

# URBAN DESIGN GROUP QUARTERLY

August 1980

## Chairman's Foreword

The Group has begun the 1980/81 session with vigour. At the Annual General Meeting on 24 April 1980 a new Committee was elected (details below) and, conscious of the need to avoid the UDG becoming too much centred around London and London-based members, we are actively seeking both to expand our membership (numerically and geographically) and to broaden our structure into the regional framework to which we are committed by our founding objectives.

Urban Design Quarterly

Central to this aim is the Group's Newsletter. This issue is the first in an expanded regular format - issued quarterly and mailed to all members, to the press, the Schools and the Institutes. In addition to carrying news of our activities, Urban Design Quarterly will carry keynote articles about urban design and serve as a vehicle for the interchange of views between members around the country, to supplement regional talks and meetings held in as wide a range of venues as practicable.

To succeed in this endeavour we need:

- ... more members (please renew your membership or join our ranks afresh using the enclosed subscription form)
- ... more members willing to organise non London based activities (we will happily provide everyone interested with a list of their local members)

contributions to Urban Design Quarterly from our membership at large - comments on the Group's achievements and weaknesses to date, ideas for our growth and development, papers about urban design issues and book reviews. We would also like to commence a regular Letters Column and will carry relevant advertisements (eg announcements of Conferences and Urban Design Courses).

So please write to us and initiate as many activities as possible that will promote the Group's objectives and build on the good start that has been made. A Group such as this is dispersed and therefore understandably fragile. It cannot be carried forward solely by a handful of energetic Committee Members operating in their spare time with limited funds: it must rely in large measure on the enormous potential of its full membership. Let's start to realise that potential in 1980/81.

# UDG Committee: 1980-81

At the Annual General Meeting on 24 April 1980 the following ten UDG members were- elected to the Committee for the next year, drawn from local government (4), private practice (4), and the academic world (2).

Please feel free to contact any of us according to our various responsibilities:

1. JOHN BILLINGHAM: Regional liaison and activities  
City Architect & Planning Officer, Oxford City Council, 108-113 St. Aldates,  
OXFORD
2. JOHN EVANS: Editorial Sub Committee  
RTM Planning Partnership, 136 Long Acre, LONDON W3C 9AE
3. KEITH INGHAM: Events Secretary  
Ingham Dockray Moore, 374 North Road, PRESTON PR1 1RU
4. ARNOLD LINDEN: Events Organisation, educational issues and printing  
School of the Environment, Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Road,  
LONDON NW1 5LS
5. ROBERT MEADOWS: Events organisation, educational issues and printing  
School of the Environment, Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Road,  
LONDON NW1 5LS
6. TONY MEATS: Treasurer and Membership Secretary  
3 High Street, Taplow, Maidenhead, BUCKS SL6 0EX
7. JOHN PEVERLEY: Assistant Treasurer & Membership Secretary  
31 Onslow Gardens, LONDON N10
8. PETER STUDDERT: Publications Secretary & Editorial Sub-Committee  
11 Ferncroft Avenue, IDNDON NW3
9. FRANCIS TIBBALDS: Chairman, Press Liaison Officer and Editorial Sub-Committee  
Francis Tibbalds Associates, 39 Charing Cross Road, LONDON WC2H 0AS
10. TONY TUGNUTT: Committee Secretary  
33 Park Mansions, Prince of Wales Drive, LONDON SW11

# Less 'Architecture' & 'Planning' More Urban Design

Architects and planners have failed in important aspects of their responsibilities. Architects have been pre-occupied with their own individualism; planners have retreated into the more abstract and strategic issues of planning. Architects and planners have collided head-on over development control. The important middle ground between architecture and planning - urban design, the making of urban spaces and places - has gone by default. Worse still, terrible consequences have come from ill-informed 'good' intentions.

Architects, planners, landscape architects, road engineers must come together in making the urban environment. This calls for a change of heart, a willingness to admit past mistakes, to understand each others responsibilities and, above all, to understand more clearly the qualities which make a good, socially acceptable urban environment. But this will not happen without a conscious effort, especially in education and research. There must be more urban design education, both in the initial training programme and in postgraduate and continuing education. Research is needed in many urban design topics, but especially in the psychology and aesthetics of the built environment. Perhaps the present lull in building activity gives a good opportunity for some new thinking and re-training.

Robert Meadows, Polytechnic of Central London

## SSRC Review

On 7 July the Group submitted evidence to the Planning Committee of the Social Science Research Council, which is currently reviewing the funding of Urban Design Courses. The evidence was submitted under the following main headings:

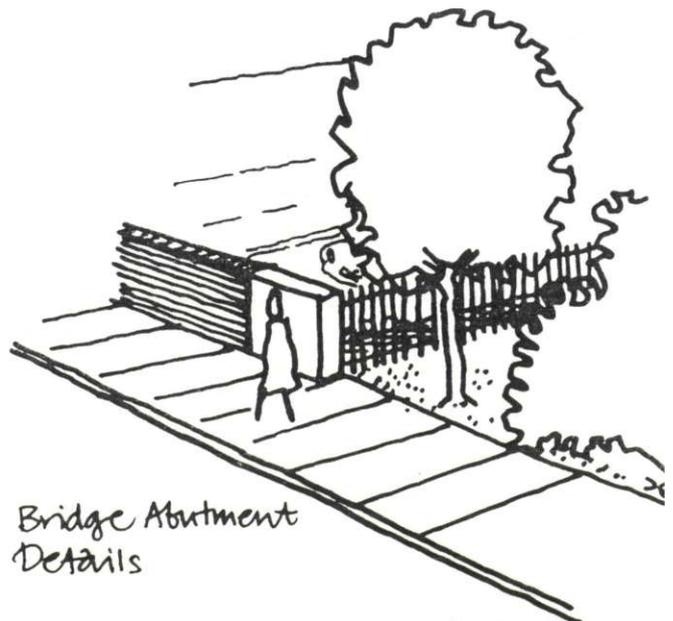
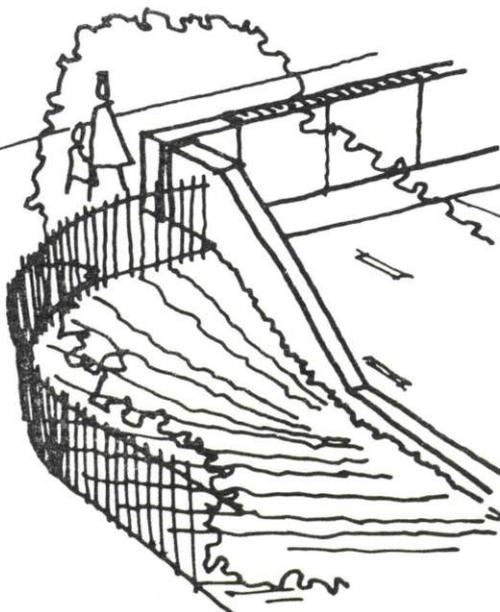
1. Demand for Post Graduate Training in Urban Design.
2. Links with Practice.
3. Areas Requiring Research.
4. Problem Areas.

# Roads v Towns

The Role of the Urban Designer in the Process of Designing High Capacity Urban Roads: a synopsis of the talk to the Urban Design Group on 24 April 1980  
by John V S Evans - RTM Planning Partnership

1. In the 1960's the philosophy became accepted that the best way to build successful urban highways was to integrate them with other forms of redevelopment.
2. When the Urban Motorways Committee looked at integrated redevelopment, it was soon discovered that though it could be justified economically in certain locations, the real problem was probably social/political in that it necessitated change of land uses adjacent to the road and disturbance to a large number of people in order to produce a satisfactory result.
3. Many of the urban roads which could have faced the most severe design problems have now been abandoned, but many of the roads now being designed are bypasses in outer urban areas and have the problems the Urban Motorways Committee considered.
4. I believe that the major objective of this ameliorative design should be to restore the town to a shape and form to the satisfaction of the local residents. How do we reduce the effect of severance; how do we compensate the loss of familiar features; how do we repair the edges of the town which abut this totally alien feature?
5. Design, therefore, must include consideration of all the features of the road itself and those of adjacent areas; no element can be designed in isolation. It includes adjacent roads, the adjacent paving, the adjacent fencing, the civic features which may be lost or remain in a new environment. It means consideration of the actual material used; there is little we can do about concrete - the ubiquitous material of highway construction - but where it intrudes on the local area we need to clad it or change its quality and this is difficult. In order to produce the best answer, it also necessitates looking at the actual procedure of road design, the procedure of road construction and the conventions of civil engineering practice.
6. The scale of the projects is similar to designing a building many miles long in an area over which you have little or no control. There is little or no possibility of changing the areas adjacent to the road, and the area of transition must be concentrated into the smallest possible space which is quite the opposite to the integrated redevelopment approach where the land take needed was frequently three or four times the width of the road. The possibility of acquiring affected property is little used because of the inevitable social disturbance.

7. An aspect which is totally different from architecture is that the geometry of road design is non-rectangular and therefore does not fit easily with adjacent buildings and not even many open spaces when used for formal recreation. This is something architects frequently fail to appreciate. Part of the real skill is to produce the kind of consistency and homogeneity which you get with architecture where there is an internal sense to the building produced by the rectangle. This is less possible with road building; not only are you switching from one area to another with totally different qualities, but the road fits with none of it. Another problem is the fact that we have to work with standardised elements such as signs and crash barriers. Many of the features which are manufactured or have to be designed to particular specifications, become standardised and obligatory when designing any new road. Frequently these have never been considered as elements which abut one another, or abut anything else except within the limited area for which they are designed.
  
8. The measures needed to produce a better result are relatively simple to design and can be created by the normal highway team with only a minimum of additional expertise. The problem lies in the implementation, as it necessitates the involvement of a large number of people, agencies and interested parties who must be encouraged to maintain a consistent approach from the beginning of the project and not expect to apply an answer, as a last minute option. If this were not difficult enough it is made more so by the process of road design as it has developed over the last 20 years. It has tended to substitute an administrative formula for creative analytical thought by means of the introduction of procedures, codes of practice, guidelines and standard components. This has engendered an attitude amongst the people involved that is more akin to that of a specialist technical administrator rather than a designer.



Bridge Abutment  
Details

## RIBA SGM: June 4 1980

At a rather thinly attended meeting, UDG Chairman Francis Tibbalds made a strong statement on behalf of the Group opposing the Motion, which called for the removal of aesthetic control on architects by planners and the setting up of architect's advisory panels to adjudicate in cases where a planning Committee's view on the aesthetic aspects of an application differed from the architect's view.

The statement deplored the extent to which the 'planner bashing/aesthetic freedom' lobby among the RIBA'S membership had damaged the image of the architectural profession. It was regretted that the path towards better collaboration between the architectural and planning professions was being diverted by the extreme views of a few individuals.

The following points were made:

'Aesthetic control' is difficult to define - does it embrace bulk, massing and scale or is it merely colour, materials and 'cosmetics'?

- Why should the community, through its elected representatives, not have every right to consider and judge the visual qualities of proposals by which it will be affected?
- What evidence is there that advisory panels are not more meddlesome and conservative than lay committees and their advisors are alleged to be?
- How impartial is one architect likely to be in judging the work of another - especially if a local competitor? And how many top-notch architects are likely to be willing to serve on such panels?
- The way for architects to secure "recognition in the planning process" of their design expertise is to demonstrate that they are worthy of that recognition. The Motion did not encourage that belief.

The RIBA would, it was argued, be better advised to consider three objectives for architects and planners:

- 1 To rebuild public confidence in both professions by demonstrating a more humble, sensitive, collaborative and mature behaviour before the community that we serve.
- 2 To provide greater opportunities within the planning framework for unusual and imaginative solutions and a firm commitment to quality in all that we do.
- 3 To minimise the dictatorial, arrogant and divisive attitudes that architects, planners, engineers, landscape architects and other associated professionals and specialists not infrequently adopt with each other:

- by concentrating on areas of commonality, in terms of problems, objectives and commitment to the community that they serve
- by fostering better mutual respect and collaboration between each of these professional groups
- by forging stronger links between the various professions - informally at a personal level and formally via the various existing Institutes
- by ensuring a better understanding of each other's strengths, weaknesses and actual areas of competence and operation, during our education and professional training
- by architects getting to know their local Planning Officer and his problems and objectives, so that the first encounter is not over some trivial point of aesthetic control, leading to both sides taking entrenched and equally ridiculous positions
- by accepting that the views and requirements of the local planning authority are an essential and proper part of the briefing of the architect.

The statement concluded by referring to the considerable progress that had been made towards these objectives, including the moderately worded Joint Policy Statement agreed between the RIBA and RTPI. The RIBA should make every effort to further the constructive progress that had been made instead of continuing to discredit itself by pursuing divisive and boring 'old chestnuts'. Environmental quality will not be achieved by architects 'going it alone'.

Despite a healthy round of applause (not to mention a little heckling by an architect who clearly didn't want to make friends with his local Planning Officer!) it was hardly surprising that the Group's statement was not well received by the more extreme supporters of the Motion, although it received good coverage in the technical press. For the record, the final wording of the Motion that was passed reads (rather ambiguously) as follows:

That the Council of the RIBA shall, within the spirit of the Joint Policy Statement agreed between the RIBA and the RTPI, seek to change the planning machinery to:

- require recognition in the planning process of the expertise of architects who are statutorily registered practitioners, qualified to design buildings.
- remove aesthetic control for schemes designed by architects.
- set up architects advisory panels in each planning authority area.

pcl      School of Environment  
**POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN URBAN DESIGN**  
**Two-Year Part-Time Course (Day Release)**

The course will be open to people who are actively interested in urban design and have at least a first degree, preferably in Architecture, Building, Civil Engineering, Surveying, Town Planning or Landscape Architecture. The course leads to the award of the P.C.L. Postgraduate Diploma in Urban Design and is recognised for the award of the R.I.B.A. Diploma in Urban Design to qualified architects.

A further group of students will start the course in September 1980. Enquiries from prospective students should be made to:

The Admissions Officer  
School Registry for the Environment  
The Polytechnic of Central London  
35 Marylebone Road  
LONDON, NW1 5LS

## Events

The Urban Design Group is proceeding with its proposal to co-sponsor, with the RIBA and RTPI, a Conference/Seminar as part of the programme for European Urban Renaissance Year 1980/81. This will take place later this year or early next and details will be circulated in due course. In addition to this major event for the current year, we shall be arranging two Autumn meetings of the Group with invited speakers - one or whom we hope will be Richard Hargreaves to talk about his work on Industrial Improvement Areas. Please watch the professional press for details.

Conscious of the feeling by a number of members that the Group held too many London based meetings in 1978-80, we should like to encourage regional organisers to proceed with local meetings and activities and will happily publicise details in forthcoming issues of Urban Design Quarterly.

## Next Issue

Please send us your comments for the next issue on local projects and proposals - especially those which are controversial from an urban design point of view.