

URBAN DESIGN GROUP QUARTERLY

NOVEMBER 1980

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Joining It All Together

One of the great problems with present-day 'place-making' is that each of the environmental professions - architects, planners, engineers, landscape architects - have become over-concerned with their own particular skill as a separate activity. The most successful and likable urban environments tend, however, to be those where all the components - buildings, trees, roads, spaces, people, traffic - have been blended or joined together to make interesting, lively and attractive places or series of places. The concern of urban design is firstly to get this mix to happen at all and secondly to get the mix right.

As a frequent visitor to the Netherlands, it has always seemed to me that this most densely populated European country has traditionally done rather well in the joining-together aspects of urban design. Amsterdam and the Hague remain among my favourite cities not just for the obvious scenic beauty of canals, bridges and gabled facades, but more for the vitality of their urban transport systems, in which the limited available space is shared by pedestrians, bicycles, trains, taxis and cars. The accompanying sketch of Amsterdam's Reguliersbreestraat shows what I have in mind. The mix varies in different parts of the city and in many parts segregated routes are provided for cyclists - the Danes make similar provision. I noted on my last visit that Leids Straat has now been pedestrianised, but still accommodates the occasional bright yellow tram - a somewhat alarming mix, but one that Amsterdamers seem to take in their stride.

The densely built-up older residential suburbs have been harder to cope with than the city centres or the truly rural areas, and the concentration of pedestrians, vehicles and cyclists in dense areas traversed by narrow streets and canals has often resulted in fairly nasty accidents. A new approach was demanded by Dutch citizens and resulted in a unique concept called the "Woonerf", which is now finding its way into planning terminology and practice outside Holland.

The solution was deceptively simple and one which might also have wide applicability to the towns and cities of the UK. Each street or residential area is considered and designed as a whole - an integrated system of uses and activities accommodating bikes and every other sort of traffic, but emphasising the priority of residential and living functions over vehicles. Woonerven are not traffic-free or pedestrianised areas, nor is there any sub division of the street surface into separate areas for pedestrians and cars. In principle all kinds of vehicles (except through traffic) may enter but their movement, speed and parking is controlled by design features such as bottlenecks, bends, planting, placing of tubs and street furniture, and bumps in the floorscape.

In practice little traffic needs to enter the woonerf and parking capacity is kept deliberately low. No part of the woonerf is more than 500 yards from a main road, according with the perceived size of a Dutch 'neighbourhood'. Pedestrians have complete freedom of access and movement and right of way through an attractive environment, combining hard and soft landscaping, and the edges of the "Woonerf" are clearly defined. Great stress is placed upon safety and clear visibility in the detailed design of the features intended to achieve the above ends.

Woonerven have now been tried and tested in existing and new residential communities in Holland over the past seven years. New ones need not be more expensive than the cost of constructing a new roadway : conversion of existing streets on the other hand is at least 50% up on the cost of simple reconstruction after periodic settlement of the roadway. The demand for woonerven often comes from the community itself and limited subsidies are available from central government. They have made a considerable contribution to the quality of the residents' lives and would seem to mark a new phase in urban transport planning of great relevance to other countries. In fact, I saw something remarkably like a woonerf in Milton Keynes last year, so perhaps they've already made the small jump across the North Sea.

FRANCIS TIBRALDS

The Schools & UD Courses

There are eight academic institutions around the country offering courses in Urban Design leading to Diplomas or Master's Degrees. The Group is aware of the acute concern about falling student numbers in a period of economic recession and hardship, which is in sharp contradiction to the revival of interest in the subject of Urban Design. Many local planning authorities are still without qualified urban design staff and yet too few are prepared to sponsor their employees for suitable courses.

In an effort to help everyone understand the value of such courses and the trained professionals who emerge from them, we have invited each of the eight schools to write for us in the next few issues about what they have to offer. In addition, if present and former students have comments about the courses we shall be happy to carry these in our Letters/Comments column.

News

UDG CONSTITUTION

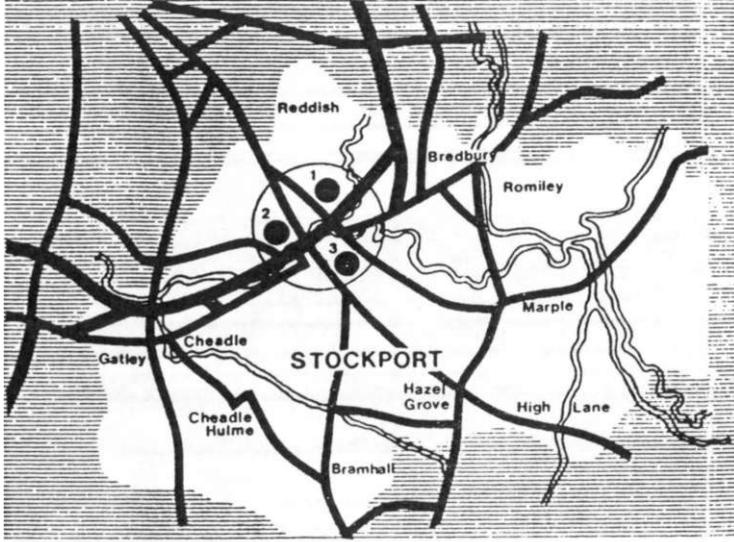
The Group intends to seek charitable status in the near future and is in the process of drafting a constitution based on the Civic Trust model which is known to be acceptable to the Charity Commissioners. We will report progress in future issues.

THE DOE DRAFT CIRCULAR

The Group on 12 September 1980 added its voice to the growing body of concern about the Draft Circular "Development Control - Policy and Practice" in a letter to the Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment. The strongly worded letter by the Group's Chairman, Francis Tibbalds, asked that the Secretary of State meet a representative body of the professionals who had submitted observations to discuss the reconsideration of the Circular and was reported in the planning and architectural press.

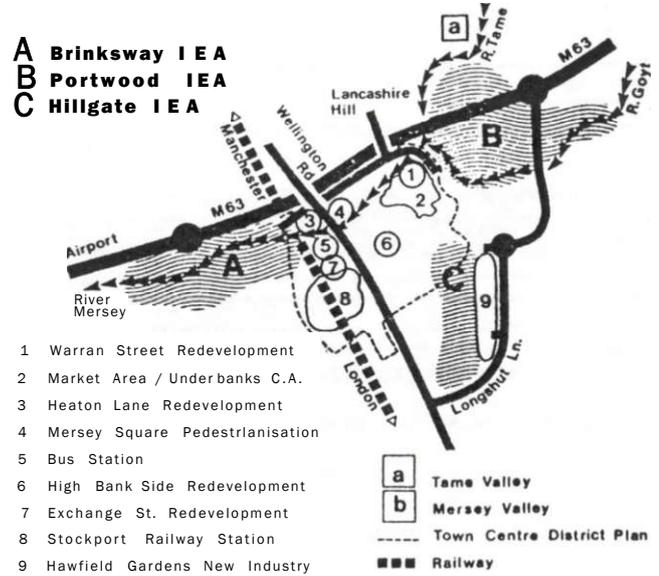
Members who would like a copy of the letter should contact Francis Tibbalds on 01 734 3935.

TO MANCHESTER



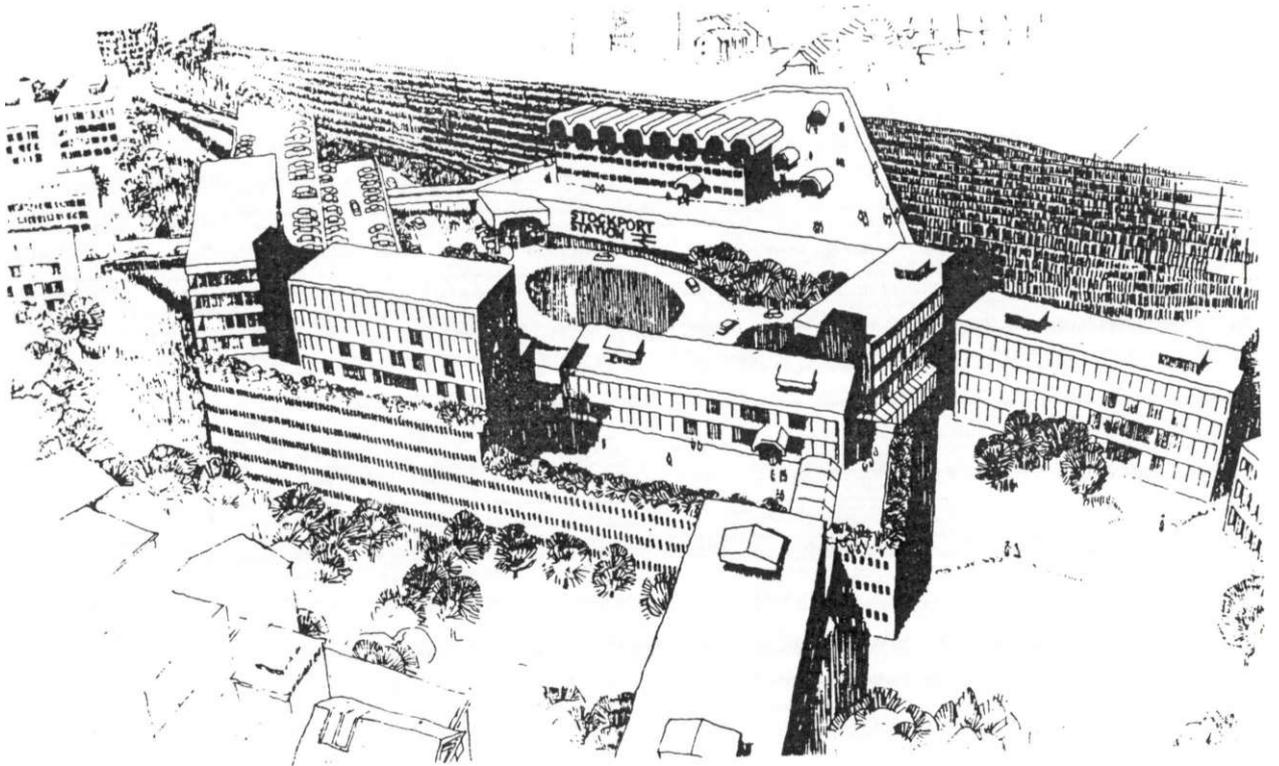
- Motorways
- Trunk Roads
- Town Centre
- Enterprise Areas
- 1** PORTWOOD
- 2** BRINKSWAY
- 3** HILLGATE

- A** Brinksway IEA
- B** Portwood IEA
- C** Hillgate IEA



- 1 Warran Street Redevelopment
- 2 Market Area / Underbanks C.A.
- 3 Heaton Lane Redevelopment
- 4 Mersey Square Pedestrianisation
- 5 Bus Station
- 6 High Bank Side Redevelopment
- 7 Exchange St. Redevelopment
- 8 Stockport Railway Station
- 9 Hawfield Gardens New Industry

- a** Tame Valley
- b** Mersey Valley
- Town Centre District Plan
- Railway



PROPOSED OFFICE AND HOTEL DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO STOCKPORT STATION

A Different Kind of Enterprise Zone

With so much talk about Enterprise Zones these days it's nice to hear about a more serious attempt at economic regeneration being carried through for reasons other than political window-dressing. In February of this year Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council declared Stockport town centre and adjoining old industrial areas an Economic Enterprise Area, and Dick Hargreave, Director of Development and Town Planning at Stockport, gave a witty and well-illustrated talk to UDG members on 15 October which described this innovative approach to solving the problems of inner city decline.

Hargreave began his talk by describing his widely-acclaimed work at Rochdale which pioneered the concept of the Industrial Improvement Area. However, it was his more recent work at Stockport which particularly stimulated discussion.

The Stockport Economic Enterprise Project is not a single project but a comprehensive package of initiatives in which the Council acts in partnership with the private sector and public bodies. The objectives of the project are to maintain and promote employment and secure investment for the future with a target of attracting £50 million investment and creating 3000 jobs.

Hargreave has put forward a four-part plan for the implementation of the strategy for the Enterprise Area with the aim of :

- 1 Unlocking community initiatives by the involvement of the private sector and voluntary groups in the identification and solution of problems.
- 2 Enabling private development to take place by his Council's programme of derelict land reclamation and infrastructure improvement.
- 3 Stimulating private investment in refurbishment and new development by identifying areas with development potential and increasing confidence in the area, using Government and Council aid where appropriate to get schemes underway.
- 4 Promoting environmental improvements to create pleasant surroundings which enable investment to be attracted to the area.

Construction of the M63 motorway extension is the single most valuable investment acting as a trigger mechanism to launch new projects. These include a new central bus station, commercial redevelopment at Exchange Street and High Bankside and industrial development at Hillgate and Heaton Mersey.

Current projects are planned to improve the visual environment and create confidence in the future of the town from which other projects follow. Hargreave hopes that rehabilitation of the Market and Underbanks Conservation Area will promote investment in under-used floorspace and street improvements. A steering committee of local traders is working with the local authority to produce a street improvement scheme.

The Council is acting in an entrepreneurial role, to attract grants, investment and appropriate developers to an ambitious scheme of hotel and commercial development at Stockport Rail Station as part of an important communications interchange. It is also a catalyst in unlocking opportunities for shop and office development at Warren Street, and industrial development at Hawfield Gardens. The proposal to create an exciting and attractively landscaped town square at Mersey Square is an example of its determination to revitalise the busy heart of the town.

The key to implementing proposals in the Economic Enterprise Area is the involvement of industrialists and business concerns. Enterprising Steering Committees are being established to develop contacts and good working relationships. These committees consist of representatives of the businesses in the area, local organisations and Council Representatives. Voluntary organisations are showing a keen interest in participation in the expanding programme of environmental work.

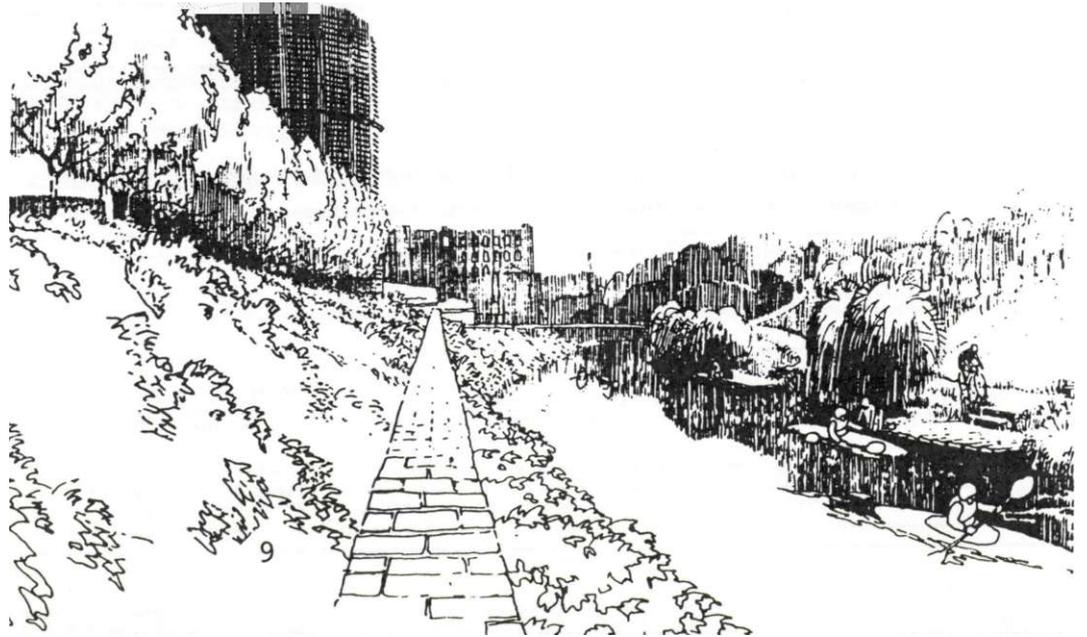
Central Government, particularly the Department of the Environment is impressed with the project and gives every assistance. Derelict land grant schemes have attracted grants amounting to £390,000, topped up with £70,000 of Council funds.

Cooperation and cost sharing is a feature of the project but the Council's environmental fund of £220,000 is the cornerstone of success. Contributions of £170,000 from outside sources bring the value of work in hand on environmental improvement schemes up to £370,000 on 22 different sites.

Hargreave admits that it is still early days in the Economic Enterprise Area but already the private sector is shewing a willingness to invest in the area. In major schemes alone £4 million pounds of office development will go ahead in the near future, with a potential for 650 jobs and 200,000 square feet of industrial floorspace has received planning permission and will create 360 new jobs. The station area scheme is likely to attract 1,500 jobs.

Hargreave is encouraged by these facts, and believes that this concentrated attack on environmental improvement in the Economic Enterprise Area makes a significant contribution to regeneration at the start of Urban Renaissance Year.

PETER STUDDERT



RIVER GOYT

Letters Column

Sir

In welcoming the first edition of the Urban Design Group's Quarterly, one can only regret the seemingly cautious and 'low-profiled' response in the issue to what is potentially the most devastating series of blcws ever dealt to the cause of 'urban design ' in recent years.

Surely the Urban Design Group, as reflected in its 'Quarterly', cannot afford to take such an apparently restrained and polite line against the concerted attack on the fundamental tenets of good planning, especially in the field of urban design, represented by aspects of current proposals for changes in planning and other legislation and ministerial guidance and policy over the last twelve months.

The entirely counterproductive and potentially disastrous implications of the proposals affecting the listing of historic buildings, the introduction of charging for planning applications, and the introduction of 'enterprise zones' implicit in the Local Government Planning and Land (No 2) Bill are surely self-evident, not least as exacerbated by the sort of facile Ministerial guidance set out in the new notorious and hopefully rejected Draft Circular on the Control of Development.

The current attribution of responsibility for all that is wrong in the urban scene to planning, per se, as opposed to inadequate or ill conceived political decision-making and the pressures of commercial development is surely symptomatic of the current situation in which the concept of urban planning, especially in the discipline of urban design, is not only questioned but set up for political reasons as the sole target for attack.

One looks forward to the UDG Quarterly to not only being a vehicle for reasoned debate in the present dark times but also to fulfilling a leading 'radical' role in the assertive and coordinated advocacy of the cause of high standards in urban design, and efficient and effective decision-making in the development control process. Such an approach by the Quarterly would surely contribute to filling the vacuum left by the seeming abdication of the RIBA in the realm of concern for the quality of the built environment.

PAUL VELLUET BA BArch RIBA

Richmond
Surrey

We intend to make a regular feature of the "Letters Column" to extend the value of the Quarterly as a vehicle for members to express and exchange views. Please write to us in good time for the next issue (February 1981) .

Events

Please mark the following UDG events in your diaries and accept our warm invitation to attend any or all of them. They will, for the time being, continue to be held under the kind auspices of the Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Road.

- Tuesday 9 December at 18.15 hrs : "Do Architects care about Urban Design in Housing". Seminar led by Robert Rummey (co-author of GLC Study : "An Introduction to Housing Layout") and others.
- Tuesday 24 February at 18.15hrs : "The Function and Workings of the Royal Fine Art Commission" by Sherban Cantacuzino Secretary RFAC.
- STOP PRESS Kevin Lynch is visiting the UK in the week of 15 December and staying with one of our Committee Members. We are hoping that he will be persuaded to talk to the Group on the evening of 16, 17 or 18 December. Watch the professional press carefully for details.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Group hopes to arrange some activities in locations outside London in 1981 and a programme is being drawn up by John Billingham and Keith Ingham.

It is proposed that the main efforts should be concentrated firstly on arranging lectures on Urban Design topics in liaison with the RIBA, RTPI, or Landscape Institute Branches and secondly arranging visits to towns and cities of interest. Approaches will be made to members in areas where there is clearly a strong interest in Urban Design issues to obtain their support and views on lecture or discussion topics or other activities which they feel might be particularly worthwhile.

It is hoped that the visits could be organised to allow members to participate either for a single day or two days with overnight accommodation arranged. This is likely to be most feasible in places with educational facilities that can be used out of term time. Enquiries are being made to see whether it would be possible to arrange such a visit for Spring or alternatively Autumn 1981. Locations being considered include Durham, Bath and York.

If you have any comments or suggestions please contact John Billingham (0865 49811) or Keith Ingham (0772 24870).

Have you paid ?

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Group's Treasurer Tony Meats is starting to receive subscriptions of £3 for the 1980-81 session, but reminds those members who have not yet subscribed to do so as quickly as possible in order to remain on the UDG mailing list. Please make cheques payable to "Urban Design Group" and send, with your name and address, to : UDG, c/o 3 High Street, Taplew. Maidenhead, BUCKS.

Any Comments?

Our next issue will be published in February 1981. Please write to us with your comments, ideas, notices of regional meetings and anything else which you think will interest the Group's Membership, particularly about urban design activities in your particular area. Meanwhile, the UDG Committee wishes its readership a Happy Christmas and New Year.

URBAN DESIGN GROUP

Committee (1980-81) : Francis Tibbalds (Chairman) , John Billingham, John Evans, Keith Ingham, Arnold Linden, Robert Meadows, Tony Meats, John Peverley, Peter Studdert and Tony Tugnut.

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