

SPRING 2009 ISSUE 110

# URBAN DESIGN

TOPIC: EDUCATION  
FRANCIS TIBBALDS  
AWARD PROJECTS  
SHORTLIST:  
KINGS CROSS  
DUNSFOLD PARK  
WORLD HERITAGE SITES



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DESIGN  
GROUP

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## UDG UPDATE

### UDG Chairman Duncan Ecob reflects on Ecobuild 2009

No one who attended the Ecobuild in March can have failed to have been impressed by the number of people there; a cascade of seminars and workshops with an incredible five hundred speakers, and enough exhibitors to occupy both Earls Court 1 and 2. The day of the sustainability movement would appear to have come. Yet outside the exhibition halls the world seemed much the same. The media were reporting the news of another atrocity, the latest scandal, and more on the financial crises afflicting the world. But nothing on sustainability or an impending environmental catastrophe, or the need to invest in changed and better lifestyles, or the urgency of action. The reality dawns that the major part of the public want the next prime minister of Great Britain to be Jeremy Clarkson, and they want him to uphold the Rights of Man...to own a car, and to drive it wherever, whenever and how ever fast they like.

It was perhaps inevitable that the early stages of the sustainability drive

would be the commissioning of a host of policy reports and assessments, and the creation of complex financial instruments and a large burden of bureaucracy. It is something that we must address, for the impression we now get is one of immense complexity, of problems so involved, intricate and intractable that no single person can possibly get to grips with them. Is there any hope? Yes there is. The actions that we need to take are simple: we need renewable energy supplies, to economise our use of energy, including thicker insulation and recovering energy from waste heat. We need to meet our travel needs in a more energy efficient way, and especially by making walking and cycling an easy choice through the best urban design. There is a range of sensible and practical steps that we can take, given the political will, the public support, and the finance.

This is where people who care about urban design have such an important role to play in providing leadership: local leadership, and

leadership by doing, not just by talking. I have often seen the true role of the Urban Design Group as a means by which individuals can gain the knowledge, enthusiasm and confidence to turn themselves into leaders. I was therefore very pleased to be able to announce at Ecobuild the UDG's new award of Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design. It is not about creating a profession of urban designers, nor exclusivity, but it is about creating a focus for professionals of all backgrounds who share in the task of designing the setting for life in our cities, towns and villages. It creates a badge which people can wear with pride and that identifies them as being one of a greater group of individuals who have a vision for a better society and possess the skills and determination to bring a vision to fruition. It is through these people that we will make true progress in designing the cities of the future and redesigning the cities of the present. Not by talk, but by deeds.

### Director Robert Huxford reports on the professions and education

Last year I heard the philosopher A C Grayling bemoaning our tendency to divide knowledge into unrelated -ologies and -ographies, when they are truly part of a collective attempt to make sense of the world around us. This is one of the difficulties and delights of urban design, a subject where most of the different branches of knowledge combine as we attempt to create the ideal human habitat.

This year our thoughts turn to Darwin and his theory of evolution, which the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has more recently applied to the realm of ideas, coining the term 'meme' (as opposed to gene). It seems that where knowledge is held

and developed by isolated groups, a special jargon emerges that eases communication within the group but, through over complication and excessive categorisation, acts as a barrier to those outside though. It can also lead to decisions being referred to a growing body of 'micro-specialists' presenting their knowledge as an absolutist, non-negotiable doctrine.

The design and management of our cities, towns, and villages does not merely require inclusivity and compromise, it is compromise. For instance, local authorities are given a duty to have regard to the needs of disabled persons by the Disability Discrimination Act and the Traffic

Management Act specifically defines traffic as including pedestrians. Balanced decisions and mutual consideration are what is required. Clearly some professionals are uncomfortable with their role as balanced decision-makers as was demonstrated by a recent UDG/UDAL survey which found a good proportion of professionals having a preference for the directive approach of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges over the more flexible Manual for Streets. However there is no substitute for balanced decisions; or the professionals with the breadth of knowledge and understanding that is necessary to make them; or even that education in life that goes by the name of urban design.

## DIARY OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, all LONDON events are held at The Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ at 6.30 pm. All tickets can be purchased at the door from 6.00pm: £5.00 non-members, £2.00 members, £1.00 students

### WEDNESDAY 22 APRIL 2009

#### RETHINKING MASTERPLANNING – A WORKSHOP

April's evening event will provide an opportunity to go back to basics. What does it take to produce a successful masterplan? How can one ensure that the focus is not merely on completing the masterplan but actually completing the project? How should a balance be maintained throughout the process? Workshop leaders include John Deffenbaugh, Rob Cowan and Paul Reynolds.

### WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 2009

#### URBAN DESIGN EDUCATION

Addressing the themes covered in this current issue of Urban Design, three speakers will explore the challenge of urban design education, CPD and careers. By this time it is expected that the Homes and Communities Academy will be on their way to launching their Skills Action Plan, along with a Government report on quality of place that will cover the skills requirement. The event will be an invaluable opportunity to take stock of current and future policy initiatives. Speakers include Sebastian Loew and Louise Thomas.

### WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 2009

#### URBAN DESIGN GROUP AGM, FOLLOWED BY MONTHLY EVENT ON THE ESSEX DESIGN INITIATIVE

Since the publication of the Essex Design Guide, published in 1973, it has been one of the main influences on development in the UK. Since then Essex has seen the update of the guide in 1995 and 2007, the establishment of the Essex Design Initiative, the addition of the Urban Place Supplement and the arrival of the Thames Gateway with its massive construction programme. This event will look at the achievements of the initiative, the lessons learned and the plans for the future.

### WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2009

#### BIRMINGHAM

The 'Venice of the North', Birmingham is more famous in design circles as the high water mark of vehicle-optimised development under Herbert Manzoni, and subsequently a battleground between place and movement, with much of his work now undone. This event will reflect on the changes in Birmingham in the 20th and early 21st century, looking at key developments and how it relates to other towns and cities.

### URBAN DESIGN DIRECTORY 2009-10

A new edition of the Urban Design Directory was published in February and has been circulated to all members. Copies have been sent to all local planning authorities in the UK and Ireland, development agencies, major public libraries, architecture centres, large building contractors and major developers.

## Urban Design Group

**CHAIRMAN** Duncan Ecob

**PATRONS** Alan Baxter, Tom Bloxham, Sir Terry Farrell, Colin Fudge, Nicky Gavron, Dickon Robinson, Les Sparks, John Worthington

**DIRECTOR** Robert Huxford

**OFFICE** 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ, Tel 020 7250 0872/0892

Email [admin@udg.org.uk](mailto:admin@udg.org.uk)

**WEBSITE** [www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk)

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**CURRENT SUBSCRIPTIONS** *Urban Design* is free to Urban Design Group members who also receive newsletters and the *Directory*

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# SHIFTING ROLES

There is a danger reflecting on the state of the market several weeks before publication that unexpected changes will have reshaped the landscape in the meantime. However as the credit crunch continues, many public and private sector organisations are looking at the impact, roles and priorities for getting development schemes moving again. These fall into three areas:

**SKILLS:** With the market downturn have come redundancies and reduced workloads, and inevitably a rethinking of career paths, as the recession of the 1990s did to many of my contemporaries. In turn there are also fewer opportunities for newer urban designers to start their careers and test newly acquired skills. Will more people, personal finances permitting, take the opportunity to learn new skills or stay in academia to undertake research while the development market is so vulnerable? Concerns will remain about skills levels and so there can be no slowdown in the education choices on offer, as this issue suggests.

**RELATIONSHIPS:** The impact on the relationship between developers and local authorities have almost seen a reversal in roles, as developers struggle to maintain cashflows, secure borrowing, or keep schemes afloat. Discussions underway are about the creep of the S106 shopping list, delaying obligations to make them deliverable in a time of limited finance, and the willingness of developers to work in partnership with the public sector. But what is not yet clear is the impact of this on place-making, design quality and higher environmental standards, which are relatively soft targets in reducing costs, when faced with a shortfall in funding to build essential affordable housing or key infrastructure. A new culture of cooperation is emerging, led by developers and which needs the public sector's engagement.

**LEADERSHIP:** A direct consequence of the switch in financial stability from the private to the public sector, is the potential pendulum swing back to the public sector having considerable power and clout. Unused to having constructive dialogues with developers, many local authorities are still viewing the industry with suspicion and doubting the severity of their problems in delivering much needed new homes for example. The authorities who will excel in this financial climate will be those that see this as a time for taking leadership and innovation, working with the private sector to find new ways of financing, sharing risk and delivering better places and homes. This will be a challenge, as few within local authorities have been given opportunities in recent years to assert the kind of leadership that they could now assume, and so may not have the skills well developed.

All of these issues mean that this is an extraordinary time for education and skills – demanding a wide understanding of development and planning, but also how to work innovatively with others. Does the urban designer offer the portfolio of skills and understanding to come to the fore?

LOUISE THOMAS

## Urban Design

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John Billingham, Matthew Carmona, Tim Catchpole, Alex Cochrane, Richard Cole, Alastair Donald, Liezel Kruger, Sebastian Loew, Malcolm Moor, Judith Ryser, Louise Thomas

### EDITORS

Louise Thomas (this issue) and Sebastian Loew  
louisethomas@tdrc.co.uk  
sebastianloew@btinternet.com

### BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Richard Cole

### DESIGN

trockenbrot  
(Claudia Schenk and Anja Sicka)

### ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Urban Design Group  
70 Cowcross Street  
London EC1M 6EJ  
Email admin@udg.org.uk

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## Letter to the Editor, Urban Design

You ask for responses to an issue that was supposed to be about 'reimagining the city.' The reported fact that so few urban designers are employed by local authorities for me raised the issues of what values and whose interests we should be trying to serve. Surely a good city is essentially about people creating places together that allow them to enjoy a better quality of life, and not just spaces where people can realise their personal ambitions?

John Montgomery's letter seemed to denounce collective activity and suggested that there was nothing new. For those of use who get our inspiration from looking and learning from European towns and cities, including the pleasures of Alan Stones' valuable tours, it has been clear for some time that the UK has been following the false gods of 'market forces', global capitalism, and the veneration of architectural superstars. Places that have been carefully restored to look unchanged, like Freiburg which we bombed to smithereens, should

remind us what intelligent people value. Unfortunately most academics have become lost in theoretical mazes. We desperately need new writers of the calibre of Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford to remind us why we value towns and cities, and what makes them 'tick', and to celebrate enduring values.

The explanation is certainly not 'branding', and the recent study tour that the TEN group made to Belfast brought out the weaknesses of an approach that commissions such arid nonsense, and that for so long failed to tackle the fundamentals of getting people to live together. Simply crossing the border to the Republic, where Dublin now enjoys a first class tram system that links up the new suburbs, or seeing the progress that has been made on building new settlements like Adamstown, brought home the need to invest much more in public infrastructure and much less in private shopping centres and commercial leisure centres.

As we struggle with the fallout from over-reliance on financial institutions

and the under-resourcing of local authorities, perhaps we could see a future edition of Urban Design that draws lessons from comparisons between similar types of urban area, including all importantly the suburbs and smaller centres where most people actually spend their lives. Perhaps it is time for designers to promote a suburban renaissance that celebrates what people do together, (from singing in choirs or making model railways to attending colleges or having a meal in a 'special place') instead of reinforcing the takeaway and self-service culture that has come to symbolise so many British towns.

If readers want to follow these ideas up, they may find our new report (with PRP and Design for Homes) called *Beyond Ecotowns: Learning from Europe* of interest (see [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk)), which has its roots in an UDG's study tour which first introduced me to Freiburg, and its amazing urban extensions.

Nicholas Falk

## 20th Kevin Lynch Memorial Lecture: World Squares for All THE GALLERY, LONDON 19 NOVEMBER 2008

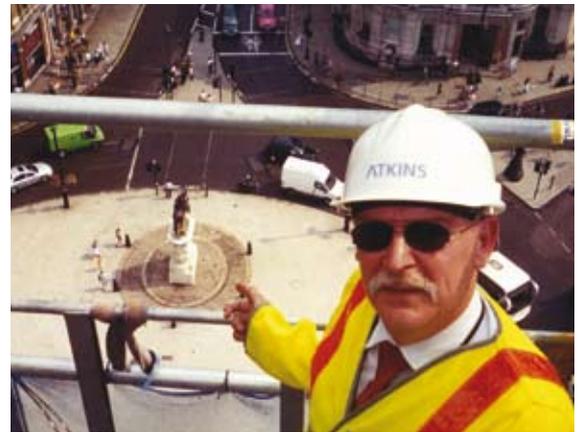
Peter Heath led the young audience through the evolution of the World's Squares Project since 1996, apologising for not persuading Norman Foster to attend. Enthusiasm and public spirit had moved the team forward in spite of the disparity between the fees and the scale of the project. Heath felt that the project only existed because certain factors came together - a wish to change car-filled squares, an enthusiastic government, and media support.

The lecture had four sections; Perceptions, Realities, Lessons and Public Realm futures (and the audience's perception of Trafalgar Square was positive). Trafalgar Square was phase one, followed by Whitehall and Horse Guards, and concluding with Parliament Square. The intention of the Programme was the improvement of a wide area, and the team started by looking into the history of Trafalgar Square and how the demands of traffic had eroded it, making the project more labour-intensive than building design. Questions such as 'why are London's spaces so bad?'. 'Why is there nowhere to get a civilised cup of coffee?' and a determination to make things better drove the team further,

taking the de-cluttering of Covent Garden and the Strand as precedents. Space Syntax work highlighted the nodal significance of the King Charles statue, so the proposals included the closure of the north side of the Square, a new flight of stairs and an oval roundabout allowing access to the statue. Luck played an important part in the project, as it coincided with the introduction of the Congestion Charge. Without this there might have been gridlock, and there had been problems with universal access, events being difficult to manage and street clutter. A series of photos showed the increase in pedestrian space afterwards.

When it came to Whitehall which was phase two, the steam had gone out of the project, and the issue of security loomed large. This resulted in wider pavements but cluttered with bollards and defensive low walls. Phase three is still awaited and it presents the challenge of managing traffic which nobody seems willing to tackle.

What lessons had been learned? Heath lamented the lack of any independent evaluation; the later work emphasized links and routes; spaces



needed to have a seamless quality - a light touch and reduced traffic, and often the smallest elements to link schemes were the most challenging. The proposed 'all red' traffic light phase for Oxford Circus was an example that could make a huge difference for pedestrians. He was also concerned about the reliance on signs and 'things' that appeared in spaces. To succeed he concluded that the project needed the right brief, client and team, and an ability to sustain and motivate a large team.

Richard Cole

## Manual for Streets: A Debate

THE GALLERY, LONDON 20 JANUARY 2009



Twenty years ago as I drove down a main road, I collided with the driver of a Ford Fiesta emerging from a housing estate side road. The driver apparently had not seen me even though I had seen him some 150 metres back. It proved to me that some crashes have less to do with visibility and more to do with genuine human fallibility. Yet visibility splays, stopping sight distances, reaction times and deceleration rates are the key matters of contention as the philosophies of the Manual for Streets and the Design Manual of Roads and Bridges collide. Alan Young of WSP opened the evening

with an overview of Manual for Streets. The document states that 'MfS focuses on lightly-trafficked residential streets, but many of its key principles may be applicable to other types of street, for example high streets and lightly-trafficked lanes in rural areas' and that 'DMRB is not an appropriate design standard for most streets.' Alan discussed the relationship observed between driver's choice of speed, and the width of carriageway and forward visibility; and some of the appeal cases where the use of Manual for Streets has been upheld, when applied to main roads.

Steve Proctor, from TMA offered a thoughtful presentation which probed the research used in Manual for Streets. Are permeable layouts safe? He highlighted the Belgravia exception: a permeable grid with a poor accident rate, though with long sightlines and wide carriageways. Is the MfS X distance of 2.4 metres sufficient when there are cars such as the BMW Z3 which are 2.6m? Or reaction times when drivers are

performing difficult movements in the dark? Is MfS appropriate for roads with higher speed limits?

Discussions are continuing in different quarters; the Department for Transport and the Urban Design Alliance are addressing what happens beyond Manual for Streets. The Scottish Government has gone further publishing the consultation draft Designing Streets with the statement that 'Designing Streets does not generally apply to trunk roads, but in some locations, such as where a trunk road passes through the centre of a small town, and the 'place function' is high, a more sensitive design that follows the principles of Designing Streets may well be appropriate.'

It is important that the debate goes on, and that we continue to challenge both the basis of DMRB and Manual for Streets to keep principles and rules of thumb relevant for the age in which we live, rather than allow them to degenerate into doctrine and dogma.

Robert Huxford

## Designing for Education and Play

THE GALLERY, LONDON 21 JANUARY 2009



It is said that the presence of children on our streets is the true measure of the civilisation of our cities. And a strange civilisation it is in which we live that seems to value vehicles more highly than the generation of tomorrow.

Tim Gill opened the evening by examining the relationship between society, children and use of the public realm. A quick show of hands revealed that most of the audience had regarded the public realm as their favourite play area in their childhood – whether pavements, footways, areas of waste ground or woods. The best areas were ones that had natural forms and materials and were away from parental supervision – the type of environment generally denied today's children. Tim had a simple thesis that children need to use the public realm to grow up into responsible citizens. To

do this they must push the boundaries, by being slightly naughty, to see how people react, and then adjust their future behaviour accordingly. Without this they soon become excluded and slight naughtiness can develop into nasty problems. He added that children are at extremely low risk from adult strangers, and that contact with strangers is an important part of growing up.

Peter Owens, of Colour Urban Design Ltd, gave a presentation on designing schools, based on user surveys: the children themselves. He found that different ages of children ask for different things, and the favourite of one age group is the least popular with others. Creating a range of different settings in which children could play imaginatively was a key theme. Walter Jack showed examples of his work

with utilitarian objects such as fences or walls turned into playable objects. Asked to produce a fence surrounding a play area, he had created a barrier from metal rings that could also be used as a play tunnel. This must surely be one of the unwritten objectives of good design – getting more than one use out of an object or space.

There was a heart-felt debate about risk: why is the UK the most risk-averse country in Europe? Here areas are fenced off and restricted, while people in other countries are free to do what they will. There was concern about the growth of meaningless risk assessments and procedures; that designers are responsible for the decisions that people make in free will; and, a concern that some groups are profiting by unnecessarily inflaming people's fears and possible litigation. Tim Gill referred to 'Design for Play' guidance published by Play England, and the Department for Children Schools and Families' guidance which stressed the need for procuring organisations to take responsibility for assessing both risk and reward – not just risk.

Robert Huxford

## Re-imagining the City

THE GALLERY, LONDON 18 FEBRUARY 2009

It was standing room only at the Gallery; rarely had a subject attracted such a large audience to a UDG lecture. Alastair Donald who edited last UD issue on the same topic, had assembled four very different speakers and allocated each of them a strict time limit to present their ideas on how to re-imagine the city. Although they did not entirely follow the brief, they did stick to time thus allowing for discussion.

First, Hank Dittmar of the Prince's Foundation gave a guided tour of evolving neighbourhoods in Manhattan, describing the process of gentrification without using the term; instead he mentioned stages that went from 'scary cool', through edgy and discovered, to 'so over it'. To enter this cycle a neighbourhood needs to be affordable, accessible, adaptable and attractive. The next speaker, Quentin Stevens from the Bartlett, and topic editor of UD 108 on in-between spaces, took a very different approach, deploring the way that public policy seems to be concerned with the control of public behaviour. On the contrary he thought that public space is where people take risks and events are unpredictable; limit the risks and you also limit opportunities. Cities he said,

should be about tolerance and not zero-tolerance. He thus advised designing places for unplanned activities as well as planned ones.

Dan Hill from Urban Initiatives followed by attacking gigantism, designing too big and thus creating problems for the future by limiting adaptability. Based on examples from Birmingham and referring to the ubiquitous 'creative quarters' appearing in cities under the urban renaissance banner, he suggested that to be sustainable, change should be at the fine grain, small scale level allowing for adaptation. He hoped that the economic downturn might encourage this. Self build and local building companies could see a renaissance as a result.

The last speaker and the most provocative was Karl Sharro, who thought that we should totally reconsider our attitude to modernity (which he differentiated from modernism). His message is that we should design cities to our own image, reflecting our way of life today. In contrast he saw the ideas advocated by government policies in order to build communities, as being paternalistic and destined to failure. He suspected



that professionals are concerned with designing people's behaviour rather than public spaces and advocated thinking big, for instance as Le Corbusier did.

Not surprisingly the debate was lively and touched on a range of issues from the relationship between design and behaviour, through the near impossibility of visionary design with the constraints of health and safety (the advice was 'break the rules'), to globalisation and the credit crunch. Nothing was discussed in depth and not surprisingly nothing was resolved, but the feeling was that people would have been happy to continue the debate for hours, a certain sign of success.

Sebastian Loew

## Masterplanning and Urban Design

AJ CONFERENCE, LONDON, 20 NOVEMBER 2008

Way back all talk was of masterplans, and then frameworks and design codes, but are we back to masterplans? Sir Terry Farrell saw masterplanning as a tool for balancing nature and towns, investing in what we have, blasting proponents of 'iconic' masterplanning and wishing that recent novelty architecture would not be repeated. Helle Lis Soholt described Jan Gehl's work observing people and creating a framework for living – e.g. when you walk slowly you need stimuli to keep your interest, i.e. a changing impulse every four seconds.

Despite English Partnerships' push for zero carbon, Kevin McGeough thought that making places requires a holistic view, with EP's standards only going part of the way. In the discussions, both Jason King from Llewelyn Davies and Alex Whitbread from Feilden Clegg Bradley emphasized the importance of a critical mass of density to sustain public transport. Connectivity from Tim Stonor of Space Syntax was important for spatial layout, and land uses, land values

and crime, with the need to analyze 'to' and 'through' movement shown in an example from Jeddah.

David Partridge of Argent saw the public realm as a framework to structure development plots but spaces have no value until the buildings go in, talking about King's Cross, where his ten principles for a human city had been applied. At Elephant and Castle Jon Abbott of Southwark Council described it as working to overcome 1960s masterplanning problems through a framework done in 2004, but with a long way to go.

Upton was planned using design codes, according to David Taylor from Alan Baxter & Associates, but in defining rules, they can kill creativity. Neil Deely from Metropolitan Workshop took us to Somerstown and Norway, the former a neighbourhood trapped by major infrastructure and needing minor interventions, and Oslo for impressive large-scale waterfront masterplans with the public realm going in first.



Some speakers queried how to bring sustainability into masterplanning and Terry Farrell mused whether the next boom will be the last before climate change causes shrinkage. He may be right.

Philip Cave

## The Urban Design Interview Marilyn Higgins



### What is your current job and how long have you been there?

I am a senior lecturer in the School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. I've been teaching urban design here since 1993, following 18 years in professional practice. Last year, I had a magical year at the University of Auckland, where I was Deputy Head of the School of Architecture and Planning, responsible for the professional planning programmes. Teaching and researching urban design on the other side of the world was fascinating and invigorating - a real shot in the arm.

### Can you describe the path that you followed to become an urban designer and what motivated you?

Since my teens, I've been motivated by a passion for cities, people and learning - my current job happily combines all three. Growing up in a suburb of St. Louis, my ambition was to be a French teacher. I worked in New York City one summer when I was 17 and was so fascinated by how it worked that I changed my major at Brown University to Urban Studies. It was only an embryonic department, but Brown had a liberal new curriculum, which sparked my interest in education and student-centred learning. I then completed a Masters in Urban Design and Regional Planning at Edinburgh University. What pulled me to the UK was the stronger emphasis on town planning... plus I had loved another summer job as a waitress in Tobermory. The push factor was that Richard Nixon had just been re-elected. My five years with the Royal Fine Art

Commission for Scotland immersed me in urban design with inspiring teachers. Other jobs in the public and private sectors in Glasgow and Lambeth got me hooked on the interplay between design, planning and the public. At Lambeth, I did part-time teaching at South Bank Poly which rekindled my interest in education.

### What do you find exciting about your work?

1. Watching students change over time, but like being a parent, the best things can also be the hardest. 2. Seeing connections between everything - perhaps a factor of getting older. 3. The increased blurring between learning and teaching. 4. Thinking about the number of colleagues that have become good friends over the years. 5. Travelling to new places - I loved my ferry commute every day in Auckland last year (see photo) and am currently excited about my journeys north to Moray Council to deliver urban design training with Leslie Forsyth.

### What do you think are the most important skills of an urban designer?

Understanding the complex interrelationships between physical, environmental, social, cultural and economic factors; contextual analysis from the strategic to the site level; creatively conceptualising and appraising three-dimensional change; implementation skills, including collaboration, market awareness and project management; monitoring and evaluating process and product. These need to be underpinned by determination, courage, commitment, humility, patience, listening, caring....

### What would you like to be doing in ten years' time?

I hope I am still walking cheerfully over this world, bumping into former students and colleagues, travelling to places I love. One ambition is to spend prolonged periods in different parts of Italy, discovering new places and practising my Italian. I would also like to continue walking the Scottish hills.

### As an urban designer, do you have a role model?

Bob Jarvis got me into teaching at South Bank Poly - I admire the way he dares to be different and also speaks Italian. I once read that graphics were not Kevin Lynch's forte, which endeared him to me even more.

### If you were to recommend an urban design scheme or study (past or present) for an award, what would you chose?

John Hope's masterplan site for Holyrood North in Edinburgh's Old Town is a favourite place to take students. It's a lively blend of old and new and mixed land uses with a sense of place and taking full advantage of its spectacular location.

### Where is your favourite town or city and why?

I have so many, but it would have to be Manhattan. Having grown up in Webster Groves, Missouri, when I was 15, I rode a bicycle down Fifth Avenue at night, in the rain, and didn't worry about my hair. It was a defining moment in my life and I never looked back. New York saved me from myself.

### Where is your most hated place and why?

I try not to hate. In the past, friends have laughed at me for wanting to see industrial estates and the poorer parts of towns. We should be trained to see potential, more than ugliness and learn from our mistakes. However, I was pleased when my son grew up and no longer begged to go to the huge toy store in our nearest out-of-town retail park. We now often walk into the centre of Edinburgh together instead.

### What advice would you give to UD readers?

I try not to give advice, it's more powerful for individuals to discover things themselves. The best piece of advice I have received was from my son when he was in primary school. Before my first lecture and in a state of terror, I asked him what made a good teacher, and he said, 'You'll be all right, mummy, just put your heart into your breath.' The real genius in those simple words comes from the way he linked passion and confidence, the mind and the body, the physical and the emotional - urban designers could usefully ponder these linkages, as it's easy for them to get lost.

### What should the Urban Design Group be doing now or in the future?

Promoting constructive dialogue between different people involved in urban design to break down barriers, deepen understanding and produce better results on the ground.

### Finally, who would you like to see interviewed by UD?

'Ordinary' members of the public asking them how recent projects have influenced their lives, so we can learn from that.



## Tensions in the Management of Urban World Heritage Sites

Michael Short, John Pendlebury and Aidan While examine these concerns

World Heritage Sites have traditionally reflected a desire to protect particular monuments and sites of historic or architectural importance and their immediate surroundings. In more recent times however we have witnessed a move to designating much broader areas of cities including entire central business districts. Places such as Liverpool, Edinburgh, Mexico City and Tel-Aviv have been designated World Heritage Sites due to the 'outstanding universal value' of those townscapes. Designations of central cities as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO has meant that not only have these cities in essence become world heritage cities, and places of international conservation, but proposals for development which impact upon that status must be scrutinised more closely and by a wider group of consultees. The regime of planning control is therefore significantly strengthened, given that an additional level of interest from UNESCO and ICOMOS is added to the often-competing interests of development and conservation. This paper seeks to review some of these tensions in relation to urban World Heritage Sites in the UK drawing on some experiences of tall building control in Liverpool.

### UNESCO AND WORLD HERITAGE SITES

World Heritage Sites are at the pinnacle of international heritage status and this concept derives from the 1972 UNESCO General Conference which adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the

World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, otherwise known as the World Heritage Convention. The rationale of the convention was that there were places of 'outstanding universal value', that these were part of the heritage of all humanity and that their protection was therefore a shared responsibility. The most well-known outcome of this was the identification of cultural and natural properties, and their inscription as World Heritage Sites.

World Heritage Sites (WHS) are considered on the basis of nominations put forward by national governments and can be seen, in some ways, as a beauty contest between nations. The first twelve WHS were inscribed in seven countries in 1978. By 1982, this had risen to 137 sites, by 1992 to 380, and by summer 2008 the total had reached 878 sites across more than 140 states. The UK government ratified the World Heritage Convention in 1984 and by the end of 2008 there were twenty-seven World Heritage Sites in the UK (twenty-two cultural, four natural, one mixed). Of these a significant number are located within cities or are themselves a significant part of a city: the City of Bath is the largest example. Edinburgh Old and New Towns effectively cover the centre of Edinburgh, and Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City is a significant part of the city centre, especially along the waterfront. There are a number of more discreet sites that are located in dynamic city locations – especially the metropolitan sites of the Tower of London, the Westminster Palace and Abbey group, Maritime Greenwich,



the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Durham Castle and Cathedral, and the Canterbury Cathedral group. Many of these sites have an extremely heterogeneous character and the scope for very different interpretations of heritage value. This in turn has implications for very different scenarios of future urban development.

#### WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN THE UK

At present provisions for World Heritage Sites in UK planning law are not strong. There is no specific legislative provision or additional statutory control. However, in England Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 makes the existence of a WHS site a key material consideration, and suggests that each local authority should formulate specific planning policies for protecting sites in their development plans. Significant development proposals affecting WHS will require formal environmental assessment. The 2007 White Paper, Heritage Protection for the 21st Century discusses specific notification and call-in protocols for planning applications in WHS, the strengthening of national policy, an emphasis upon management plans, and that WHS be classified as Article 1(5) land (where more restricted permitted development rights exist). In late 2008 the Department for Culture Media and Sport launched a review of policy exploring the extent to which the current approach supports the interests of the Government in protecting and promoting the cultural and natural heritage; wider strategic priorities; and international goals, particularly in relation to UNESCO.

#### TALL BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

Tall buildings are a relatively recent phenomenon in the evolution of our cities, although concern about the character of cities and the impact of taller development has a long history. Recently a renaissance in the design and construction of tall buildings in Europe is in evidence. London, Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt and Rotterdam are experiencing a rush to build tall and are responding to this in locally distinctive ways. In many British cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham the picture appears complex; local planning authorities have been keen to welcome tall buildings to promote their status on the world stage, whilst a diverse range of other interest groups have either welcomed them or sought to combat

them due to their real or perceived impact on the form of the city. In metropolitan WHS, a further layer of complexity is added to the decision-making process about such buildings, and Liverpool is an interesting example.

#### LIVERPOOL – MERCANTILE MARITIME CITY

Liverpool is a city of world renown; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was central to the expansion of the British Empire, in particular to trade and the emigration of British, Irish and other Europeans to the new world. The built legacy of this period is reflected in the large numbers of protected buildings and areas in the central city. The city then became synonymous for urban decay, dereliction and out-migration. More recently however, Liverpool has attracted the attention of the world again with its Europe's Capital of Culture status recognizing the role of Liverpool to the heritage of Europe, and in 2004, UNESCO declared the waterfront to be a WHS worthy of protection. The boundary of this site includes the waterfront and the main commercial core of the city. This designation has attracted the general support of the many agencies and government bodies involved in regenerating the city, yet there is concern within the business community that the tightly drawn boundaries are stifling investment. Indeed stakeholders seem to be coalescing around having the WHS status revoked or at least revised to rid the city of the buffer zone.

The World Heritage Site Management Plan was adopted by UNESCO, ICOMOS and Liverpool City Council in December 2003 to manage conservation and development in the site. A buffer zone was designated drawn more broadly than the site boundary and including the setting for the centre of the city. UNESCO also requested that City Council planning policy be in conformity with the special qualities of the site, as UNESCO and ICOMOS were concerned about proposals such as the Fourth Grace and other tall building proposals coming forward, which could impact negatively on the character of the site at that time. UNESCO and ICOMOS have been concerned about the impacts of tall buildings on WHS elsewhere and so were unusually insistent that a policy framework should reflect the needs of the site. UNESCO also indicated that in applying its planning procedures, the City Council assured that the

**Previous page** View of the emerging tall building cluster north west of the city centre  
**Opposite** View of the Three Graces from Albert Dock  
**Right** View of the Anglican Cathedral



height of any new construction in the World Heritage Site and its buffer zone does not exceed that of structures in the immediate surroundings. The City Council considers the management plan to be part of the city's statutory planning framework alongside the development plan.

Yet there is an apparent mismatch between the aims of the management plan and the desire of the city to attract much needed redevelopment in the form of tall buildings. As an urban WHS Liverpool is particularly susceptible to change given that the morphology of the city is so important. In responding to the management plan the City Council wrote a draft tall buildings policy which was published for consultation in December 2004. This policy suggested three clusters of tall buildings at Kings Dock, Lime Street Station and the commercial core to the north all within either the site itself or the buffer zone. In collecting the public consultation responses to the tall building policy, it soon became apparent that the draft policy did not accord with the WHS Management Plan and, as such, it was shelved for further work to be undertaken at a later date.

In response, UNESCO and ICOMOS indicated that they were concerned that major development schemes did not emerge from a structured process. As a result, the World Heritage Committee requested that the government invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS monitoring mission to consider the impact of tall building proposals on the World Heritage property, and that it provides an updated report on the progress of strategic plans for future development and the state of conservation of the property. Having responded in due course, the government has welcomed the monitoring mission and persuaded ICOMOS that it could strengthen the legal and planning framework for WHS and that powers are given to the Minister for Communities and Local Government to 'call-in' major development proposals. For Liverpool much weight was placed upon the production of specific supplementary guidance for the WHS as part of the Local Development Framework process, the preparation of which is underway.

## CONCLUSIONS

The issue of tall buildings and World Heritage Sites is particularly important and interesting for research on urban World Heritage

Sites. Tall buildings clearly create tension around questions of boundaries, impacts and meanings. But tall buildings are merely the most visible of a multitude of development struggles of varying impacts that become apparent when the lid is lifted on World Heritage Site governance and regulation. We are especially interested in what they might reveal about the future direction of conservation thinking; an urban World Heritage Site does not fit neatly into the dominant conservation emphasis on preserving iconic structures, spaces and views, with difficult decisions having to be taken. What we would therefore expect to see is the opening-up of debate about the relationship of the past, present and future, and – as in Liverpool – the partial re-regulation of conservation policy to meet the demands of site management.

Liverpool is particularly interesting given the heterogeneity of the physical heritage of its WHS and the complex relationship between conservation, the pressure to regenerate, and repositioning the city centre as a major twenty-first century leisure, retail and residential location. Whilst cultural built heritage is certainly part of the regeneration mix, it has to be balanced against new development. The tensions between conservation and development around the WHS are clearly far from over, although the credit crisis will reduce development pressure. Perhaps now, we can stand back and reflect on the type of changes that we have seen in WHS cities and whether these are appropriate given their conservation and management.

The government has indicated that it will nominate two more sites for WHS status (in addition to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct) - Darwin at Downe and the Twin Monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow. The Twin Monastery nomination will add to the UK's stock of sites in urban areas - in Jarrow and Sunderland, and so it is crucial that there is greater understanding of the ways in which complex heterogeneous townscapes can be conserved as part of sustainable regeneration strategies.

Michael Short, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning, University of the West of England Bristol, John Pendlebury, Head of School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Aidan White, Senior Lecturer in Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield



## Is Urban Renaissance Failing Humanism?

Laura Alvarez asks whether we have lost sight of what matters

### URBAN RENAISSANCE UNDERWAY

As the 'urban renaissance' courses its way through Britain, numerous urban developments are emerging that illustrate how designs can satisfy the current central Government agenda. We see new masterplans integrating with existing urban areas and many developments are achieving good levels of connectivity, urban nodes and a variety of areas of vast natural landscape and biodiversity. Environmental concerns and security are hot topics, and professionals are increasingly accomplishing realistic sets of deliverables with environmentally-friendly approaches.

Thus satisfied perhaps that the profession is now delivering desirable urban forms and governance structures, it is time to examine other factors also present in the complexity of the public realm. It would be good to think that these have been intelligently avoided recently in the pressing urge to repair the damage caused by the urbanism of the last few decades, and addressing the challenges of the new millennium.

In his article for issue 109 on Re-imagining the City, Alastair Donald strongly asserted that there is a contradiction between the wording of policies and guidance and the metropolitan urban design emerging as a result. Perhaps we should explore these very valid concepts from other angles, as they are the essence of contemporary urbanism and they could result in the success of urban renaissance.

We find ourselves buried in piles of documents telling us how to interpret, communicate and enforce renaissance, but due to the economic nature of this model, more rigorous enforcement would probably be required in order for policies and guidance with humanistic wording to be effectively translated into urban design. As professionals, most of us are capable of understanding and delivering localism, safety, community, health and respect, but unfortunately we are not sufficiently empowered to create them.

Although outstanding examples can be cited, with an economic map as the backdrop, the humanistic model preached by government is broadly manifested in the form of a series of anonymous urban oases amidst a very rich heritage. Economic regeneration is undoubtedly the driving force of the urban renaissance, and the financial sustainability of most recent urban developments is driven by the population's

capability, desire and need to acquire goods. Yet the anonymous metropolitan approach to urban (as opposed to suburban) design is not a commitment to a newly emerging lifestyle, but the physical manifestation of an economic model. It is our responsibility as professionals to work within this framework but also to create buffers against its downfalls. Unfortunately, we have not yet seen many good examples of renaissance outside city centres or within suburban areas.

The word 'inclusive' is so extensively used in contemporary urban design that no report would be complete without it; however, more selective use of the term may have the unintended and adverse effect that, by designing exclusively for metropolitan life, we are designing for a specific sector of society, rather than being truly inclusive. In short, there might be a tendency towards non-inclusion and disenfranchisement. Capitalism should include mechanisms to avoid reaching the point where urban renaissance is associated with elitism. Perhaps this is how renaissance is failing humanism?

### A MORE HUMANISTIC APPROACH

Diluting unilaterally-driven developments is one of the main characteristics of contemporary architectural and urban design practice. An indication of the valuable social input required to create good urbanism could be evident in the requirement to make design processes increasingly available to the general population. For example, public consultation schemes aim to involve the community by encouraging individual active participation; however, very often money and efforts are directed to box-ticking exercises in which very little input is truly taken from the community involvement. Detailed practical concerns may even be taken into account, such as retaining a bus stop or relocating a drop-off point. But while these issues are undoubtedly of public concern, do they contribute to the organic metamorphosis of an urban space into a place? And do they generate a sense of belonging amongst the community?

Public access to a space is not sufficient for it to be public in nature, and this is more likely to be developed through a sense of belonging. The urban renaissance might be producing fully designed urban realms that offer the opportunity of exploring, perceiving and enjoying

**Opposite and Right**  
Campus projects  
undertaken by  
students at UNLP,  
Argentina



them, but these are manufactured spaces which position the public as 'observers' as opposed to a 'space makers', and depriving social groups from communal space-conquering.

As designers, we are sometimes obsessed with the final product, taking pride in the forms and spaces 'we' have designed. Perhaps we could embrace the idea of creating 'blank' urban spaces dedicated to receiving social dynamic inputs for small communities to develop their own settlement processes. Why are we intimidated by the idea of an unfinished product or, more accurately, a dynamic space?

Comprehensive social studies of local communities and the will to deliver organically appropriated public spaces could result in new social behaviour toward the public realm. A combination of a physical space and a community framework could establish the platform for social structures and encourage a more organic appropriation of space and place-making. Small or more homogeneous communities, such as educational campuses and other collective living developments, could offer excellent opportunities to explore spontaneous occupation within the current regulatory framework.

#### A PARADIGM

Times of financial crisis are undoubtedly of major detriment to urban design and development, but they could also result in spontaneous collaboration and a burst of creative ideas, contributing to the natural transformation of our cities. Having begun my architectural career in the less developed country of Argentina, I have witnessed some of the simplest and most affordable approaches to urban design problem-solving.

During the Argentinean recession of the early nineteen eighties, the high school that I attended began a three-month course in maintenance; students were taught DIY and Health and Safety, and were given responsibility for surveying, planning and carrying out the maintenance of the school. The parents' association acted as the economic driving force, procuring donations of disposed materials from local industries and businesses. This simple programme not only helped the building to survive the financial crisis by reducing maintenance costs, but it also created an unprecedented sense of belonging and

pride amongst the students. When materials and workforce exceeded the demand, the school and its students worked for local charitable organisations instead.

Furthermore, the Faculty of Architecture from which I graduated, works in collaboration with local authorities in the region to assist organic place-making in deprived areas. Students participate in research programmes and competitions to produce proposals with a very high level of community involvement, such as taking an active part in the search for sponsorship, the creation of a building programme and even undertaking part of the works. Interdisciplinary work is often carried out involving various university departments such as Social Care, Economics, Sociology and Psychology. This type of work not only gives students the opportunity to work on real-life projects, but it also creates a great bond between young professionals and the community, and a sense of pride and belonging amongst both.

The same faculty has also had a scheme in place for many years in which the student association receives a fund in return for the responsibilities, under supervision, of the maintenance and development of common and semi-public spaces. The university as an institution grants students certain powers over the decision-making process to constantly transform communal areas, patios and galleries. A student commission also takes an active part in any redevelopment, extension or intervention within the university campus (as in the examples illustrated above). The settlement process occurs organically and it gives students the opportunity to learn mechanisms and social skills associated with communal and multidisciplinary undertakings. Students value this opportunity to socialise, even volunteering for decorating, planting and other risk-managed activities. They take pride in their achievements and ensure that 'their' place is well maintained. Naturally, there are individuals who do not take part, but the social space remains open to anyone who is willing to participate. Every time I go back to the university, I do not recognise it, but neither do I recognise the majority of the faces making use of their place.

Laura Alvarez, working for Lewis & Hickey Architects as an architectural practitioner involved with a university campus development



## Urban Design at the Coalface

Tim Hagyard presents a perspective from Development Control

I must confess that I was invited to write about the skills deficit in local authorities, but I have strayed. This is not because it is not an important issue, but because training alone will not make the main difference in delivering good urban design.

The number of local authority employed specialist staff in conservation, architecture, urban design and landscape has been in decline, and these trends need to be reversed to reinvigorate the design emphasis of planning. The status and pay of design professions doing important and long-term planning work should be enhanced, and having urban design as a core skill for town planning makes sense – as it would for architects, landscape designers, transport planners and highway engineers. Delivering good design therefore requires a body of public servant design professionals that know and care about their local areas.

However we need to look at more than the skills available to make an impact on local delivery of good urban design; we cannot let national government off the hook when it implies that this is a just a matter of education (in essence saying that the responsibility for poor quality outcomes is purely local). Professionals working in Development Control (DC) are already highly skilled officers; they have a stressful (and pretty thankless) task in managing the inevitable conflicts of an adversarial planning system, caught within the highly regulated culture of local government with targets and tightening budgets. DC officers employ negotiation skills, time management skills, people skills, analytical and decision-making skills, amongst others, and to great effect generally.

Yet, to really improve the delivery of high quality development, DC officers need to be given the means to deliver this quality and raise the quality of submitted applications. Beyond that there is a key question

of leadership and having the belief and a vision of what proactive local government is able to achieve.

### OVERARCHING CLEAR DESIGN GUIDANCE

Planners already work with some well recognised regulations. In general, the planning system does a good job in protecting the Green Belt, countryside and special landscapes, conserving listed buildings and historic conservation areas, controlling advertising, and protecting neighbours against undue loss of amenity. In these areas the rules for Development Control are well established by robust national and local policy, and officers are confident using them.

But in other areas the rules are not so well defined nor do they keep up with the speed of change, or the resources of powerful private interests. The resources of the large supermarket chains have steadily increased their dominance of the domestic grocery market - does national legislation (PPS6) really secure sustainable development within retailing, or the core principle of land use planning (PPS1)?

It is a similar picture for the hugely important question of urban design. Is the guidance robust enough to demand high quality walkable mixed use sustainable development? When determining quality is there a presumption in favour of development? For a long time national guidance has said that demonstrable harm was necessary to refuse planning proposals – remember the 1980s 'Lifting the Burden'? So should we first ask 'what is the harm of development' or what is its benefit? On first reading PPS1, with its requirement that new development take opportunities for enhancement, I hoped that this would make a difference, but subsequent experience has been less encouraging.

With national government setting priorities, and saying that design guidance needs to be produced at the local level, this may never happen

**Opposite** Parc de Guell, Barcelona – a place offering a high quality of life

**Right** New England Quarter, Brighton – a good example of design quality



while local authorities are compelled to focus on their other higher priority statutory duties. Development Control is increasingly complex, and Local Development Frameworks, as Local Plans before, take many years to put in place. National guidance could help with more robust priorities about design and sustainable development, so that while local frameworks are developed why can't PPS1 clearly say (as some in CABE think it does) that 'development should positively enhance our urban and rural landscapes'; so that development needs to be good enough to approve, rather than just not bad enough to refuse. Why not formally adopt the CABE guidance on the use and content of Design and Access Statements, so that proposals always include sound urban design appraisals and are prepared for negotiation with local planning authorities and the public at the pre-application stage? Is it desirable to wait for every local authority in the country to eventually adopt detailed local guidance that will more or less repeat the same urban design principles? Couldn't we require that professionally qualified architects and urban designers be employed to prepare schemes above a minimum size threshold? Or that open architectural competitions be held for key sites? We have seen leadership on other planning issues make an immediate difference – for instance in PPG3 on minimum densities and parking levels for residential development, and so unambiguous leadership is needed now on design.

#### LEADERSHIP BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Good leadership is also about direction not micro-management. Unfortunately, the trend over the last two or more decades has been towards too much central government interference in local government, rather than local empowerment and initiative, and so the profile of planning has slipped too. Only a minority of design progressive authorities integrate highways and planning work and proactively emphasise the importance of design in the public realm and public space management. Such authorities go beyond their core planning duties (DC and Local Plan) because they have realised the benefits of

design champions, design and citizen panels and by resourcing design and conservation teams, streetscene teams, urban design strategies, public realm strategies, masterplans, development and design briefs, architectural design competitions, design award schemes and the rest. These need to be more widespread along with a greater role for local government to acquire key strategic sites and bring forward development. This could make the private sector bid for the project based on the quality of their submissions – competing on quality, rather than their ability to secure land deals or their tactical nous in winning planning permissions (neither of which improve the eventual design).

It is true that the skills deficit exists on both sides of the fence. In sixteen years of DC work, I still await a developer who has employed an urban designer to present planning proposals, and it is the minority of developers who employ architects (and even fewer who give them much freedom). The quality of the design depends on a developer having a clear idea of what standard is expected for a likely permission. Ideally this can be stated in clear design policies, supplemented by design and development briefs, and through a meaningful process of dialogue with public engagement before ideas become too fixed. How often does it happen like that? How frequently is the land value set even before this process has begun?

#### REAL PLANNING AND DESIGN SKILLS

Reforming the highly adversarial and legalistic nature of our planning system to a more inclusive, design focused and collaborative model is so important. Planning appeals are now too common and seem almost habitual for some developers who feel that they have to test a development on appeal (or in the courts) before accepting planning restrictions. What is the role of a local planning authority in such cases? Planning inquiries can be a useful way of examining evidence and reaching decisions, but they are costly and time-consuming, and do not add to the quality of development outcomes. If more developer



Left New Street, Brighton - design quality and liveability combined

and public confidence can be built up at the pre-application stage with dialogue then fewer appeals should occur, and any appeal would be less likely to succeed if it contradicted the progression of the design negotiations. Increasing the numbers of professional designers, at the expense of the number of lawyers, would make good quality development mainstream. The planning system has over-rewarded those skilled in unpicking policy wording, and under-rewarded those with the vision, an ability to listen, and design creativity to produce popular distinctive places. With a refocus on design, place-making and effective consultation, developers will see that it is essential to invest in the right design skills and any increased costs of employing designers would be offset by the reduced costs of lawyers, barristers and planning appeals. The same principle applies to the budgets of local planning authorities, meaning that this new model does not necessarily require greater resources, just better use of available resource.

#### LOCAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

On local leadership, which is essential and needs to come from elected democratic bodies, some council leaders are content to run local government as an efficient administrator of services with tidy accounting and staffing levels. But they have lost the vision of what local government can achieve. Unfortunately short-termism is a problem as the gains from improved design require investment and are usually long-term, and so do not offer rewards for politicians wanting to demonstrate quick-fix benefits within one electoral cycle. The relative lack of planners and designers reaching senior positions within local government is another problem. Local government and its planning role has been diminished and seen as a less attractive career option as services have been divided up, stripped away, privatised and the subject of increasing central auditing and monitoring. Design skills have been reduced and outsourced. Yet urban design and planning offer some of the great opportunity areas for a renaissance in local government; with fine examples from the Birmingham City Centre Design Strategy in 1990 (Tibbalds et al) to the ambitious programme of Project Taunton – to become a zero carbon town by 2025. The evidence is that local leadership, of whatever political persuasion, can bring change. e.g. Councillor Daniel Moylan in Kensington and Chelsea with changes to Kensington High Street and Exhibition Road; Ken Livingstone with his 100 Public Spaces in London (now axed), and, the long term leadership of Mayor Maragall (15 years) in Barcelona and Mayor Freche (27 years) in Montpelier.

Our towns and cities have no value if they are not imbued with meaning and history. In enhancing the public realm and guiding new development, it must be with the aim of reinforcing local identity and distinctiveness. Standard road layouts, highway regulations, single use developments and house types have produced 'identikit' developments, which are neither sustainable nor inspiring, and continue to be proposed and accepted. So the struggle for delivering urban design is also a struggle for greater purpose in local government, and for civic leadership that engages residents who care about their environment. The planning system works best when it engages people creatively, so that they too become advocates for quality and view development positively and as a way to bring real enhancement to the environment.

#### MUCH NEEDED CHANGE

My key recommendations for change would be for:

- Comprehensive performance assessments to audit the level and status of design professionals within local authorities, and to monitor key design initiatives such as the presence of design champions, design teams, design awards and design panels
- National planning guidance to recommend settlement and area urban design strategies, adopting CABE advice on Design and Access Statements, and to set a presumption that new development will secure 'positive enhancement'
- All new land allocations and development sites e.g. above 1 ha, to be subject to publicly developed appraisals and lead to the production of concept plans with statements of key design principles
- Harsher treatment for developers who operate 'planning by appeal' and fail to enter into a pre-application process

The importance of rethinking how national government monitors and assesses the performance of local planning authorities cannot be underestimated. It will be a happy day when a DC officer receives that keenly-awaited planning application – the outcome of a thorough and inclusive design process, proposing a real place of quality, delight and meaning, and has little left to do but guide it through to successful implementation.

Tim Hagyard is Development Control Team Manager at East Herts Council (this article presents his own views and not those of his employer)

# Sustainable Urbanism

Alona Martinez-Perez looks at its definitions in a Scottish context



Sustainable urbanism: it seems to be everywhere - in new policies, publications, books, political agendas and university courses. But everyone assumes to know what we mean by urbanism, but when the prefix 'sustainable' is added, suddenly the meaning changes. Clearly urbanism is related to urbanisation, and in looking for a definition of urbanisation, its importance becomes obvious - an increase in the number of people migrating from rural areas to urban areas.

Looking at urbanisation from a global perspective the data indicates that in 1955, there were 732 million urban dwellers making up 29% of the world's population, and by 2015 there will be 3.8 billion, making up 53% of the world's population (BBC News website). At the local level and in this case where the author lives, there is the Scottish perspective to consider. 'Overall, the population of Scotland grew 1% over the [past] decade, to 5.14 million. One of the key trends in Scotland during the last decade has been the growth of urban areas such as West Lothian and Edinburgh' (Bank of Scotland Research 2008).

Given these statistics, we must ask why is urbanisation so important to the development of Scotland's built environment? Three reasons emerge:

- Scotland is becoming an increasingly urbanised society, focused around the Central Belt and Inverness
- The *Designing Places* policy document notes that existing Scottish cities have developed over many years to become unique and distinctive places. It also notes that the distinctive character of our cities may be damaged by poor quality development
- The issue of newer cities and urban areas such as Inverness, Stirling and West Lothian

But how do we ensure that existing towns and cities grow in a way that contributes to their distinctive character, and that new urban areas develop to become high quality distinctive places? There is only one answer: Sustainable Urbanism. The definition of sustainable urbanism in the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment in its report 'Valuing Sustainable Urbanism' is:

'Sustainable urbanism - a phrase which is widely used, not always consistently - has three basic aspects: environmental, social and economic. An urban form which is environmentally sustainable enables its inhabitants to adopt a more ecologically aware, lower carbon lifestyle. In particular, a sustainable layout will enable people to walk to amenities, rather than be forced to use a car.'

The Scottish Government in SPP1 (Scottish Planning Policy) states that one of the primary objectives of the planning system is to set the land use framework for promoting sustainable economic development, and goes further by saying that "Enabling sustainable development requires co-ordinated action, combining economic competitiveness and social justice with environmental quality and justice."

There are different ways in which we could encourage sustainable urbanism under these three categories:

- **Physical:** development of the highest physical quality, which enhances the quality of our built environment and public realm, with sufficient parks and open spaces
- **Social:** Ensuring that development accommodates a range of citizens (old, young, single, married); that it plays a role in reducing crime (Jane Jacobs' eyes on the street, etc); that it provides sufficient local services and avoids mono-use ghettos of housing or offices; and that it is of appropriate density (e.g. higher around public transport nodes)
- **Environmental:** Maximising and prioritising the reuse of brownfield sites; sourcing local materials; and using sustainable construction materials (e.g. Edinburgh Standards for Sustainable Buildings)

On one hand the aims and objectives are high, but on the other the question lies on how governments, local authorities and urban design professionals can create and encourage sustainable urbanism in today's towns and cities. It is important to work at different levels, from local to regional and national, and aim not just for short-term plans but for long-term solutions. For local authorities to achieve sustainable urbanism, it is important to ensure that housing site allocation is appropriate and ensure development is focused around existing settlements and amenities; with Area Plans asserting aspirations for mixed use development at a very strategic level; ensuring that public transport connections are thoroughly considered at the strategic level; and, that development is responsive to existing and proposed public transport routes.

It is also essential to acknowledge areas of conflict, such as economic development versus sustainability and urban design, and work to address these potential conflicts in local development plan policy framework. It is also very important to provide training and support to local authorities who are experiencing urban growth and may not have the skills or experience to deliver policies to address these issues. It is vital to ensure the participation of communities in development proposals in their area, and to create communities that are sustainable (e.g. Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative). An overriding concern is to create integration between land use and infrastructure to be clearly sustainable.

While it is not possible to define every aspect of sustainable urbanism here, or try to anticipate every solution, it is our responsibility as urban designers to create places that meet our current needs, but also meet those needs of future generations, as set out in the Brundtland Commission's ground-breaking report. If we create places that are truly sustainable and successful, the urban design and the architecture of today will be the legacy of tomorrow.

Alona Martinez-Perez, an architect-urban designer and Regional Convener of the UDG for Scotland, and with thanks to John Deffenbaugh for his thoughts and suggestions

# The Academy of Urbanism

John Thompson and Kevin Murray look beyond the designer mindset



Since its launch in 2006, the Academy of Urbanism has made continuous progress as a result of our core activity of learning from place, while growing our membership across the UK and Ireland, broadening the range of discourse, and making it available to different audiences in a variety of modes. Of particular note more recently are:

- The establishment of a network of UniverCities – following a very successful Congress in Sheffield in May 2008. This is a network of places that combines academia, practitioners, the public sector and communities learning about their own place in much greater depth over time, and disseminating that to a wider audience. There are now many UniverCity partnerships being formed across the country and the first main research project has been commissioned by SEEDA into four ‘pilot’ towns in the South East. Our next Congress in Newcastle–Gateshead in May 2009 will include updates on these various partnerships.
- The development of toolkits and techniques such as City X-Rays - helping groups to explore, record and track their places using comparable formats. This enables different layers and details of socio-economic and physical knowledge to be gathered, compared and analysed to help understand the processes and implications behind the more obvious facets of urbanism.

These initiatives are important in building learning networks and localised capacity at a time when both private and public sectors are experiencing cutbacks. If we are to maintain credible capability through into the next generation, we need such mechanisms to get learning about good urbanism out to different audiences and in an accessible format.

We also have our Urbanism Awards, recognising quality of place at the scales of City, Town, Neighbourhood, Street and Place. The learning from the finalists is captured each year in our book series *Learning from Place* (see book review in UD 107, p40). This learning dimension is central to our whole advocacy of good urbanism. We believe that looking at places in depth, understanding what works, what people enjoy and return to again and again, helps us develop socially and environmentally responsible places that can endure.

## EVOLUTION

In the very early days of the Academy, concern was expressed by various parties about our potential role. What was to be our purpose? How would we be any different from CABE, the Urban Design Group, or the Urban Design Alliance? Indeed, we are still asked by practitioners in planning, architecture, but particularly in the urban design field, why we separately identify and pursue our notion of urbanism, and why with a so-called high level academy?

Although many of our members are designers by training, we have all recognised that successful place-making is not about the

sequential linear and rather narrowly aesthetic processes of planning, design or development, but rather about understanding place from a human point of view. Many of us happily remain active members of our respective professional bodies and networks, including the Urban Design Group; but these bodies do not adequately capture the full Space-Place-Life spectrum, nor the philosophical approach to deliver it. We wanted a vehicle specifically to promote better urbanism.

The initial dependence on very senior practitioners is largely due to needing people who have already created real places, perhaps even making ‘conventional’ mistakes along the way. Few of us are born urbanists – we get there through a journey of reflective inquiry over many years, irrespective of our starting point.

The tradition of thinkers and writers that the Academy aspires to follow includes the likes of Jane Jacobs and Patrick Geddes, with links to the work of Jan Gehl and Francis Tibbalds, as well as our counterparts at the American Congress of New Urbanism (ACNU) and Council for European Urbanism (CEU), in which some of our members also participate. However, we do not believe that the debate revolves around individuals, whether signature ‘starchitects’, planners, politicians or developers. For us it is very much about the quality of place. Icons are strictly for the inside of Orthodox churches.

## FOCUS ON PLACE

We have reviewed places where interesting things are happening, visited many locations of different scales to assess and celebrate them, and also looked in more depth at those places that have hosted our conferences and Annual Congress. In a relatively short time we have put many diverse places under the microscope from Belfast and Berlin, Ludlow and Liverpool, Malmö and Manchester, to St Andrews and St Ives, and celebrated a myriad of streets and spaces in Lincoln, London, Birmingham, Dublin and Glasgow.

Our study has provided many salutary lessons for us all. Crucially we are learning that successful urbanism is not exclusively about design thinking or built objects, which can often be much too reductive and limiting a perspective. Nor is it about urban design or public realm strategies, important those these clearly are in providing a framing armature at different scales. Fiscal mechanisms to secure community gains or ongoing management can be crucial underpinnings, as can subtle subsidies that sustain diversity and affordability of space for a mix of activities, like artists’ studios or specialist shops and restaurants. The market is clearly important but it is not necessarily ‘king’, as we know that an untrammelled development sector – especially one exclusively devoted to immediate property disposals – does not seem to deliver the long-term perspective and slower leaching of value evident in our successful places.

Constructive conservation policy over the medium term has often served a role in tempering some of the worst excesses of zeitgeist fetishism, and it is also instructive that the characterful elements of so many great places would not necessarily get permission today. If there is one thing we have learned so far, it is that the making of successful, convivial places is too important to be left to designers and planners alone; but they need to play a positive and inclusive role, working in informed dialogue with others from across the community.

If you would like to work with us in promoting better urbanism, for example by joining or creating a UniverCity, developing a City X-Ray methodology, or coming on an assessment visit to our Great Places, then contact Linda Gledstone at The Academy of Urbanism (lg@academyofurbanism.org.uk) or see [www.academyofurbanism.org.uk](http://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk).

Kevin Murray & John Thompson, Founding Directors of the Academy of Urbanism

# EDUCATION, EDUCATION AND STILL EDUCATION



Photograph: CABE / Mark Ellis & Ashley Bingham, ICD Ltd

It is eight years since Urban Design last looked at skills and education, and the context is quite different. As several of our contributors describe there is concern not only about skills being lost as the economy slows up, but also the two-speed needs of employers – for a sound footing in well-established urban design principles, coupled with a good understanding of fast-moving industry advances and policies.

However there has been considerable consolidation of design in planning terms, taking urban design from being an optional or peripheral influence to being centre-stage in the new spatial planning structure. The emphasis on local development frameworks should have brought joy to urban planners and designers, as they have at last been given an opportunity to consider their patches in strategic, dynamic, creative and 3D terms, bringing life to dull and needlessly word-dependent policies.

Instead there has been much uncertainty and a loss of confidence as planners (who are invariably not designers) have been grappling with this apparently ‘new’ concept and perspective. Only now is there a sense of understanding of what LDFs can be in the right hands, as more are approved, adopted and good examples heralded. But this has been a rough ride, which more widespread urban design understanding and skills could have avoided.

If the articles in this issue have another common theme, it is the happy revelation that urban design brings, providing clarity and the ‘bigger picture’ to the fragmented perspectives offered by architectural, engineering and planning educations. Before speaking at The Oxford Conference in July 2008 on architectural education, I listened to a variety of presenters wondering whether there was anything new to add; yet it became clear that the cultural divide between urban design and architecture is as unchanged as it was in my student days in the late 1980s. There is still an almost religious blindness between the professions, which is as fundamental in some quarters as ever, and so bridging professional gaps remains important. As practices struggle, will there be a shift in architectural services to include urban design and how will those brave clients, who are continuing to plan ahead and engaging designers, judge their quality? Is accreditation the answer?

Recent regional initiatives with local authority councillors and their design champions however suggest that the intuitive and common sense approach that urban design embodies is making a difference. Design education is also reaching the public through the architecture centres, and at last design quality interest is moving from just being about city centres to suburban places too. It will be interesting to see what the new Homes and Communities Agency’s Academy brings to education and the quality of what is on offer, whether through formal courses, top-up events or projects which start to engage other professions and the public?

**LOUISE THOMAS**

# URBAN DESIGN SKILLS AND EDUCATION – A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD?

Carlton Roberts-James sets out the new challenges for education



Above The CABE Urban Design Summer School in Newcastle-Gateshead June 2008

## STARTING POINT

Seventy-five years ago President Roosevelt launched his New Deal to rescue the United States from financial crisis and the Great Depression. It took a war, and the military industries and employment that it spawned, to bring the US out of the depression. Faced with the current global economic, energy and environmental crises, powerful arguments are forming, articulated by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, that 'business as usual' is not an option and a Green New Deal is needed to rebuild and reshape the economy.

The Green New Deal argues that the three overlapping crises – economy, energy and environment – require joined-up action and a bold vision for a low carbon system. The current economic crisis, rather than diverting attention away from greater sustainability, means that the two problems present a major opportunity for positive change. Just as recent economic challenges have been met with vast rescue packages, however governments respond to this combined opportunity, built environment skills will have an important role to play in the emergence and delivery of resilient low carbon interventions - mitigations, adaptations and innovations - rich with new jobs and based upon independent sources of energy supply. Is this a bright future for urban design skills and education?

## BACKGROUND

One of the central messages of the last Urban Design Quarterly to focus on skills and education (Autumn 2001, issue 80) was that skills and innovation were key to effective urban management, and that a transformation in professional education and training was necessary to create experts capable of delivering a renaissance. Much has changed since then and for CABE in its tenth year, it is timely to review progress and priorities, taking stock of economic and environmental imperatives and their implications for education.

Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance (The Urban White Paper, 2000) set out a broad vision for an urban renaissance. Since then urban design has been enshrined in planning policy, and the argument that design matters seems to have been won, not least through the creation of CABE, the appointment of ministerial design champions and local authorities' statutory duty to deliver good design and sustainability in the 2008 Planning Act. But buildings, streets and public space must work together, and so joining-up the work of built environment professionals, decision-makers and educationalists is paramount.

CABE recently published its Corporate Strategy for 2008-2011 in which it encourages sustainable living, and design, management and maintenance decision-makers to recognise, prioritise and choose good design. CABE wants to enhance design knowledge and skills through developing and sharing knowledge – based on observation of practice and research – and working with others to improve built environment education, especially for young people. Underpinning CABE's work is a programme of research, learning, dissemination and campaigning to help people to find creative solutions to the biggest challenges.

## TRACK RECORD

Despite acknowledged skills gaps, there have been some notable regeneration successes over the last ten years with dramatic improvements in our major cities and in neighbourhoods, as a

visit to Bristol or Manchester demonstrates. On the other hand, CABE's housing audits, covering 293 schemes completed in 2001-6 and based on Building for Life criteria, found that fewer than one in five developments audited could be classed as 'good' or 'very good', and worthy of a BfL award. Eighty-two per cent of new housing schemes across the country were not good enough in terms of design quality. There was a significant minority of developments that should not have been given planning consent, as their quality was so low. Improving the quality and quantity of urban design skills has an important role to play in changing this.

**IMPACTS OF THE CREDIT CRUNCH**

The independent report for the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on The credit crunch and regeneration: impact and implications (2009) examines its economic and financial impacts on regeneration, which has had fifteen good years. The report confirms that many urban areas have benefited from a buoyant economy and extensive public expenditure. But the picture has changed during the past year and it notes that if regeneration activity is halted, a generation of skills and capacity, built up during the last decade, may be lost. The impact of the credit crunch on physical development will have an impact upon the supply and demand for urban design skills, at least in the short-medium term. The report sets out clear conclusions: the financial crisis is as severe as anyone can remember; it is not over yet and the pressures on regeneration will get more intense in the coming months; and, this means identifying and sticking to some clear principles to guide future behaviour.

Of the nine principles set out, the most relevant are:

- recognise that regeneration is a long-term challenge which needs long-term commitment
- commit to quality, flexibility and innovation
- do everything possible now to prepare for the upturn and
- retain existing capacity and skills wherever possible

The message from CLG is that, despite the pressure of reduced planning fee income and development activity, now is a time to retain planning skills, to focus on strategy and plan-making, and to ensure that conditions are in place to expedite sound development decisions when the upturn occurs.

**THE GREEN NEW DEAL?**

If there is good news at this otherwise gloomy time, some international commentators have observed that after the gigantic international interventions in financial markets, the idea that governments can intervene to redirect the energy market no longer seems so extreme. As the floodgates of government funding have opened for banking, the argument is strengthened for greater investment in green industries and associated built environment interventions. Proponents of the Green New Deal argue that massive public investments and fiscal incentives can underpin the development of new industries, creating millions of jobs and the economic upturn, protecting the environment in the medium term and delivering greater security for citizens.

**QUANTITY OF URBAN DESIGN EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

Research commissioned by the RTPI has concluded that there is a well-documented unfulfilled demand for urban design skills by the public and private sectors, and this has been the case since 2000.

The Homes & Communities Agency Academy's Mind the skills gap (2007) report assessed the gaps in the supply and demand of the skills required to deliver sustainable communities. The study identified a need for an integrated strategy to support skills development and address labour shortages in key occupations and for partnership approaches. It

analysed skills gaps by occupation, and labour shortages were forecast to increase significantly up to 2012 for urban design and landscape architecture, as a reflection of the growing demand for design skills and the lack of increase in supply - before the credit crunch.

**QUALITY OF URBAN DESIGN EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

At last year's Oxford Conference reviewing architectural education fifty years after the 1958 education conference, CABE used the design review method to bring together an expert panel to appraise urban design projects from schools of architecture from the UK and Switzerland. This enabled panelists to 'take a look in the kitchen' of the schools, to understand what trends may be emerging, to explore urban design as both a discipline and a process, and to enable the schools to share knowledge and gain experience of design review.

Participants were asked to consider whether an architectural education was an adequate preparation for the practice of urban design, to undertake context-based analysis and to think at the urban scale. Furthermore, if taught at all, is urban design presented at the right time during education? Four key messages emerged:

- Urban design should have an important role in every (undergraduate) design studio, but it does not at present.
- Architectural education is a highly relevant route to urban design practice, but as a multi-disciplinary process, and not the sole domain of the architect.
- The objective of urban design is to enhance quality of life for all, which refers strongly to the need for designers to develop a greater user focus in their work.
- Teaching should be relevant to industry needs and making development more sustainable; yet there is a tension between this and using postgraduate design education as an opportunity to experiment.

The RIBA's Head of Policy Ewan Willars' view of this is that, 'Climate change and the switch to low and zero-carbon development are forcing a revolution in the built environment and its professionals. Technologies, standards and best practice are changing rapidly, while education – and the slowly evolving teaching environment – struggles to adapt... Non-practising academics are failing to relate students to working practices... If we are to succeed in delivering a low carbon economy, it is vital that we close this skills gap, and prepare students properly for the challenges they will face on leaving education.'

The urban design component of built environment education needs to catch up with the emerging requirements of changing policy, practice and technological requirements. In March 2009 CABE launched its sustainable cities programme and supports the RIBA's excellent climate change programme, with discussions ongoing about opportunities to create a climate change learning module for architecture and built environment students, to fill this gap.

One priority action is for the professions to develop the knowledge and skills that they need to promote good urban design through their day-to-day work. This means making it as practical and relevant to everyday jobs as possible. As Esther Kurland, Director of Urban Design London (UDL) says, 'hooking onto a catalyst for learning can be successful, as is the case with UDL's learning programmes. This catalyst might be a new policy, guidance note or procedure of which practitioners are required to take heed. PPS1, PPS3, the requirement for design and access statements, and now the requirement to use Building for Life as a performance indicator in local authority annual monitoring returns have all stimulated valuable learning and for planners in particular'. Similarly the Department for Transport's Manual for Streets, Mixed Priority Routes and Traffic Management and Streetscape notes have awakened interest in urban design amongst highway and transportation professionals, supported by programmes run by CABE and the Institution of Highways and Transportation.

Achieving tougher environmental standards will form an important aspect of professional life and more ethical approaches. Practitioners are already expected to play a proactive role in achieving government objectives for reducing carbon emissions from the built environment, through the zero carbon homes programme and new non-domestic buildings, existing homes and buildings, including historic environments. Of potentially greater importance under any Green New Deal, this will include ensuring that new housing developments meet standards set in the Code for Sustainable Homes. As the Code levels rise over time, practitioners will be expected to be at the forefront in meeting this challenge. The skills and learning gained at undergraduate and postgraduate level and proactive approaches to life-long learning need to provide a sound foundation to meet these challenges.

#### THE SKILLS AND EDUCATION CHALLENGE

Delivering well-designed buildings, places and spaces that inspire and lift

spirits, as well as being functional and fit for purpose, requires more skilled professionals and decision-makers, with a broader range of urban design competencies than exists at present. Continued effort is needed to:

- match built environment education to the emerging consensus around the competencies needed
- attract new recruits with strong design skills to built environment professions and
- offer career progression and increase the diversity of those joining and rising in built environment professions

Future skills development and training will need to be driven by technological advances, and ever tougher carbon/ energy efficiency standards, alongside issues around place-making and social equity. However, in recent years there has been a tendency for each new public policy issue to be accompanied by broad and under-funded initiatives to upgrade skills. This has led to skills providers and accreditation bodies being overloaded with new demands to include additional knowledge and competencies in an already crowded programme. Therefore, an easy feat that would quickly add value would be for existing skills and training provision to be more relevant and widely available across the various professions. The aim is for better co-ordinated, co-badged and accredited CPD; it is hoped that the HCA Academy's emerging partnership-based skills action plan will offer additional purpose, direction and coordination to this work.

There is evidence of difficulty or resistance among education providers in getting up-to-date experience and knowledge, developing their work quickly enough, to keep pace with change. The RIBA has noted that teaching is not keeping pace with the rate of change in mandatory and voluntary standards, design policies, principles and tools, materials and technologies. This may require better support by leading agencies and practitioners, teaching aids, and increasing the availability of emerging best practice. CABE intends to build upon its work with government, professionals, decision-makers and the public, to increase their ability to be more creative in the design and delivery of places. We will do this by working with clients, professionals, educators, decision-makers and delivery agents to provide an innovative programme of research, learning dissemination and campaigning to help people to find better solutions. As a measure of our success, CABE wants its advice and activity to lead to an increase in the skills, knowledge and understanding by built environment professionals and decision-makers in recognising and prioritising good design.

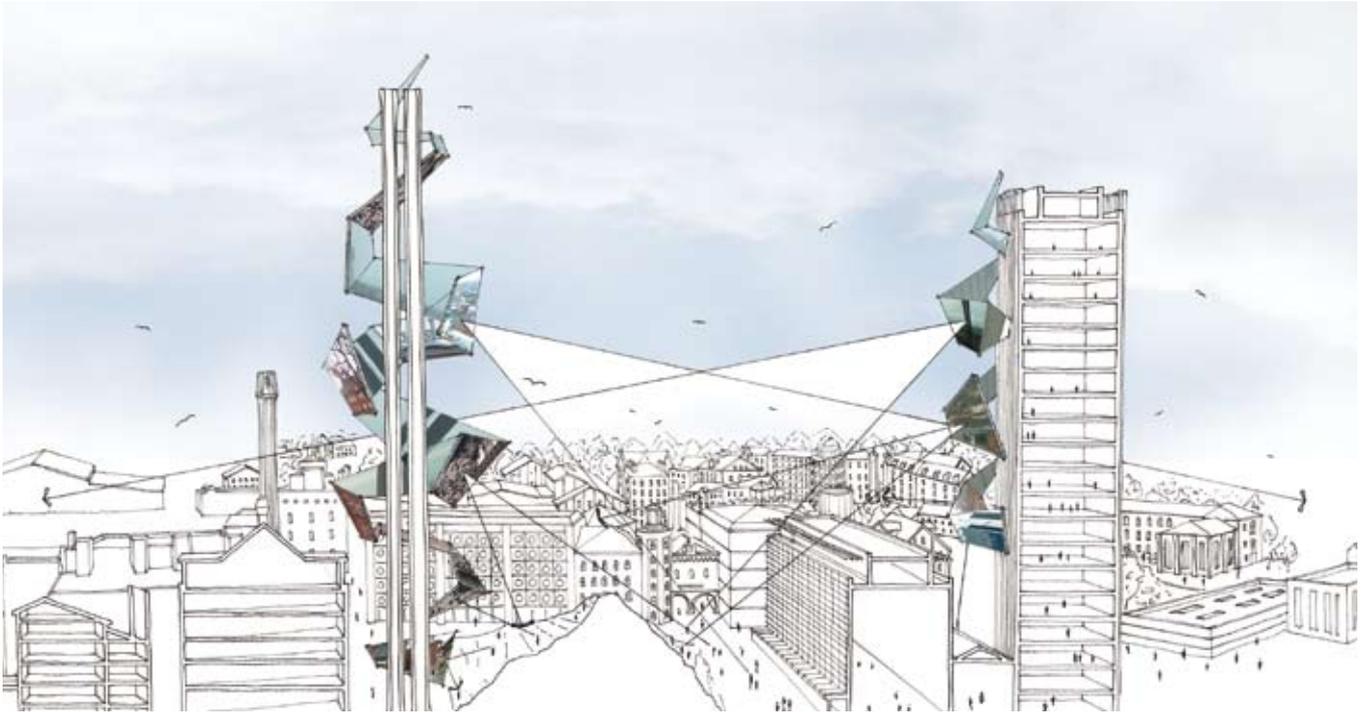
#### CONCLUSION

A lot of positive developments have occurred since the Urban Design Skills Working Group investigation in 2001, both on the ground as real projects, and in skills development opportunities. However, there are tough challenges ahead: retrofitting existing homes; constructing more 'excellent homes' to make more sustainable places; delivering well-designed public buildings and work places; adapting to the effects of climate change and reducing the contribution that the built environment and its operation makes to it; giving people the skills to create well-designed, managed, inclusive and accessible places; and to do all this quickly, within tight public expenditure limits and difficult market conditions. Improving the quality and quantity of urban design education and skills has an important role to play in responding to these challenges. In this regard, there is a bright future ahead for urban design skills and education if we all respond to the challenges and priorities of climate change, and if the built environment sector has the courage and confidence to prepare for the upturn.

Carlton Roberts-James, Head of skills, CABE. See CABE's new programme at [www.sustainablecities.org](http://www.sustainablecities.org) with a learning framework for the core cities.

# CHANGES IN FORMAL POSTGRADUATE COURSES

Professor Georgia Butina Watson reports on the JCUD course



Above Carlsberg Site  
Competition Entry by  
student Chris Read

There have been many changes in the course content, structure and the mode of delivery of a number of postgraduate urban design courses since the last issue of *Urban Design* on education in 2001. Some of these were the result of internal institutional restructuring, whilst others were shaped by external market forces and advancements in urban design theory and practice. When some of us met in London in 2003 at the University of Westminster to debate what, how and who should we teach urban design, we agreed on a number of principles that have found their way into urban design educational programmes.

At the Joint Centre for Urban Design (JCUD) at Oxford Brookes University we have introduced changes in the content and delivery of our courses, largely driven by our own research and consultancy work, but also influenced by other thinkers, practitioners and our PhD students. Since its foundation in 1972, the postgraduate teaching has remained multidisciplinary, attracting students with first degrees from architecture, planning, landscape design and a broad spectrum of cognate disciplines, and this multi-disciplinarity is also evident in the composition of teaching staff. The JCUD's overarching focus has been to develop an urban design approach which links socio-spatial, political and economic concerns to practical, typological and spatial design outcomes, to produce places that offer choices to everyday users and are loved and valued by different community groups.

## A WIDE RANGE OF STUDENTS

As a result of the introduction of semesters and the academic updating of modules at Oxford Brookes University, the JCUD now offers full-time and part-time programmes of study leading to postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert), postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) and Master's degrees (MA) in urban design. These routes are still our main mode of delivery and they continue to recruit students nationally and internationally, and the profiles of students vary from young recent graduates to mid-career professionals. The international cohort of students has expanded and in recent years we have seen a strong presence of students from Europe (including Central and Eastern Europe), Australia,

New Zealand, USA, Canada, Latin America, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, China, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea, Pakistan and Japan. The importance of urban design is now seen in countries such as India, Pakistan, Vietnam and South Korea that traditionally did not teach urban design. Many professionals in these countries were influenced by the JCUD's teaching and research agendas which became accessible through the translation of *Responsive Environments* (Bentley et al, 1985) into Chinese, Taiwanese, and Spanish, as well as other unofficial translations. These professionals had found parallels with their own cultural traditions such as Feng Shui, Vaastu and some of the teaching of Islam. In a similar way the publication of *Identity by Design* (Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007) and its immediate translation into Chinese, is having a similar influence on the professionals from these regions. The presence of such an international group of students brings a wealth of cultural and professional knowledge that has influenced what and how we teach urban design. The part-time route of the course (24 months for the MA) has also been offered to several local authorities off-site – in West Dorset, Derbyshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

In addition to these, the JCUD also offers two specialization routes for Diploma in Architecture, MSc in Spatial Planning or fourth year BA in City and

Regional Planning students. In any one year the JCUD trains some 80-100 postgraduate students in its PGCert/ PGDip/ MA and specialization routes in urban design. Some modules are also taken by Master of Research (MRes), Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students.

## Responsive Environments ideas have been expanded and supplemented by the sustainability and place-identity agendas

### LEARNING STAGES

Urban design teaching is delivered in three learning blocks (180 credits, in nine modules) that reflect the level of the qualification awards, as well as the complexity of theories, skills-based modules, studio-based design work and an MA dissertation for those following that course. The Certificate stage of the course focuses on key urban design theories, practice and skills-based modules and a major urban design project. Students are introduced to the theoretical concepts that underpin current urban design thinking, developed by the JCUD teaching staff and researchers, as well as by national and international thinkers and practitioners. Many of the original Responsive Environments ideas have been expanded and supplemented by the sustainability and place-identity agenda through two major books *Designing Sustainable Cities in the Developing World* (Zetter and Butina Watson, 2006) and *Identity by Design*. In addition, *Urban Transformations* (Bentley, 1999) provides a framework for understanding the form-production process through the interpretation of the cultural landscape and the built-form typologies.

Students are also made aware of how urban form is produced within a particular context of development and how it is consumed by different actor groups. They are also introduced to the theories and principles of sustainable and energy efficient urban design, and issues of mobility and public space structures and qualities. These theoretical and conceptual ideas are tested through workshop-based modules, where students acquire practical skills and concepts such as economic feasibility, space syntax analysis, coding, communication skills to articulate design ideas to a variety of audiences, 3D modelling and computer simulations, sensory design principles, energy efficient buildings and sustainable urban design. The JCUD's long-standing working partnership with the Space

Syntax group has been very successful, and students have annual lectures and workshop tuition on how to use space syntax as a tool for developing design ideas.

### DESIGN PROJECTS

These theory and practice modules feed directly into a major urban design studio project allowing students to integrate different types of knowledge and skills. The major project is structured in two parts - students work in teams with about seven students in each, to develop proposals for a major site (about 10 ha in size), using 'enquiry by design' methods. The groups are organized so that professional backgrounds, age, cultural composition and gender are mixed in as broad and diverse composition as possible. The study areas are normally 'live' projects, usually in Oxford or in nearby towns, to allow students to visit the sites and test their design ideas through different cycles of design enquiry. Students are tutored in studios by a group of tutors drawn from the JCUD and from practice. These 'live' sites also provide useful input from planners, developers, (through the partnership link with Savills plc), transport planners and other key players who provide relevant information and participate in studio crits and discussions. The local study locations also offer a useful forum for engaging local users and other key players in public consultation exercises, where students show their design ideas and receive useful feedback. This feedback is then taken on-board by students in preparing their design proposals. Students receiving in-house training use their own local sites so they can link their everyday work to the academic training programme. Previous sites included Bridport in West Dorset, Goole in East Riding of Yorkshire and Bolsover in Derbyshire. The outcome of this project is a design-based proposal (a masterplan or an urban design framework) for the study location (usually 1:1250 scale) where the students have to demonstrate how they deal with landscape structures and the larger geomorphology of the site, built form and socio-economic context, the proposed overall spatial structure of the public space network, space syntax analysis, patterns of use and other relevant aspects. Design proposals are explained by students through their group design 'rationale'. Students and staff also visit case studies either in the UK or abroad, to analyse how other practitioners develop their design ideas.

In the second design studio project, students continue to apply theoretical knowledge through the continuation of the previous studio work, but now on an individual basis, developing more detailed aspects of design. This incorporates architectural and landscape detailing, energy efficiency and sun paths, sensory aspects of design and public art and the detailed treatment of public space network. In addition, students also carry out economic feasibility studies and prepare a design rationale to explain their design ideas.

### DIPLOMA MODULES

The Diploma stage of the course consists of four modules – firstly introducing them to the latest thinking and theories in urban design, urbanism, public art and urban aesthetics, public space design, architecture and urban form, the impact of globalization on urban form and the local cultural dimensions. The key aim of this module is to enable students to develop a critical understanding of how and why urban design theories change, so that they can make informed decisions about the reflective merits of different theoretical positions.

Development seminars are focused on a particular topic that staff and students explore in more depth, covering themes such as reclaiming modernism, competing users in public space, sustainable urban design, community development, and the impact of globalization on urban form and place-identity. Both UK and international theories and practice are discussed. Some of the international case studies in the Identity by Design series



Above Exhibition at Modern Art Oxford

cover examples from Europe, North and Latin America, Malaysia, Iran and Japan. A variety of cultural student profiles brings approaches and case studies from around the world. Students engage in writing critical essays or produce design ideas around these themes, including the 'Space to Think' masterplanning project for Oxford Brookes University's own campus. Some of the student work produced during 2008 is being considered by Brookes University project team for implementation. A group of students and staff also participated in a major international competition with proposals for the Carlsberg Brewery site in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The major urban design project work is in two studio-based modules, where students address a current issue that is important in urban design theory and practice, and topics vary from year to year. Recent topics have dealt the regeneration of small coastal towns (Bridport); climate change and urban design (various sites); delivering sustainable communities for the twenty-first century (Oxford, London); large urban growth areas and eco-towns; coding and briefing for local identity (Bethlehem in Palestine); and, restructuring of major infrastructure projects (Milan and Bari in Italy, Oxford and Thames Gateway in London). In addition, students engage in comparative overseas studies by visiting cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Bari, Barcelona, Madrid and other destinations. Both UK and internationally-based projects have received very positive feedback from local planners, politicians, users and other key players. These are undertaken both in groups and individually to form a major professionally-produced report. Regular studio tutorials and discussions take place with the JCUD staff with contributions from visiting academics and a variety of professionals.

#### MASTERS DISSERTATION

The final part of the course is the MA stage, where students take a 'Research Methods in Design' course and produce a major dissertation on an individually chosen topic of about 20,000 words or equivalent if it is a design-based dissertation. It is in these dissertations that we have seen a significant expansion of urban design knowledge. Given the diversity of students, research topics vary from local authority-based

projects (largely undertaken by part-time students) on themes such as coding for local distinctiveness, regeneration of derelict areas, urban expansion and sustainable urban form. International students tend to choose topics relevant to their future employment and career development, including the regeneration of the Volga territories in Kazan, in Tatarstan, Russia, now a live project by JCUD staff and students. Another group from Vietnam focused on themes of major urban restructuring and the negative impact of globalization in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City. Other students have worked on the sensory dimensions of urban design, space syntax, energy efficient buildings and urban form. Some of these topics have been taken further into PhD studies or they have found their implementation internationally.

With more than 2,000 alumni who have graduated from the JCUD, we are seeing a great impact of their work all over the world. However, there are still major challenges ahead of all of us. The current economic situation, climate change, how to deal with emerging economies in developing regions, and how we deliver sustainable communities, are only a few of these concerns that we all need to address, both through academic training and through practice.

Professor Georgia Butina Watson, Research Director for Urban Design, Head of Planning, Oxford Brookes University

# CPD IN URBAN DESIGN – IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

Sebastian Loew explores the merits and drawbacks of different educational options



Until a decade ago, there was little demand and consequently little supply of urban design related continuing professional development (CPD). This was hardly surprising in view of the general lack of interest in the subject itself. But since the publication of Lord Rogers' report *Towards an Urban Renaissance* and the consequent official recognition of urban design in government publications and statutes, an increasing wish for specialised skills has emerged. As a result, a wide range of options is now open to built environment professionals, from one day conferences, workshops, summer schools to short courses. They not only range widely in cost but in the form of delivery and the subjects covered. In short, there has been an explosion of CPD in urban design, but with no quality control and little advice beyond the advertising on each course's brochure – it's a jungle out there!

## WHO NEEDS WHAT

Who are today's courses aimed at and how does a professional (or the paying employer) decide which is their best

option? What should they expect to get from these? To a large extent, the main problem goes back to the fundamental question of 'what is an urban designer' and this is an ongoing debate. For the sake of argument, most urban designers have a first profession and these are generally in planning, architecture, landscape or engineering. There may be others but the majority come from these four professional groups, and have decided that they want to increase their knowledge of urban design, develop skills in urban design that they feel they lack, or to become urban designers. Immediately this presents a number of variables in backgrounds and aspirations. Self-awareness is also an important factor and it can work in two ways: in a room of planners or engineers, almost everyone will deny that they are urban designers, when in reality most will have active involvement in urban design. Conversely most architects and a number of landscape architects will argue that they are urban designers, when they are not thinking like one.

It is therefore not surprising that the RTPI has been the most active of the professional bodies to offer CPD in urban design; more recently there have been increasing efforts from the engineering professionals. Architects are getting involved in urbanism too, and the Landscape Institute is investigating urban design options. Unfortunately each professional needs slightly different courses and yet the CPD on offer does not necessarily make it clear how it will complement an individual's existing skills.

Having been involved with CPD for a number of years, I would argue that multi-disciplinary courses are the most

successful route for learning, as they allow different professions to interact, become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, understand others' vocabulary and learn from each other. They are a good way to overcome barriers and allow participants to choose their next step with clarity. It is arguably the main reason for the success of the CABE Summer School programme. On the other hand, what is available as CPD is too often directed just to one type of professional.

**ARCHITECTS, PLANNERS AND ENGINEERS**

Honest architects will admit that although they have strong design skills and are able to produce schemes at various scales, they have difficulties in team work and do not always have an awareness of the complicated interaction between their schemes and the public realm. They are more concerned with the site and less with its environment. For this group, urban design CPD needs to take them away from the drawing board or computer screen, and into the critique of realised projects and how they work for others. As architects often have an adversarial attitude towards planning, they need to understand how planning can in fact improve their schemes in the widest sense, and for the satisfaction of a wider public.

Planners trained in the past thirty years see their duty as being to protect the public good from private greed, but when it comes to design, their education has typically failed them. In the best cases, this will have included a one semester module introducing them to the 'elements of urban design' and on that basis they are dispatched to make important judgements: rejecting or approving schemes on design grounds; commissioning masterplans and implementing them; and, negotiating complicated schemes with architects and engineers. One day of CPD consisting of lectures from successful professionals is not going to help them; it is more likely to confuse them or worse still may give a false sense of confidence. Yet this is what is on offer and for a fairly hefty fee. Workshops with a substantial practical hands-on element are more useful, as they give participants practice in using tools for dealing with applications. If these are run well, they can demystify design by separating it from subjective aesthetic judgements.

Few short courses or CPD programmes manage to explain the complex and iterative process of design, and give participants a chance to work through that. This takes time and is resource-intensive, explaining why an architectural education takes so long and why planning courses have abandoned design. Full-time year-long Masters programmes in Urban Design (or a two-year part-time course) in reality just manage to give students sufficient projects to develop these skills, and these courses are arguably the best form of CPD for a planner wanting to specialise in urban design.

Engineers are not sufficiently involved in multi-disciplinary CPD, and seem to suffer from an inferiority complex ('we know nothing about design') and from risk-aversion and related 'working by the book' attitudes. Yet when given a chance to participate in workshops with other professionals, their contribution can be very positive and they discover that their role in urban design is a fundamental one. With the publication of *Manual for Streets*, a more open attitude in the profession and several important role models, there are new opportunities to develop engineers' urban design skills. CABE have started to grapple with this by offering introductory urban design courses specifically designed for engineers. It would perhaps be more effective to structure these as multi-disciplinary, to give all participants an opportunity to understand their relative roles.

**IN-HOUSE OPTIONS**

A number of employers, both in the public and private sectors, have commissioned in-house training for their staff. There are many advantages to this approach but also a few disadvantages



- the main one being that there is no guarantee that a member of staff will remain in the post once he or she has undergone the training (although the state of the economy may reduce this likelihood for a while). The advantages are that a good training provider will tailor the course to specific participants' and organisational needs. Examples used for projects will be in similar locations and of a similar complexity to the ones that the organisation is engaged in; participants work with their colleagues (although often not with those they normally work with) and will be able to quickly transfer their newly acquired skills. Most commonly, policy planners and development control planners may be meeting for the first time, despite being in the same building for years. A number of local authorities have devoted considerable resources to developing such programmes as they have seen the benefits to the whole corporate organisation and not just a few members of staff: Carrick District Council and Ashford Borough Council are two recent examples, as is Turley & Associates in the private sector.

**Above top** Hands-on workshop for a London Borough. Photograph by University of Westminster  
**Opposite and Above bottom** Workshop at CABE Urban Design Summer School 2004

**LEARNING BY SEEING**

Study trips as CPD can be highly successful and yet are rarely used, as they are often seen as an extravagance,



Above University of Westminster MAUD students sketching during field trips to Nimes and Montpellier

## Imagine a multi-disciplinary group spending a day studying one of these schemes and debating their conclusions afterwards

when they are seldom that. The trips organised by the Carvill Group are exemplary; once a year Christopher Carvill invites his collaborators within and outside his firm to travel abroad for an intense three-day visit. The programmes are carefully structured around themes relevant to the firm's work such as traffic calming, residential squares or particular aspects of housing. All participants work hard during the trips which are planned in detail, and learn a lot both from what they see and hear, and from each other. Carvill is so convinced of the benefits to his firm that he has been willing to subsidise these visits for a number of years.

Equally the feedback from the UDG's tours has been consistently positive and a number of participants – and their employers – have seen them as their best CPD for the year. The key to the success of such activity as a learning tool is that there should be a specific theme and a structured programme. One particular kind of trip is very rarely organised and yet could offer great benefits – visiting relatively recent schemes and analysing their successes and failures: Hulme, Glasgow Merchant City, Brindleyplace and Poundbury are good examples where practitioners could learn directly from experience. Imagine a multi-disciplinary group spending a day studying one of these schemes and debating their conclusions afterwards. Participants are almost certainly going to learn more from this than from a day sitting in a lecture room listening to a series of urban design luminaries, however brilliant these might be.

### DISTANCE LEARNING

CPD through distance-learning is attracting increasing interest for obvious reasons, as participants do not have to leave their desks and can partake in the learning activities at their leisure. Once a programme is set up and the initial investment is very high, it can be used by millions and therefore becomes good value. Whether this is the best way to learn about design is open to question though. To introduce the subject, develop awareness of the issues and direct people to sources of information, it is undoubtedly useful as is the internet as a learning media. The filming of lectures or masterclasses and their availability on the web to those that could not attend in person (as done by the UDG and Urban Design London) is a helpful tool. Adapting these technologies to structured learning and particularly to design CPD probably needs more work, but is worth exploring.

### UDG AS ADVISORY BODY?

In conclusion we can return to the beginning of this article: a great range of CPD options are available, some more effective than others. What is needed is a way of clarifying what is useful for each candidate or group. Unfortunately in a commercial world dominated by advertising and the bottom line, it is too frequently star names that attract candidates rather than the rarely mentioned learning outcomes of the course. There would seem to be a role for the UDG here, not necessarily to control what is out there, but to advise those that want to develop a career in urban design.

Sebastian Loew

# TEACHING PEOPLE ABOUT URBAN DESIGN

Esther Kurland reports on Urban Design London's approach



For the past three years I have been running a programme to teach both urban designers and other built environment professionals about urban design. As there are great training experts available and the subject matter is very engaging, it is not a hard job, but it has not all been perfect or plain sailing. This article outlines what we have been doing, and what we have learned about teaching busy professionals.

## AT THE START

Urban Design London (UDL) was set up around six years ago by a group of local authority urban design officers. They wanted to help each other understand and deal with new urban renaissance ideas and policies that were emerging at that time. Today UDL still offers networking opportunities and support for London borough urban designers, public realm officers and design champions, but we also offer a lot of training.

Initially we provided free, pretty low-tech sessions on potentially troublesome new policies and initiatives, such as the requirement for Design and Access Statements with planning applications. Just after this formal requirement came into force, we did around thirty five separate sessions on what statements were about, and to local authority teams in their own offices. As we did them ourselves, the only cost was a travel card. But these briefings gave us a chance to talk to a range of borough officers and councillors, and helped us to form a better understanding of what their training needs were. We still do some in-house briefing and workshop sessions, but not on the scale of how we began.

## WHAT WE PROVIDE

Before starting work at UDL, I was a regular national conference speaker on design, and it surprised me that these were often targeted at both people with no urban design experience and those who had been working in the field a long time.

While people gained a lot from these conferences, they often seemed to miss out the basics of urban design - the knowledge foundations upon which to build their understanding and working practices.

So in developing UDL's programme, we used the flexibility that our remit gave us to provide different types of training for different types of practitioners. We offer masterclasses for urban design experts, as well as foundation level courses for built environment professionals without an urban design background. These cover a range of subjects from high density family housing to car parking design options. Most masterclass talks are videoed and are available for anyone to view free on our website. By separating the foundation and masterclass levels, we can explain the principles of good design, how places are structured, the point of the urban block and active frontages, etc to those who do not yet know this important content, but bring in cutting-edge practitioners, researchers and thinkers to discuss more complex emerging design issues with experienced urban design officers.

Over time the programme has grown from these two basic session types, as we found that there were certain skills and tools that people wanted to learn, and so now also offer a series of workshops

**Above** A seminar at London Borough of Sutton



**Above** Discussions on an informal site visit

on topics like how to read plans, how to use design and access statements, and how to negotiate design issues. We also introduced an informal site visit club in 2008, and for this we arrange a visit each month, asking the architect, engineer, designers or officer working on a scheme to give a guided tour. People can just turn up rather than book ahead, and they are very popular especially the visits to important street and public realm schemes, such as The Cut street design scheme in Waterloo and the Light at the End of the Tunnel project, which has revamped the derelict arches and dreary tunnels between London Bridge and Waterloo.

#### THE AUDIENCE

This year we are running forty five separate events, and this will rise to just over fifty next year, with no more than thirty six people at each event (although some site visits and very popular sessions can reach fifty), so that six tables of six people can work together on the group exercises and discussions. Attendance levels are high with eighty per cent of those who book attending, so overbooking sessions is a juggling act and at times we have had to find extra chairs on the day!

In terms of the number of people engaged, around six hundred have attended an event each year (around 1,200 attendees in total), with many coming to more than one session. There is some overlap from year to year and we have seen people progress from the foundation course to the masterclasses. It is also good to see a core group of urban design officers coming back time and time again to the workshops, masterclasses and site visits, and we learn more from them than they do from us sometimes.

In a typical training season of six months, we would have over eight hundred individual 'learning experiences', thirty two separate

events, and involvement from the staff of eighty four different organisations, including thirty two of London's thirty three boroughs. The foundation course has attracted people from thirty one organisations doing forty different types of job, and the masterclasses have reached 217 individuals, with a high return rate (up to five classes per person) and from forty eight organisations.

#### WHO PAYS FOR IT

UDL receives core funding from the Greater London Authority family of organisations and from CABE as a regional pilot. We have also secured ad hoc funding from the Academy for Sustainable Communities and others. However the London boroughs also pay a subscription, which is very important not only because of the funding it provides, but because it makes boroughs active partners. Although the subscription is not expensive - much less than the market rate for the training that they receive - it means they have a stake in our programme and an incentive to use their places. Overall the programme is cost efficient, with most sessions delivered through long-term contracts where we pay for the development of the training material, and then a reasonable sum for the delivery of repeat sessions.

**London boroughs pay a subscription... it means they have a stake in our programme**

#### MAKING LEARNING EASY

At the start, we ran sessions in borough offices, with sets of events in the London sub-regions; for example we held a set of foundation courses in north London with one session hosted by each borough in the area. This encouraged people to visit neighbouring councils, but the travelling proved difficult, and it seemed harder to get from Hounslow to Hillingdon than from any London borough to central London.

These sub-regional events also restricted the choice of dates that people could book, and so in 2007 we moved all the sessions to Transport for London and London Development Agency buildings in central London, and now run five foundation level sets each year for all authorities.

We have also experimented with the sequence of events; concerned about people having enough time to attend, we initially ran our foundation courses over five months - one session a month. But over the last year we have adopted an intensive course over three days, one day a week over five weeks, or once a month. The key is to balance consistency in attendance with allowing people time to think about what they have learned, but also not forget these new ideas between sessions.

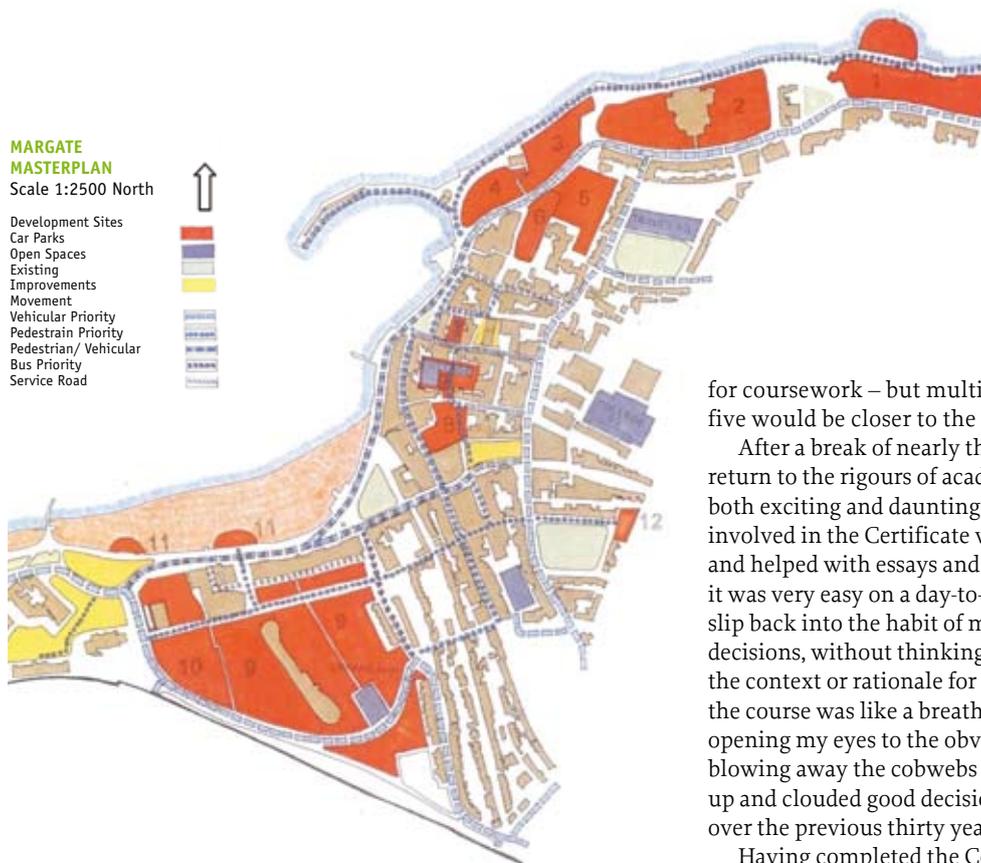
UDL is still a small team growing from just four days a week for me, to a full time role, administrator, a part-time training programme manager and now a TfL graduate. Our next priority is to have another programme officer to help with our e-learning project called LearningSpace, and develop ways offering better project-based design advice. As we are so small, we rely on our training providers and we have been working with two excellent consortia: IHT/Urban Initiatives/Urban Design Skills/MAE Architects providing the foundation courses, and the Universities of Westminster and Greenwich (URI) providing the masterclasses, and with their help and hard work, we have all learned a lot.

To find out more about UDL, watch the previous masterclasses and visit our online training resource LearningSpace, visit [www.urbandesignlondon.com](http://www.urbandesignlondon.com).

**Esther Kurland, Director, Urban Design London**

# THE BENEFITS OF URBAN DESIGN MID-LIFE

Doug Brown describes his experience of returning to education



At the end of 2004 I faced a professional mid-life crisis: as Head of Development Control for a coastal district council, my job had become process-orientated, determining planning applications within time constraints to gain planning delivery grant, rather than negotiating good design solutions. Achieving a good grant allocation did not result in the delivery of a better service, and the shortage of experienced planners resulted in a high staff turnover, as higher salaries were offered by competing authorities because of the availability of the grant.

One positive aspect of grant allocations was a concentration on the need to improve urban design skills within planning authorities, and as soon as it was clear that there was money for design skills, many councils became very interested in urban design.

Kent County Council was particularly proactive in encouraging improved urban design appreciation. The Kent Design Guide has been through several iterations and helps to raise the quality of the environment and understanding of design issues. As a result of those involved in Kent Design and particularly the Kent Planning Officers Group, the University of Westminster was selected to provide training for development professionals in Kent, with just over twenty brave souls taking up the challenge. The programme offered a post graduate Certificate in Urban Design squeezed into a fairly intense six month period starting in 2005. I saw this as an opportunity to gain more knowledge and understanding of the design process - little knowing that this would be the start of a 30 month personal renaissance.

Fortunately I was supported by my authority financially and in being allowed the half day per week for lectures. We were told early in the course to allow an equivalent time each week

for coursework – but multiplying that by five would be closer to the mark!

After a break of nearly thirty years, this return to the rigours of academic life was both exciting and daunting. The work involved in the Certificate was practical and helped with essays and projects. But it was very easy on a day-to-day basis to slip back into the habit of making quick decisions, without thinking through the context or rationale for them. Yet, the course was like a breath of fresh air, opening my eyes to the obvious, and blowing away the cobwebs that had built up and clouded good decision-making over the previous thirty years.

Having completed the Certificate, the possibility of turning it into a post graduate Diploma was raised by the lecturers who dangled the carrot of ten days in Prague the following summer as one of the modules; looking forward to a relaxing city break, I signed on the dotted line.

Living on the Kent Coast and commuting two and a half hours to attend three hours of evening lectures on one day a week, proved difficult. But as well as the benefits of academic training, learning to work on projects in teams and being able to use IT as a presentation tool were just the basic benefits, and I would not have made time for them otherwise.

As it continued, I was able to use my new skills and logic in my everyday work. When this came to my employers' attention, a new post was created for me drawing up master plans, developing schemes for council development sites and dealing with major economic development proposals.

The long-awaited city break in Prague proved to be one of the most intense periods of learning I have experienced. Understanding the cultural design differences of a central European city, trying to complete numerous projects within tight timescales, working in accommodation clearly not designed for masterplanners (the back of my

Left A Masterplan for Margate

hotel door was my drawing board), all proved particularly challenging. My abiding memory however is the spirit of teamwork and friendship that was built up in that short period of time.

Having been given the opportunity to shift career I had no intention of continuing the course to complete the Masters thesis; however the learning bug had now well and truly taken hold. I was again fortunate to be able to choose a dissertation subject that related to my new job; I did an in-depth study of Margate, compared it with other seaside resorts, and put forward suggestions for studies needed to contribute towards its regeneration as a town by the sea, rather than a dated resort. I now spend a lot of my time doing the studies that I had recommended should be carried out.

I have been particularly lucky to have such strong help from my employers, Thanet District Council, supporting me through the course and ensuring that I

use what I have learned. The frustrations of local government bureaucracy and the wasted effort drawing up ideas that do not come to fruition are still occasional annoyances. However the enjoyment of working on development briefs, liaising with stakeholders and the occasional success when a proposal that I have worked on actually happens, more than compensates for the failures.

As Thanet is probably the most deprived district in the South East of England, the need for innovative regeneration ideas is pressing and the opportunities for implementation numerous. I am presently working on proposals for the expansion of a local airport, the development of a 50,000 sq m employment site, and the preparation of development briefs and master plans for numerous locations within the district. We have developed some proactive relationships with landowners, developers and consultants, and I am hopeful that, even in the present economic climate, some of these schemes will emerge over the next few years, helping to turn the District's fortunes around. I would not have had the opportunity to get involved in these projects without the benefit of my urban design qualification and experience, and so if you are thinking about following the same path, don't hesitate, sign up for the course and enjoy!

**Doug Brown, Planning (Strategic Sites) Manager, Thanet District Council**

## WANNABE URBAN DESIGNER

Daniela Lucchese describes an unusual European route to urban design

It all began with my father, who wanted me to study architecture at the University of Venice and so like every respectable Italian daughter, I decided not to follow his advice. From then on, a journey began that would take me through a couple of universities in Europe and to a job in London.

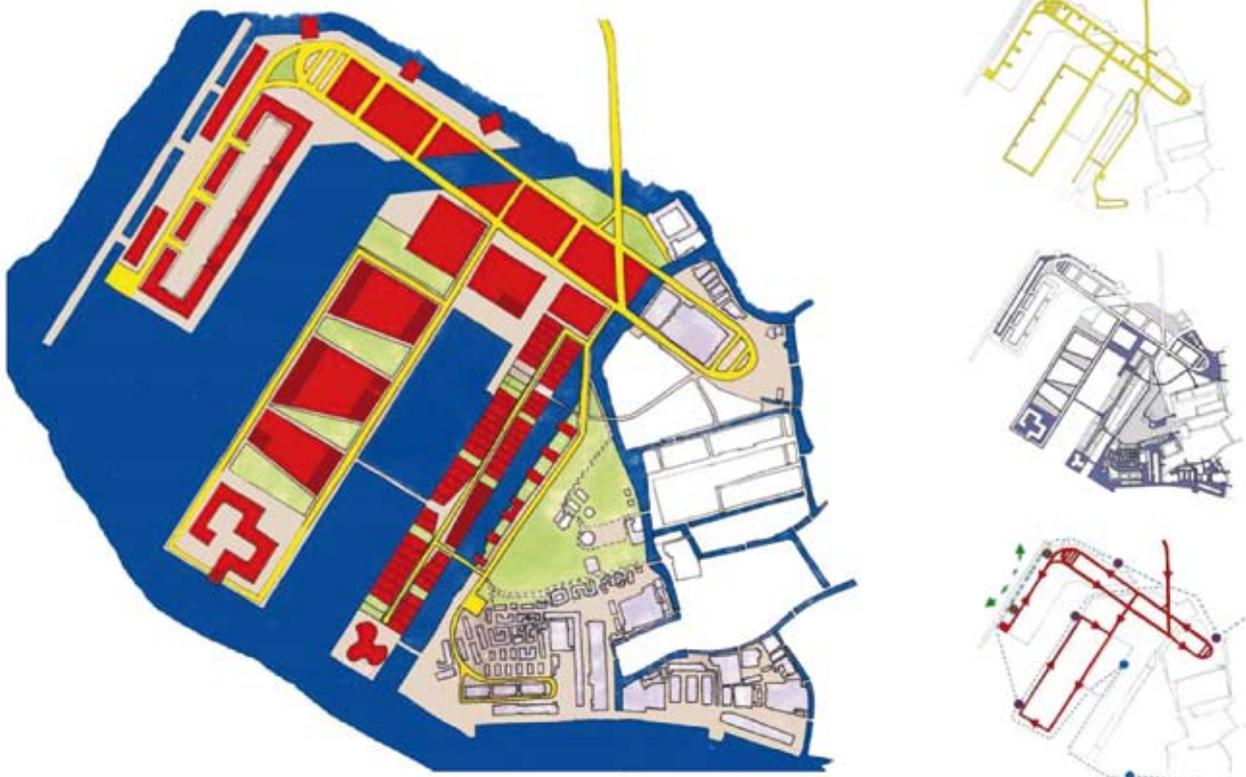
When I finished high school in a small northern Italian town close to Venice, I decided to take a year out and went to Germany to learn the language. While working there, attending language classes and making up my mind about what I was going to study (anything but architecture!) I decided to study Geography at the University of Bayreuth. The course looked interesting and would open up a wide range of career opportunities, plus it offered a special seminar in urban planning. The course provided me with a very good introduction and background to what would later become my profession. Through the urban planning seminar I became more interested in the subject and also urban design, and decided after two years of Grundstudium (equivalent to a BA) to apply for a degree in urban design and urban planning at the Technische Universität of Hamburg-Harburg - now renamed HafenCity University Hamburg. Normally in Germany, one has to have a BA in

architecture to study urban design, but this course was the exception.

When I joined it, the course was fifteen years old and still in an experimental phase, having been founded by professors who believed that the city is a cultural entity, definable in a variety of ways, and therefore influenced by a variety of subjects. They saw the city as a place of commerce, a social or political formation, a technical entity, and built form with spaces and volumes. Consequently the disciplines and professionals working within cities should be equally diverse, and shaping places was the responsibility of more than just architects.

As the students were from a wide variety of backgrounds (geography, mathematics, architecture, art, sociology and planning), we all had to take introductory courses to get up-to-speed with pencils, tracing paper and scale bars. Held on the campus of the University of Hamburg-Harburg which was more renowned for its civil engineering, informatics and scientific subjects rather than urban design, this context offered very little to us wannabe urban designers who wanted to change the way that spaces and places were formed. We were a cluster of sixty students in an old tall red brick building, reminiscent of an old garrison, with huge extraordinarily cold rooms. If it hadn't have been for the international background of our professors, we would have had little contact with the outside world.

Through the type of courses on offer, we were encouraged to work in groups to allow us to exchange ideas and knowledge. This meant that we experienced what the course founders had intended - urban design as the effort of many different people with different needs and ideas, rather than just designs. The teachers were renowned in various fields such as planning in third world countries, the economy of the city, history and archaeology, strategic planning and Dutch urban planning. The influences of the Netherlands and Denmark were very strong and every year we made a pilgrimage on study tours to learn and gain experience.



**Above** Dissertation study of the redevelopment of the harbour in Venice

## The disciplines and professionals working within cities should be diverse, and shaping places is the responsibility of more than just architects

Whilst I very much enjoyed the variety on offer, I felt that I needed more practical design knowledge and decided to study for a year in London, as I had always dreamt. Despite the Erasmus and similar exchange programmes, there were no exchanges between Hamburg and a comparable university in London, and as I did not have a German passport I was not eligible for traditional scholarships from my university. Nevertheless, in March 1996 I visited every university in London in a week with an interview in each, and decided to spend a year at the University of Westminster. Despite other colleges offering suitable packages for exchange students, Westminster was the only place where I had a choice of courses to take and was not segregated with other exchange students. And so I took modules from both the architecture and postgraduate urban design courses. In hindsight I learned more about the creative and practical side of urban design in these courses than in any previous seminars. Hamburg had provided me with a good framework - understanding the need to think laterally, exploring the socio-economic situation of an area, understanding its potential, its economic growth, in which direction a city could grow, what infrastructure it had and what it needed to function well, all the while bearing in mind who would live there, why, and how to accommodate a variety of different needs. However, the course at Westminster taught me how to translate that onto paper. I especially enjoyed and learned from the coursework with other students who were already working in practice. My experience at Westminster was an eye opener and complemented what I had learnt in Hamburg.

Back in Hamburg and whilst still studying, I started working for a very small architectural firm with three people, where the boss was a 'grand dame' of urban design. I had the chance to work on a variety of projects that ranged from streetscapes, place enhancements and conservation area improvements, to taking part in the organisation of international competitions such as Hafencity. I completed my degree in urban design with a dissertation on the redevelopment of the harbour in Venice (my starting point) and it brought together everything that I had learned in England, Germany and Holland. The project provided the local authority with an interesting platform for discussion on how to deal with such a specific and unique location.

Shortly afterwards I returned to London to start my career in urban design, but it was far from easy. Coming from such an unusual background, practice directors were not sure what to expect from me and having to share a title with graduates who had only knowledge of the design side of urban design, was challenging. But despite this and the fact I had not studied architecture, I found my way. Thinking back, I would not change the non-architectural route that I took to urban design, as I would have missed out on the lateral thinking I was taught that urban design is also about.

**Daniela Lucchese, Senior Urban Designer, Colin Buchanan & Partners**

# EMPLOYING GRADUATES IN CONSULTANCY

## Joanne Cave offers ideas for those entering a new profession



In looking at how many graduate urban designers our organisation has employed in the last ten years, it is a surprisingly moderate percentage. Our urban designers are a mixed bag including planners, architects and landscape architects. Most, but not all have a postgraduate qualification in urban design, some of which were acquired on part-time courses under a day-release arrangement, but we have also had great success in 'growing our own' - investing in staff whose abilities and potential were evident.

In developing a talented and effective urban design team, it has been important to remember that this is a broad church, and as an 'anti-discipline' without its own institute, it welcomes all comers from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Urban design schools have always recognised this, and rightly encourage people from all backgrounds to study the subject; spreading the word can only be a good thing. But for design consultancies herein lies a recruitment challenge: by bringing a diverse student group to a common level of appreciation of the basic principles and issues involved in urban design - is there enough time to enhance the skills of students with true creative potential? How can students be encouraged to think more creatively about design solutions? How can employers spot the potential which has yet to be exploited?

In interviewing graduates, we are often struck by the similarity of their presentations, which is a disadvantage if several applicants have studied on the same course, and each presents a comparable version of the same project. The graduates who stand out are those who have added original ideas to their exploration of basic urban design principles, and present these with flair and enthusiasm. Urban design education could do more to encourage this creativity alongside the foundational elements of

the subject, because the combination of creative problem-solving and pragmatism lie at the core of successful design consultancy.

One way of achieving this might be to broaden the scale and range of sites which students work on, and allow them to become immersed in masterplanning in its wider sense rather than in more limited site layout work. Students could deal with one major site for their entire course, and be required to work through the multitude of issues which arise in a live project. This would begin with a thorough piece of analysis, not just observation, to fully understand the meaning of a place, involving an investigation of site constraints (for example access, flooding, contamination), and taking account of existing vegetation, historic features, the legacy of previous site uses, and the proximity of other activities and land uses. It would mean exploring different design solutions at a conceptual level, and then thinking holistically about urban structure, the provision of green infrastructure, local services, residential and commercial uses, and movement patterns. The final phase could be to work up an area in greater detail defining the built form and public realm qualities.

This approach would also necessitate team-working, already an integral component of the postgraduate course, to reflect the multi-disciplinary make-up of real project teams. This highlights the need for the student body to include individuals from across the core built environment professions, and the importance of ensuring that a good percentage has acquired work experience, enriching the course experience as the level of discussion and debate is better informed.

This approach could apply to brown or greenfield sites allowing students to consider issues about regeneration or urban expansion. It would give greater scope to develop imaginative ideas, whilst still giving a solid grounding in the basics, and it would be advantageous for those considering a career in consultancy, as their interviewers would be able to appreciate where their strengths and weaknesses lie, and in turn help to establish a suitable mentoring programme for the first couple of years in the job.

There are two key attributes that we look for in a graduate or someone with years of experience. First, are they, or do they have the makings of a good designer? A tour through the interviewee's portfolio (student work included) can be a great insight, not only from the content, but from the way the applicant articulates his or her work – presentation skills are an inherent part of a consultant's role. Second, do they have the attitude and personality that is suited to our type of consultancy? Researching the company and making a direct approach is essential.

If an applicant demonstrates these attributes, it is likely that they were also successful in their postgraduate studies, and are highly motivated to pursue a career as an urban design consultant. An education in urban design will have shaped their approach to designing urban places, introducing them to topical issues, and broadening their professional outlook. In practice they will go on to learn about how many varied projects are won, nurtured, secured through the planning system, and implemented on the ground. They will learn about the diverse client base of an organisation, the roles and responsibilities of other professions, how spatial strategies are dovetailed with economic strategies to deliver regeneration, and about how the huge demand for housing is being met across the country. A postgraduate education is the first step on the path to a career as a consultant, but the learning never ends.

**Joanne Cave is a town planner and urban designer and an Associate Director of David Lock Associates. The views expressed are her own**

# THE JOURNEY

Cindy Carmelia describes how an urban design education is part of a bigger plan

‘Your big opportunity may be right where you are now’

Napoleon Hill

The above quotation summarises how I view my life today - everything happens for a reason, and my journey in this life is a reflection of that.

As a child, I played with wooden blocks stacking them randomly at first and gradually it resembled a tower. When I went to primary school, I swapped the wooden blocks for LEGO building houses for my LEGO figures, and my friends began to ask me to make theirs too. But I wasn't aware of this hidden interest until I was 14 years old, when my local school went for a field trip to Borobudur temple in Central Java. For most people this is the most popular and revered tourist attraction in Indonesia, but I was fascinated by its scale and how it had been constructed.

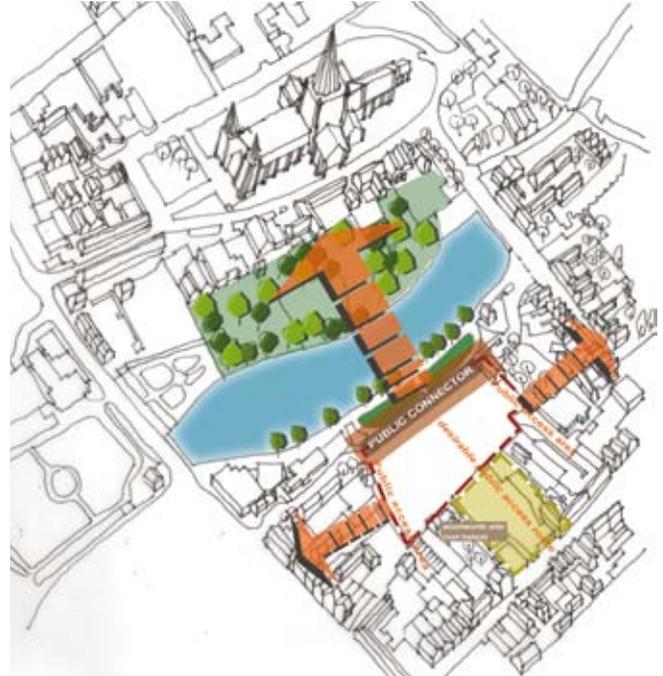
From then on, I was determined to become an architect and began to pay attention to the buildings that I visited, and went on to study architecture in university. During my university years I learned that being an architect requires more than just design ideas: it has to do with passion, persistence and hard work, and I learned a lot through sleepless nights, random site visits and being ‘skinned alive’ in crit sessions!

However one experience that shaped my future was when I signed up for a ‘City and Urbanism’ module. The module required groups of students to visit and examine particular slum areas in Jakarta. I had been allocated a site to visit in the western part of Jakarta. When I arrived at the outskirts, it looked fairly neat and occupied by well-to-do families, but as I started to walk towards the inner ‘ring’ of the area, things started to look very different. The buildings were rundown, the housing plots were much smaller, and the communal facilities were almost nonexistent.

To my surprise, there was a family with five children who had managed to squeeze into a 4x5 m space that they called home. The house had only one bedroom, a kitchen plus a small toilet. I was shocked. When each of us had finished examining the area, we concluded that the reason why it was so bad was because the designer had not taken into account the relationship between people and their built environment - there was little consideration of their basic needs. That day I promised myself that I would use my skills as architect to contribute to creating better built environments for people. At that time I had no idea how to achieve that ‘big vision’, but I have kept this goal in mind as I go along.

Not long after graduating, I had an opportunity to work in Singapore as an architect's assistant. During these early professional years, I was involved in various projects from low-rise residential to large scale masterplanning projects in both Singapore and overseas. It was incredible and I was able to taste the complexity of each project type, and I learned that successful design needs to have both marketable value and design flair. But despite all the invaluable experience I gained from work, I was craving knowledge to enrich myself as a professional. So after three years in practice, I decided to come to Britain to do a Master's in Urban Design and to explore designing masterplans in more depth. I chose to study to at Birmingham City University (formerly UCE), mainly because I wanted to explore a big English city other than London.

From the beginning the course pulled me right out of my comfort zone - from an architectural point of view and round to an urban design perspective. I began to analyse things in the wider context, the relationship between people and the external spaces around them, and I must admit that I struggled as I was so



used to concentrating only on a site given by a client and not the site in relation to the whole city. The process of looking at the city was very interesting and I visited many places and urban settings. I began to enjoy the complexity that each town and city has to offer, from contemporary buildings to traditional streetscapes. I still enjoy contemporary buildings but having learned about urban design has helped me to understand the connection between the building and the surrounding context. It has ‘topped up’ my architectural skills.

Now after a year working as an urban designer in London, my perception of urban design has changed again – what I once thought was merely about dealing with masterplans, streets and buildings is much more than that: it is working to create better places for people. And so urban design is different than architecture and it is not architecture in a larger scale. It is a profession that helps to shape our cities, adding value to what is already there and improving them to make them better for all.

This journey has made me proud to call myself an architect with urban design knowledge and I am glad to be one of the professionals that contribute towards a better environment for the future. I can also say that I am on my way to reaching my goal and everyday I look forward for new challenges and opportunities to fulfil it.

Cindy Carmelia, Urban Designer at RPS Group based in London

Above Design Project for Lichfield near the Cathedral

# A RECOGNISED PRACTITIONER IN URBAN DESIGN

Michael Lowndes and Katy Neaves give an employer's views

'Being a Recognised Practitioner will give professionals a sense of identity; greater influence on professional practice and public policy; and a stronger sense of common purpose' <sup>1</sup>

The Urban Design Group has emerged as a force of influence on the basis of a widely-held belief that urban design is not the job of any single professional, but instead that the creation of successful places can only be achieved through positive collaboration between genuinely informed and inspired professionals.

Taking this all-embracing approach has meant that the UDG has exercised an influence disproportionate to its status as a 'members club' or loose collection of like-minded professionals. Urban design arrived as an agenda-setting approach well before the UDG's 30th birthday last year, but this anniversary served to highlight the gathering force moving urban design from an approach to a discipline. Put simply, the UDG is now moving away from being the organisation that embraced everyone with an interest in the built environment and characterised them all as urban designers, to promoting a categorisation of those who can or cannot be viewed as a professional urban designer. This is the proposed Recognised Practitioner scheme.

I am sure that the majority of you have now commented on the UDG's Recognised Practitioner proposals. But for those who are not aware, membership to the Urban Design Group is currently open to anyone. It is now proposed to keep this standard membership, but to add an enhanced subscription level (subject to meeting the necessary professional criteria) for a 'Recognised Practitioner of the Urban Design Group' to your CV. This is only open to 'suitably experienced

professionals' and has been set up to ensure that experience and commitment to urban design is properly recognised. This recognition would provide a degree of professional credibility but would not offer the status of a chartered institute. Such institutes as the RTPI, LI, RICS and RIBA all claim the territory of urban design and perhaps it is time for the UDG to exercise a little muscle in taking a stronger ownership of the now established discipline.

In my experience, whilst those of us that call ourselves urban designers are rarely challenged on our professional integrity, the lack of a common understanding of the professional definition of urban design as an activity has been questioned by clients, counsel and others outside the embrace of the discipline.

Turley Associates employs around thirty urban designers and, as National Head of Urban Design, I review incoming CVs of all hopeful candidates into the team. These are measured against our internally-developed urban design job descriptions. An external definition of what constitutes an urban designer would be most helpful in setting professional standards and expectations.

The new Capacity Checklist<sup>2</sup>, from the Urban Design Alliance, provides a useful aide to the interrogation of a potential employee's knowledge and skills. It is appropriate that the Recognised Practitioner assessment will use Section C – Roles in Urban Design of the checklist as a basis for evidence of

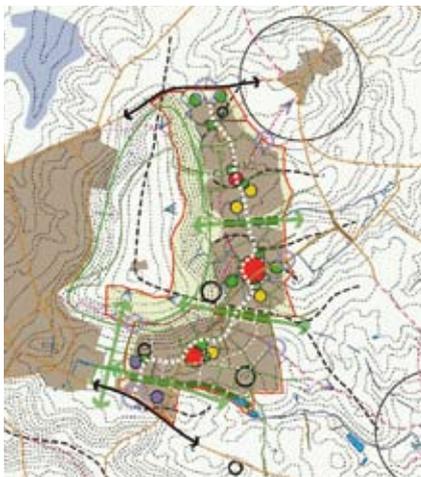
## An external definition of what constitutes an urban designer would be helpful in setting professional standards and expectations

professional competence. For us this useful checklist can be used to provide a structure for further refining our job descriptions and for carrying out annual development reviews of our people.

We do of course consider other professional qualifications, especially if they have achieved a chartered status in their field. The chartered status that the RTPI, RIBA, LI or RICS provide ensures that both the employee and any potential client knows they are working to a particular standard, and also that if the person does not work to the appropriate standard they are answerable to their institute. If an applicant had the Recognised Practitioner statement on his or her CV, it would provide further reassurance that they are practising urban design at a certain level and are committed to the cause!

However for it to be a reliable measure of competence, the Urban Design Group needs to make certain that, through being a Recognised Practitioner, the person demonstrates a continuing high standard of professional competence and clearly works under a relevant code of conduct - in our case the Guiding Principles of the Urban Design Group. This must be explicit if the Recognised Practitioner status is to have any relevance to an employer.

Once the person becomes a Recognised Practitioner care needs to be taken that they keep up-to-date with current good practice through continuing professional development. The UDG needs to find a way to monitor this too and this rigour will ensure that the Recognised Practitioner has the necessary experience and knowledge to give the status meaning and value.



**Above and Opposite**  
A masterplan collaboratively prepared at Turley Associates by planners, landscape architects, surveyors and architects all acting as urban designers



Care needs to be taken to ensure that the other professional bodies also support this scheme. The RTPI runs an Urban Design Network and the RIBA initiated a group that became the Academy of Urbanism. The Public Realm Information Advice Network offers a professional certificate in Design and Management of the Public Realm through a six day accredited course. In fact the Urban Design Group itself was formed as a splinter group when Francis Tibbalds, Keith Ingham, Percy Johnson-Marshall, Kevin Eastham and others convened a meeting at the RIBA under the title 'Architects in Planning'. The Recognised Practitioner scheme needs to ensure that these other bodies are not excluded.

With the need to monitor this scheme there is a danger that the Urban Design Group could be taking on too much by promoting the Recognised Practitioner status with only two full time employees. As identified in the 2008 Annual Report, there is a need for administrative support to both implement the membership and to run it. Also, with the increase in cost of membership will people expect more output from the Group?

I believe it is important that the UDG remains open to anybody with a professional interest in the built environment. Urban design is not the job of any one discipline. However the Capacity Checklist provides an excellent tool to identify skills and knowledge of both potential and existing employees. I am in favour of the Recognised Practitioner accreditation but I would question whether the UDG is currently sufficiently prepared to resource and administer a viable scheme.

In conclusion, the Recognised Practitioner scheme provides a good base for identifying whether an employee could be seen as being an urban design professional. But only over time as the scheme settles in will it become important to consider it when employing someone.

**Michael Lowndes, Director and National Head of Urban Design and Katy Neaves, Senior Urban Designer at Turley Associates**

<sup>1</sup> Becoming a Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design – Guidance Notes (2008) Consultation Draft  
<sup>2</sup> [www.capacitycheck.co.uk/about/](http://www.capacitycheck.co.uk/about/)

## UDG Recognised Practitioner

Suitably experienced urban designers can apply to become Urban Design Group Recognised Practitioners. The new distinction provides a wide range of professionals with a valued affiliation (in many cases an additional one), proclaiming their commitment to, and experience of, the discipline of urban design. Being a Recognised Practitioner will give urban designers a sense of identity; greater influence on professional practice and public policy; and a stronger sense of common purpose. A recognised practitioner is entitled to use the letters UDP after his or her name.

Recognised Practitioners are professional urban designers with a wide range of skills and experience of designing in an urban context. Other individual members of the UDG are equally committed to the group's principles but do not necessarily earn their living as urban designers.

A rich variety of professions will be represented among the UDG's Recognised Practitioners and members, including architects, building conservationists, engineers, landscape architects, planners and surveyors. Many of the new generation of professionals have more than one professional affiliation, and they expect to develop new skills and areas of expertise throughout their career. Anyone who meets the following criteria is entitled to apply for the distinction of Urban Design Group Recognised Practitioner:

1. Commitment to the principles of the UDG.
2. In the case of practitioners who have a recognised diploma or MA in urban design, they will have devoted the majority of their working time for at least the past three years to at least four of the seven activities listed in 'The work of an urban designer' or other activities that the UDG may be willing to accept as part of the work of an urban designer. Five years' such experience is required for candidates without a recognised diploma or MA.

Once recognised, practitioners will be required to demonstrate a commitment to actively advancing the practice and profession of urban design. Recognition will be renewable on an annual basis for a fee, which will include membership of the UDG at no extra cost. Renewal will be automatic, providing practitioners carry out continuing professional development and activity to advance the practice and profession of urban design. The UDG Membership Panel may call applicants for Recognised Practitioners status for interview, but this will not usually be necessary.

Honorary Recognised Practitioners may also be chosen and elected by the UDG Executive Committee as those who have made a significant contribution to urban design, including existing and past patrons of the UDG, and others who have made an outstanding contribution to the UDG's work.

### HAVE YOU EXPLORED CAPACITYCHECK?

Higher standards of urban design depend on everyone who makes or influences decisions about development (including councillors, design champions, clients and a wide range of professionals) having better understanding, knowledge and abilities.

To raise standards through training and education, and through learning on the job, we need to be able to assess what capacity individuals and organisations have, and to plan how to develop it. Capacitycheck is an urban design skills appraisal method, and was published by the Urban Design Alliance in 2008. It has had sponsorship and endorsement from a range of government agencies and professional organisations, and is available online at [www.capacitycheck.co.uk](http://www.capacitycheck.co.uk).



## Regent Quarter, Kings Cross, London

Urban Initiatives describe how their masterplan shaped the place today

### INTRODUCTION

The Regent Quarter project involved the regeneration of a run-down part of Kings Cross, which despite being located next to some of the best transport connections in London, had nevertheless acquired a very poor reputation associated with drug dealing and prostitution. Through the creative re-use of existing nineteenth century buildings, the regeneration has created a distinctive urban quarter based on the area's industrial heritage. This project is a pioneering example of conservation-led regeneration and at the same time shows outstanding commercial success. The project also demonstrates how the objectives of the public and private sectors can be aligned, and how a sequence of professional consultants can work to a shared concept for a place and deliver an outstanding development

### CONSERVATION-LED REGENERATION APPROACH

Regent Quarter regeneration project transformed redundant industrial, brownfield sites into an economically viable area with high quality open spaces and buildings. Although few of the buildings were listed, the entire development area lay within a Conservation Area and represented an important part of London's industrial heritage. The master plan has created a distinct character with a variety of architecture, adapted from the local historic context that combines the preservation of the existing industrial buildings with new, high quality buildings, public art and attention to architectural detail.

Consultation has been very important in the development of the Regent Quarter development; developers, stakeholders and local people were invited to hear and give their views and ideas about the proposal. Over

twenty public meetings were held in a widespread exercise of public consultation, during which the new masterplan received the support of 91% of residents and local businesses.

### THE DEVELOPMENT

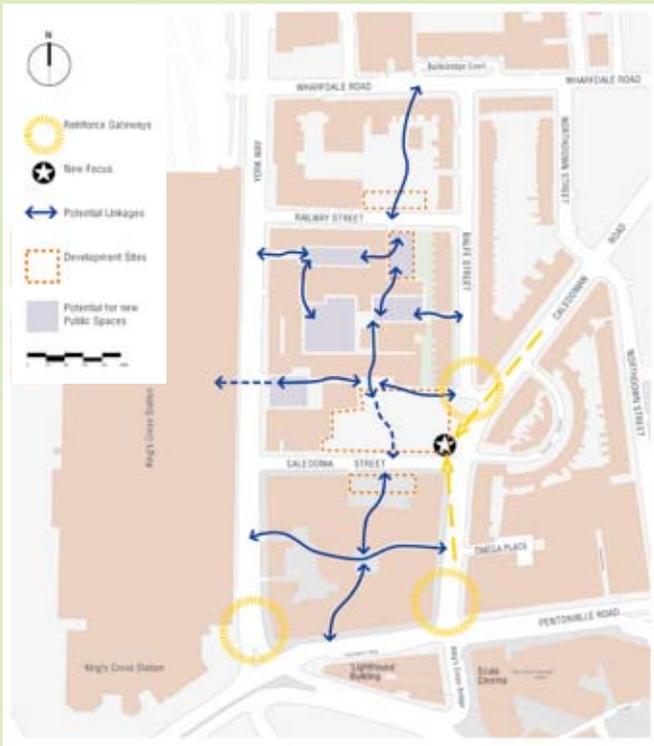
The Regent Quarter is a 2.35 ha (5.8 acres) site, comprising four blocks, three of which are within the Borough of Islington and one block, the Lighthouse block with its listed building is in Camden.

With a final development value in excess of £150 million, the Regent Quarter development has created 20,500 m<sup>2</sup> (220,000 sq ft) of offices; 4,600 m<sup>2</sup> (50,000 sq ft) of retail (including locations for three restaurants/bars) and 1,300 m<sup>2</sup> (14,000 sq ft) of leisure uses. The rest of the 58,500 m<sup>2</sup> (630,000 sq ft) scheme is made up of a 277-bed hotel, a fitness centre, an art gallery and 138 residential apartments. 25% of residential units have been given over to affordable housing through the Peabody Trust.

### HISTORY OF THE AREA

From the 1820s, a mixture of industrial and commercial premises was established along with residential dwellings; large warehouses, small houses, factories complexes and industrial buildings with internal courtyards formed an eclectic architectural landscape and a coherent historical group of buildings.

In 2000, P&O Estates presented a planning application for the redevelopment of the blocks. At this point, English Heritage contributed in an innovative way, opening up the debate about the future of the area. EH commissioned consultants Urban Initiatives



Opposite Aerial view of completed development  
 Above Concept plan showing building footprints before redevelopment  
 Top right and right Refurbished and connected buildings.  
 Photographs by Chris Hollick



to show how refurbishment of existing buildings and spaces could be complemented by the sensitive development of gap sites and the creation of new pedestrian routes. This concept was taken up by P&O, who in 2001 commissioned RHWL architects to produce a new plan for the area.

**REGENERATION BENEFITS & LESSONS**

The new plan embodied Urban Initiatives’ concepts of the re-use of existing buildings alongside new, contemporary additions and the creation of pedestrian routes linking the blocks and the series of former industrial courtyards into new public routes. The existing but disused courtyards were revitalized in order to capture the original character of the area and give access to the public.

The Islington Conservation Advisory Committee (ICAC) deemed the development to be very well designed, with a very good mixture of uses and an important contribution to the local economy. In terms of community benefits, the development increased the civic pride of local people in their area and provided important facilities and services.

The key outcomes of the project:

- An excellent combination of the new buildings with the retained ones, respect for conservation principals, and a distinct sense of place
- The combination of different uses and architectural responses creating an attractive and animated environment with activity at different times of day
- Public access within each block
- Flexibility and adaptability of buildings maintaining continuity

with the historic associations and providing for response to changing requirements in the future

- The creation of public courtyards creating a feeling of non exclusivity for local people and private open spaces including the rear gardens of existing terraced houses are better secured by surrounding development
- The elevation treatment and the massing and height of both the new and refurbished buildings have resulted in a strong sense of enclosure
- The creation of new routes through the sites has opened up frontage allowing highly efficient land utilization. A plot ratio of 2.5:1 has been achieved with building heights similar to those of the retained buildings

The project provides important lessons for other places. Firstly, that conservation does not have to be a barrier to change, but can in fact aid regeneration, adding value to development through strengthened character and distinctiveness. Conventional development approaches can be challenged, even at an advanced stage, provided that rigorous and well-grounded alternatives can be found.

Secondly, that commercially successful projects can be achieved through fine-grain, incremental development, working with the constraints of the site rather than trying to obliterate them. Lastly, complex projects involve a multitude of players and each must understand and support the urban design principles that underpin the project. P&O and RHWL did more than just comply with Urban Initiatives’ concept, they embraced its spirit, introducing ideas of their own that extended and enriched the masterplan.



## Dunsfold Park, Surrey

Pollard Thomas Edwards architects design a new eco-village

Amid all the talk of large eco-towns, plans to create Britain's most sustainable village in rural Surrey are well advanced. Dunsfold Park sits within 248 hectares of one of the most wooded landscapes in England, hidden from view by hedgerows and woodland – former through-roads terminate at the site boundaries. The site was cleared to make way for a wartime aerodrome in 1942, and is still dominated by the three runways, one of which is still in active service, with industrial buildings concentrated on the north side of the site. Aviation use is not sustainable in the long term, and the new owner and developer Dunsfold Park Ltd (DPL) intends to transform the site into a new eco-village with 2,600 homes and a model for rural living in the 21st century.

### VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The client's vision is to:

- Create a balanced community, by providing new jobs on site and affordable homes for the wider workforce.
- Promote the sustainable social and economic development of the wider area.
- Reduce the environmental footprint of the village by incorporating and delivering innovative designs, technologies and practices for energy, transport waste and construction.
- Create a diverse housing stock, which responds to the acute local shortage of open market and affordable homes.
- Develop contemporary Surrey vernacular housing that performs to the highest environmental standards.
- Make no call on public funds for the delivery of the development.

- Enhance the natural qualities of the site which site adjacent to very important landscape features.

### THE NEW VILLAGE

Three preliminary masterplan options formed the basis for consultation with the local community. This gave rise to a hybrid masterplan, which was reviewed once again and resulted in the final radial layout.

The final masterplan creates a village which combines homes with jobs – and creates places for recreation, shopping and learning. Dunsfold will provide the critical mass of population necessary to support underused services in the wider area whilst providing sufficient facilities to minimise the need for car journeys outside the new village. Dunsfold will be a proper, sustainable and integrated settlement – a new Surrey village for the 21st century. It will consist of:

**Market Square** - where all key routes converge, commercial and community facilities are concentrated, in which the church forms the tallest landmark, and the residential neighbourhoods connect with the expanded business district.

**Runway Park** - on the line of the main former runway, serves as a modern-day village green. It has continuous water features with Runway Lake at its midpoint, by the Market Square.

**Neighbourhoods** - from the higher density (65-50 dph) mixed-use neighbourhoods, the village decreases in density towards the village edge. It passes through the medium-density (50 dph) and car-free central neighbourhoods which consist of continuous terraced blocks, until it reaches the lower-density (32 dph) neighbourhoods, where the terraces break down into smaller groupings of dwellings and fan out into landscape, terminating in a necklace of detached villas.



**Opposite** The Proposed Masterplan  
**Top left** Indicative View of the Market Square  
**Top right** Indicative View of a Central Neighbourhood  
**Above** Evolution of the Masterplan – Island Village, Parkland Village, High Street and Hybrid

**Business Park** – building on existing facilities to provide increased local employment. A mixed-use district forms both a connection and buffer between the existing business park and other residential neighbourhoods.

**Central Avenue and Canal** - providing a clear and playful boundary, like a moat, curving around the car-free village centre, which is reached across a series of bridges.

**Canal Basin** - with narrowboat moorings marking the main entrance to the village. The visitor centre, waste centre and landmark energy centre are clustered here.

**Country Park** – the village is surrounded by over 140 ha of landscaped parkland, which amounts to 60% of the total site area, in which all existing woodland, fragments of hedgerow and trees have been preserved and natural habitats protected and encouraged.

**SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES**

Our environmentally driven masterplan aims to achieve zero carbon emissions for the site and maximum energy efficiency through building design and fuel efficient technology to achieve Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes in terms of energy and water. The masterplan is supported by a comprehensive set of sustainable strategies:

**Transport Strategy** - The transport strategy for Dunsfold will change conventional reliance on the private car. The entire village is within eight minutes' walk of the Market Square, with a central car-free neighbourhood. New bus routes to the wider area will be provided and subsidised by the developer, and improved public transport will be complemented by the discouragement of car use through car user

charging and a workplace levy. There will be incentives to use low-pollution hybrid vehicles, and buses will also use this technology.

**Energy Production Strategy** - Low grade forest products from local woodlands will provide the biomass fuel to the energy centre to provide heat and power to the whole village – and revive a traditional local industry.

**Water Strategy** – The water features and canals which form part of the masterplan are an integral part of the Sustainable Urban Drainage Strategy, designed to add flow to the Wey and Arun Canal. Surrey is one of the driest regions of the UK and mains water consumption will be reduced by 30% by harvesting rainwater for reuse.

**Recycling and Waste Strategy** – Including the provision of an efficient on-site Fibrecycle waste process plant which will convert over 80% of otherwise unrecyclable waste into an additional fuel source and dramatically reduce the amount for disposal – a virtuous circle.

**Employment Strategy** - The strategy for the existing business park is to expand it to provide up to 2,000 jobs which will support 2,600 homes on the site.

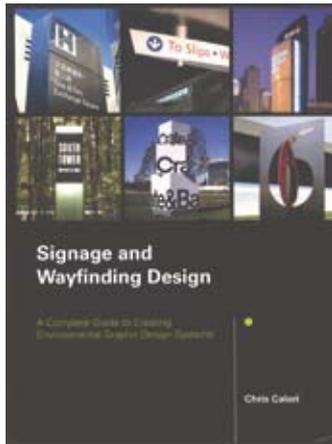
**NEXT STEPS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The outline planning application is due to be reviewed at public enquiry in March 2009. If approved, work will start on site in 2010, with a construction period of around 12 years.

Only the control and vision of a single inspired landowner can deliver an ambitious project like Dunsfold Park, to provide genuinely innovative and sustainable development in terms of community infrastructure, a transport strategy, a waste and energy strategy, and housing provision.

## SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING DESIGN

CHRIS CALORI, WILEY, 2007, £39.99



ISBN 978 0 471 74891 5

Street clutter is becoming an increasing cause for concern in the public realm today, and so a book focused on the creation of well-designed signage and wayfinding systems is to be welcomed. This is tempered a little by the fact that the book originates from American

experiences, but is promoted by the Society for Environmental Graphic Design. The book's quality of layout and accessible language go a long way to overcoming these concerns.

But is the book relevant to the practising urban designer? Much of the content is elementary and basic, however it is useful to have such material drawn together in a single document. The subject is divided into three overlapping spheres: signage; place-making and interpretation. It is a pity that this simple division is immediately, but quite reasonably, compromised by dividing signage into two parts – signage as a passive element, and wayfinding as an active function including landmarks and paths. The passive nature of signage is emphasised by the view that no amount of signing will save a site that lacks a good internal wayfinding structure.

The author admits to seeing

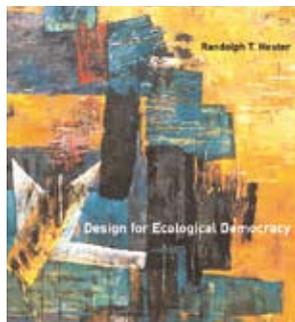
urban designers as one of his potential clients but he does aim to improve understanding between the environmental graphic designer and clients. The bulk of this well laid-out and clearly organised book is the process of designing a signage programme. Disappointingly there is no mention of the needs of the disabled and clearly no mention of the tyranny of the Road Traffic Regulations that dominate our own highway signage.

Much of the book is devoted to process and methodology and there are useful pointers for any of the design professions, such as a reliance on colour-coded drawing references which can be disastrous once material gets into the client's copying system. This is not a book that furthers the urban design message, but it would find a useful place in the office library.

Richard Cole

## DESIGN FOR ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY

RANDOLPH T HESTER, THE MIT PRESS, 2006, £26



ISBN 978 0 262 08351 5

Has community building become lost in the process of city building? The author suggests that urban design should once again forge connections between citizens and with their natural environment, i.e. cities should be ecologically resilient, enhance community and give pleasure. To achieve this, Hester proposes a combination of the powerful forces of ecology (its inter-connectiveness) and democracy (its freedom). Refreshingly,

urban form is used to describe this merger in more detail, starting with analysis and synthesis as the basis for understanding each unique urban context. The rest of the book explores this concept by breaking form down into three sub-categories.

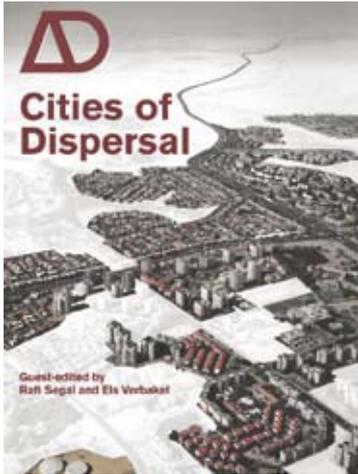
The first, enabling form, focuses on how design elements such as centeredness or connectedness (amongst others) allow us to know our neighbours better, with the aim of re-inspiring us to a higher sense of shared civic purpose. The second, resilient form, focuses our attention on the fact that, in our pursuit of happiness, we have become so used to unsustainable technological fixes and that we neglect to use the natural attributes of place-making, e.g. natural ventilation and the freedom that it allows. The third, impelling form, addresses our sense of identity and stewardship, which has been lost through compelling but mindless free

enterprise, and which has also stolen our enjoyment of collective public space. The author provides a fifteen point checklist of inter-connected design principles and uses these to expand the three form based categories. This checklist acts as a guide for students (the core audience of this book) but also as a reminder for professionals of the basic design principles which allow a city to respect its context, integrate people and offer enjoyment. It is rather hard to digest, but with ample illustrations, drawings and photos, one is constantly reminded of urban form as being superior to policies and theories. It has parallels with the old favourites (Ching, Lynch, etc) and, although spread out over too many pages, offers a current reminder that ecology and democracy, in some sense so far apart, can be united through good design and expressed through urban form.

Liesel Kruger

## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN: CITIES OF DISPERSAL

ED RAFI SEGAL AND ELS VERBAKEL, PROFILE NO 191, VOL 78, WILEY, 2008, £22.99



ISBN 978 0470 06637 9

Entitled *Cities of Dispersal*, this edition of *Architectural Design* focuses on 'X'urbia - the somewhere in-between the city centre and the truly rural and asks if suburbia/the shanty town should now be classified as urban? Various authors contribute to this 'in-between-ness' and we as designers are made aware

that we have a unique opportunity to re-invent urbanity. It is in 'public space' that change can start happening; in the dispersed parts of cities the word 'urban' and its contemporary meaning relates less to density and more to interaction, access and interchange.

This AD edition is full of thought provoking articles ranging from small scale public 'implants' to large, city scale interventions: Albert Pope asks the poignant question: 'who do we design for, the collective or the individual?' He notes how extended infrastructure (a requirement for new edge developments) actually becomes a barrier; preventing communities from relating to each other. Alex Wall suggests that 'out of town' malls can act as catalysts for future centres if all players ensure public space is public (what a day that would be!), yet well managed.

Bruno de Meulder looks at Belgium as a dispersed country due to extreme de-centralised sub-division and powers,

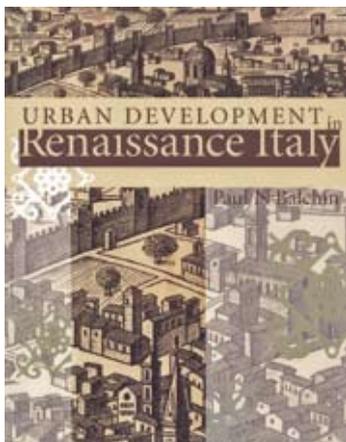
while Kjersti Monson looks at the use of the superblock in China and how the highly state-controlled 'marketisation' process of the 1980s heralded a period of unprecedented urban expansion, re-settlement and loss of agricultural land. Rafi Segal in turn tells us more about the non-cit' of Beer Sheva in southern Israel and how segregated communities can be integrated by optimising the spaces in between, turning it into public realms which are shared without compromising individual cultural identities.

Guest editors Rafi Segal and Els Verbakel conclude with a discussion focused on the role of public space in the design of modern and future cities and how designers can make the most of this unique opportunity in the lifetime of the built environment. May we look back in the future and be proud of what we have made of the opportunities within dispersed cities.

Liezel Kruger

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

PAUL N BALCHIN, WILEY, 2008, £29.99



ISBN 978 0 470 03155 1 (pb)

The aim of this book is to relate the political and economic transformations that took place in the Italian peninsula from around 1200 to 1700, to urban development in the same period. The author acknowledges that this is a very wide interpretation of the Renaissance; however he does not see it as a problem since it allows him to cover the period in which the history of Italian architecture had a central role in the European

psyche, and as a consequence has been extensively studied. Nevertheless therein seems to be one of the main problems with the text: there is too much information and the story gets lost amid the amount of data presented.

We learn inter alia about the intricacies of the Venetian government, the transformation of cities from republican to aristocratic rule, the development of capitalism in Italian cities, the internecine fights between families, and much more than we need to. We are also given very detailed descriptions of significant buildings in most of the important Italian cities as well as in lesser ones, and anecdotes about the patrons that commissioned them. Changes in style are seen as a reflection of societal changes, potentially an interesting subject, and both are described here but the connections and the relationships seem to be missing.

Town planning and urban design are mentioned at the end of each of the periods considered, almost as a separate subject; therefore the connections between changes in architecture and

the treatment of public space is rarely considered. Well known places such as Rome's Campidoglio and Sixtus V's baroque planning, the Vatican's St. Peter's Square are described with the surrounding buildings; the transformation of Pienza and the impact of Filarete's Sforzinda are also mentioned, but all these schemes have been analysed elsewhere and probably better related to their political or economic context. The connections between the changes in architectural style, urban morphology and the evolution of Italian society would have made for a fascinating study; what is on offer here is a vast amount of description of all the above, but separately.

The book is fairly well illustrated; there are photographs of most of the buildings described and the town planning sections have a few plans. There are almost no plans of the buildings themselves with their urban context. Thus the central element promised in the title - 'urban development' - is missing.

Sebastian Loew

## CONTRIBUTORS

**John Billingham**, architect and planner, formerly Director of Design and Development at Milton Keynes Development Corporation

**Philip Cave**, principal of Philip Cave Associates, landscape and urban designers

**Richard Cole**, architect and planner, formerly Director of Planning and Architecture of the Commission for New Towns

**Joe Holyoak**, architect and urban designer, Principal Lecturer in Urban Design at Birmingham City University

**Liesel Kruger**, Associate Urban Designer, David Lock Associates

**Sebastian Loew**, architect and planner, writer and consultant, teaching at the University of Westminster

**Louise Thomas**, independent urban designer and Director of the Urban Renaissance Institute

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## SOUTH

**Maya Shcherbakova**  
Mob 07884 246190  
Email [mshcherbakova@dps.co.uk](mailto:mshcherbakova@dps.co.uk)

## SOUTH WEST

**Judy Preston**  
Mob 07908219834  
Email [judy.preston@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:judy.preston@blueyonder.co.uk)

## EAST MIDLANDS

**Laura Alvarez**  
Tel 0115 962 9000  
Email [laura.alvarez@lewishickey.com](mailto:laura.alvarez@lewishickey.com)

## WEST MIDLANDS

**Patricia Gomez**  
Email [Patricia.gomez@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Patricia.gomez@birmingham.gov.uk)

## EAST ANGLIA

**Rachel Leggett**  
Tel 01223 484 646  
Mob 07738 697552  
Email [RachelLeggett@eeda.org.uk](mailto:RachelLeggett@eeda.org.uk)

## NORTH WEST

**Annie Atkins of Places Matter!**  
Email [Annie.Atkins@placesmatter.co.uk](mailto:Annie.Atkins@placesmatter.co.uk)

## NORTH EAST

**Georgia Giannopoulou**  
Tel 0191 2226006  
Email [georgia.giannopoulou@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:georgia.giannopoulou@ncl.ac.uk)

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**Alona Martinez-Perez**  
Email [scotland\\_street@yahoo.com](mailto:scotland_street@yahoo.com)

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Tel 028 9073 6690  
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Email [ama@amaplanning.com](mailto:ama@amaplanning.com)  
Website [www.amaplanning.com](http://www.amaplanning.com)  
Contacts Andrew Martin/  
Sophie O'Hara Smith

Masterplans, urban design, urban regeneration, historic buildings, project management, planning, EIA, landscape planning and design.

## ANTHONY REDDY ASSOCIATES

Dartry Mills, Dartry Road, Dublin 6  
Tel 00 353 1 498 7000  
Email [info@anthonyreddy.com](mailto:info@anthonyreddy.com)  
Website [www.anthonyreddy.com](http://www.anthonyreddy.com)  
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Contact Tim Day  
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Contact Alan Stark  
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Department of Architecture, Urban Design Studies Unit, 131 Rottenrow, Glasgow G4 0NG

Tel 0141 548 4219

Email [ombretta.r.romice@strath.ac.uk](mailto:ombretta.r.romice@strath.ac.uk)

Contact Ombretta Romice

The Postgraduate Course in Urban Design is offered in CPD, Diploma and MSc modes. The course is design centred and includes input from a variety of related disciplines.

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Email [w.n.erickson@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:w.n.erickson@westminster.ac.uk)

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MA or Diploma Course in Urban Design for postgraduate architects, town planners, landscape architects and related disciplines. One year full time or two years part time.

## 24 HOURS FROM TULSE HILL

Mentioning Fairport Convention in the previous Endpiece reminded me of the first Endpiece I wrote, years ago in UDQ59, standing in for a busy Bob Jarvis. I called it *Songs about Towns*. The connection? The song by Sandy Denny called *Fotheringay* (sic), written about the imprisonment of Mary, Queen of Scots in Fotheringhay Castle in 1587, which appears on Fairport's 1969 album *What We Did on Our Holidays*. The theme of *Songs about Towns* was the frequency with which USA towns feature in song, compared to the relative absence of British towns. It was prompted by an unscheduled call at a little town in Virginia called Danville, where I discovered that it was commemorated in two well-known songs, both about trains. In 1903 a locomotive travelling too fast crashed off a trestle bridge at Danville. The song about the tragedy, called *The Wreck of the Old 97*, was recorded several times, most famously by Johnny Cash. Earlier, in the Civil War, the Danville train was the supply line into Richmond in the siege of Petersburg. *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, written by Robbie Robertson and recorded both by The Band and by Joan Baez, describes the defeat of Robert E. Lee's Confederate army when the besieging Union army "tore up the track again".

But there are some English exceptions, and *Fotheringay* is one. Some years ago my partner Polly and I were driving, lost, through wet Northamptonshire woodland, looking unsuccessfully for a campsite. Night was falling, and we had given up, when we saw a sign for Fotheringhay and immediately made the Sandy Denny connection. We stayed the night at Castle Farm, and in the morning strolled out to look at the grass-covered *motte*, which is all that remains of Fotheringhay Castle. Historians are taught that this is where the imprisonment and execution of Mary occurred (and the birth of Richard III) but for the rest of us, popular song helps to create a map of the landscape of events both momentous and more personal. Paul Simon, homeward bound, sitting in the railway station, with a ticket for his destination, lent significance to the unremarkable platform at Widnes (trains again), and added a new layer of meaning to the place. Is there a plaque commemorating the spot? I hope so, or if not, at least some memorial graffiti.

Simon was describing an incident in his life which had significance for him, but for part of the audience at least, it is the historical fact of the writing of the song in a particular place which is significant. One block away from my office in Digbeth is a Grade II listed pub the terracotta Eagle and Tun, sadly recently empty and now boarded up. Here UB40 filmed *Red Red Wine* (although they were more likely to be drinking Ansell's bitter there) and UB40's recording studio was until recently just across the railway viaduct from the pub. The building was ordinary but it was a local landmark, colourfully painted all over with murals. It was demolished last year, to be replaced by apartments and a new studio; the site is still vacant, the development now on hold, like so many others. Gentrification, I suspect, tends to undermine the connections between places and songs. In the 1960s I was at a lecture by Constantinos Doxiadis in which he described his proposal to replace hillside *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro by modern apartments. He reported a local asking him "But Senhor Doxiadis, if this happens, who will write the sambas?"

Joe Holyoak