenged by online shopping and the rise of local centres. Superbia will need to address these places with more diverse uses and retrofitting buildings and parking spaces.



## 04 Planning a healthy suburban TOD

Planning growth around fast and more convenient links to the city and employment centres has been the typology we deploy in order to imagine the significant growth of our urban areas. Emphasising a rebalancing of locally focussed jobs, culture and social services will see this model adapt and evolve to meet different community priorities.



## Evolving the suburban main street

Imagine our local high streets recovered and reinvigorated by more local investment, improved public spaces, and a wide range of opportunities for local business. Shops, car parks and empty lots adapted into art galleries, maker spaces, co-working offices, health centres and playgrounds. Connected by contemporary public transport and linked back to their community by a safe walking and cycling network.

In superbia, these places will be the model for compact and healthy communities.

- 1 Connecting the high street to the neighbourhood through a web of new walking and cycling links – done now through tactical urbanism and real engagement with community users.
- 2 Stack the parking, creating sites for new mixed use developments ‘behind the main street’ creating places to live and grow new businesses.
- 3 Create safer streets through infill development – turning backs into fronts and increasing eyes on the street. Create space for innovative new housing models to support affordable and accessible places for the community.



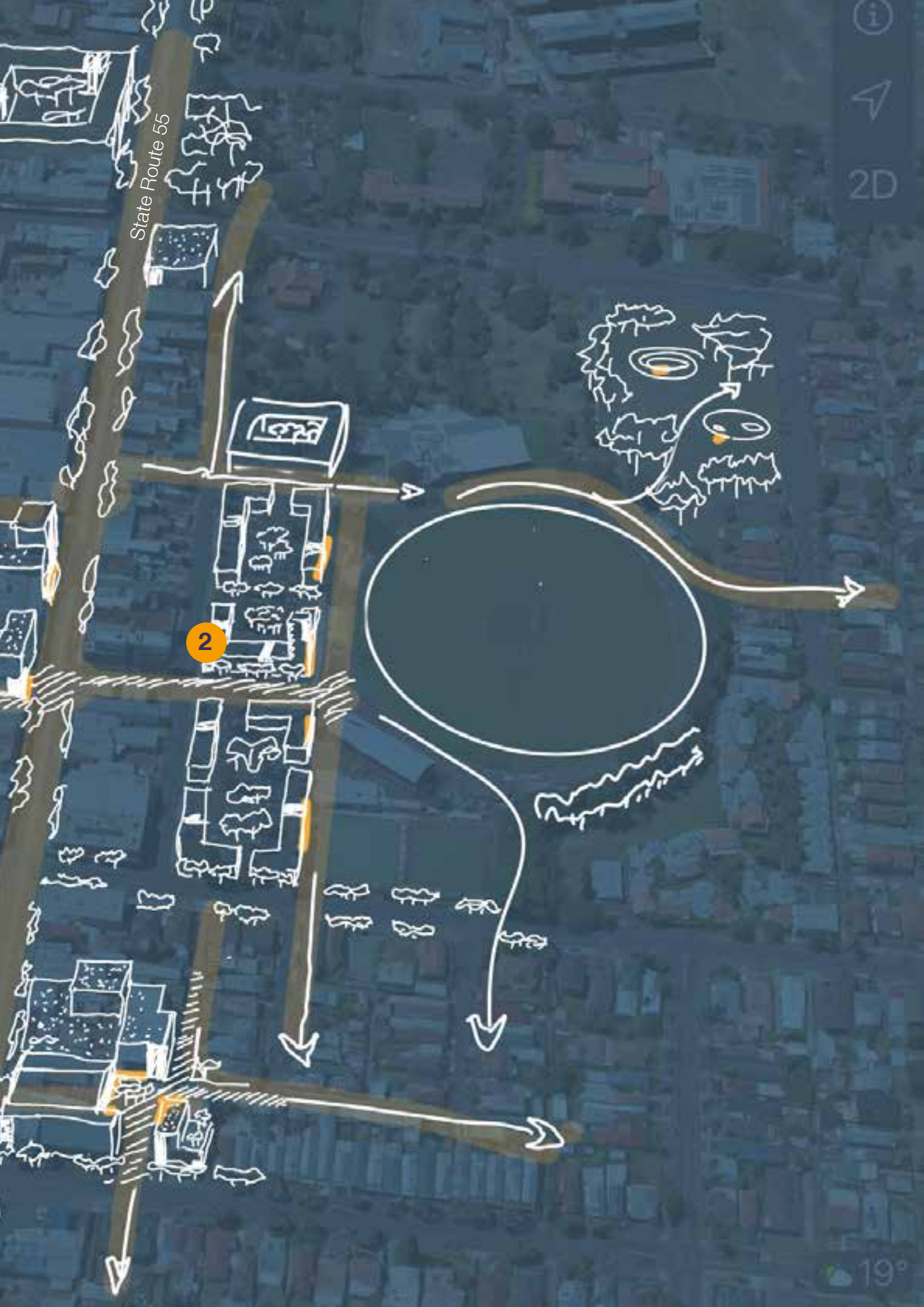




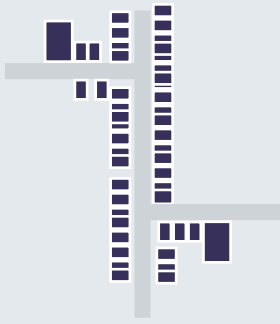
2D

State Route 55

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19°



## Evolving the suburban main street

Three interventions for now:

- 1 Deliver low cost workspace to support start-ups, training and close to home working.
- 2 Utilise vacant shops as 'test sites' for new businesses that could include hospitality and retail.
- 3 Redesign the street by widening footpaths to support social distancing, provide space for cafés and create accessible transport stops.



- 1 Low-cost workspace close to home







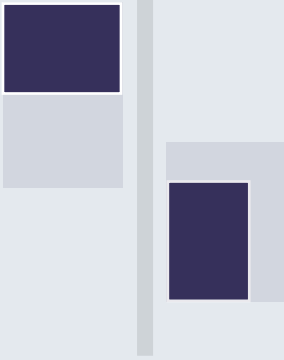
② 'Test sites' for new businesses



③ Widening of footpaths to support social distancing





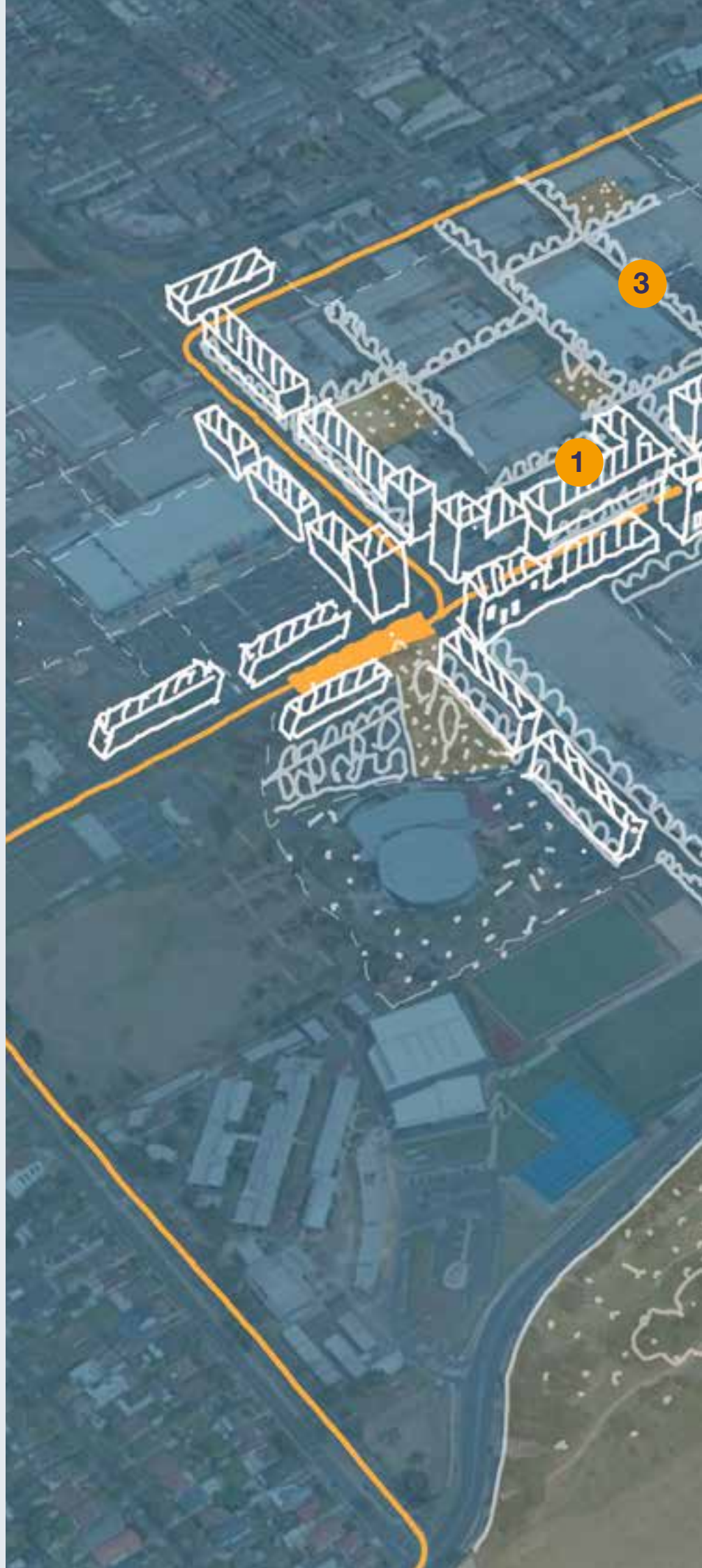


## Reimagining the out of town centre

Shopping centres have great capacity for transformational change largely due to the inefficiencies of the land used for parking lots that surround them. With the right public transport investment, big box retail can maximise its value through a less land hungry and less car dependent model.

Better integrated within walkable urban structures, the re-use of land used for parking can open up the opportunity to diversify the offering to local living, local employment and local services. Future retail can be embedded into the fabric of localised living thus creating more self-sufficient, sustainable neighbourhoods.

- ① Intensification of residential population to create local housing options that support a mixed-use activity centre consisting health, education and cultural uses with civic functions central to its core.
- ② Upgrade of the existing public transport to connect into adjoining networks.
- ③ Make new links through the impermeable urban form to create a more connected urban structure that optimises walking, cycling and open space networks.







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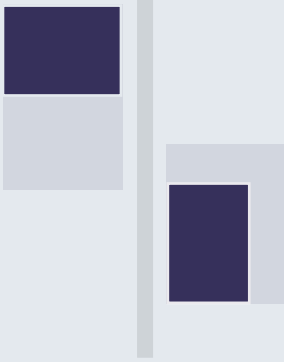
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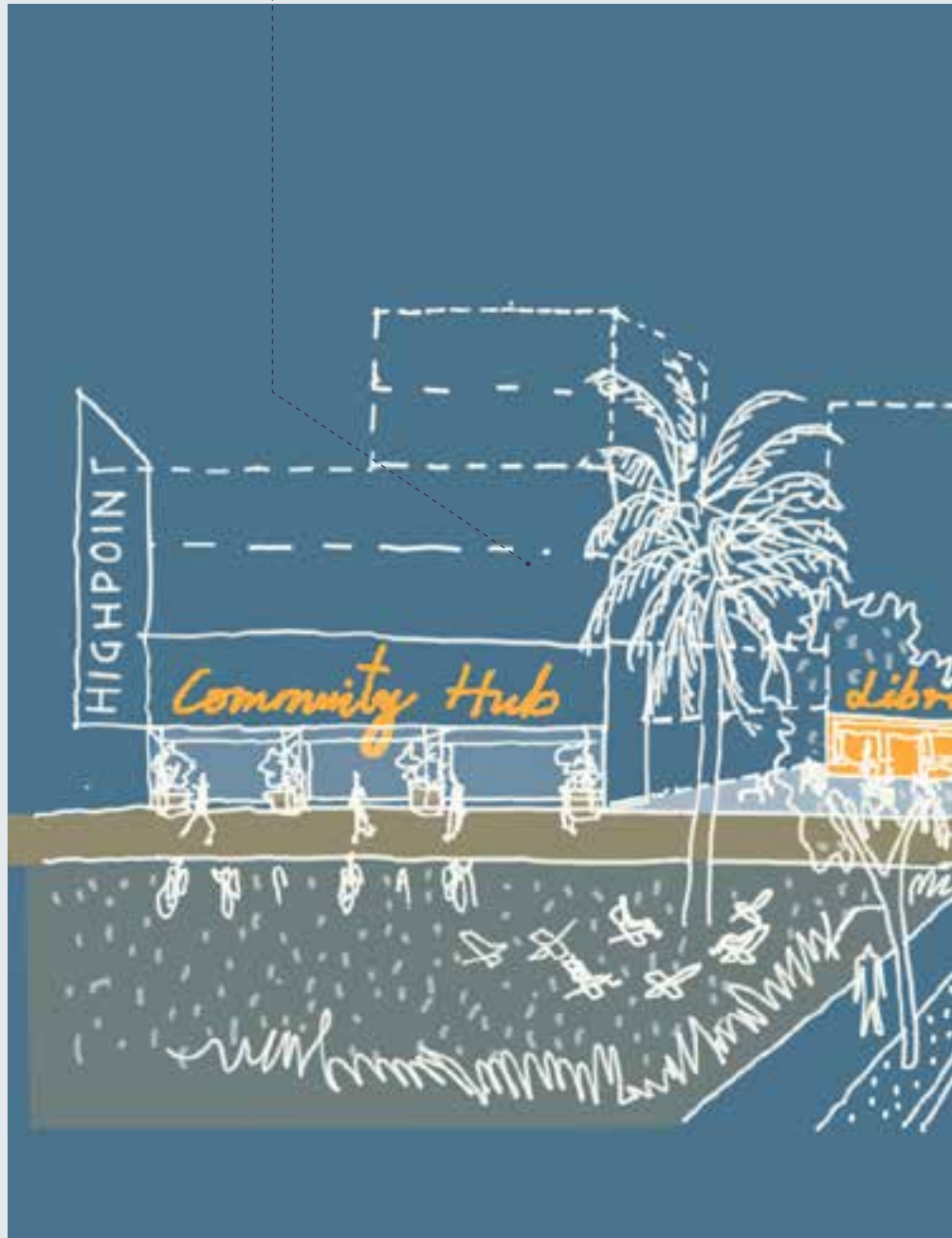


## Reimagining the out of town centre

### 1 Pop up community hub

#### Three interventions for now:

- 1 Utilise car parking ground floor space for community and or co-working spaces.
- 2 Reclaim car parking adjacent to the library for a pop-up parklet and outdoor urban green space. Provide a coffee cart to be located within the parklet, serving the library users and wider community.
- 3 Utilise existing big box retail car park for a pop up local produce market combined with a mobile bike repairs workshop.



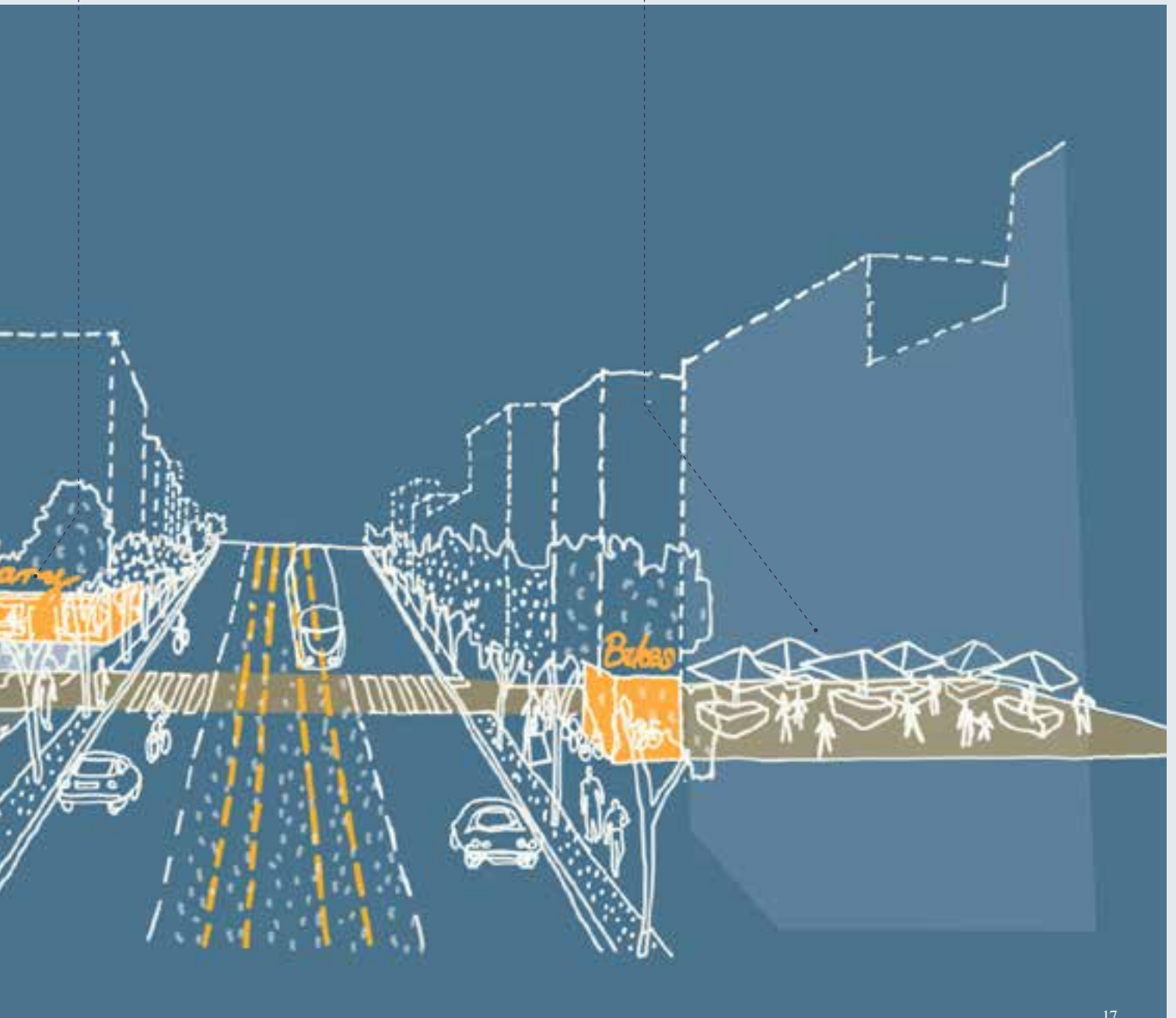


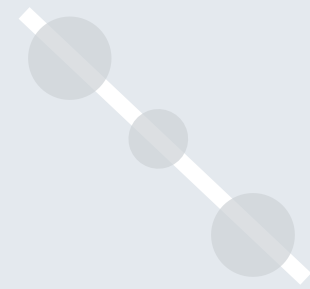


② Reclaim street car parking



③ Utilise existing big box retail car park



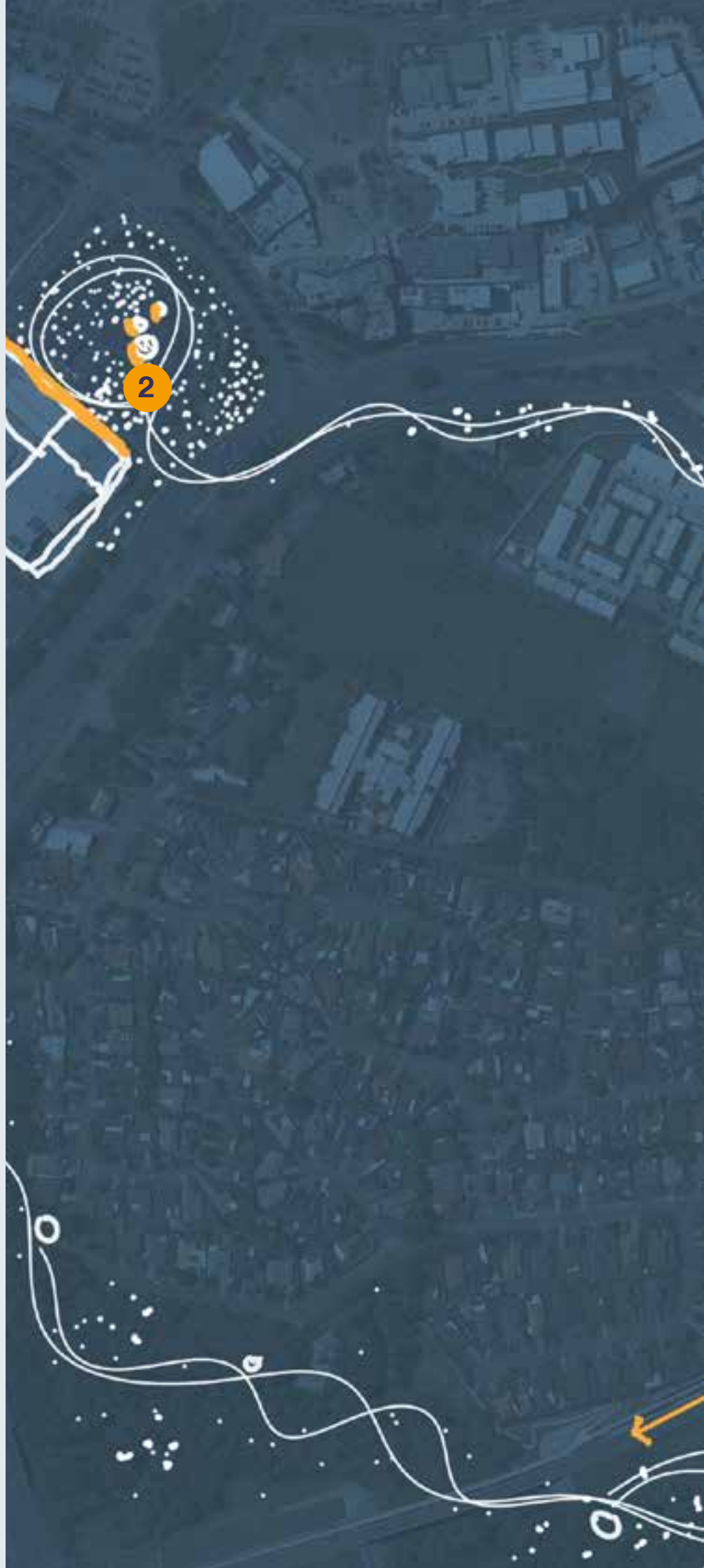


## Planning a healthy suburban TOD

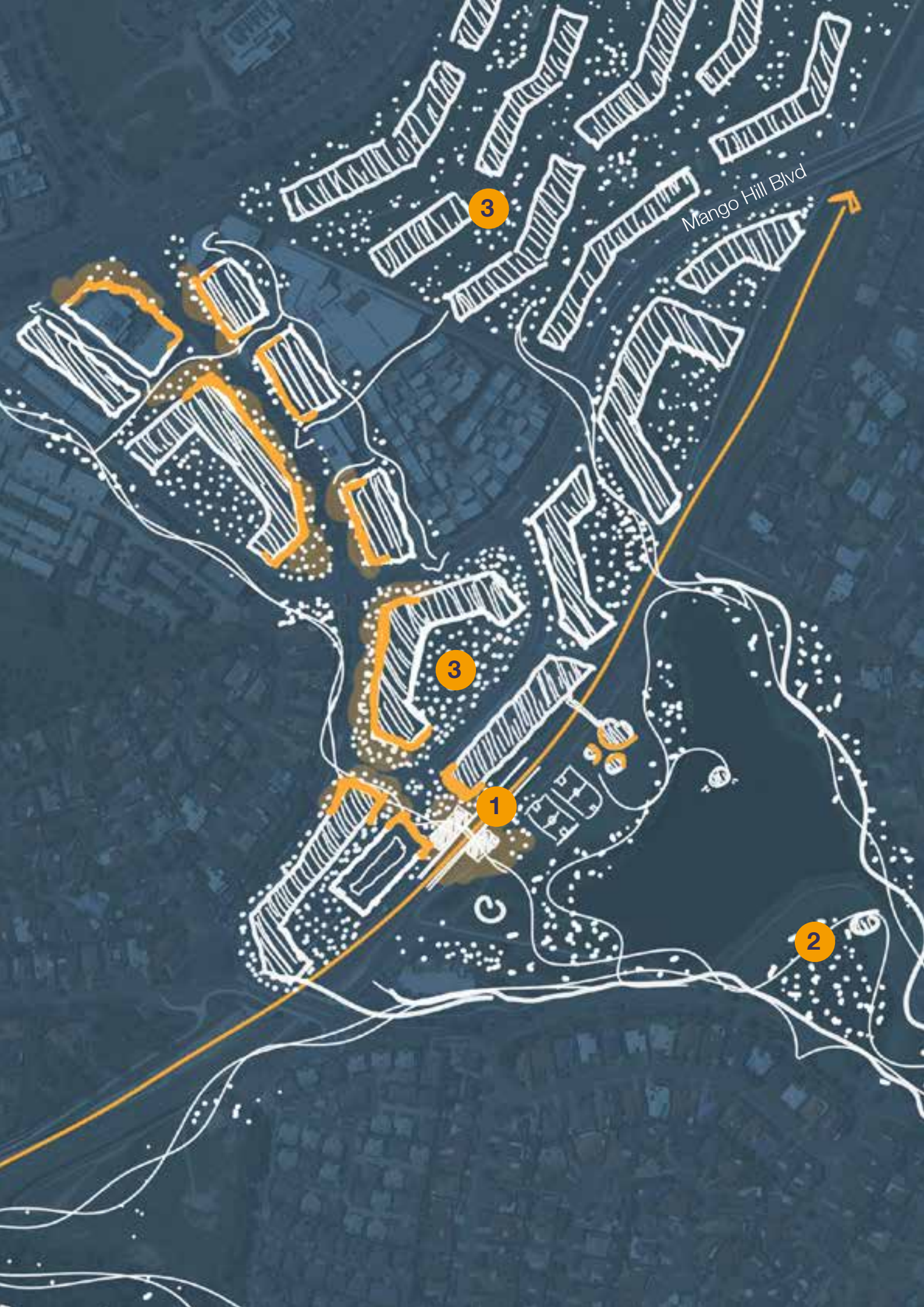
Imagine a future centre around a station, where empty car parks once stood, we see new green infrastructure, food production, and accessible connections to open space.

From the station we can easily walk along active streets, through retrofitted buildings to see schools and workspaces interwoven with new infill residential and easier to the walking and cycling links to surrounding existing community.

- ① Growing the transit corridor through a network of TOD centres with distinct characteristics and complementary services for the wider neighbourhood.
- ② Walkable TOD that is part of a network of meaningful open spaces and employing a regenerative design approach in restoring ecosystems.
- ③ Quality and flexible medium-high density living, with subtropical and communal gardens, increased connection to external environment, 'green' and productive neighbourhood laneways and corridors to support e-commerce and home businesses.
- ④ Adapting and retrofitting local retail centres to respond to digital, automation and augmented 'customer experience', through local consolidated retail delivery service centres, scaled urban manufacturing and 'living laboratories', combined with pop-up markets.







Mango Hill Blvd

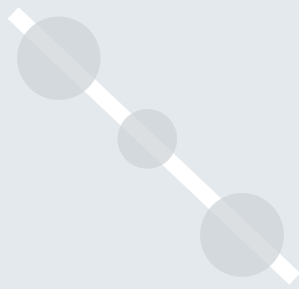
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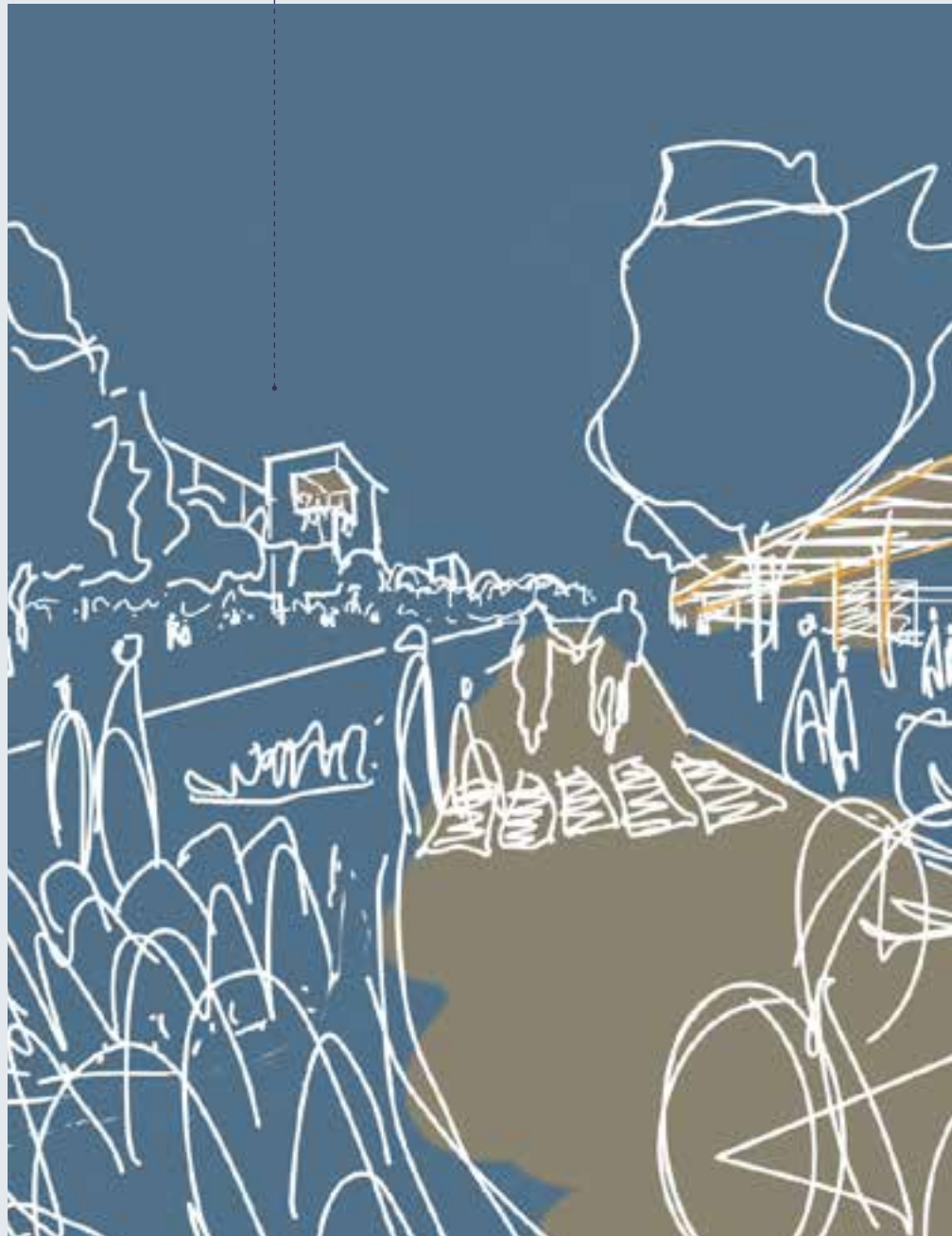


## Planning a healthy suburban TOD

### 1 Facilitate more active travel routes

#### Three interventions for now:

- 1 Low-cost protected cycle and walking infrastructure, through pop up bike lanes, moveable shade planters and cycle park stations.
- 2 Deliver flexible and programmable use of carparks adjacent to train stations to transform into community uses, for example: markets, small pop-up retail, temporary play spaces and plazas.
- 3 Enlarged public spaces around the station and temporary shared streets to support community activities and traffic calming.





② Utilise adjacent carpark  
for community uses



③ Enlarged public spaces  
around stations





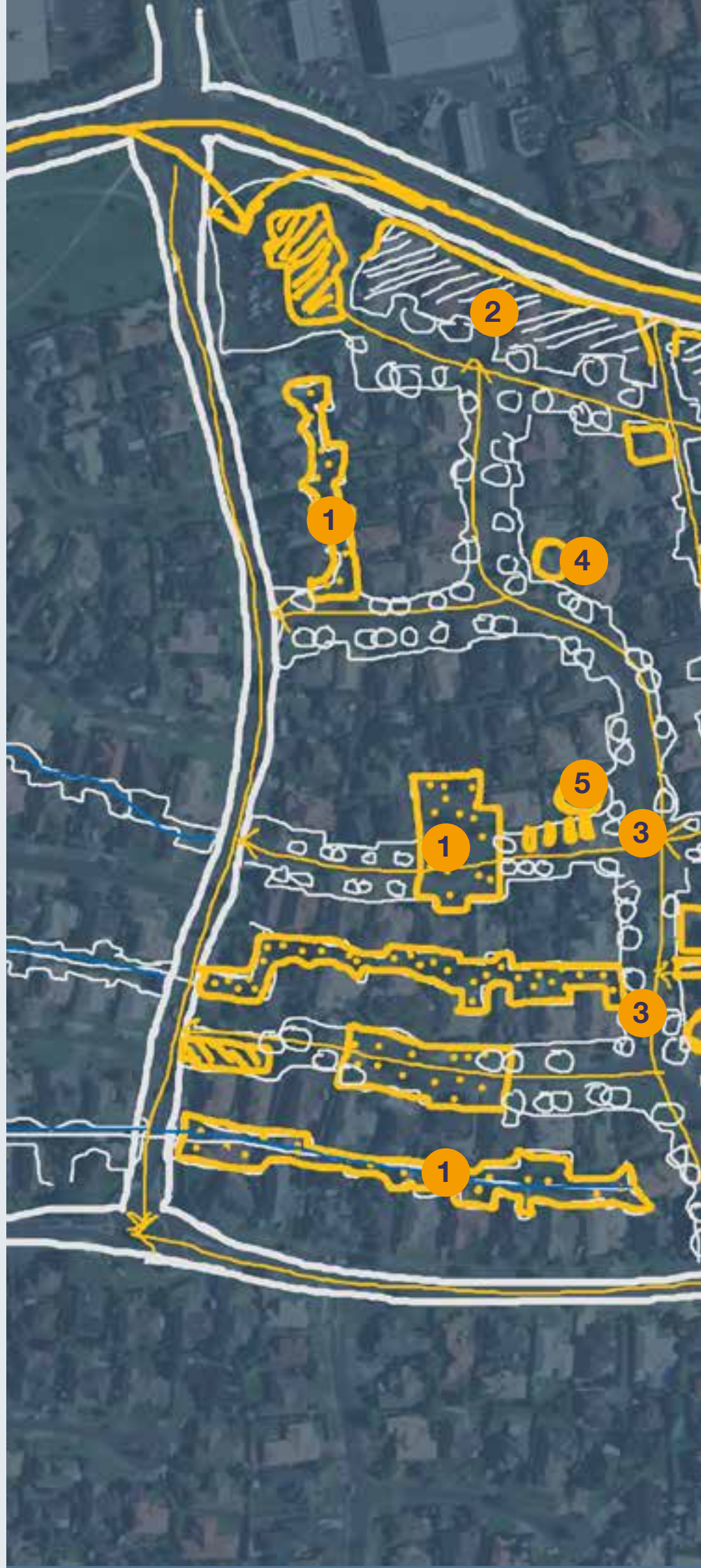


## Opening up the dormitory suburb

Lot by lot residential suburbs could better support the lives and wellbeing of their residents through the reallocation of space away from cars to walking and cycling communities connected by public transport.

Through supporting flexible uses of homes and community facilities to provide working space, homeschooling, gyms and markets, residents can exchange the daily commute for a lifestyle that is more localised, sustainable and community oriented. Streets and backyards are now for urban agriculture, play spaces, energy production or ecological corridors.

- ① Taking down the fences – creating communal backyard and street space for collective food production, ecological corridors, greater accessibility, socialising/play, encouraging a shift from the street to the Village Green where sharing economy and neighbourhood trading can take place.
- ② Gradually increasing density over time to support sustainable population growth.
- ③ Prioritising walkability through connecting cul-de-sacs and shifting streets to walking and cycling with parking limited to key roads and small electric vehicles providing service access to houses.
- ④ Flexible use – community facilities and house pooling. Schools are offices, gyms, community centres and markets while houses become small offices and homeschools where the learning is online and parents take turns hosting.
- ⑤ City batteries – localised energy production and storage on roofs, in carparks and open spaces. Suburbs as back-up batteries for cities in a crisis.









## Opening up the dormitory suburb

### 1 Support home offices and schooling

#### Three interventions for now:

- 1 Reprioritise hierarchy of streets through removing parking, narrowing streets, implementing temporary cycle lanes and widening footpaths
- 2 Support neighbourhood home offices and schooling through provision of digital infrastructure and policy to enable small offices spaces
- 3 Encourage communal urban agriculture and local food production. Create ecological corridors with water sensitive urban design, bee friendly plantings and increased tree canopy coverage.







2 Remove parking, widen footpaths and install temporary cycle lanes and traffic calming



3 Encourage communal urban agriculture and water sensitive urban design in suburban streets



## Five recommendations to bounce forward into Superbia

The reinvention of our suburbs needs both **big ideas** and **small interventions**.

It needs contribution from **individuals, communities, public sector and private sector**. It needs **strategic leadership and strong local presence to drive practical implementation and shape our recovery**.

With the following **recommendations we can collectively invest in our suburbs as one of the keystones of our emergence from COVID-19 and the long term future of our communities**.

### 01

#### Diversify our suburban main streets to meet new needs

Without the office, many of us have quickly learnt to adapt our daily routine, exchanging our offices and coffee shops for digital tools and cherishing local interactions. This has accelerated adoption of remote working, balancing and created a renewed support for local businesses.

Emerging from the pandemic our suburban main streets will:

- Adapt existing buildings to create flexible co-working and co-learning spaces
- Activate local community facilities safely with tactical interventions in the public realm
- Support local business with digital skills, networking and local retail champions.

### 02

#### Build and retrofit sustainable and healthy homes

Throughout lockdown, much of our usual world has been shrunk back to fit inside our homes. Dining tables have become offices, balconies replanted to grow food, our kitchens turned into classrooms and our streets made empty, ready to be reoccupied by our children.

Emerging from the pandemic our existing and new living environments will:

- Be designed and retrofitted to high standards of environmental performance
- Encourage shared use of underused garden spaces for community benefits including food production and play
- Innovate housing types and tenures to create affordable and adaptable living.

## 03

### **Prioritise walking and cycling improvements**

The shutdown reinforces the importance of walking and cycling, not only for exercise but to connect to your community. Yet many suburbs have ‘designed out’ walkability, with no footpaths or cycleways, a lack of shade and inhospitable crossings, all leading to short journeys by car and engrained health issues.

Emerging from the pandemic we imagine a future shaped by:

- **A complete walking and cycling network in all suburbs specifically around local centres**
- **Investment in a widespread tree planting program including planting on private land**
- **Innovation in tactical urbanism and collaboration between councils and landowners to deliver active transport.**

## 04

### **Invest in community health, sport and culture**

The lockdown has reminded us how much we need social interaction and diverse cultural activity in our communities. From sport to music, community meetings to libraries and local services, the integration of these pleasures and practicalities at a local scale will be even more critical to creating and restoring inclusive and healthy communities.

Emerging from the pandemic our new suburbs will:

- **Develop community services hubs for social services**
- **Invest in and support theatres, and community sports venues**
- **Invest in the provision of community health centres and local health services.**

## 05

### **Innovate the funding and delivery mechanisms**

COVID-19 has, and will continue to, create financial uncertainty. The emphasis in the short term appears to be on stimulus projects to deliver new infrastructure and bring forward construction which creates jobs at scale. Superbia will require innovation in creating wider benefits from these large investments, alongside further innovation in smaller scale investment and funding of finer grain projects.

Emerging from the pandemic we imagine a future shaped by:

- **Collaboration and partnerships including suburb-scale business improvement districts**
- **Tactical urbanism and ‘meanwhile’ uses**
- **Innovative housing delivery models.**

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