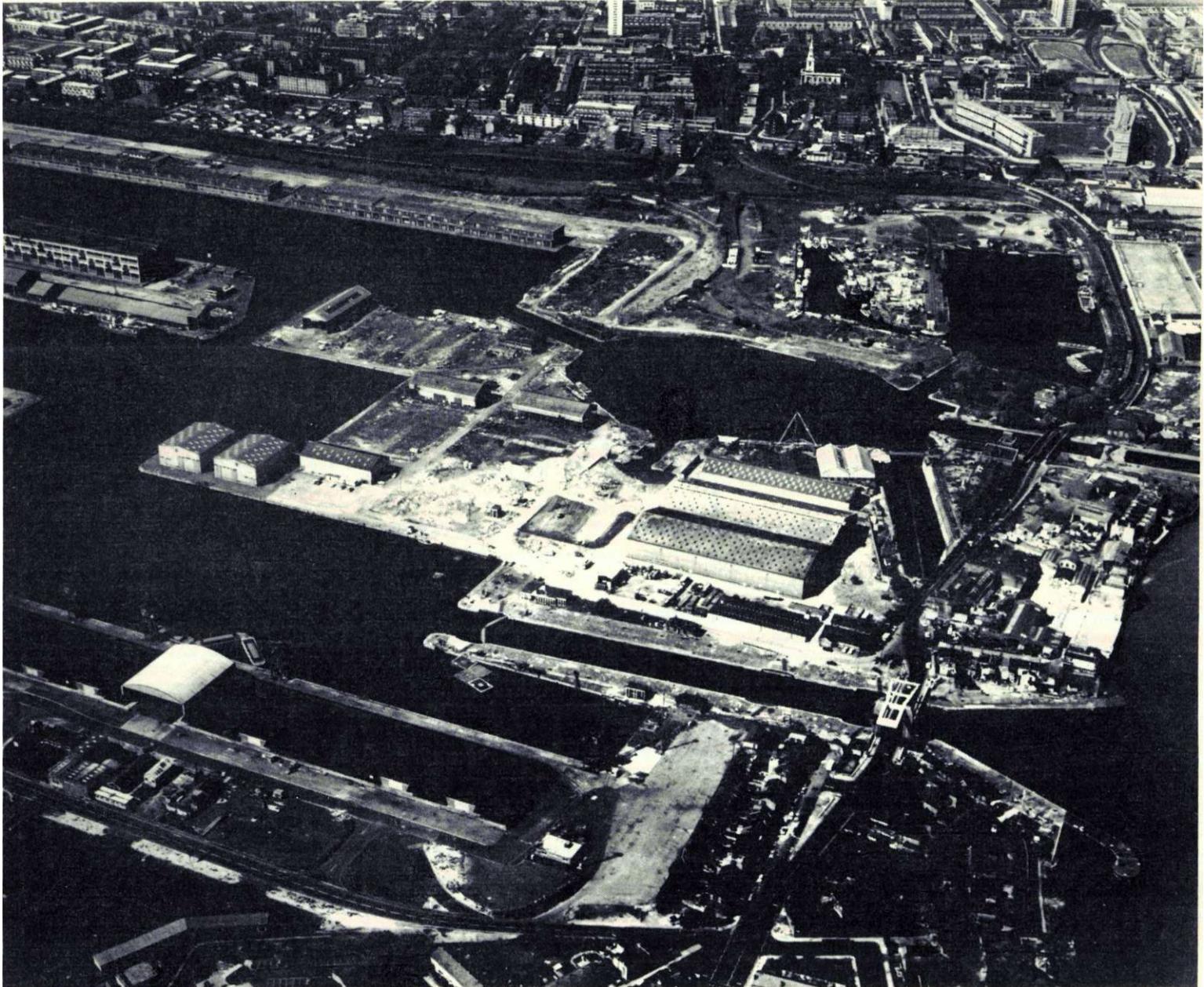


URBAN DESIGN GROUP QUARTERLY

December 1981 50p



London Docklands

News & Editorial

THE UDG CONSTITUTION

At the Special General Meeting of the Group on October 13th 1981 the draft Constitution was formally adopted. A number of minor amendments were proposed to the draft as originally published in the August/September 1981 issue of the Quarterly. These amendments were all agreed by the SGM and the Group is sending the final version to the Charity Commissioners in order to complete the formal registration of the UDG as a charitable organisation. We will re-circulate the final text to all members as soon as practicable.

Charitable status will bring to the Group a significant benefit in terms of seeking sponsorship for activities which cannot be funded from our modest membership subscriptions.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR UDG?

Having operated reasonably successfully for three years in promoting talks and publishing firstly the Newsletter and now the Quarterly, the Group is anxious to develop and explore new initiatives and to strengthen its value and status. So far this year, new directions have included the Bath Regional Forum (reported elsewhere in this issue), the promotion of a candidate in the Election to the RTPI Council and the decision to arrange, with the RIBA London Environment Group, a one day conference on Thameside planning on June 3rd 1982 (also separately reported herein).

There are several courses that are open to UDG:

- The Group could grow dramatically into a TCPA style Society or Association, with its own secretariat and premises (it is often overlooked that we have neither at present and that our activities depend entirely on voluntary assistance, patience and goodwill);
- It can continue as at present;
- It can continue as at present, adding ad hoc new ingredients (Urban Design Competitions and Awards; evidence to major Public Inquiries, Commissions etc have been suggested).
- It can gradually fade out, hopefully when the existing environmental professional institutes have reached a level of collaboration which adequately covers the 'middle ground' which the UDG at present aims to occupy.

The Committee feels that the UDG is at a crossroads and is devoting considerable thought to the preferred future for the Group. We would like to open this debate to our full membership through the paper of the Quarterly. Do, please, let us have your views. We will publish a selection in our next issue.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Bath UDG Forum on September 19 and 20 represented the Group's first major non-London based event. We have subsequently participated in debates and meetings in Cardiff (October 28) and Winchester (December 2), the latter being under the auspices of the local branches of the RIBA and RTPI.

John Billingham has organised UDG Regional Contacts throughout the UK who will act as a focus for regional activities:

- Scotland: Mike Galloway (041 221 9855);
- North East: Bob Jarvis (0632 816144 Ext 258);
- North West: Kevin Eastham (0772 54868);
- West Midlands: Joe Holyoak (021 356 6911)
- East Anglia: Alan Stones (0245 67222 Ext 2545).

Do make contact with your local representative and/or with John Billingham (office: Oxford (0865) 49811 Ext 486; or home: Abingdon (0235) 26094).

Please send us details of meetings etc for publication in the Quarterly.

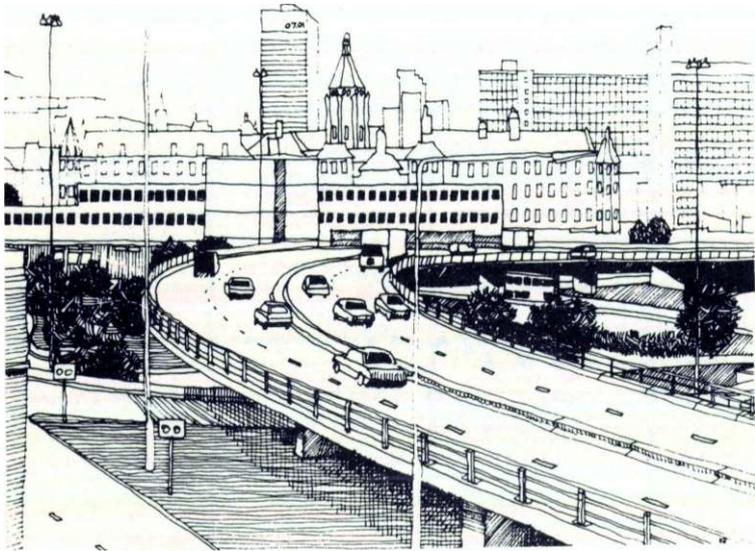
MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Our drive to update our mailing list and attract membership/subscriptions has been generally successful. Many thanks to everyone who has responded. We would now like to attract new members. Can we, as a first step, appeal to all our existing members to enlist at least one additional member each? A subscription form and Bank Mandate form is enclosed for this purpose.

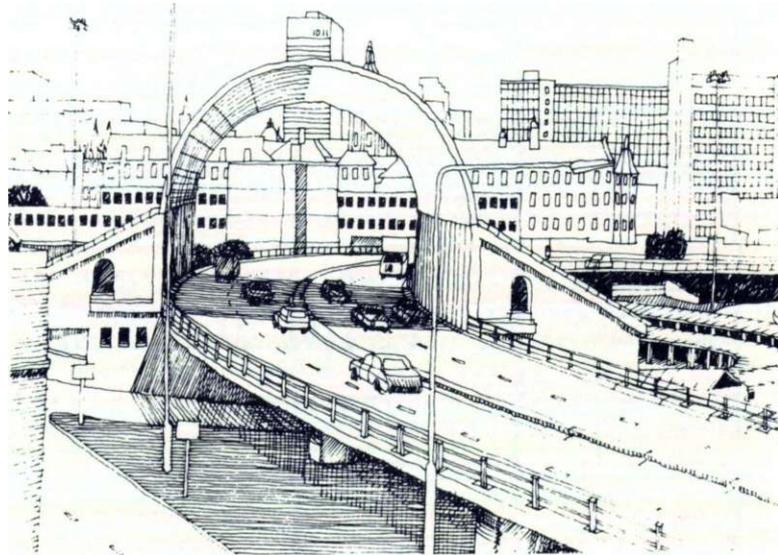
SEASON'S GREETINGS

This issue of the Quarterly is planned to be published before Christmas. The Committee would, therefore, like to offer good wishes to all UDG members for both Christmas and the New Year 1982.

STOP PRESS.....RTPI Election
As we go to press, we have received the good news that UDG candidate Francis Tibbalds has been successful in the ballot on November 25 1981 and has accordingly been elected to the Council of the Royal Town Planning Institute for 1982 and 1983. He has asked that we convey his warm thanks to everybody who supported him.



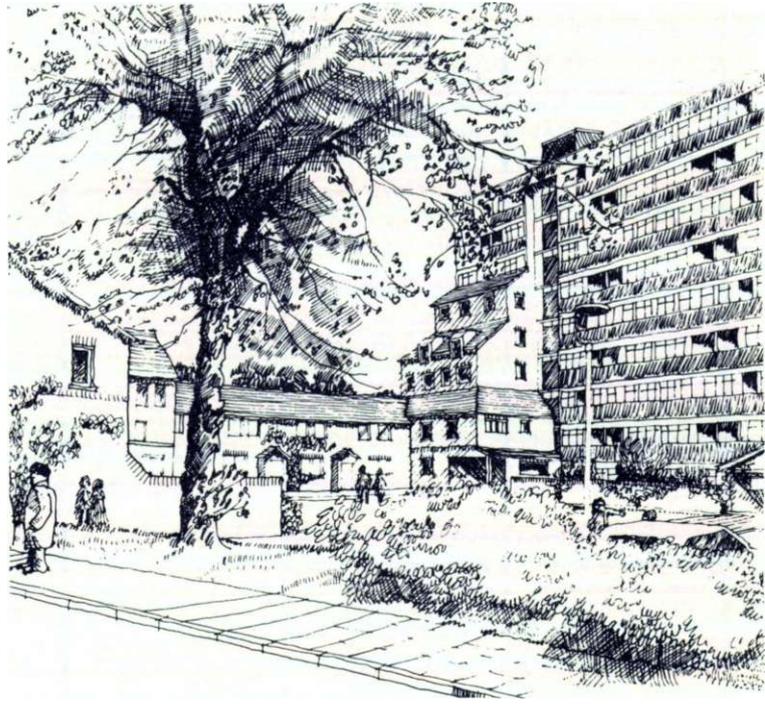
A view from the University of Aston of Lancaster Circus as existing. The City centre is in the background.



The same view after mending.



One of the nine-storey slab blocks as existing, with car park and public open space.



The same view after mending - the slab block extended, new housing enclosing territorial space, the giant scale fragmented.

Mending the City

That talented and diligent architect, Joe Holyoak, a member of the staff of Birmingham School of Architecture, recently prepared an unusual exhibition which deserves a much wider audience than it could achieve in the Timaeus Gallery in that city.

Taking as his starting point the damage which Birmingham (and it could be almost any other city) has suffered through its devastating love affair with the motorcar, from the impact of illiterate architecture, and the destruction of the street as an urban form, Holyoak has prepared nine nicely drawn examples of the manner in which decency, liveliness and economic use of that precious commodity, land, could be returned to this much damaged city.

All the proposals in their differing ways are imaginative and most of them show considerable regard for the grain of the urban fabric.

Probably, the most unusual is the entertainingly fanciful, but properly worked out, suggestion for utilising the splendid white elephant, Duddeston Viaduct (built in 1853 by Brunel, but never used) as the base for an elevated and linear student village. This imaginative proposal has been seen previously when it deservedly won 1st prize in the 1980 Arts Council competition, 'Art into Landscape 3'.

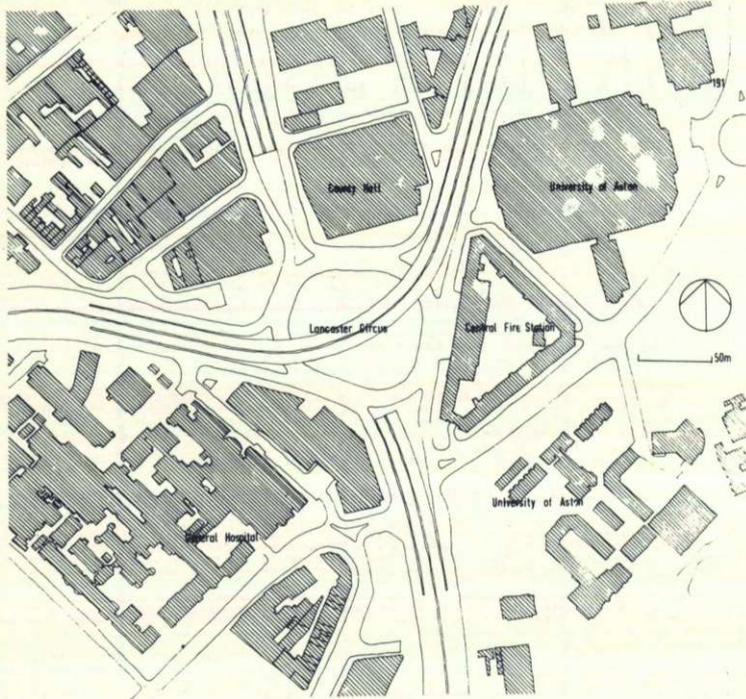
Using the well known, but insufficiently exercised tools of the urban designers trade, such as additive architecture, the re-establishing of the street grid where broken, adoption of mixed site uses and employment of arcading to unify disorder, Holyoak has examined such widely different problems as how to mitigate the damage caused by the gash of a sunken expressway through an erstwhile small scale inner city suburb, sensible uses for the 'landscaped' sunken roundabouts of a traffic-dominated city accessible only to the most determined pedestrian with no backache and a degree in orienteering, or how to insinuate new large scale buildings such as a concert hall into the city centre hinterland and at the same time return the area to its onetime companionability.

The designer has tackled these any many other design problems in a fresh sometimes charming, inventive, and often highly practical manner. Holyoak's proposals for Colmore Circus, a tired, windswept and totally inhospitable piece of sunken land left over after road planning, (the 3rd prize winner in a local Urban Renaissance competition this year) creates a space, entered by a delightfully quirky aedicule which could provide the pedestrian with an agreeable and useful addition to the incidental oases essential for the enjoyment of civilised urban life.

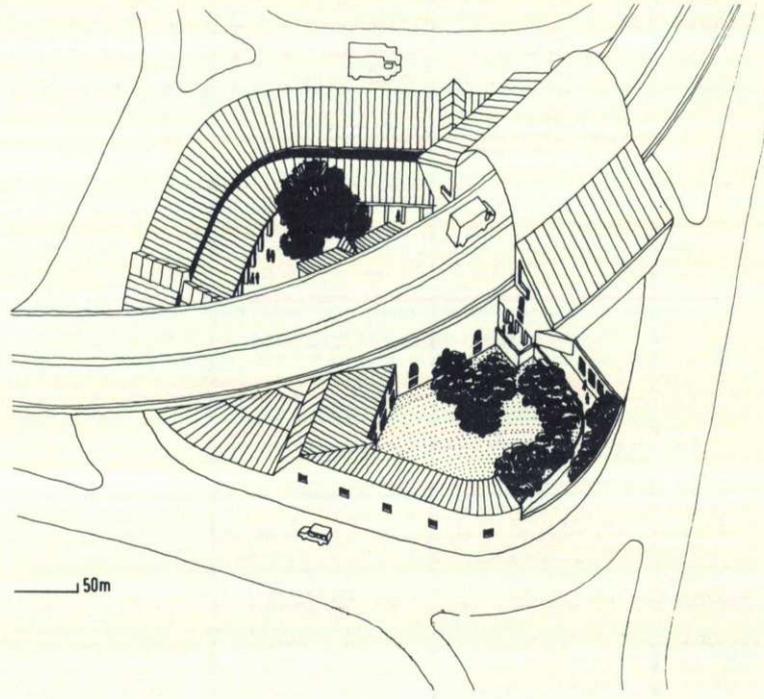
Joe Holyoak uses the gamut of the urban designer's tricks of the trade, parasitic architecture to provide a humanising and de-scaling cascade when attached to high rise slab blocks of flats, low rise, arcaded screen buildings to retrieve a once elegant street savaged by tall office blocks, or a little pavilion precariously perched over the inner ring road to assist in linking again the now disconnected parts of the city centre.

Mending the City is a timely reminder that real town-planning is a creative art, desperately required in all our cities and sadly, little understood by the great majority of those who have to deal with our urban surroundings. Joe Holyoak's exhibition is not large, but it shows great sensitivity and urban sense and should be exhibited South of Potters Bar, before London finally loses it's looks.

Alfred A Wood
County Planner Architect
West Midlands County Council



Lancaster Circus as existing.



Axonometric of the space after transformation into an urban block.

Images of Docklands

UDG members were given a glimpse of the new approach to planning in London's docklands when Ted Hollamby, Chief Architect and Planner to the London Docklands Development Corporation gave a talk on the theme of 'Images of Docklands' on 13th October.

Hollamby began by illustrating his many and varied impressions of London's docklands - the reflection of light from water, the stunning views along and across the Thames, the wide open spaces, buildings silhouetted against misty skies, but all overlaid by a feeling of death and desolation - derelict buildings, disused cranes and machinery, acres of vacant land.

Hollamby sees his job as a voyage of discovery, not knowing quite where it will lead. One thing was clear to him, however - a new, more entrepreneurial approach to planning was required to enable the opportunities to be taken and to attract investment into the area.

This approach is already bearing fruit, and Hollamby said that interest in Docklands is 'vast and varied' - more than he can cope with at present. A striking example of this interest is the proposal by four major housebuilders to build modestly-priced houses at Beckton, and on the industrial front Hollamby is particularly pleased with the way in which the national press and printing industry is now prepared to relocate eastwards away from its traditional stamping-ground. New public transport proposals have been quickly formulated and could be agreed in a matter of months, proposals that are essential to making the area more accessible from the rest of London.

At the same time Hollamby is determined to retain the most valuable features of Docklands - the docks themselves - in spite of the inevitable high cost. And every effort will be made to find new uses for redundant buildings of special character, such as the Skinfloor with its 'marvellous forest of columns and beams'.

But what about the conflicts with the Local Authorities and established community groups? At least, joked Hollamby, GLC officers are now allowed to talk to the LDDC, and liaison officers are now being seconded to the LDDC from each of the three Docklands Boroughs. As for the local groups, the LDDC is keen to establish links, but, says Hollamby, they must realise that the Corporation has been set up to make decisions. Overall Hollamby likens his approach to 'a very powerful iron fist in a velvet glove' - he is keen to hold out an olive branch but everyone must realise that the LDDC has the power and the determination to carry on regardless if necessary.

On the thorny question of the design quality of LDDC-inspired developments Hollamby is confident that this will be high, if only because he will encourage developers to use the best architects. Questioned whether the Enterprise Zone would help or hinder expectations of high quality, Hollamby hinted that control was still possible over 'sensitive areas' within the Zone because the LDDC owned most of the land.

In spite of a few understandable doubts about the contradictions inherent in these last remarks, his audience was happy to wish Ted Hollamby well in his new and challenging task. Only time will tell if his new approach to planning will produce the high quality environment that London's decaying docklands surely deserve.

Weekend UDG Forum in Bath

A Weekend Forum was held in Bath on the University Campus on September 19th and 20th and about 20 members took part. The main aim was to provide an opportunity for members located outside London to meet together.

The first seminar, on the theme 'Urban Design Objectives', was led by Keith Ingham and Les Sparks.

Keith Ingham began in a topical vein, likening urban designers to Social Democrats - both were seeking the middle ground between two extremes. The urban designer plays a vital role in filling the gap between the architect and town planner. To do this job effectively he needs a wide range of skills. By way of illustration Keith Ingham described the wide range of activities in which his own practice was involved. These ranged from dockland studies, and village planning studies to interior design projects, furniture design and graphic design. Quoting Jacquelin Robertson he defined the primary objective of urban designers as 'serving people in the place where we work'.

Les Sparks, Director of Environmental Services at Bath, saw two main objectives for the urban designer - the integration of buildings and places, and the management of places over time. He bemoaned the relentless pressures which are making all places look the same - the same chain stores in each High Street with common house styles, houses built of the same range of materials, the same DIY products available throughout the country, identical road signs and street furniture. Urban designers often felt like King Canute, vainly trying to prevent the unique character of their areas being submerged under wave after wave of standardised products. The primary role of the urban designer was to understand just what it is that makes a place special and then to ensure that changes to that place reinforce or extend that special character.

In the discussion that followed there was concern that architects were not being trained to think of the proper context of buildings. Students were still being taught to think of their designs as 'jewellery' to be conceived in abstract. It was suggested that very little attempt is being made to encourage students to think about the underlying character of a place to which their designs ought to respond.

Others saw the urban designer's role as being to generate enthusiasm for the qualities of a place. In the local government context this often meant persuading other Departments in the Council to set high standards of design throughout all their activities. It also meant educating and inspiring the public to insist on high standards of design from their local authorities.

Different views were expressed about the range of urban design and whether it was concerned with the detailed landscaping around buildings. Both urban and landscape designers needed to be involved at an early stage so that the strategic decisions affecting an area could be properly considered.

The importance of environmental education in schools was stressed - providing an opportunity not only for children to understand more fully what shapes their surroundings but for designers to learn how children perceive their environment. Little information existed about the impact of surroundings on people and there was no accepted language of urban design.

The second day's seminar was related to 'The Future of Urban Design', whether it should be seen as a specialist field and whether it had an equal role in both public and private practice.

Francis Tibbalds illustrated a range of schemes in which he had been involved over the past ten years and drew a number of conclusions from his own experience. He felt it was important to acknowledge that quality in urban design was likely to occur from a mixture of skills and that no one person contained the whole range. It was also essential for urban design to be supported at the highest decision making levels in project teams.

He felt that private practice was often able to achieve more in projects because an equal role multi disciplinary team could be more easily established. In the public office there was always the danger that the resources and status were not available for strategic urban design issues to be properly explored.

There was general support for the need to create a relationship with the basic environmental professions and not to seek a specialist role. Post graduate courses in Urban Design needed to have continued support but it was also important to influence the basic professional courses so that the various disciplines could speak the same language.

Terry O'Rourke was concerned about the term 'Urban Design' and whether it was wide enough to cover the various types of design situation. In his own case in a District Council in Dorset the objective was to raise the quality of the environment which in many examples was not urban in character.

He queried whether there had been real gains in environmental quality as a result of the introduction of the post war Planning legislation. He maintained that the schemes that tended to obtain easy approval were of a low common denominator and that ironically it was schemes of quality that received a hard passage; he instanced the case of Span developments where schemes had either been delayed or refused and illustrated these various points from schemes in his own area and Cambridge.

As a result the planning profession had often alienated architects who should be allies in seeking to achieve the right standards. A great deal of progress was still needed with Highway Authorities to enable roads to serve environmental objectives and he hoped that more influence could be used to see that architects were involved in a higher proportion of development proposals on the grounds that such schemes should be able to meet the higher design standards that should be required.

In the discussion afterwards the question of whether people have low expectations in environmental standards was raised and the feeling existed that this was the case for the majority of the population. Different views remained whether this could be improved by accepting the American low density solution with landscaping dominant or whether densities in Britain did not allow this solution to be applied generally.

It was perhaps disappointing that more members did not participate but the benefits of meeting in a location away from London still appear relevant and it is hoped to arrange a further weekend in 1982.

John Billingham & Peter Studdert

RIBA London Environment Group

The London Environment Group is a working group of the Royal Institute of British Architects London Region, with two representatives from each of the six London branches plus the Architectural Association. Branch representatives from the adjoining Eastern and Southern Regions are also members of LEG as well as any interested architect/planner/urban designer or any well informed person interested in the future of London's environment.

The LEG was originally set up by the London Region and chaired by Raymond Andrews in the late 60's to study and consider the proposals put forward in the draft Greater London Development Plan. This led to the publication of a study and its presentation at the Inquiry into the GLDP. This study was subsequently reflected in the Secretary of State's decision. Since then many environmental issues have come and gone and LEG has endeavoured to make contributions accordingly by promoting discussion between the profession and the public at large.

Currently the River Thames presents opportunities and objectives that need clear direction for action. It is with this in mind that the Urban Design Group and the London Environment Group will be pooling their efforts to promote a one day Conference on the 'Thames-side Environment A Brief for the Future', on Thursday 3 June 1982. (Full details to be announced in due course.) A Working Committee from both Groups is studying the format and content of the day's events with a view to considering a site in the Docklands area for the conference and a river trip to the Barrier and back to Westminster Pier in the evening. Ideas and Suggestions will be most gratefully received. (Tel: 01 828 8070, ext 2520 (Office) or 01 435 2462 (home)).

Noel E Hill
Chairman: RIBA London Environment Group

Diary

UDG EVENTS

- • Tuesday 26 January 1982: "Process & Product: The Relevance of Interior Space Planning to Urban Design" by John Worthington, Frank Duffy & Sheena Wilson.

Interior space planning is primarily concerned with the allocation of resources through time, and reflecting organisational style in physical design solutions. At a larger scale the same is true of Urban Design.

During the early stages of its development, space planning drew heavily on ideas from Urban Planning for its theory and techniques. Can Urban Planning and design now learn from the experience of space planning?

Drawing on the past experience of the practice, Frank Duffy (DEGW) will describe the issues faced by the space planner and Sheena Wilson (BUS) will describe an experience for BL Uniparts new warehouse where design direction for the interior environment were hammered out in working groups with all levels of staff. John Worthington (DEGW) will talk about the practice's involvement with larger scale planning issues for a District Centre in Warrington, and in re-using existing industrial stock in the declining inner city.

- • Tuesday 2 March 1982: Talk by Peter Smith
- • Tuesday 20 April 1982: Annual General Meeting
& Talk by Roy Worskett.

The above meetings will all be at 6.15 pm in the Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Road, London NW1, unless otherwise notified. Details and reminders will be published in the professional press, if possible; but this cannot be guaranteed.

Thursday 3 June 1982: Joint RIBA London Environment Group/Urban Design Group Conference on London's Thameside Environment - "Brief for the Future". Details to be announced in next Quarterly.

OTHER EVENTS

THE DESIGN GAP

A series of evening meetings for people working in local authority planning & architecture departments, and specifically for those concerned with development control work. The series will be based upon discussion & analysis of the reasons for the poverty of design guidance to planners and the split in professional responsibility in this area. Case histories of typical failures will be explored and remedies proposed, including changes in education for the professional.

Each session will be introduced by a talk from one or two guest speakers, followed by questions and discussion.

DATES: December 3, 10, 17 1981; January 14, 21, 28 1982. All sessions starting at 7.00 pm.

FEE: £16 for the series.

ORGANISERS: Roger Jones & John Ireland.

All courses will take place at 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS

For further information telephone 01-486 5811 ext 284 or 397.

UDG Committee Members 1981-82:

John Billingham	(Regional Activities)	Robert Meadows	(Education)
Richard Ellis	(Member)	Tony Meats	(Assistant Treasurer)
John Evans	(Editorial)	John Peverley	(Treasurer)
Keith Ingham	(Events)	Peter Studdert	(Editorial)
Arnold Linden	(Education)	Francis Tibbalds	(Chairman)
Alexandra Marmot	(Publicity)	Tony Tugnut	(Secretary)

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