Government of South Australia

How urban places take shape

HASS Geography – Changing Nations
Year 8 (Australian Curriculum v9)

This four-lesson unit introduces students to the built environment and how human decisions shape place, population change and urban systems. It explores how Australia's urban places are planned and designed, how they function as interconnected systems, and why decisions about land use, movement and public space matter.

Through structured learning, collaborative design work and reflection, students apply spatial reasoning, systems thinking and critical thinking in a hands-on activity. Acting as urban designers and planners, students balance environmental, social and economic considerations, evaluate the impacts and trade-offs of their decisions, and build awareness of real-world built environment careers.

The unit separates the creation of an urban place (Lesson 3) from the assessed explanation, justification and reflection on that design in Lesson 4.

Definitions

***Built environment** refers to the human-made places where people live, work and play. It includes both the physical places where human activity takes place, such as homes, buildings, streets and open spaces, and the infrastructure that supports daily life, including transport, water, energy and waste systems.*

***Sustainable development** describes development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing environmental, social and economic considerations to support long-term wellbeing and quality of life.*

***Urban places** are types of built environments where people live and work in relatively high concentrations, including cities, towns and suburbs. They are shaped by planning and design decisions and supported by interconnected urban systems.*

***Urban systems** are the networks and services that support urban life, such as transport, housing, water, energy, food supply, waste and green spaces. These systems interact with one another and influence how urban places function and develop.*

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Context of unit	This unit focuses on how urban places develop in response to population change, movement and settlement patterns. Students explore urbanisation as a key influence on decision-making within the built environment and examine how planning and design choices shape the way urban places function and support quality of life. Through this lesson sequence, students will: • explain the causes and impacts of urbanisation and how population change influences the development of the built environment • develop and evaluate a response to an urban design and planning challenge by proposing and reflecting on decisions that support sustainable development, liveability and the functioning of urban systems.
Curriculum content and skills covered	This unit aligns with the following content descriptions from the Australian Curriculum ACARA V9 Geography for Year 8: • **Causes of urbanisation and its impact on places and environments** (AC9HG8K06) • **Strategies to manage the sustainability of Australia's changing urban places** (AC9HG8K09) • **Identify a strategy for action in relation to economic, environmental, social or other factors, and explain potential impacts** (AC9HG8S05)
Success criteria	Students demonstrate success when they can: • use spatial reasoning to logically place land uses and explain the reasons for the chosen locations • demonstrate understanding of urban systems, such as transport, housing, services and the environment, and how they influence each other • incorporate and explain sustainable development considerations, including environmental, social and economic factors, in the city design • communicate urban design and planning decisions clearly using appropriate geographical terminology • reflect on design choices by identifying trade-offs, impacts and areas for improvement.

Unit overview	This unit is delivered across four lessons and aligns with the Geography topic *Changing Nations*. Students examine how urban places develop and function in response to population change. Through case study analysis, collaborative design and reflection, students apply geographical concepts and skills to an urban design and planning challenge. The unit culminates in an assessment task where students justify and evaluate their design and planning decisions.
Teacher preparation	Lesson 3 pre-work: • students will work in groups of three to five • using the attached *Build a City Activity* resource, print one city grid, a corresponding set of land use tiles and a legend for each group • cut out the land use tiles and the legend prior to the lesson • Blu Tack or glue may be used to secure the tiles in place during the activity. No additional preparation is required for Lessons 1, 2 and 4 beyond standard lesson planning.
Author, licensing and contact	**Version:** 1.0 (February 2026) This resource was developed by the **Office for Design and Architecture SA** in collaboration with **Amber Dias**, Leader of HASS and Geography at St Paul's College. This material is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**, which allows others to copy, adapt and share the material, provided that appropriate credit is given to the creators. If you have feedback on this resource, please contact the Department for Housing and Urban Development via dhud.reception@sa.gov.au.

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Lesson 1 outline	**Urban places: what are they?** Students develop a shared understanding of urban places by exploring key concepts related to urbanisation and population change. The lesson introduces how and why urban places form and the opportunities and challenges associated with urban settlement in different contexts. Students will define and explore: • urban places and urbanisation • population growth and population distribution • the origins and consequences of urban settlement • opportunities and impacts associated with urbanisation in developed and developing countries • sustainable development and why it matters for urban places.
Lesson 2 outline	**Urban systems and decision-making in Australia** Students examine how Australian urban places, with a focus on Adelaide, are planned and managed by analysing urban systems and place-based examples of sustainable development. The lesson builds understanding of why urban planning emerged and how informed decisions shape the form and function of urban places and influence how they respond to growth and change. Students might, for example: • explore how key urban systems operate in Australian urban places, including transport, housing, water, energy, food supply, waste and the environment • understand the emergence of contemporary urban planning as a public health response to poor living conditions during the Industrial Revolution, including overcrowded housing, polluted water and lack of sanitation • consider Aboriginal approaches to caring for Country as an example of long-term, place-based land management and stewardship • examine examples of planning and design responses that support sustainable development in Adelaide • analyse how urban systems interact to create opportunities, constraints and trade-offs • recognise how urban design and planning decisions influence the form and function of urban places.

Lesson 3 outline	**Build a City (group activity)** See detailed lesson plan and the *Build a City Activity* resource. Building on concepts from Lessons 1 and 2, students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place and consider how its systems interact. This lesson focuses on applying and implementing informed decisions. Students will: • design and justify an urban place using land use zoning, transport planning, services and spatial reasoning • apply sustainable development considerations to address challenges such as movement, green space, urban heat and resource use • consider how urban systems interact and identify potential trade-offs and impacts of their decisions. **Teacher note** Lessons 3 and 4 may be delivered as a double lesson to allow additional time for design refinement, group discussion and presentations, depending on class size and timetabling. Teachers may also choose to assign a written reflection as homework at the end of Lesson 3 to support preparation for presentations in Lesson 4. Prompts from the detailed lesson plan could be used for this exercise.
Lesson 4 outline	**Reflection and assessment** In this lesson, all groups present their urban place and justify the planning and design decisions developed in Lesson 3. Students will: • use geographical concepts and language to justify design and planning decisions and respond to feedback • explain how their design responds to human needs, the physical landscape and key urban systems • evaluate trade-offs and impacts of their decisions, particularly in relation to sustainable development, liveability and interconnected urban systems • identify areas for improvement based on reflection and peer feedback. As groups present their designs, student peers are encouraged to ask questions and provide constructive feedback demonstrating their own understanding. **Teacher note (optional delivery model)** Teachers may structure presentations as trade expo-style to provide a more authentic audience and increase engagement. At the beginning of the activity, each group sets up their work at a table or designated space around the room. **Round A**

	• half of the groups act as presenters • the remaining groups rotate around the room as the audience • at each station, presenters explain their design and respond to questions • audience groups ask questions, provide feedback and, if required, take brief notes • each rotation lasts approximately 5–7 minutes. **Round B** • groups swap roles • the same timing and rotation process is followed. This format works best when dedicated lesson time is allocated.
Assessment opportunities	• **Observation:** collaboration, engagement and idea generation • **Product:** clarity and quality of design concepts • **Communication:** explanation and justification of ideas • **Reflection:** understanding of systems, trade-offs and learning.
Optional extension	This activity may be followed by a short sequence of lessons focusing on mapping knowledge and skills, such as BOLTSS, topographic maps and contour interpretation. This extension supports students to consider how landform and relief influence urban design and planning decisions.

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Lesson 3 Total time 50 minutes	**Build a City (group activity)** Students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place. **Purpose** To make visible the thinking involved in urban design and planning, including decisions about land use, movement, access to services and environmental impacts. **Learning intention** Students will understand how urban places develop as interconnected systems and how urban designers and planners influence liveability, balance sustainable development considerations and manage trade-offs that affect quality of life.
Introduction 5 minutes	Suggested teacher script *Urban places are interconnected systems made up of transport, utilities, housing, employment, industry, education, recreation and green spaces. Decisions in one part of the system can affect many others.* *Today you're going to take on the role of urban designers and planners.* *Urban designers and planners help decide how cities and towns grow. They make decisions about where homes, schools, parks and services are located, how people move around and how places change over time.* *Urban places are not random. They are shaped by human imagination, decision-making and labour over time. The choices urban designers and planners make influence liveability, balance environmental, social and economic needs and manage trade-offs that affect people's quality of life.*
Instructions 5 minutes	1. In groups of three to five, students use the city grid and land use tiles provided in the *Build a City Activity* resource to design a city, town or suburb. 2. Each grid has a corresponding set of land use tiles and legend. 3. Teachers may provide one grid per group or combine multiple grids for a larger shared design.

Activity
30 minutes

Students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place, applying their understanding of urban systems, population change and sustainable development. Teachers may support student thinking by circulating between groups to prompt discussion and displaying selected design and reflection prompts for students to refer to during the activity.

Design and reflection prompts

These prompts are intended to guide decision-making, support reasoning about how urban systems interact and align directly with the assessment requirements in Lesson 4. Students should be encouraged to record or remember their responses, as these will support presentations, peer feedback and written reflection.

Responding to needs, place and systems

- *What human needs is your design responding to (e.g. housing, access to services, movement, recreation)?*
- *How does your design respond to the physical features or constraints of the map?*
- *How are key urban systems represented and supported, and how do different land uses interact (e.g. transport, housing, industry, green space)?*
- *What problem or challenge is your design responding to (e.g. congestion, access to services, heat, growth)?*

Justifying decisions

- *Why have you located different land uses where you have?*
- *How do transport and movement decisions influence land use, or vice versa?*
- *How accessible and connected is your design for different users?*
- *Are your decisions practical and realistic for the size and needs of the population?*

Evaluating trade-offs and impacts

- *What trade-offs or constraints did you have to manage?*
- *How do your decisions balance environmental, social and economic considerations?*
- *What impacts might your design have on liveability, urban heat, emissions or water use?*
- *What challenges might emerge over time as the place grows or changes?*

Reflection and sharing 10 minutes	Pair each group with another group in the room. In Round A, one group takes on the role of presenters and briefly shares their design, explaining: • the key features of their urban place • the rationale behind major design and planning decisions • any trade-offs or constraints they managed. The paired group acts as the audience. They are expected to: • listen carefully • ask thoughtful questions about the design and decisions • identify strengths or potential areas for improvement. After 3–5 minutes, the teacher signals for groups to swap roles. **Purpose** This structured peer exchange ensures all students actively explain, question and reflect on design and planning decisions before the formal presentation and assessment in Lesson 4.

Suggested assessment rubric

Criteria	A – Excellent Achievement	B – High Achievement	C – Satisfactory Achievement	D – Partial Achievement	E – Limited Achievement
Understanding of urbanisation ***(AC9HG8K06)***	Demonstrates thorough and insightful understanding of the causes and impacts of urbanisation. Clearly explains how population change influences cities, environments and economies using accurate geographical concepts.	Demonstrates strong understanding of urbanisation, explaining major causes and impacts with appropriate examples.	Demonstrates a sound understanding of urbanisation, identifying some causes and impacts.	Demonstrates limited understanding, with simple or unclear explanations.	Demonstrates little or no understanding of urbanisation concepts.
Spatial reasoning and urban design ***(AC9HG8K06)***	City layout is highly logical and well-reasoned. Land uses, transport and services are deliberately placed and clearly justified using strong spatial reasoning and recognised urban design and planning principles.	City layout is mostly logical, with thoughtful placement of land uses that shows strong spatial thinking.	City layout shows some logical placement of land uses, though reasoning may be general or uneven.	City layout shows limited logic, with weak or unclear placement decisions.	City layout is largely unplanned or random, showing minimal spatial reasoning.
Sustainable development ***(AC9HG8K09)***	Applies multiple effective sustainable development strategies and clearly explains how their decisions balance environmental, social and economic considerations to improve liveability and long-term outcomes.	Applies several sustainable development strategies and explains how their decisions consider more than one dimension (environmental, social or economic) to support liveability.	Identifies some sustainable development strategies with basic explanation, showing partial understanding of how they support people or the environment.	Mentions sustainability or sustainable development in a limited or unclear way, with little explanation of how decisions support long-term outcomes.	Does not identify or apply sustainable development strategies.
Systems thinking and interconnections ***(AC9HG8K09)***	Clearly explains how urban systems interact (e.g. housing, transport, services, environment) and analyses trade-offs and consequences of decisions.	Explains key interactions between urban systems and identifies some consequences of decisions.	Identifies basic links between systems with limited explanation.	Shows minimal recognition of system interactions or trade-offs.	Does not recognise interactions between urban systems.
Strategy for action and impact ***(AC9HG8S05)***	Proposes a clear, well-justified strategy for action that responds to an identified urban challenge and explains environmental, social and economic impacts in depth.	Proposes a relevant strategy and explains multiple impacts clearly.	Proposes a strategy and explains some impacts.	Proposes a strategy with little explanation of impacts.	Strategy is unclear, inappropriate or missing.
Collaboration and participation	Consistently works collaboratively and responsibly, contributing ideas and supporting group decision-making.	Participates effectively and contributes useful ideas.	Participates appropriately with some contribution to the group.	Participation is inconsistent or requires prompting.	Rarely participates or negatively affects group progress.
Communication and reflection ***(Presentation and written reflection)***	Communicates ideas clearly, confidently and accurately using appropriate geographical terminology. Reflection provides thoughtful evaluation of decisions, challenges and improvements.	Communicates ideas clearly using appropriate terminology. Reflection evaluates choices with some depth.	Communicates ideas adequately. Reflection describes decisions with limited evaluation.	Communication is unclear or incomplete. Reflection is minimal.	Communication and/or reflection is missing or demonstrates very limited understanding.

Student-friendly rubric

What I'm being assessed on	A – Excellent	B – High	C – Satisfactory	D – Partial	E – Limited
Understanding of urbanisation	I clearly explain why cities grow and show a strong understanding of how population, jobs, transport, the environment and the economy are connected.	I explain why cities grow and describe key impacts on people and places.	I show a basic understanding of why cities grow and identify some impacts.	My explanation is simple or unclear, or I mention very few ideas.	I don't show understanding of why cities grow or what urbanisation means.
City design and spatial thinking **Placing things logically on the map**	My city layout makes excellent sense. Buildings, transport and services are placed in smart locations, and I can explain my choices clearly.	My layout mostly makes sense and shows good planning choices.	Some parts of my layout make sense, but other choices are unclear.	My layout has limited planning and doesn't clearly explain why things are placed where they are.	My layout looks mostly random or unfinished.
Sustainable development **Making the city liveable now and into the future by balancing environmental, social and economic needs**	I include many sustainable development ideas and clearly explain how my decisions balance environmental, social and economic needs to create a liveable place now and into the future and explain any trade-offs this created.	I include several sustainable development ideas and explain how my decisions consider environmental, social and economic needs and some trade-offs this created.	I include some sustainable development ideas with simple explanations about how they support people or the environment.	I mention sustainability or sustainable development, but my ideas are weak or not clearly explained.	I do not include sustainable development ideas.
Systems thinking **How parts of the city affect each other**	I clearly explain how different urban systems in my city interact (e.g. transport ↔ housing). I explain trade-offs and consequences.	I explain how some systems interact and mention consequences.	I identify a few connections, but explanations are basic.	I show limited understanding of how systems connect.	I do not explain how parts of the city affect each other.
Strategy for action **My main planning idea and its impacts**	I propose a strong planning idea and explain the environmental, social and economic impacts in detail.	I propose a clear idea and explain more than one impact.	I propose an idea and explain at least one impact.	My idea is unclear, or impacts are not explained well.	My idea is missing or not connected to the task.
Working in a group	I worked very well with my group, shared ideas, listened to others and helped make decisions.	I worked well with my group and contributed useful ideas.	I worked with my group and contributed at times.	I needed reminders to stay involved or contribute.	I did not work effectively with my group.
Communication and reflection **Explaining ideas and reflecting on learning**	I explain my ideas clearly and confidently using geographical language accurately. My reflection shows thoughtful thinking about what worked and what I'd improve.	I explain my ideas clearly and include a reflection with some detail.	I explain my ideas and complete a basic reflection.	My explanation or reflection is unclear or very short.	My explanation and/or reflection is missing or very incomplete.

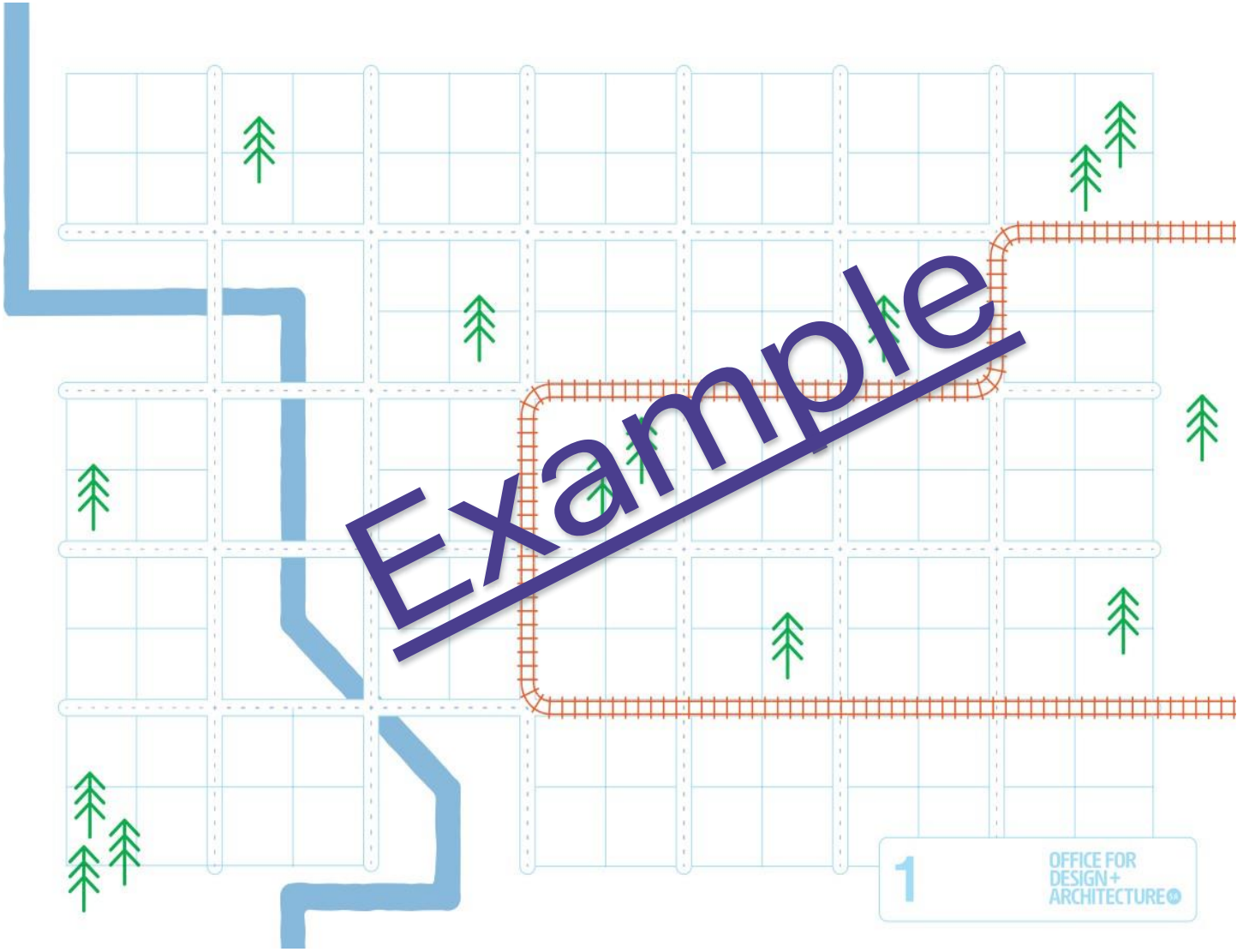
Optional student tip (you may wish to provide to students)

To aim for an A or B:

Be prepared to explain why you made each planning decision, not just what you included. Use geographical language accurately and show your understanding of sustainable development, including how your design balances environmental, social and economic considerations. Explain how different urban systems interact in your design, and how this influenced your decisions.

Appendix A – Urban Planning Activity Resource

City Grid Plan Example (there are 6 different plans available)



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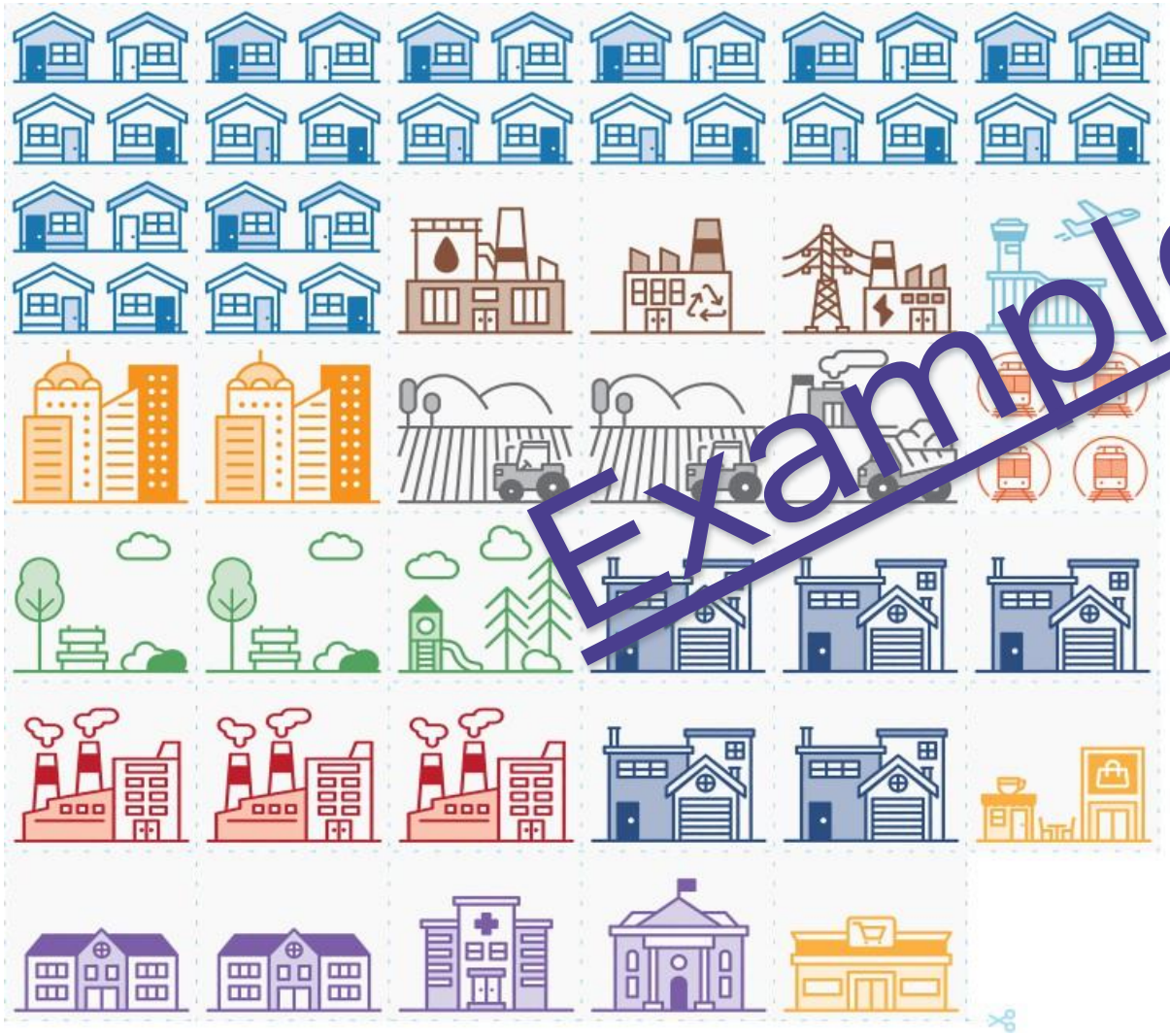
Land Use Tiles and Legend (cut out each tile separately, cut train station tile into 4)



Completed example