

## UDG UPDATE

### UDG Chairman Duncan Ecob Celebrates the Launch of Recognised Practitioners

January 2009 was an important month for the Urban Design Group with the launch of the much anticipated Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design initiative. It has taken some time to come to fruition with much work on getting the assessment criteria right, keeping standards high and reflecting our desire for inclusiveness and flexibility. To this end, I feel our endeavours have been rewarded with the high calibre and diversity of applications we have received so far. Overall the level of response has been encouraging and I would encourage all the potential Recognised Practitioners out there to download and apply!

Clearly the questions we must now consider are where will the Recognised Practitioner initiative lead next? Is the next logical step for Urban Design to become a profession? The Urban Design Group has always prided itself on welcoming into its community all those who care about the quality of urban life and rejecting exclusivity and

restrictiveness. There are many members who would be strongly against the UDG following the professional route, and many of the definitions of urban design hold that it is inter-disciplinary and an antidote to professional elitism and monopolies.

At this point we find ourselves walking a fine line; on the one hand we want to be open – at its heart urban design is about collaboration – on the other there are many built environment institutes claiming urban design as a core principle and we run the risk of becoming an adjunct to the other more established professions. If urban design is to remain a generalist subject, encompassing many disciplines and crossing the professional boundaries how do we place it within an educational context that is relevant to all? How do we ensure that all the students gain a thorough understanding of the issues and skills required to create good urban environments?

One of the challenges is to ensure

that urban design remains a broad concept, from the large scale of strategy and its consideration of infrastructure through to the definition and creation of a sense of place. Within this process, grappling with the less tangible issues of human behaviour, finance, legislation and governance is essential to the creation of successful settlements. It is in the union of these subjects that we find the true skill and expertise of the practitioner in urban design.

Of course, we also hope to increase our membership through the Recognised Practitioner initiative. This is vitally important because making better spaces for people to enjoy living, working and playing is the core belief of the UDG and, by extension, its members. Increasing our membership enables us to better spread the word and the Recognised Practitioner can only strengthen our voice in an increasingly competitive forum. So come on shout loud (and proud) for the Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design and let's see the applications flood in.

### Director Robert Huxford Reflects on the Insurance Industry

The Urban Design Group has just renewed its insurance policies. Even though we have managed to find a better deal, the premium amounts to 1 percent of our turnover. It got me wondering, what are we actually insuring against? There's libel and slander; it is possible that one of the authors of an article in *Urban Design* might - in a misguided attempt at being edgy - libel an individual or a company, but the editors of the journal are very diligent and it seems unlikely. As to loss of equipment, the thought of someone making off through the streets of Smithfield with the UDG's very modest and somewhat antiquated array of IT is absurd. Loss of data – well this is something you can't insure against; the best means of prevention is taking copies and storing in different secure locations. We reckon the UDG would be able to continue in the aftermath of a nuclear strike on London, although it would be something of a skeleton service.

The received wisdom is that it is good practice for organisations to have insurance and, in the case of professional indemnity insurance, it is specified in contracts. But again the nagging question arises: what are the risks we are being insured against? When it comes to negligence based on design in the public realm, a survey last year conducted in preparation for the revised UK guide on Highway Risk and Liability revealed no clear-cut cases that had gone against any local authority. Yet there are plenty of organisations offering advice on how to minimise risks and local authorities have entire risk management sections, when in fact the advice they are giving is actually about minimising the risks of being sued! As children we enjoyed being scared by stories of trolls and wicked stepmothers, as adults we progress to fantastical tales of the risk of liability claims, or the possibility of corporate manslaughter.

According to the Association of British Insurers, 'The UK insurance

industry is an important contributor to the economy, a major employer'. There is no doubt about the latter – the insurance industry employs over 300,000 people. But when I think of the parades of shops with roller shutters specified in insurance policy clauses, or the urban trees felled to forestall a risk of subsidence, the likelihood of getting insurance for properties in a brand new built-in-a-flood-risk-zone Venice, and not to mention the size of the premiums we pay, I wonder whether the contribution to the economy made by the insurance industry is positive, or negative. Furthermore I reflect that there are aspects of risk management that are more akin to the primitive superstitions that have haunted mankind since the dawn of time. We need cost-effective insurance against actual risks and liabilities, not insurance against the hysterical hyped-up fear of the unknown that comes at the expense of the industries of the built environment and the interests of the public as a whole.

# DIARY OF EVENTS

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

## WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2009

### BIRMINGHAM

Sometimes described as the 'Venice of the North', Birmingham is perhaps more famous in design circles as the high water mark of vehicle optimised development and as a battleground between place and movement. This event will reflect on recent changes in Birmingham, looking at some of the key developments. Speakers include Joe Holyoak, lecturer in Urban Design at Birmingham City University.

## FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2009 - CAMBRIDGE

### URBAN DESIGN GROUP ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

*Is big still beautiful? What is the best way to make places in the 21st century?*

With the impact of the economic downturn, the demands of sustainability and increasing pressures on infrastructure, the challenge of creating high quality places is tougher than ever before. The UDG's conference will explore what is the best way to go forward; whether large scale, global issues demand all encompassing solutions, or whether it is the more modest, yet achievable strategies that eventually add up to really big improvements. Keynote speakers will put forward their perspectives and experience, considering examples from the past and internationally as well as local strategies from the Eastern Region area. The conference will be held in the beautiful setting of Peterhouse, the oldest college in Cambridge, and culminate with dinner in the College's 13th century dining hall. In addition to the main conference, there will be optional events, activities and tours on 17 and 19 September. For further information, contact Louise or Robert on 020 7250 0892 or email [admin@udg.org.uk](mailto:admin@udg.org.uk)

## WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2009

### FRANCIS TIBBALDS AWARD

Following on from last year's memorable event, the presentation of the Francis Tibbalds Prize will mark the culmination of the 2008-09 urban design awards cycle. Each of the six short-listed practices, whose projects have been featured in the journal over the past year and on which the UDG members will have voted in the preceding month, will present a brief summary of their entry, before Janet Tibbalds announces which has been chosen by the membership. The evening generously sponsored by Taylor and Francis will begin with a wine reception.

Over the next 18 months the awards are to be expanded into other areas. A new award for students is being introduced: each course listed in the journal has been asked to nominate a student's work for submission. Short listed work will appear in the January issue. Members will be asked to vote on those entries and an award event will be held in February 2010.

In future years a single annual award event will be held; the first of these will occur in February 2011 at which new awards for public sector work and for journalists will be introduced.

## WEDNESDAY 21ST OCTOBER 2009

### URBAN DESIGN THEORY

This event will take stock of urban design theory advanced during the 20th century and the emerging ideas of the 21st. Led by Dan Durant of Inspire East and Regional Cities East, Convenor of UDG Eastern Region.

## 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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**COVER** Aerial View of Birmingham, Birmingham City Council

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**CURRENT SUBSCRIPTIONS** Urban design is free to URBAN DESIGN GROUP members who also receive newsletters and *The Directory* at the time of printing

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**INTERNATIONAL INDIVIDUALS** £50

**RECOGNISED PRACTITIONER IN URBAN DESIGN** £80

**PRACTICES** £250 (including a listing in the UD Practice Index and on the UDG website)

**EDUCATION** £100 (including a listing in the UD Practice Index and on the UDG website)

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES** £100 (including two copies of *Urban Design*)

**UK LIBRARIES** £40

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# TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RECESSION

The recession is having serious effects on the built environment professions; colleagues in the private sector have been losing their jobs for a while and those in the public sector are threatened as well. Talks of renegotiating Section 106 agreements are ubiquitous, mixed-use and mixed-tenure projects are questioned, and the gains made in the past fifteen years seem to be challenged.

The UDG has always been a campaigning organisation and needs to continue to be so now more than ever. The message has to be spread loud and wide: this is not the time to lower standards and forget what we have learned. The pause in the frenetic growth that we have had must be used to reflect and prepare for the next phase. Have we not been told for years that applications were coming so fast that local authorities could not have their master plans prepared in advance and could only react to the pressures? Now the pressure is gone, those master plans can be drawn at leisure and those development control officers can participate in the process. The public can be consulted before decisions are made on the hoof. History shows that periods of austerity have often saved neighbourhoods rather than the other way around.

Another consequence of the boom was the dearth of qualified urban designers (as well as planners and other built environment professionals) and the poaching of one consultant from the other, or one district from another. Staff are more likely to stay put now and will be able to build up greater knowledge and awareness of their patch. Furthermore, many professionals could and should take advantage of the calmer market to upgrade their skills. In the early nineties recession, many architects retrained as urban designers; let us hope the same happens again.

This issue's topic celebrates the 1909 Chicago plan, the model of the City Beautiful school. One of the purposes of planning in its early days at least was to create beautiful places: should we allow this to be forgotten? The results of those periods that did forget are the ones we have to now spend millions remedying. We cannot allow such lapses to happen again and we should turn this recession into an instrument to renew our fight for a better, more beautiful and now – more sustainable environment.

SEBASTIAN LOEW

## Urban Design

### EDITORIAL BOARD

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

### EDITORS

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

### 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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please send text by email to the editors, images to be supplied at a high-resolution (180mm width @300dpi) preferably as jpeg

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## Residential Design Assessment

THE GALLERY, LONDON 18 MARCH 2009

There was a good turnout at the Gallery showing the interest members have in making judgments on residential design issues in their professional lives. UDG former Chairman Alan Stones introduced the research findings of the Residential Design Quality Assessment System used in Essex as part of the Essex Design Initiative supported by Essex County Council and the Essex Planning Officers Association. An appropriate note of controversy was introduced early in the proceedings, as fellow speaker Dominic Church from CABE pointed out that Alan's amendments to CABE's *Building for Life* (BfL), which added three criteria for privacy and amenity space made the results not comparable to CABE's own assessments. Alan had also amended the CABE scoring system of 0, 0.5 and 1 to a 1-4 system (with 0 being bog standard house builders horrid, and 4 being an urban designer's dream). The Essex assessment system was applied to housing schemes designed within the past five years, built within the past three, and of 100 dwellings size or more, whereas CABE also looked at smaller schemes of 20 units up. By interviewing various people responsible,

the Essex exercise also investigated how the schemes developed and why. Alan let us into the secret that major house builders think that modern design, that means using a qualified architect, is suitable for higher density central city projects only; suburban housing requires a more traditional look that their own in-house layout planners have honed over the years with their standard house types, those much loved Dorchesters and Canterburys.

Dominic Church followed with a very thorough description of CABE's valuable work in developing and promoting BfL assessments and organising training events to make sure that every Local Authority has a least one trained BfL assessor. The overall objective is to raise design quality throughout the country and therefore make comparisons between places. The existing criteria have the advantage that they distill all current legislation and government advice.

There may however be a need to broaden assessment to include other factors such as sustainability, as there is a potential conflict in layout terms between achieving improvements in both urban design and sustainability.



Our profession is pinning its hopes that the widespread adoption of design codes and the necessity of house builders to come up with new standard house types to achieve the required higher eco homes ratings will contribute to the raising of standards and make developers employ both urban designers and architects. There is some evidence that the message is being listened to by the big players but the credit crunch may make some decide to play safe once house building gets underway again despite research that shows design quality sells. A lively discussion period ended this stimulating evening.

Malcolm Moor

## Rethinking Masterplanning

THE GALLERY, LONDON 22 APRIL 2009

A lion was the first image that John Deffenbaugh of the City of London planning department offered the audience of urban designers gathered at the Gallery, as representing the two faces of a master plan: powerful and dangerous at the same time. He then emphasised their dangerous side, mostly the fact that they are being used to speed up the planning system and reduce the risk for developers. He acknowledged that master plans could be a useful tool to facilitate a dialogue around design issues but found the drive towards certainty and efficiency as conflicting with democracy. He chose some sad schemes to exemplify the potential results of masterplanning in the wrong hands, but unfortunately his "good" examples resulting from a methodology he approved of, were equally sad.

Rob Cowan followed this by giving his, as usual, highly entertaining views about what is wrong with the world, mostly the world of masterplanning;

but he made clear that even though most of the master plans produced were a waste of space, they had the potential to be an instrument to improve people's lives. The images of Edinburgh New Town and Glasgow's Crown St were sufficient to convince anyone. Furthermore he described work being done by the Scottish Renaissance Towns Initiative in the town of Neilston, where a strong community is participating in the masterplanning process; this pilot scheme which if successful is going to be repeated in other Scottish towns. Rob then outlined the stages of the process of masterplanning and the questions that might be asked to assess this process and the quality of the outcome.

The evening was supposed to be a workshop and following the two presentations, Paul Reynolds led a discussion with an audience that was very keen to participate. Paul started by asking a question that has preoccupied the editors of this magazine for a while: is it Master Plan or Masterplan? And he



suggested that the former is better as it indicates 'one of several documents' while the latter can be equated to a rigid blue print. The debate moved around several topics, particularly the issues raised by John Deffenbaugh on speed, certainty and community involvement, and on the role of the public versus the private sector. Towards the end of the evening Andy Ward (see interview page 7) returned the discussion to a more positive view of masterplanning which had been used successfully by cities like Birmingham to show the public what an area would look like.

Neilston, Main Street  
Richard Carman  
for Urban Design  
Skills and East  
Renfrewshire  
District Council

Sebastian Loew

## Urban Design Education

THE GALLERY LONDON, 13 MAY 2009



Education, training and skills of (aspiring) urban designers led to a lively discussion at the Gallery. Unlike architects, planners and other built environment professions, urban designers, masterplanners, or perhaps urbanists do not have a professional institution to ratify required qualifications and professional experience.

Louise Thomas reflected on urban design education, based on her experience with the Urban Renaissance Institute. If urban design is akin to place making, no agreed typology exists, nor consensus on who should contribute to conceiving places. Since the Urban Task Force proposed a diagram of professional complexity, urban design has been exposed to a lot of buzz words, the latest related to sustainability and climate change, notwithstanding subjective references to ethics and aesthetics. There seems to be no 'public understanding of development', nor that urban design education is to acquire creative and critical skills which

developers, politicians and even design champions, and others involved in the built environment are lacking. There remains a need for generic urban design skills which although not yet clearly defined include imagination, listening, ability to cooperate, flexibility and, dare one say, inventive leadership.

From his long experience in local government, John Sanders gave the perspective of an employer of urban designers. They remain sparse in municipal offices and may carry out a range of jobs, including development control. He presented a growth and a decline scenario, and the dilemma of increasing human resources to meet demand or reducing demand to existing human and financial resources. Specialist skills should be hired in, while focusing on generic skills of in-house urban designers enabling them to contribute to a team, as well as to take on routine tasks. In-house training of junior staff is becoming increasingly an option. It could be extended to decision makers to improve their understanding of high quality design. A prerequisite for an appropriate deployment of urban designers is a commitment of the local authority to a high quality built environment.

Sebastian Loew proposed a definition of education as long term instruction, which is neither training nor skill provision. He referred to the formal genesis of the planning profession at the beginning of the 20th century and how it was learnt on the job and ratified by a professional institution. He gave a range of options of how to acquire urban design skills as 'enabler or designer, pen holder or pencil holder', not only through

perilously short formal post graduate education, but at workshops, in-house training, CPD sessions, summer schools and others. Outlets are very broad as urban designers do not necessarily design projects but may be involved in mediation between conflicting parties, producing guidance, or controlling the quality of urban design.

In the discussion a certain maturity was expected of urban designers to understand complex physical and institutional environments. An urban designer is a necessary member of a team for a complex development. Recession provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on what skills are required for the future and to provide training accordingly. Formal education at post graduate level of students with a first degree related to the built environment, was considered the appropriate approach.

From the debate it emerged that urban designers may experience difficulties in defining themselves, referring to a formal academic degree, the work they are carrying out, the politics of the built environment or how they wish to evolve in the future. Contrary to the fragmentation of the engineering professions, the attraction of perceiving oneself as an urban designer, lies precisely in the ambiguity of urban design, which ranges from creativity and responsiveness to hard edged project management, budgeting and formal decision making. At the heart of it all is problem solving which may be the one thing formal urban design education can deliver.

Judith Ryser

## Letter to the Editor

I recently attended the monthly forum of the UDG on education. Contrary to what some speakers contended, the problem is not the divide between theory and practice, but between two fundamentally opposed philosophical positions.

There are those who believe urban design is largely a process of correcting past [almost exclusively post-war] 'mistakes', and entails the unlearning of modernist planning, and the recovery of mediaeval and European post-enlightenment models. Proponents of this position proclaim good urban design principles to be timeless, or as

common sense.

On the other hand there are those who believe the modern project never ended and that urban design involves a constant striving for innovation in order to respond to a constantly changing world. If we take the latter on, then we can clarify the aims of an urban design education as the same as architecture or any other design education for that matter. New briefs, new sites, new conditions require new solutions, new technologies, new thinking.

If the first misfired clay block led to an abandonment of the project to

develop a new building material, we would have been deprived a whole discourse of shelter and architecture. To abandon failed planning experiments only to rely upon pre-modern exemplars for our emerging cities is to undermine our profession and eventually to kill urban design as a practice altogether. This ought to be self-evident.

Our schools need to be equipping urban design students with tools to reason, imagine and develop the 21st century city.

Darryl Chen

## Excellence in the East of England

Featured in the *Urban Design Compendium 2* and with over 900 registered users, the Excellence Framework is the East of England's online toolkit for delivering sustainable communities. Developed by Inspire East, with support from the Building Research Establishment and Sallet Consulting, the Excellence Framework can be accessed free at [www.inspire-east.org.uk/excellenceframework](http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/excellenceframework).

By taking a holistic view of sustainable communities, the Excellence Framework enables projects to achieve excellence by considering the government's eight components of a sustainable community through a series of standards. The toolkit has been adopted by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and is currently being used across the region to projects applying for funding. The European Regional Development Programme (ERDF) is using the Framework to embed low carbon economic growth into the broader sustainable communities' agenda.

Julian Sykes from the Urban Regeneration Company 'Opportunity Peterborough' has used it to ensure that high standards are set for the new Fletton Key development in Peterborough. He says 'the Excellence Framework takes time to work through, but it is informative and helped us avoid missing crucial success elements of our project'.

Dawn Easter, Mid-Suffolk District Council's Economic Development Officer, was encouraged to use the Excellence Framework by Haven Gateway Partnership. The Council were putting together a bid to bring in further funding for the regeneration of Stowmarket Town Centre. Running through the initial prompt questions in the Excellence Framework helped them to develop a rounded bid and secure the funding to move to the next stage of development.

The Excellence Framework is divided into two parts. Stage one is a set of 24 broad questions to prompt thinking. Gill Eden from Bedford Borough Council used this part of the toolkit to complete an ERDF funding application for green business support. Having used the first set of questions, she says 'it concentrates the mind and helps you think through other issues applicable to your project'.

Used with local communities to develop community led plans, Joel Carré

from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity has been using the Sustainable Communities wheel (see above) to get local people to think about what will make a sustainable community. He says, 'I've used it as a useful checklist to make sure local communities consider all aspects of what makes a great place. It has gone down really well'.

The second part of the Excellence Framework introduces the user to a series of standards in each part of the wheel. These draw on existing national and regional guidance. Users are encouraged to select the standards that are appropriate to their project and show how they will achieve them. With over 40 standards to choose from, highlights include the BREEAM assessment, biodiversity guidance, following the *Code of Good Governance*, working well in partnership, reflecting on the CABE *Building for Life* criteria, working through the Sustainable Schools National Framework, using EEDA's Equality Impact Assessment Framework, applying the Living Place's new Culture and Sport Planning toolkit, and producing a quality Travel Plan. Users have found a wealth of useful information in one place. As well as standards, the Excellence Framework acts as a one stop shop for case studies and further best practice.



Bringing all this together, Inspire East, the regional centre of excellence for sustainable communities, has developed a series of training sessions on sustainable communities and the Excellence Framework. For more information about what's on offer this year, please contact Inspire East on 01223 484644. Inspire East's acting Executive Director, Mark Deas, is keen to see more people using the Excellence Framework, 'the more projects that appraise their quality, think about sustainable communities and draw on good practice, the more likely we are to develop quality places to live in which will stand the test of time'.

Rachel Leggett



## ParkCity Investing in Communities as if the Environment Mattered



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Borough Council

Green infrastructure is increasingly recognised as a key foundation for establishing healthy and popular communities. For some, the term provides a way to describe familiar urban greening initiatives. For others, the concept promises radical change – new ways to restructure communities into places which are more sustainable, and rise to the challenges of climate change, finding more renewable forms of energy, and the credit crunch.

Recognition for popularising the ‘green infrastructure’ term must go to the American Urban Land Institute’s senior resident fellow, Edward McMahon. When he published the key text on the subject in 2006, with the Conservation Fund’s Mark Benedict, he defined it as ‘an interconnected network of natural areas and other open spaces that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions, sustains clean air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife.’

McMahon gave the keynote speech at the first national conference on green infrastructure, ParkCity, hosted by CABE and Natural England in March. International practitioners came together with political leaders and technical specialists to discuss the role of green infrastructure as a key component in creating sustainable towns and cities.

McMahon was compelling on the economic value of green infrastructure. He illustrated it with the story of the Willamette River in Portland Oregon, which used to be separated from the downtown area by a multi-lane freeway. The replacement of the road with a 3Km long waterfront park has levered in US\$4 billion of adjacent development.

Better networks of public open space and natural green corridors connecting into the countryside were being pressed for a decade ago, by the

Urban Taskforce, to support more dense forms of development. But the concept is taking hold now with breathtaking speed. Whilst a number of planning policy statements already make reference to high quality green spaces, the most recent, *Development and Flood Risk* (PPS25), explicitly references the value of green infrastructure in delivering more sustainable forms of water management. Regional guidance too is starting to embed green infrastructure into policies, with the London Plan, supported by a dedicated supplementary planning guide for the East London Green Grid, providing perhaps the most comprehensive example to date.

The TCPA recently provided guidance on creating green infrastructure within their *Biodiversity by Design* guide, and CABE has published a significant amount of content on green infrastructure within their [sustainablecities.org.uk](http://sustainablecities.org.uk) resource.

The New Economics Foundation has called for a Green New Deal with resources for a vast environmental reconstruction programme. Nicholas Stern’s *Blueprint for a Safer Planet* suggests that ‘investment opportunities from low-carbon growth will play the role of the railways, electricity, the motorcar and information technology in earlier periods of economic history’. Even the G20’s statement committed to ‘make the transition towards clean, innovative, resource efficient, low carbon technologies and infrastructure’.

However, whilst the Chancellor’s April budget included a number of measures to help build a low carbon economy, including the world’s first carbon budgets, most of the funded initiatives concentrate on improving the efficiency of the built form, restructuring our manufacturing sector, and investing in more renewable and decentralised energy production.

So it is up to green infrastructure programmes to demonstrate their practical contribution to all this. Becoming efficient about energy use involves designing, valuing and working the urban landscape in a different way – for local fuel and food production, for instance - so that it is both better protected and more productive. It means working more creatively with green and blue spaces, streets, buildings with living roofs, civic squares, playgrounds, allotments, greenways and river corridors.

Ever more careful choices are needed

about public spend, which is why CABE argues for a shift in investment from grey to green infrastructure. The services provided by traditional and energy intensive forms of grey infrastructure are provided more sustainably by large tree canopies which provide solar shading to buildings, and living roofs for heavy duty insulation and rainfall absorption. Airport expansion and road widening are concerned with long distance movement so it is obvious that green will not always replace grey like for like. However, if we are serious about meeting our legally binding carbon targets, we will need to reprioritise public investment in infrastructure. Investing in cycling greenways instead of widening the M25 is about building a different kind of place. The current budget for M25 ‘lane gain’ would buy 3.2 million new street trees and save 1.2 million tonnes of carbon.

At the ParkCity conference, William McDonough, author of the *Hannover Principles* and *Cradle to Cradle*, pointed out that a low carbon world need not be a limiting one. There is an abundance of solar energy and fresh water, for instance. McDonough’s practice designed the world’s largest green roof for the Ford Motor Company at River Rouge to create a habitat, something that produced oxygen and purified water, rather than leave behind 10.5 acres of asphalt. Their approach eliminated the need for a massive storm water management scheme and saved Ford US\$35 million in capital expenditure. This kind of example starts to articulate and quantify the benefits from green infrastructure through simultaneously reducing long term operating costs and providing immediate environmental return. Recent work by the Natural Economy Northwest estimates that the region’s environment generates £2.6 billion annually in Gross Value Added, and supports 109,000 jobs.

Investment in green infrastructure creates more desirable business locations, generates new commercial sectors in tourism, recreation and conservation. It supports localised urban agriculture, as well as renewable energy resources. These kind of economic benefits will become ever clearer as we shift from a traditional grey to a more green, low carbon, infrastructure to serve our towns and cities.

Peter Neal is head of public space at CABE

## The Urban Design Interview: Andy Ward

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

I am a director of NEW Masterplanning, an urban design company that was set up with three colleagues after we left Terence O'Rourke three years ago.

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

I have always loved people-watching and my dad's experiences as a policeman showed me from an early age the effect the environment could have on people's behaviour. My mum can talk to anyone and impressed on me to see the positives in everyone. At the age of nine my friend's architect dad influenced my interest in design. My best memory of him was his skill at turning an empty cornflake packet (within minutes) into the head of an ox for our nativity play! And after that, I was hooked on becoming an architect.

I studied Architecture in the 80s at Oxford Polytechnic where I was subjected to many a difficult crit. from the urban design lecturers who helped out on the architecture course. After working for one large commercial company and then a local architect, I returned to Oxford Poly determined to learn all about urban design and beat the urban design lecturers at their own game. In the end, by 1990, I converted to urban design, got married and soon after joined Birmingham City Council as one of their first two in-house urban designers. The Council's City Centre Team, a mix of policy, design, development control officers and town managers worked together with the community under the stewardship of Les Sparks. The recession of the early 90s actually helped us argue for, plan and deliver mixed use schemes in Birmingham. The projects were enough motivation in themselves: Brindleyplace, The Bull Ring, Quarter Plans, Metro and the Mailbox. In 1999 I took up another challenge when Terry O'Rourke asked me to help build a team and reputation in urban design for his company.

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

I still get excited by drawing, meeting people and new places and generating ideas that bring together economic, social and environmental objectives in a compelling way.

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

An urban designer should draw and have

good creative, problem solving and negotiations skills. Above all you must have passion and courage to achieve.

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

We have got some interesting 'NEW' projects and I hope to be watching people enjoying the completed places we are working on. I would also like to take my wife on a world tour to say thank you as well as take a few more photographs!

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

Ian Bentley is a great example of a committed enthusiast who has made a difference. I know he is nothing like 'Dell-boy' but when I was studying, I found myself hearing 'you know it makes sense, Rodney' whenever Ian lectured or criticised my work. Not only does he talk with a lot of commercial sense, having once been a developer, but he has pushed the regeneration agenda for decades, influenced the academic success of Oxford Brookes and practised working with local communities and training local government, always it seems with a smile on his face.

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

The Oxford Town Trail Guides are a series of studies that use a simple mix of informative text, block plans and sketch views that encourage the visitor to experience the thrill of moving through a town. You are compelled to get involved; to consider the sorts of activities taking place; to feel the subtle effect of a narrowing street and appreciate the challenge of introducing new development into Oxford. They taught me that understanding a town and how it has evolved can change your perception of a place and identify the essence of what makes it special.

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

There are many towns and cities that I like but the one I have the fondest regard for is Oxford. Studying there guided my discovery of the city and fired my interest in urban design. Oxford is full of contrasts; it mixes old and new, urban and rural, public and intimate spaces. It demonstrates that a town can be beautiful when seen from the countryside surrounding it and benefits from a variety of green spaces very close to its centre. It's great to be in a city where it is the norm to walk, cycle or



even go running. Yes, it has benefited from the generosity and wealth of the University, but what is wrong with having good patrons who invest for the long term in our towns and cities?

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

I dislike out of town retail parks and most roundabouts because of their negative impact on the urban environment, the priority they give to use of the motor car and their waste of space.

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

'Seize the moment and don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today' is my Mum's advice, and it works. It helps when you get to that key moment in a meeting when you should speak up and make a difficult suggestion. In my experience the sooner a difficult issue is discussed the better the outcome.

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

It should concentrate on what differentiates it from the rest. With all these other alliances, academies, agencies and good practice guides coming out of our ears I fear the UDG is becoming a bit dull and lost in the mainstream.

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

Jose Mourinho – would be a 'special one'! I think he would have interesting perspectives on the cities he has worked and lived in. He understands the benefits of structure, organisation, team work and ambition and could apply his ability to spot what needs changing to make a difference.



## Sustainable Urban Design

Matthew Carmona poses some questions for educators

Today most conceptualisations of urban design include explicit reference to sustainability, so that sustainable urban design sits as an overarching imperative within a theoretical framework for urban design that already embraces well-established morphological, perceptual, social, and visual dimensions. For example, the ten general design principles for creating more liveable places identified a decade ago by the Urban Task Force demonstrated a clear emphasis on environmental concerns, which have gradually been adopted into national policy.

Yet despite this change in the policy context, the constituent professions of the built environment, and arguably built environment educators, have often been slow to incorporate issues of sustainability into their practice. Arguably some professional disciplines have been better than others; landscape and planning, for example, have generally been more tuned into this agenda than architecture and property. But even those disciplines with a better track-record have often failed to treat sustainability as anything more than a discrete, specialist, concern. Today, we need to ask ourselves:

Should we be teaching sustainability?

If yes, how do we relate sustainability to urban design?

What does this mean for our established approaches to teaching the subject?

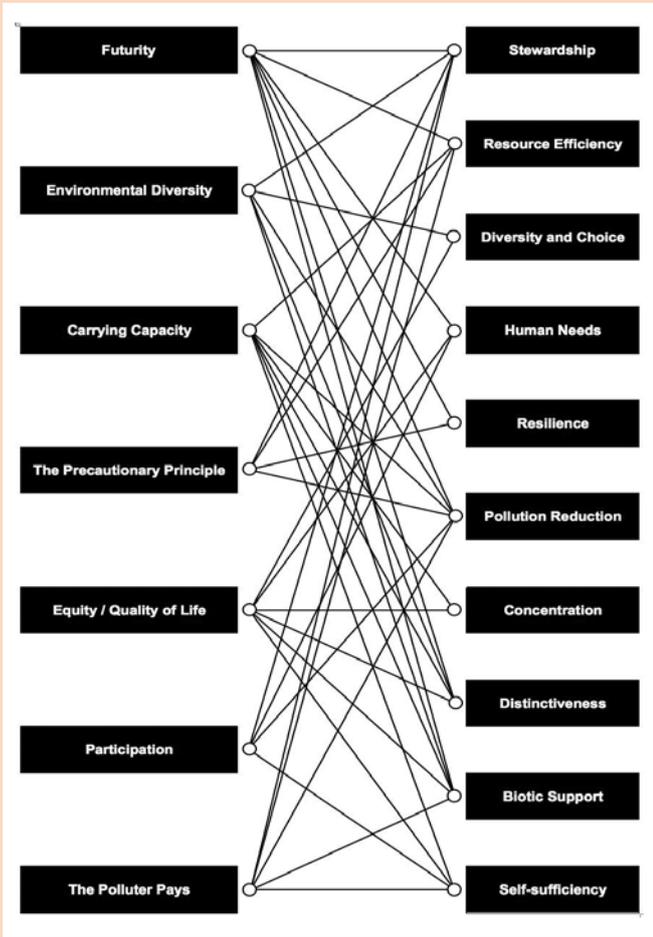
### SHOULD WE BE TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY?

Nothing is straightforward in this fast developing field, and arguments can be made both for and against many of the new policy and practice directions that have emerged; both from the perspective of whether sustainable principles are as laudable as much of the literature would

have us believe, but also as regards the potential for state intervention to make any difference. In his most recent book, the influential economist Nicolas Stern dismisses all such critiques as misguided voices of the uninformed, arguing instead that there is no serious doubt that emissions are growing as a result of human activity and that more greenhouse gases will lead to further global warming. An overwhelming consensus has gradually emerged amongst researchers and writers on many aspects of a sustainable urban design agenda, giving added legitimacy to developing policy and practice in the field.

Some argue that planning and to a lesser degree urban design have always pursued notions of sustainability and that their public interest *raison d'être* implies that concerns for environment, economy and society should be balanced. Ideas about the interpenetration of town and country, for example, can be traced back to the pioneers of the planning movement like Howard, Geddes and Unwin, as can notions of local social and economic sustainability (although not the terminology). Nevertheless, the recent proliferation of writing on concepts of sustainable development has firmly shifted the urban design agenda towards broader environmental concerns. As with planning, the sustainable agenda is giving the discipline a new and broadly accepted legitimacy, and one that is highly compatible with a discipline that emerged, at least in part, as a reaction to the unsustainable (anti-urban) development models of the mid and late 20th century.

However, if such notions exist in theory, more often than not they have been absent in practice. Instead they are compromised by the need to deliver outcomes largely through market processes, by public political agendas that prioritise economic growth coupled to social (rather than environmental) well-being, and by private



**Opposite page** Looking from one residential enclave to the next  
**Left** Sustainable tenets and design principles compared  
**Below** Sustainable tokenism, wind turbines in a sea of car parking



agendas that too often see the environment as someone else's problem. This has implicitly been reflected in urban design education where sustainability, until recently, has been largely absent from many built environment programmes. Nevertheless, as the damage being wreaked on the environment both locally and globally has become more apparent, notions of sustainability have moved up the public and political agenda and have led to a renewed questioning and refocusing of most professional remits; amongst them urban design.

**HOW DO WE RELATE SUSTAINABILITY TO URBAN DESIGN?**

This pressure for change has often come from the students themselves, rather than from the academic establishment or the professions. Thus sustainability has increasingly been featuring in pre-university education, and in the politics of the young, often to such a degree that well seasoned educators can feel swamped in a rising tide of enthusiasm for sustainable development, but ill prepared to harness it. The problem is compounded by the surfeit of writings on sustainable development with its own jargon-ridden language and disciplinary boundaries. The outcome can too easily be a tokenism in urban design education (as in practice) instead of a coherent strategy to address the subject.

In fact a number of commonly agreed and easily graspable tenets underpin notions of sustainable development. These include futurity, environmental diversity, carrying capacity, the precautionary principle, equity/quality of life, local empowerment, and the polluter pays. Relating these to the types of principles that have emerged in the growing sustainable urban design literature reveals a complex web of inter-relationships where each tenet relates in turn to a number of the sustainable design principles.

So, for example, the need to plan ahead and consider the impact of urban design today on the experience of future generations (futurity) concerns the careful stewardship of the environment through the ability of projects to enhance established environments and create manageable places that people will want to look after. It

relates to the need to design for energy efficiency because energy and resources are finite. It concerns human needs because sustainable environments are those that cater for human requirements alongside other sustainable objectives. It requires that environments are resilient because future needs remain unpredictable. It concerns attempts to reduce pollution because irreversible changes to the environment will most likely undermine future inheritance. It encompasses notions of local distinctiveness because what is special about place can easily be undermined by insensitive development. And it requires biotic (ecological) support, in that bio-diversity is often the first casualty of the over-intensive human occupation of the environment.

This reveals a broad agenda for a greater focus on sustainability in urban design education. It also reveals the aspirational nature of much of this agenda, which inevitably contains internal contradictions that can only be resolved through practice. For example, the desire for more concentrated patterns of development might unintentionally design-out opportunities for increasing bio-diversity or for sustainable drainage, design for passive solar gain may require more south-facing development, whilst human needs for a more sociable environment may necessitate a permeable grid. As such, principles of this nature can only ever represent a start of a design (or educational) process, and subsequently need to be reconciled with local contextual factors and development aspirations. It will be the contested and contradictory nature of the subject as much as its underpinning principles that should form the basis of discussions in the classroom.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR ESTABLISHED APPROACHES TO TEACHING URBAN DESIGN?**

Fundamental questions have also arisen about whether this new imperative for the design agenda can be addressed within the 'making places' tradition of urban design that now dominates practice and education, or whether an entirely new orthodoxy is required, one that places sustainability, rather than place-making, at its heart. One



**Left** Multi-functional infrastructure: bridge used as connection, ecological resource, and retail space  
**Opposite page** Pond Square, Highgate

of the best known 'sustainability examples', BedZED is based on a continuous structure of south-facing terraces that deliberately eschews its suburban context and in effect establishes itself as a self-contained zero-carbon enclave.

Other models are increasingly being put forward by high-profile architects that either see sustainable urban design as a return to object-architecture, for example Ken Yeang's 'green skyscrapers', or as technology-driven settlements on a 'total design' model, with designed lifestyles to match, for example Arups' zero carbon city in Dongtan, Shanghai. Foster and Partners' Masdar city in Abu Dhabi combines both, where the whole city is viewed as a single object in which technology enables residents to live carbon-neutral lives in the middle of a desert. These technology-driven, object-design models of sustainable urban form will undoubtedly prove seductive in architecture studios around the world, but may fall into the trap of once again seeing the city solely as an engineering and physical/ aesthetic design problem.

All these examples suggest a break with urban design as place-making, at least to the extent that form and impact rather than people and place are the priority. However, none of the sustainable urban design principles suggested above necessarily imply that concerns for place-making – making real places for people – can not also be met. Adam Ritchie, for example, has argued that we need to analyse the ingredients that make a successful place and work with them once again whilst being aware that we are now dealing with modern issues that affect the recipe: a changing climate and the need for more people to live in a more humane city environment. The authors of the influential *Urban Design Compendium 2* conclude that there is a common misconception that a conflict exists between principles of good urban design and an optimal approach to environmental sustainability. They argue, for example, that it is perfectly possible to engage with street-based design whilst also achieving optimal thermal performance.

What may be required, therefore, is a more sophisticated and multi-functional view about urban environments and their constituent elements: people using their own homes to generate power, green open spaces used for water recycling, neighbourhoods accommodating multiple land uses, and public spaces supporting wildlife, etc. Moreover, with climate change now impacting on, and changing, local environments around the world, there will be need for flexibility, and to learn the lessons from history about what characteristics of urban form can be used in different climatic circumstances to modify local climates. This new layer of complexity will not be easy for educators or their

students to grapple with. We need to combine innovation born through research with an in-depth knowledge of how people use and value space – good urban design and modern technology combined. The urban design studio in professional programmes worldwide would provide the perfect environment for such experimentation to take place.

## CONCLUSION

Around the world, the education of our future built environment professionals has slowly come to incorporate issues of sustainability. This paper has argued that sustainability is no longer an optional extra, and needs to be seen as an integral part of the education of urban designers (from whichever professional discipline they originate). In this respect good urban design is fundamentally compatible with the core precepts of sustainability, just as sustainability is with those of place-making, and this leads to a broad, holistic agenda for taught programmes. In other words, what is required is an evolution rather than a revolution in the way we teach urban design, but one with potentially profound consequences for us all.

At UCL we continue to grapple with these new challenges and in 2010 will introduce a new one-year Masters programme in Sustainable Urbanism in order to deliver a more integrated response to the teaching of design and sustainability ([www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning](http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning)). The MSc will bring together three critical dimensions of sustainable urbanism:

- Sustainable thinking: the latest thinking and debates on urban sustainability, from policy, research and practice perspectives
- Sustainable places: the study of what this actually means on the ground through the creation of real projects and places
- Delivering sustainability: a focus on the skills and knowledge required to actually deliver sustainable development

The aim is to impart the necessary skills and knowledge to enable graduates to engage as team members in the types of large and complex sustainable urban projects that are increasingly being planned across the world, whilst also equipping them to engage in research, policy and regulatory activities relating to the field. As such it would address a major and increasingly obvious skills gap, helping in the process to deliver the new generation of sustainable place-makers that we so badly need.

**Prof Matthew Carmona, Head of the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL,  
[m.carmona@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.carmona@ucl.ac.uk)**



## CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS: 40 YEARS ON

Derek Abbott and John MacBryde argue for better  
Conservation Area Character Appraisals

It is now over forty years since the Civic Amenities Act 1967 proposed the designation of Conservation Areas, for the protection of entire areas, as distinct from individual buildings and other artefacts. These areas have burgeoned, now numbering over 7500 throughout Great Britain. The Council for British Archaeology followed suit with a short list of Historic Cities, a sort of non-statutory listing of entire settlements but this never achieved legal status or more general recognition. Later still, UNESCO applied World Heritage status to the more nationally important city centres such as Westminster, Bath and Edinburgh but this has had little direct relevance to development planning and development control.

### ORIGINS OF CONSERVATION AREAS

The original 1967 statute rather puzzlingly used the words: 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. But why the implicit dichotomy between the seemingly twin concepts of preservation (of existing character) and enhancement (of future appearance)? Despite the best efforts of English Heritage, very little indeed has been done by the vast majority of local planning authorities to do more than run a red line around their special areas on an OS map, without clearly (or at all) defining either their architectural or their historic special interest.

The next year (1968) was a milestone in British planning history. The new Town and Country Planning Act brought in a two-tier development plan system designed to operate within the new two-tier local authority structure. The effect of this new planning system was

to change development plans radically. Previously they had principally been plans (= maps) backed up by written statements of policy; now they were to be essentially policy statements backed up by maps and diagrams. This shift was accompanied by a move away from the need to get plans approved by government in favour of much more local choice.

### A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

Oddly, the chance was not then taken fully to integrate recent local powers of designating conservation areas with the new plan preparation and adoption system. The two strands of planning policy (and the necessary statutory powers) were kept strictly and unwisely, completely separate. Later still, the whole business of conservation area designation and listed building protection was consolidated in the Planning Acts of 1990. Practice within both county and district councils was to examine their respective lists of historic buildings and then to identify significant groups as conservation areas. Area-specific policy statements and design guidance followed slowly, if at all. Development plans merely give limited and general policy advice, mostly in line with and commonly based on, national policies. Government guidance was slow in coming forward. The new Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (aka English Heritage (EH)) formed in 1986 – fortuitously rescued from oblivion the respected GLC Historic Buildings Division when all the metropolitan counties were abolished.

The EH advice on the subject has not been universally or indeed at all widely followed. Most character assessments have taken the literal form of slavishly cataloguing, much in the dogged style of the late Sir



Nikolaus Pevsner, all listed buildings and groups of such buildings. These documents generally have no maps or diagrams other than the usual OS 1:2500 scale base map red-lined to show boundaries and (occasionally) with listed buildings and sometimes their settings marked in black. These are grossly inadequate for both development planning and control purposes. It seems blatantly obvious that the very least that developers, the general public and planners have a right to expect is (a) what is to be preserved and (b) what might be enhanced in each area.

"The absence of clear, readily available guidelines for the treatment of many (sic) conservation areas makes it difficult both for members of the public to assess what may or may not be considered favourably by the planning authority, and for the authority itself satisfactorily to control inappropriate development proposals. (recent advice from Historic Scotland).

#### **PRESERVE OR ENHANCE: WHY NOT BOTH?**

In other words, what is good and what is bad about an historic area? Perhaps that gives the clue to seemingly odd but virtually total inaction. Value judgements of this sort involve unwelcome and possibly pejorative assessments of architectural worth or value. Added to this is the question of expertise. It takes a fair amount of knowledge, skill and long practice to construct an architectural analysis or an urban design statement based on existing settlements. The gradual decline in design awareness and training in many town planning courses have led to a dearth of suitably skilled planners in the front line of many authorities. This is perhaps an area which the Urban Design Group and private planning consultancies are uniquely placed to fill and to exploit.

#### **AN EXAMPLE OF AN AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

The accompanying sketches, based on the twin Highgate Village Conservation Areas in North London, are given as a working case study. Analysis of (a) land form (b) key street pictures (c) listed buildings (d) significant landscape (e) structural open space (f) unlisted buildings of local merit or group value (g) traffic management measures and, not least, (h) unworthy or intrusive features may be separately indicated on a skeleton OS base map at a suitable scale (in this case 1:2500). A process of synthesis may follow, avoiding if possible any gross

overloading of graphical data. The composite diagram thus constructed may be used as a key diagram to identify the main elements of guidance on best practice in area designation and management. EH has from time to time helpfully advised local authorities to bring forward detailed plans and area assessments to assist in conservation area designation (then as now, shared between counties, districts and unitary authorities). This advice emphasises the need for graphical illustration as much as text, for conservation policy to complement the purely verbal or statistical content of the appraisal document.

#### **THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

The new planning system includes local development frameworks (LDFs) comprising development plan documents (DPDs) backed up by supplementary planning documents (SPDs). Both these and Action Area Plans (AAPs) may provide the framework where significant change or conservation (ie regulated change) is needed. Advice on these procedures are given in two recent publications by English Heritage.

This new, third generation development plan system may well facilitate the survey and analytical processes described above. This is especially relevant to the illustrated Highgate case study. Here we have a single hilltop urban village entity split between two local planning authorities. Both have matching conservation areas, designated in the same year (1968) but with totally divergent policy statements and not a lot of evidence of fruitful (or indeed any) collaboration or consultation, much to the annoyance and understandable outrage of various local amenity bodies and much to the needless frustration of ideally joint activities such as development planning, traffic management, public transport provision and on-street parking control.

#### **DESCRIPTION AND PRESCRIPTION**

One fairly valid distinction should be made in any future area character assessments. It is obvious what are the descriptive or more generally agreed or accepted elements of such appraisals. What is likely to be very much more controversial is any prescriptive content eg traffic management and notations which have more direct development control implications. This is not necessarily a bad thing; the process of preparing and adopting detailed supplementary planning guidance



Statutorily listed Buildings and their immediate settings

Buildings and development of local architectural interest

Ugly or incongruous buildings or other features

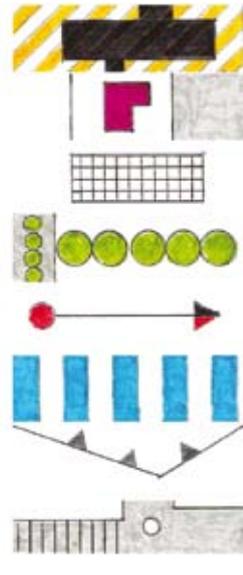
Significant groups or trees or other landscape features

Important views and vistas out of or within conservation area

Large or significant areas of open land or public open space

Extensive barriers to access or free pedestrian movement

Street frontages or enclosure of special townscape interest



Far left Contour map of Highgate  
Left and above 1:2500 scale character appraisal diagram of Highgate village

might in future quite properly and usefully engage the active attention of the local resident population and secure their more active input and commitment to conservation. This might encourage proactive rather than simply reactive responses to future development plan preparation and might indeed be reflected in Statements of Community Involvement. Or is that an idle hope?

#### BRITISH AND IRISH CONSERVATION AREA PRACTICES

Although broadly similar, British and Irish practice in historic area conservation differs in some important respects. Firstly, area designation in Ireland is much more fully integrated with the preparation of development plans. Secondly, both area designation (called Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) in Eire) and the listing of historic buildings (called Protected Structures) are locally determined. As in England, Scotland and Wales, central government advice has also been to bring forward detailed area appraisals. Like the latter countries, Ireland has published detailed guidance on policy formulation but such guidance documents (PPG15 in England and PG9 in Eire) are studiously silent on the precise way in which actual area assessment and graphical presentation is to be carried out.

There are other subtle differences in development plan practice between the two countries. In Ireland, local plans are much more specifically map-based. They also include policies to do with traffic management and public transport proposals in urban areas (which was positively encouraged in the DoE *Development Plans Manual* (HMSO:1970) but most regrettably and very rarely figures in local planning documents over here).

#### CONCLUSIONS

This article is a plea for better and more universal best practice in what should be a basic exercise in progressive urban design. The skills exist in both public and private sectors of planning; all that is needed is firm practice and policy advice from Central Government in the manner repeatedly advocated by English Heritage, Historic Scotland and indeed other expert bodies over the past half century. The clear advantages of better Conservation Area Character Assessments would be as follows:

- Better design guidance for intending developers
- Enhanced opportunities for public participation
- Increased protection of the architectural heritage
- An overdue return to more 'plan-based' local policy statements and proposals
- A model for urban design appraisal and analysis
- More explicit bases for designation and extension of conservation areas throughout urban areas
- Useful models for future Design and Access Statements in Architecturally Sensitive Areas

The above conclusions are based on key documents recently produced by English Heritage (*Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* (2006)). With some modification, this advice is likely to be contained in a forthcoming revision of PPG15 first published as long ago as 1994. It is to be hoped that such revision will not only include better and fuller guidance, on the lines of the English Heritage publications, but also much more graphic content, an excellent model for which was provided in the *Development Plans Manual* of nearly forty years ago, which has not ever been matched, far less bettered, in subsequent policy publications.

A final thought. When Duncan Sandys MP first conceived the idea of Conservation Areas in his 1967 Civic Amenities Act, it was of necessity and fundamentally a retrospective review of townscape. Now, 40 years on, why not expand the process, both in time and space? There is no need for an unofficial 30-year time horizon as there is with listed buildings. For example, one of the first Neighbourhood Units, designed by Frederick Gibberd in Harlow New Town, is now so designated. More recently, in Highgate itself, an outstanding new residential development was included in the Conservation Area a mere 3 years after its construction. Why not then integrate the analytical process exemplified by Alan Stones *Residential Design Quality Assessment* (*Urban Design* 109) into Conservation Area designation or extension? What greater accolade for good urban design than to accord it instant recognition?

John MacBryde is a consultant planning inspector with An Bord Pleanála and Derek Abbott was conservation officer with North Devon DC



## Blots on the landscape

Lee Pugalis argues that the empty property rates damage our cities

Since April 2008, when the Rating (Empty Properties) Act came into effect in England and Wales, empty commercial property has been liable for the full business rate following an initial rate-free period of three months, or six months for industrial premises. Previously, empty commercial property received 100 per cent relief from business rates for the first three months and only liable to a 50 per cent rate thereafter. Industrial units, previously received 100 per cent rate exemption in perpetuity. As of April 2009, non-domestic properties with a rateable value of less than £15,000 will receive a one year rate relief holiday. Analysing these reforms I investigate a scenario that has been dubbed 'Bombsite Britain' by practitioners as many property owners opt to demolish their buildings in order to avoid the stealth tax. With other property owners resorting to constructive vandalism, including removing building roofs, I investigate the visual and design impact this is having on Britain's urban landscape. I make the case that these blots on the urban landscape are having a detrimental impact on Britain's urban renaissance and go against Government sustainability and design quality aspirations.

### BOOMING BRITAIN

Not too long ago Britain was booming: Lord Richard Rogers' urban renaissance was beginning to bear fruit with core cities, such as Birmingham, Leeds and Newcastle, undergoing economic revitalisation, urban rebranding and aesthetic refiguration. Since the introduction of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) the significance of urban design quality has continued to rise up the political agenda and influence mainstream planning, regeneration and development policy. Urban design is being recast as a sales tool in market differentiation to promote new urban images that are closely abounded with the marketers' descriptors of the city. It is apparent that the redesign of city spaces is taking place to stabilise market conditions, particularly in regeneration areas where perceived risk is a major barrier to investment. The role of place quality, urban

attractiveness and local distinctiveness are now key components of 21st century regeneration and economic development strategies. With this wave of optimism and Government confidence that Britain's town and cities were undergoing a noticeable urban renaissance, in 2006 Gordon Brown, then Treasurer, announced empty property rate relief reforms.

### THEORY AND RATIONALE

The theory underpinning the Government's decision to modernise empty property rate relief is quite simple, rather too simple many would argue. The Government argued that reforms would 'provide a positive incentive to bring vacant shops, offices, factories and warehouse back into use, and to remove distortions in the efficient operation of commercial property markets'. The insinuation was that proprietors of empty commercial and industrial property were happy holding onto empty properties because of the generous tax reliefs available. Arguing that empty properties are blots on the urban landscape, the Government claimed that reducing empty property rate relief would help reduce rents, improve market efficiency and support urban renaissance objectives. Industry bodies, such as the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the British Property Federation (BPF), local authorities and regeneration agencies were all incensed by the reforms. Suspicious that changes to empty property rate relief were purely a revenue raising exercise, various concerns were put forward including the following:

- Arrest speculative development and physical regeneration schemes
- Property owners deliberately damaging their buildings to remove them from the ratings list
- Reducing build-quality thresholds and standards
- Premature demolition of premises

What is noticeable from these broad concerns is the urban quality strand that runs through them.



**Opposite page** Blots on the landscape. Sunderland.  
Photograph: Lee Pugalis

**Above** Urban site clearance. Photograph: Lee Pugalis

**Right** Bulldozer at work ©cmegens



### BOMBSITE BRITAIN

Since the reforms were executed a little over a year ago, evidence compiled from various sources indicate an alarming frequency of pre-emptive strikes by empty property owners. For example, a recent Corporate Real Estate Survey conducted by CBI & GVA Grimley claims that 21 per cent of businesses surveyed stated that they were already demolishing empty property or were considering doing so. In addition, the Urban Regeneration Companies' Chief Executives Group have compiled a dossier of specific case studies to confirm that property owners are indeed demolishing properties in order to avoid rates. Demonstrating the spatial extent of demolitions, the dossier cites examples in respect of industrial units and office space in Swindon, Leicester, Southend and Birmingham. In Southend an owner recently invested more than £500,000 preparing an office block for residential conversion, but with the introduction of 100 per cent rates after three months, the owner decided it was more prudent to demolish it than incur the £16,000 monthly rates bill. Buildings at Birmingham's old Longbridge West Works have also been ripped down as the financial implication of standing empty for extended periods is too great a risk.

Another notable example is the demolition of around a fifth of the 750,000 sq.ft. Alexandra Business Park in the Pallion regeneration area of Sunderland. Faced with annual empty property rates in excess of £150,000, industrial landlord O&H Q7, took the decision to call in the bulldozers even though they recognised that the premises had not outlived their productive life. The most prominent example is the demolition of a London pub. Now reduced to rubble, the owner of the former Lightning pub in Ealing, erected a sign with the slogan: 'Sorry, Mr Brown. No empty rates on this one!'

### VISUAL AND DESIGN IMPACTS

The demolition of empty properties is perhaps the most dramatic visual impact that the reforms are having on Britain's town and cities, but the ramifications for urban design go much deeper. Sites are being cleared of all vacant premises at the earliest possible phase of the regeneration land assembly process. Where previously such buildings would be retained and leased out to smaller businesses on short term agreements, the present situation is resulting in sites being flattened and cordoned off. These blots on the landscape are having a disastrous impact on place quality and urban aesthetics, and impeding the renaissance of British towns and cities. Fenced-off, cleared and rubble strewn sites disrupt urban townscapes acting as a bad neighbour to adjacent areas. Urban permeability is also disrupted

by these secured sites and the chance to generate casual encounters and informal social activities is lost.

The psychological impact of barriers, such as razor wire fencing, can also contribute to a place acquiring a negative reputation. Once this occurs it is extremely difficult to reverse public perceptions and these mental repositories can often outlive material realities. To a large extent, this is the task that most area-based regeneration initiatives are set. Whether overriding objectives are to attract tourists, sustain and develop a business district, or improve a run-down high-street, a central thrust of all contemporary regeneration strategies will unsurprisingly incorporate a reimagining or rebranding campaign. The imposition of empty property rates appears to fly in the face of wider urban regeneration goals, renaissance ambitions and urban design standards.

The Urban Regeneration Companies' Chief Executives Group argues that it is not only low quality buildings in marginal places that are being demolished, but also landmark buildings in need of renovation. Such iconic structures often incur extensive void periods prior to redesign and adaptation, and therefore demolition is often a more financially attractive proposition. The loss of buildings of architectural merit and local cultural heritage is a particular worry. Such short term thinking goes directly against Government sustainability objectives where the adaptation of obsolete premises for new uses is vigorously promoted.

### RATES, REGENERATION AND RECESSION

The reforms pose a significant impediment to Britain's urban renaissance, penetrating much deeper than the immediate visual unsightliness that vacant development lots generate. As the country languishes in an economic recession, many speculative development schemes are being mothballed and public sector-led regeneration programmes are stalling. Thus, empty property rates are needed like a hole in the head. If the Government is dedicated to regenerating towns and cities, committed to high quality design and serious about developing sustainable communities then it needs to have a major rethink about the Rating (Empty Properties) Act. The rate holiday for premises with a rateable value of less than £15,000, operational from April 2009 to April 2010, is welcome, but too little too late. Unfortunately the empty property rate relief fiasco is a further example of un-joined up policy.

Lee Pugalis is based at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle, and is the economic policy lead for County Durham Economic Partnership. The views expressed are his own

# BIG CITY PLANNING

On 4th July 1909 Daniel Burnham, Edward Bennett, and the Commercial Club of Chicago launched their manifesto for the future of the region, with the publication of the Plan of Chicago. The Burnham Plan as it is often simply referred became a landmark document not only within the USA, but around the world, setting an agenda for developing cities across the globe. It set out proposals for the transformation of a city region based on the principles of good circulation, public spaces of the highest quality and a sustainable environment, establishing these as the prerequisites for creating a place in which residents could prosper, both financially and morally. It identified that Chicago could not stand alone, but needed the support of the wider city region to thrive. It was groundbreaking in registering the link between the quality of design and place, and the commercial value of the land and buildings within it - the plan was not commissioned by the city authorities or local landowners, but rather by a driven group of businessmen who recognised that the route to prosperity was through a clear, bold vision that captured the imagination of everyone.

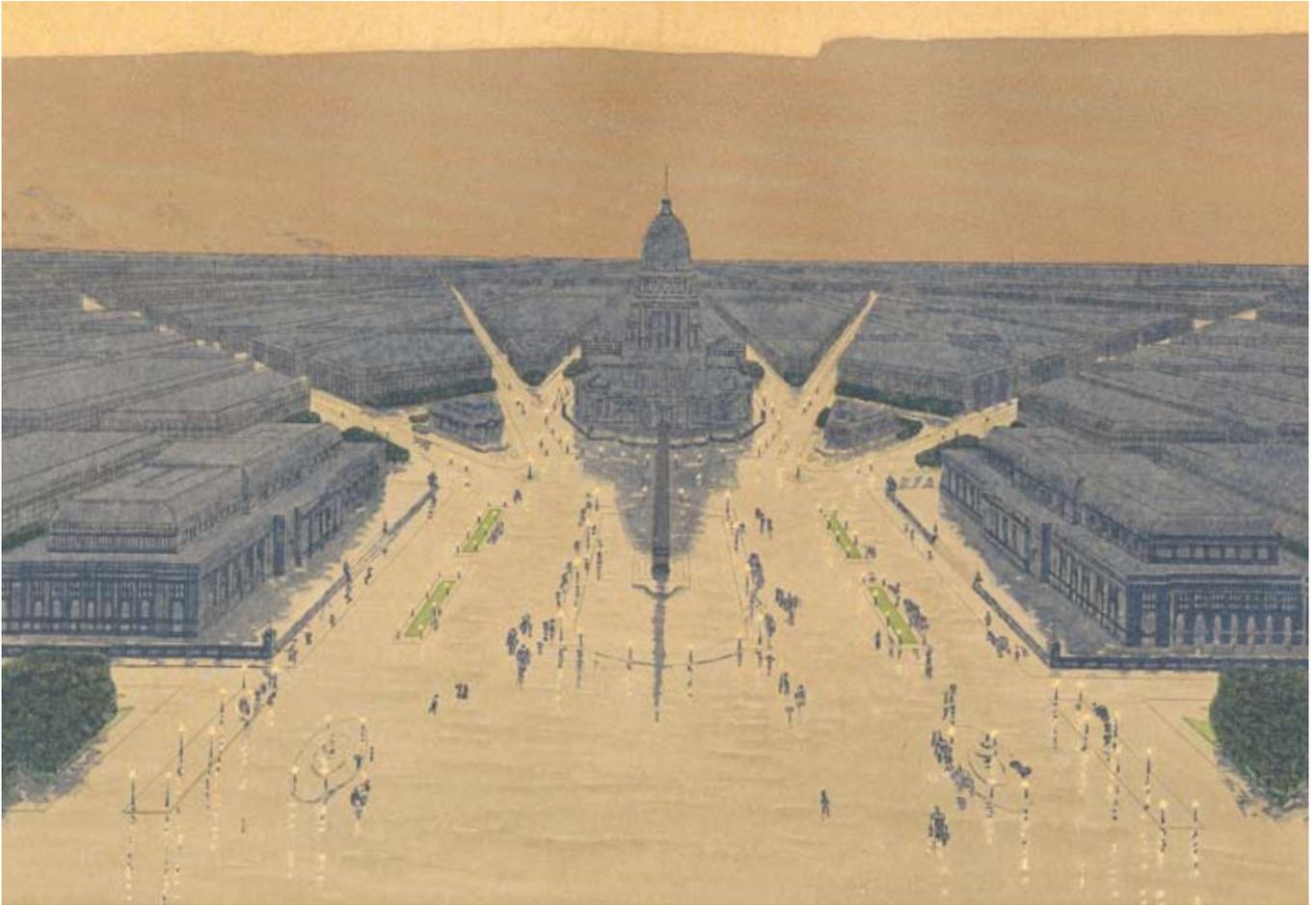
Some commentators have said that modern urban planning began with the publication of the Burnham Plan, and that the document led to a revolution in urban design thinking and practice that can be seen in many of the great planned cities of the 20th century. It certainly was innovative both in content and composition, and was a highlight of the City Beautiful movement that swept America at the turn of the century seeking not architectural beauty for its own sake, but rather as a social control device for creating moral and civic virtue among the growing urban populations. It seems particularly appropriate to be discussing these issues as we enter a new era where old models for design and delivery of our cities are being challenged, and where new thinking and fresh ideas are needed. The Plan's 100th anniversary has given metropolitan Chicago an unparalleled opportunity to recapture the spirit of imagination and innovation that the Burnham Plan represents, and is driving a yearlong event programme dedicated to the plan, its history and legacy.

The Burnham Plan Centennial will be a great celebration, but it is also an opportunity for all urban design professionals to consider what the past 100 years have shown us in designing on the grandest of scales, and to look forward to the challenges of the next century. To succeed in the global competition for jobs, prosperity, and quality of life for all, we must have inspiring and well-accepted plans that will produce actions and that will inspire others to deliver and achieve. This edition of *Urban Design* will be a celebration of the Burnham Plan and its legacy, a review of the century of big city planning that followed its publication and a look forward to the social, economic and environmental challenges that planning the cities of tomorrow pose for us all. As we face the ongoing issue of population growth, increasing urbanisation and environmental pressures it seems that never has Daniel Burnham's famed phrase 'Make No Little Plans' been more appropriate.

**PAUL REYNOLDS**

# BOLD PLANS, BIG DREAMS

The Burnham Plan Centennial Committee celebrates the Chicago plan at 100



Only 1,650 copies of the Plan of Chicago were ever printed, but despite this Daniel Burnham's 1909 document, co-authored by Edward Bennett and produced in collaboration with the Commercial Club of Chicago, proposed many of the city's most distinctive features that can be seen today. Its lakefront parks and roadways, the Navy Pier, and Magnificent Mile – a self-proclaimed Great Avenue of the World – are all legacies of the groundbreaking publication.

The Plan defined the City Beautiful movement that combined neo-classical aesthetic ideas with the modern goals of productivity, efficiency, public health and civic pride – goals that are again coming to the fore in today's modern city planning, and are increasingly seen as vital parts of truly sustainable development. While the Plan exemplifies the aspirations of elite members of urban societies to improve their domains, it also reflects the circumstance of its particular moment in history – a time when urbanisation and industrialisation were sweeping across the United States and Western Europe.

The story that lies behind the Plan is one of optimism, belief in a city and its people, and a determination to not only direct the urban experience but make major corrections to its course through rational reform and ambitious proposals.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PLAN

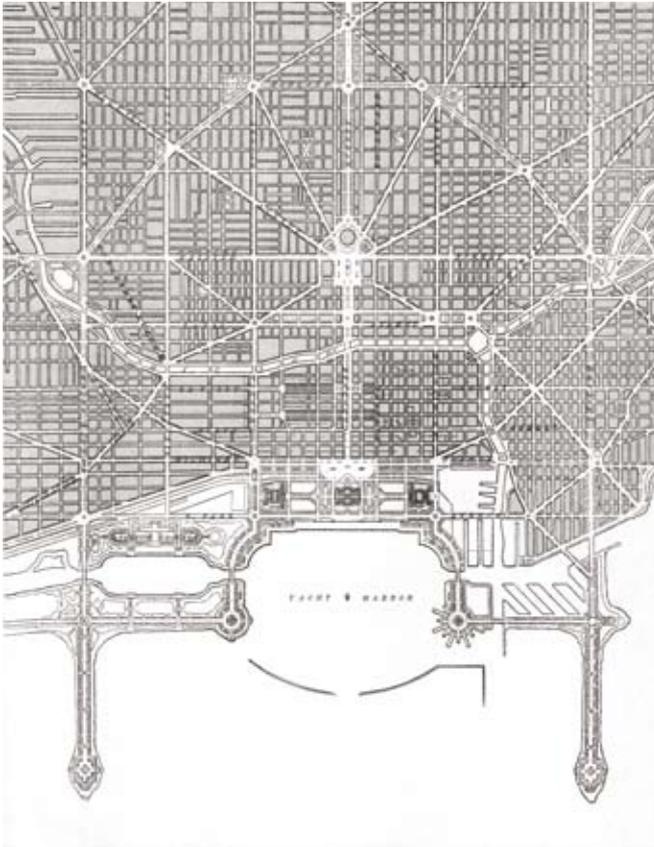
The beginnings of the Plan of Chicago, or the Burnham Plan as it is commonly known, can be found in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, an event that attracted 21 million visitors

awed by the clean, electrically lighted, harmoniously planned grounds of the World's Fair. Interest in city planning took root across the USA, and Daniel Burnham, Director of Works for the fair, became nationally renowned for his planning skills.

Despite his commercial success across the U.S., Burnham was constantly distracted by trying to find solutions to the growing problems of his home city, Chicago. Immediately after the World's Fair, a plan to connect Grant and Jackson Parks with a lakefront parkway attracted attention, but no results. In 1906 Burnham finally managed to secure the sponsorship necessary to undertake a comprehensive study of the city, from the newly formed Commercial Club of Chicago, an organisation that still exists today comprised of senior business, professional, educational and cultural leaders who seek to address social and economic issues of importance to the Chicago region.

Burnham brought his assistant Bennett back from San Francisco, and together they established a base in rooms

The monumental Civic Centre was one part of the Plan that was never realised



**Above** Burnham's master plan for Chicago  
**Opposite page** Seductive renderings by Jules  
 Guerin give the Plan much of its impact

built on the roof of the Railway Exchange Building. They hired draughtsmen and began collecting information from officials around the world; experts came to offer ideas and tracing after tracing was made over street maps of the city, looking for the most logical solutions to the physical layout and infrastructure needs of the metropolis. On July 4, 1909, the Plan of Chicago was ceremoniously presented to the city, and following its launch the Commercial Club's influential members pushed for recognition of the Plan and worked tirelessly for adoption of its recommendations into formal legislation and building code. This was the beginning of a programme of physical and social change that is still going on to this day.

It was Burnham's ambition that the plan should not only establish a physical change framework for the city, but should also shape the way its people envision and experience the cityscape and urban life itself. As an advocate of the City Beautiful movement, Burnham believed in monumental grandeur, and that delivering such beautification could promote a harmonious social order that would increase the quality of life and help to remove social ills that he felt blighted his city.

## THE PLAN AS DOCUMENT

The Plan of Chicago did not invent solutions to all of the region's problems. Some, particularly social and housing needs, were considered beyond the scope of the document, and there were a number of sections that Burnham drafted that failed to make it into the final document. However, the very recognition of the significance and importance of these aspects in the document made it stand out from previous plans. One of its striking aspects was the combination of precedent and ideology that were skilfully illustrated to underpin the ideas that it contained. For example, to illustrate his ideas on traffic circulation Burnham included theoretical diagrams of major streets in European cities – Paris, Berlin, Moscow and London.

Burnham was an advocate of re-imagining the city, and one whole chapter of the Plan was given over to the history and background of city planning, showing how the great European cities had benefited from improved circulation and gracious public space. He heralded the work of Haussmann in Paris, and likened the problems that he overcame to those that were being faced in Chicago. He even talked of the missed opportunities, including Wren's famous proposals for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, which he said were missed by the "perverse self-interest of the then citizens of London".

The Chicago Plan worked at both macro and micro scales. Detailed maps showed the reconfiguration of city streets and railroad lines, and specific street and harbour improvements were shown to serve the central area. Beyond the city limits the Plan described highways radiating throughout and encircling the Chicago region, and parks and harbour facilities scaled for the metropolitan area's future needs.

While the Plan's prose was convincing, it was the array of illustrations that made it memorable. Maps and diagrams were supplemented with birds-eye views, allowing readers to see a city that was beautiful and orderly but nonetheless recognizably

**Maps and diagrams were supplemented with birds-eye views, allowing readers to see a city that was beautiful and orderly but nonetheless recognizably Chicago**

Chicago. The importance of this visual enrichment is a lesson often missed in today's city planning documents that can often be heavy in text and light in good quality illustration, yet it is acknowledged that those that do have the best visual content also tend to be those that get the greatest recognition and support.

## PROMOTING THE VISION

The Plan's dramatic and complex proposals to reshape the metropolis fit the spirit of a place and a people that were used to big engineering solutions for overcoming civic problems. Within the memory of many of its readers, Chicago had raised itself 10 feet out of the mud, tunnelled two miles under the lake for fresh water, rebuilt a third of the city after the Great Fire of 1871 and reversed the flow of an entire river. All this plus Burnham's own achievement of transforming a swamp into the world's biggest ever Fair. The city's leaders were sure Chicago was destined to become the world's largest city, having grown from just 4,470 inhabitants in 1830 to over 1 million in 1890, and by the time the Plan was to be published more than doubled to 2.1 million.



Upon its publication both the Commercial Club and Burnham himself undertook tireless promotion of the Plan. On November 1, 1909, the City Council approved the appointment of 328 men selected as members of the Chicago Plan Commission, broadly representative of all the business and social interests of the city.

The Plan's advocates were tireless in giving slide talks to any group that would listen. Promotional brochures were sent to all the city's property owners and renters paying more than \$25 per month. Articles in newspapers and magazines showcased the improvements and even a short film 'a tale of one city' was shown over and over in the city's movie houses. A textbook summarising the Plan, Wacker's *Manual of the Plan of Chicago*, was adopted by city schools and a whole generation of eighth graders were taught the benefits of the plan.

For decades, the Plan Commission was advised by Burnham's protégé Bennett, particularly on constructing the projects that the Plan promoted, and he fiercely defended the Plan's core principles even as that eventually led to conflict with the commission itself. His use of neoclassical elements for modern infrastructure – from park viaducts to bridgehouses to Wacker Drive – brought the Plan's rich illustrations to life.

#### IMPLEMENTING IDEAS

Trying to determine the extent to which the Plan was delivered is a complex task. Some of the projects that did get built were legacies from earlier ideas, proposals that had been assimilated into the Plan but that cannot be solely attributed to it. Examples include the 'boulevarding' of Michigan Avenue, the creation of new parkland at the lakefront with fill, and the landscaping of Grant Park in a formal rather than natural style.

However, in general there are six recognised principal points set out in the Plan of Chicago where projects have been delivered:

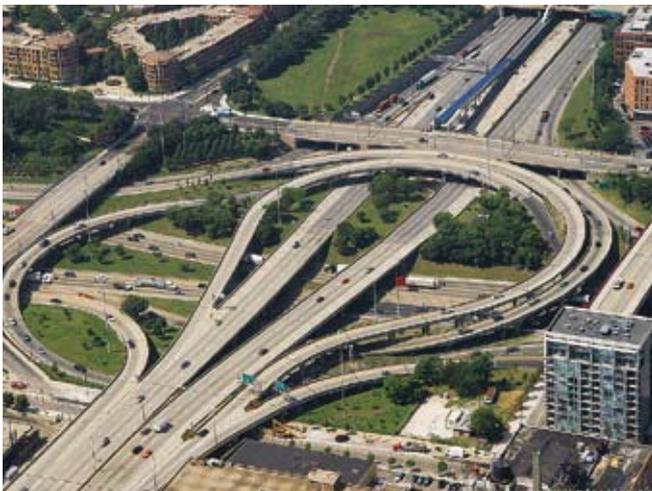
Improvement of the lakefront. 'The Lakefront by right belongs to the people', wrote Burnham. 'Not a foot of its shores should be appropriated to the exclusion of the people'. The plan recommended expanding the parks along the Lake Michigan shoreline with landfill, which was done in the early 20th century. Today, of the city's 47km of lakefront, all but 6km are public parkland and this achievement is widely regarded as the Plan's most treasured legacy.

A regional highway system. Chicago's streets were wide and well distributed by European standards, but the busy river and extensive rail yards created serious congestion. The plan considered Chicago as the centre of a region extending 120 km from the city centre. At the dawn of the automobile age, the

plan diagrammed both radial and circumferential highways for the region. However, the agencies that built and improved highways in the 1910s and 1920s do not appear to have been guided to build along the specific routes recommended in the plan.

Improvement of railway terminals. The plan drew on technical studies previously done by others, including a plan for competing railroads to pool usage of tracks for greater efficiency in freight handling. In addition, the plan detailed the consolidation of Chicago's six intercity railroad passenger terminals into new complexes west of the Loop and south of Roosevelt Road. A new Chicago Union Station was finished in 1925, but no other stations were consolidated or relocated.

New outer parks. The movement to purchase and preserve the natural areas that became the Cook County Forest Preserves was well under way as the plan was being written. The plan includes those proposals and also calls for the expansion of the city's park and boulevard system, which had been first established in the 1870s by engineer William Le Baron Jenney. Since density 'beyond a certain point results in disorder, vice and disease,' the Plan claimed, 'The establishment of adequate park area is necessary'. By the time the Plan was published in 1909, the city had enveloped the original ring of parks, and visionaries were advocating the purchase and creation of new wooded areas in the wider region. The Plan encouraged this, noting the modest cost of acquiring the outlying land in advance of settlement, and recognising how 'a city, in order to be a good labour market, must provide for the health and pleasure of the great body of workers'.



**Top** Regional highways reshaped the region in ways Burnham could not foresee

**Above** The famous circle Interchange on the site where Burnham's proposed Civic Centre should have been

Systematic arrangement of streets. New wider arterials were prescribed to relieve traffic congestion in the fast-growing city, including a network of new diagonal streets. Only one of these was ever constructed, the extension of Ogden Avenue. The plan's recommendations were followed, however, as the city widened Roosevelt Road and Michigan Avenue, and created Wacker Drive and Congress Parkway. In addition, some 174 km of arterial streets were widened between 1915 and 1931, spurred by the tremendous growth in automobile usage.

Civic and cultural centres. At the centre of the Plan's vision for the city was Grant Park. At the east end of Congress Street, which would become the central axis of the reshaped city, Burnham proposed a cultural centre in the park consisting of the new Field Museum of Natural History and new homes for the Art Institute of Chicago and the Crerar Library. This proposal, however, placed Burnham and other civic leaders in

conflict with Montgomery Ward's view that the city's original plans forbade any development in Grant Park. In 1911 a state Supreme Court decision upheld this forbidding any new buildings in Grant Park, and the Field Museum was eventually found a new site.

Some commentators have highlighted that far more of the Plan has not been built than has been realised, but despite this, and the difficulties in understanding exactly what delivered projects can be directly attributed to Burnham and Bennett, what is certain is that Chicago certainly embodies the spirit, if not the precise letter of the Plan.

### THE LEGACY OF THE PLAN

For Burnham, the Plan provided an opportunity of a lifetime to shape the city that he loved. It was all encompassing, and even civic improvement efforts that were already underway were boosted by the attention given to the Plan.

The Chicago Plan Commission remained a private body largely supported by the Commercial Club, simply offering advice and expertise to the government agencies who built various public improvements. Bennett advised the city of Chicago as it adopted a zoning ordinance and mapped out districts for various land uses. He also prepared plans for more than 10 other cities around the U.S. in the image of the Plan of Chicago, although none were ever given the same plaudits or recognition.

In 1923, the Chicago Regional Planning Association was formed. It successfully co-ordinated plans for new and improved regional highways and encouraged forest preserve districts and state parks throughout the Chicago region.

In the city itself, bond issues were passed, and the money raised was used to begin reshaping the central city in line with the Plan's proposals. Sadly the great depression hit Chicago hard and disrupted the roll out of public works, with only Lake Shore Drive in the 1930s and Lake Shore Drive Bridge (1937) realized.

In many respects, while the Plan may never have been delivered in a way that would change Chicago comprehensively as Haussmann did in Paris or Cerdà in Barcelona, its legacy is as much about what the Plan stood for as what it actually achieved. The Plan set an agenda that inspired other master plans around the globe, and shaped a movement for urban planning that can be seen reflected in some of the greatest city plans of the 20th century – particularly aspects of Niemeyer's Brasilia and the Australian capital Canberra, which was designed by fellow Chicagoan architect and contemporary of Burnham, Walter Burley Griffin.

The document was neither vague encouragement to lofty goals nor mere technical diagrams. Instead it was a list of specific public improvements that should be made, and the reasons why. It emphasized Chicago's tradition of optimism and bold thinking. It was regional in scope, it focused on quality of life for all residents, and above all it concluded with a clear call for action. The Plan itself became part of Chicago legend, more important than any city planning document before or since, and still influential in civic discussions today.

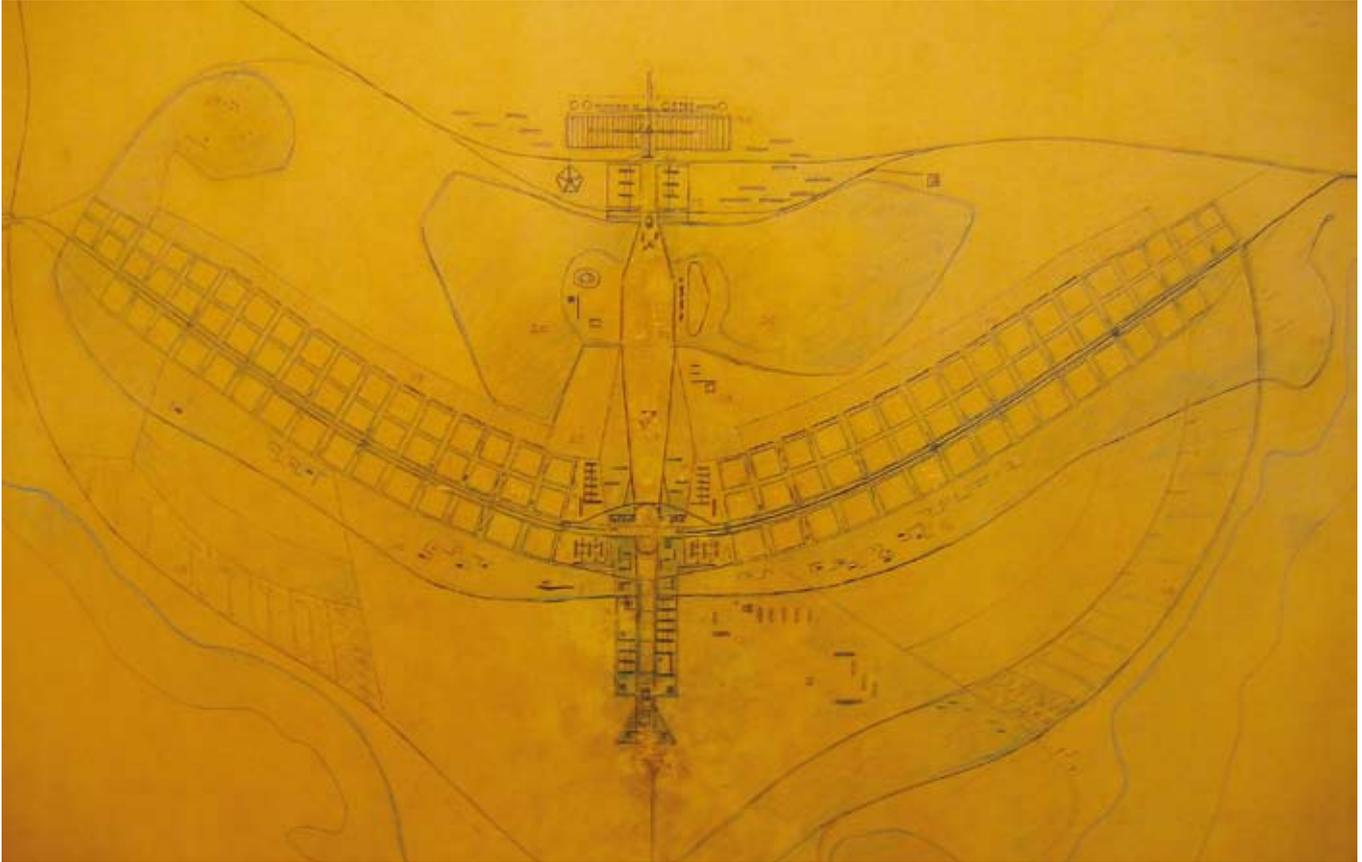
The Plan of Chicago caught the spirit of its time, but also the character of a place that dreamed the impossible and often accomplished it. In many ways it is hard to separate the Plan from an aphorism that appears nowhere in it, but that is famously attributed to Burnham:

'Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die.'

The Burnham Plan Centennial Committee

# CAPITAL CITIES

Amy Pressman considers the importance of design for new capital cities



In 2006 the world witnessed the birth of its newest capital city in Myanmar (Burma). Naypyitaw became the latest in a long line of planned capital cities to appear over a century that began with around 40 nation states having officially designated capitals; by the time the parliament left Rangoon for the 320km journey to Naypyitaw, there had been more than 150 more designated – a rate of about one every 8 months. The reasons for this dramatic increase are tied to the tumultuous history of a century that saw the demise of several global empires, two World Wars, and numerous other international and domestic conflicts.

Moving a capital city is not an easy undertaking. It is very expensive, and rarely free from controversy. In the case of Naypyitaw, it was decided to move to a site that was more centrally and strategically located than the old capital Rangoon, and somewhere that was also a transportation hub adjacent to some of the most turbulent regions in Myanmar, thus allowing the military rulers to keep an eye on their people. The official explanation for moving the capital was that Yangon (formerly Rangoon) had become too congested and crowded, with little room for future expansion of government offices. However, many see the reasons for its creation as more sinister, and one writer described the new capital as ‘dictatorship by cartography’.

## PRECEDENTS

Wholesale relocation of a capital to a distant green field site is nothing new. Cities such as Brasilia or Canberra are places shaped from little existing urban fabric in areas that were predominantly rural, and the reasons for choosing the sites varies greatly. The site of Canberra was selected as the location for the nation's capital in 1908 as a compromise site located between

rivals Sydney and Melbourne. Brasilia was located in an attempt to help populate the midwestern interior of the country, and ease pressure on the coastal cities, such as Rio de Janeiro. What is common to both is the desire to create a better city through design, and much as a corporate headquarters building is designed to reflect the image of its occupier, so it is true of the capital city. Unique in urban design terms, they reflect not only the architectural language and fashion of the age, but also the image of the nation or state that they represent.

Canberra was designed at the beginning of the 20th century by Walter Burley Griffin, following a global design competition, and it was heavily influenced by the Beaux Arts style that originated with the World Fair in Chicago (see previous article). Other capitals such as New Delhi, designed by Lutyens almost concurrently to Griffin in Canberra, were in fact planned on sites adjacent to the existing capital, in urban hinterlands. Examples such as Cerdà's plan for Barcelona or Haussmann's for Paris demonstrate how to resolve the need to expand historic cities, but New Delhi took this one step further by creating a

Lúcio Costa's plan for Brasilia resembled a butterfly in layout



## The use of strong axial geometry is a theme common to most planned capital cities

**Top** Lutyens' plan for New Delhi designed as an extension to the existing city, rather than a distant greenfield development

**Above** Griffin's plans for Canberra inspired by the Beaux Arts and City Beautiful movement

whole new city on the doorstep of the original. Lutyens adopted a style that combined the Beaux Arts bi-axial symmetry of the City Beautiful movement, and the democratic symbolism of Washington D.C., and delivered a plan at a cost that was lower than starting afresh on a greenfield site, and yet provided more scope than a mere urban intervention, inserting new monumental buildings and spaces into an existing urban fabric.

### GRAND DESIGN

The use of strong axial geometry is a theme common to most planned capital cities, in part because it brings instant prestige to the buildings that are constructed, and it allows for ceremonial spaces and processional routes. Looking at a city such as London, which has evolved over time rather than through a grand design plan, one can identify equivalent spaces and routes, but the famous Wren plan for rebuilding the city after the great fire still proposed the same axial arrangement of boulevards and piazzas that give prominence to the key government buildings – so this approach to the design of the most significant cities is not a twentieth century invention.

As the century progressed an increase in the influence of modernist design onto city planning resulted in the emergence of a new modernist urbanism: this movement that can be seen as a continuation of city planning originating in the 19th century, also represented new ideas of the time that advocated radical transformation in city form and city life. It was a movement partly politically motivated, and partly inspired by the technological advances of the time. Brasilia is a classic example – while axes and long views continued to dominate, the plan breaks from Beaux Arts precedents by giving increased importance to terminating plazas, where there is a complex juxtaposition of buildings and framed landscape views, rather than a simple use of terminating buildings. Modernist urbanism also embraced the automobile to an extent unimaginable at the dawn of the 20th century when Griffin and Lutyens were at work, something again reflected in the bus-orientated design of Brasilia.

The idea of locating the capital in the centre of Brasil first emerged in 1891 but was not defined until 1922, when the momentum to develop a new capital was starting to grow. Eventually in 1954 an international competition was held and won by the Brazilian planner Lúcio Costa. He got his close friend, the architect Oscar Niemeyer involved, and it was Niemeyer who designed most public buildings. Roberto Burle Marx was the landscape designer and together, the three formed a unique and early multi-disciplinary urban design team. This may be one of the reasons why Brasilia is the only city designed in the 20th century to be granted UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

### MOTIVATIONS

Following on from Brasilia, the second half of the 20th century saw a new wave of capital city design, resulting from the breaking up of former colonial empires and the creation of newly independent countries; examples are cities such as Dodoma (Tanzania) and Abuja (Nigeria). Abuja was designed in a period in the late 1970s when Nigeria adopted an American style constitution, and wanted an American style capital to go with it. As with its antecedents, it had its grand central axis (aligned with a distant hilltop, like Canberra) with the functional zoning of federal buildings running off of it. The design of Dodoma was less monumental, with the focus being on a tight low-rise mixed-use centre instead of grand governmental buildings, and resources being channelled to the design of the outlying residential zones instead.

Like these more recent examples, Naypyitaw is still very much a work in progress, but in terms of urban design, the emergent city is described by the few that have seen it, as being reminiscent of Islamabad or Brasilia. Land uses are firmly zoned into distinct areas linked by grand axes and designed for ease of

movement by automobile. The eight lane highway that links the downtown to the military zone is allegedly designed to double as a landing strip to allow small aircraft to take off and land if required; this must surely be a first in urban planning and a reminder that the design of a capital city is inseparable from the broader political change that led to its creation: the status of the city and its urban fabric are tied to their relationship to the national or federal state.

The one thing that is clear is the centrality of urban design to the public perception and global image of all the capital cities that have been delivered in the past century. Whether designed by a secretive military junta or through a global design competition, the brief and the solution always share commonalities. However, as we enter the age of carbon conscious design, and with high profile new eco-city regions at Masdar (Abu-Dhabi) and Dongtan (China) emerging, it can only be a matter of time before significant change takes place in the form

of cities. The emphasis on embracing the automobile that has dominated since Brasilia, will disappear, but whether we revert to the earlier aesthetic of Washington DC, Canberra and New Delhi, or develop a whole new eco-tech vernacular remains to be seen. However, whatever the future of capital city design holds, it is safe to bet it will include the axial avenues, landmark buildings and grand public spaces of those that have gone before.

Amy Pressman, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Queen's University, Canada

## BIRMINGHAM BIG CITY PLAN

Jonathan Bore outlines an ambitious plan for Birmingham's city centre



The Birmingham Big City Plan is a plan for the city centre, the 800 has. contained within the Middleway Ring Road. The area includes the main shopping, business, conference and cultural districts, traditional industrial and manufacturing areas, city centre living, 1960s council housing estates and the world renowned Jewellery Quarter. The document is more than a master plan and more than a development plan: it is a growth programme, a brand and a set of ambitious aspirations. The project is directed by Birmingham City Council with Urban Initiatives providing technical support and advice.

Birmingham is a city of a million people at the centre of a conurbation of two and a half million – it is Britain's second city and is big on the European scale. One of its major assets is its young, diverse and growing population. In the face of massive economic change, the city has achieved great regeneration successes and has attracted large amounts of inward

investment: it has new high technology manufacturing, a rapidly growing business and professional services sector, a strong university and research sector, and world-class business conference and exhibition facilities. Birmingham wants to attract more high value international investment, and register much more strongly on the international scale. It also wants to be an exciting and attractive place where individuals and families choose to live and stay.

The Big City Plan will build upon Birmingham's success and will ensure that the city raises its performance and its profile nationally and internationally.

Aerial view of central Birmingham  
©Birmingham City Council



- existing central area uses
- proposed expansion of central area uses
- transition zone and corridors
- other areas of transformation

**Above** The proposed Spatial structure of the city centre

It will provide a coherent approach to regeneration and development and will help to make the city centre a much more attractive and liveable place. The city's aspiration is to be in the top 20 most liveable cities in the world within 20 years. The original drive for a new and ambitious city centre plan emerged from Birmingham City Council's Summit for the Future in 2006 which sought to examine ways in which to boost the economic growth and prosperity of Birmingham for all its citizens. The event focused on a number of themes that have helped to shape the masterplanning process. The Council commissioned Professor Michael Parkinson, of Liverpool John Moores University, to identify the key elements for Birmingham's city centre master plan.

Professor Parkinson's Visioning for the City Centre Master plan identified five drivers of competitiveness that now inform the Big City Plan: innovation and skills; economic and cultural diversity;

connectivity; strategic capacity with strong leadership and vision, and quality of place. In August 2007, Urban Initiatives was appointed to create and shape the master plan. The mission was to involve communities and business in helping to recreate and revitalise Birmingham.

**BIG IDEAS**

The Big City Plan project started with a Big Ideas event, held in November 2007. Ideas for the future of the city centre were discussed and shaped by international regeneration experts, local stakeholders, members of the City team and council officers. These ideas were developed in the Big City Plan Charter launched in February 2008. The charter is a statement of intent which helps to define strategic objectives for the plan.

The ten global themes within the charter suggest how Birmingham can pursue its ambitions to operate and compete successfully. These are: Centricity, AudaCity, Liveable City, Diverse City, AuthentiCity, UniverCity, FamilyCity, ComplexCity, SmartCity and ConnectedCity. Centricity, for example, is about growing the city centre in terms of population, economic strength and cultural diversity. The theme of AudaCity is that Birmingham should be an imaginative and ambitious city and a natural choice for major events. AuthentiCity means that Birmingham needs to find expressions of the future that reflect its roots and history and concentrate on achieving excellent design quality and a sense of unique place. The idea behind SmartCity is that Birmingham must lead the field on achieving smart growth. This means finding new ways to reduce transport carbon, to manage energy in buildings, to make good use of water and to minimise waste.

The charter also sets out ten local ideas which will appeal to the everyday concerns and the future aspirations of the people who live, work and use the city centre: Live local, Move local, Street local, Start local, Create local, Play local, Learn local,

Buy local, Renew local and Build local. Under the Live local banner, for example, lies the concept that Birmingham should accommodate a great new family neighbourhood within the city centre, whilst under Renew local is the idea that Birmingham could create its own multi-utility services company to supply its new smart neighbourhoods on a highly efficient basis with water, electricity, heating and broadband; Build local is the idea that Birmingham could create a new way of building smart neighbourhoods.

### A BROAD PROJECT

The Big City Plan is an ongoing project rather than a single planning document: it will address many topics and cover several areas, over a long life and a continuous timeline. Some of it will be part of the LDF; much will have a life of its own outside the planning framework. Plans and ideas will come forward at different times depending on priorities. But collectively the whole project is called the Big City Plan and is involved in:

- Establishing city image and direction against the objective of developing the global city
- Improving liveability against international performance standards
- Creating an overall city centre spatial strategy
- Dealing with dynamic change in the economic and employment structure, in retailing and in education and health
- Planning for households, new homes and creating a more family friendly environment
- Addressing issues such as innovation, creativity, worklessness, digital futures
- Setting the planning objectives and direction for each of the quarters / policy areas
- Transforming particular areas such as Southside, Ladywood and Highgate
- Establishing the future direction of transport policy
- Making Birmingham a sustainable city
- Developing specific individual themes, including greening the city, water city, building heights and integrating the A38 corridor more effectively into the city's fabric
- Identifying and putting in place different delivery mechanisms
- Establishing and taking forward early actions and effective delivery mechanisms

Work is being carried out in several stages. An evidence base is being assembled on a continuous basis to ensure that the proposals and policies which emerge later in the process are grounded in robust, up-to-date information. An issues and options report entitled *Work in Progress* published for consultation at the end of 2008 seeks views on the city's aspirations and the challenges it faces, and this will feed into the Core Strategy. The next stage is to prepare a prospectus, which will set out an initial list of objectives, priorities and projects.

### SCALE OF AMBITION

We concluded early that the most important factor in raising the city's status is its liveability: a good physical environment with well designed buildings, streets and spaces; a range of attractive homes including more family homes; good quality schools and social facilities; high quality open space; attractive and safe walking routes; and efficient and easy to use public transport. The most liveable cities are economically successful and desirable; they attract highly qualified people and hence investment. They promote social inclusion.

The purpose of the Big City Plan is to tie together existing plans, giving the City Council, stakeholders, residents and workers a focus for positive change and growth. It will allow the city to become more strategic and comprehensive and less project based in its approach to development, and will

encourage partners to focus upon long-term development, increase the value of land and property and generate increased confidence in the city centre.

The Big City Plan needed a strong brand to make it stand out. Urban Initiatives designed a striking logo with eye-catching neon icons and a familiar writing style. The logo was adopted by the City Council and the brand can now be seen across the city. The Big City Plan is now a household name and features on official and unofficial websites such as [www.bigcityplan.org](http://www.bigcityplan.org) and [www.bigcitytalk.org](http://www.bigcitytalk.org). It has been used for the branding of major development sites, a city dressing campaign, articles in the local press and Council leaflets, an active blogging community and our local ambassadors The Big City Team.

**The most liveable cities are economically successful and desirable; they attract highly qualified people and hence investment**

### BIG QUESTIONS

Birmingham city centre is a diverse area, and preparing a master plan for 800 has. brings its own special challenges. To break down the scale of the task, the document looks at the role of the different quarters and identifies key themes:

- How to move away from the dominance of apartments and create a place where families are happy to live
- How to create an environment to attract a diverse range of office accommodation, foster creative industries, encourage and exploit spin-off from higher education and support growth-end manufacturing
- How to promote, respect and preserve the heritage of the Jewellery Quarter, Colmore Row and Digbeth Conservation Areas
- How to support investments such as Bullring whilst encouraging local distinctiveness in the shopping and leisure sector
- How to enhance Birmingham's unique water environment including its canals and the River Rea
- How to make Birmingham a leading demonstration of how sustainability, liveability and growth can work together
- How to organise city centre transport, including the potential for an extended Metro system or a high capacity alternative



## The Big City Plan has concentrated especially on the areas with potential for transformation

The new Selfridges has become an Birmingham landmark  
Photo: Sebastian Loew

### BIG OPPORTUNITIES

Initial work has aimed at reinforcing local character whilst concentrating on potential areas of transformation in the city centre. For the most part Birmingham has a very good urban structure with some very strong streets and exceptionally high quality, powerful buildings. The Big City Plan is based around a structure of clearly-defined quarters, each with its own character based on its history of occupation and industry: the Core (including the Bullring); Southside (including the Wholesale Markets and the Gay Quarter); Digbeth (including the Irish Quarter); Eastside; the Gun Quarter; the Jewellery Quarter; Westside (including Brindleyplace); Ladywood and Highgate. In some, much has already been achieved: the Core, Eastside and Westside have received high levels of investment; and the Jewellery Quarter is a fine example of historic building stock accommodating a fascinating range of professional and creative activities.

However, outside these quarters there are several mixed commercial areas with an air of underinvestment, lower levels of activity, a lack of natural surveillance and poor quality public realm. There are also two housing areas, Ladywood and Highgate, designed and built in the 1960s, which could benefit from refreshment. The Big City Plan has concentrated especially on the areas with potential for transformation: Southside, Ladywood, Highgate and the A38 corridor. But it also recognises that areas like Digbeth need a degree of protection in their current form, as they provide a platform for creative activities.

Birmingham City Council has been proactive in securing the redevelopment of New Street Station; the new station will have a more prominent entrance which will open up areas in the south of the centre. This opportunity can be exploited by developing new links to help regenerate the Southside area. Further growth in Southside will be achieved by developing the Wholesale Markets, a major strategic site which currently acts as a barrier to movement. The opportunity can be taken to restore links across the site, enabling better connections with Digbeth.

The A38 is a major road that traverses the centre of Birmingham. Great improvements have been made in reducing its impact; Masshouse Circus has been removed and the road to the east of the core has been lowered to at-grade level but the A38 still remains a formidable barrier to pedestrian movement on the western and northern sides of the centre. The Big City Plan will look at how it can be better integrated and its impact reduced. Certain key sites are related to the A38. The library redevelopment at Paradise Circus and additional commercial growth near Snow Hill, for example, will create opportunities for improving pedestrian connections and the surrounding environment.

### FINDING THE RIGHT PLANNING TOOLS

The Big City Plan has to be consistent with national policy guidance, the Regional Spatial Strategy and with the Birmingham Plan. The Regional Spatial Strategy sets out some important requirements for Birmingham: 50,600 new homes by 2026; a 130ha city-wide reservoir of employment land with a longer term requirement of 390ha; 225,000m<sup>2</sup> of comparison retail development by 2021 (355,000m<sup>2</sup> by 2026) and 590,000m<sup>2</sup> of office development in the city centre.

Initially it was envisaged that the Big City Plan would be a single area action plan. But by the time we had reached the consultation stage, three things had happened to change our approach. Firstly, the Big City Plan brand took off and developed an impetus of its own. Many ideas and initiatives ascribed to it could not be neatly fitted into a development plan document. Secondly, it was realised that the range and scale of the city's ambitions transcended a mere development plan document. And finally, as knowledge and good practice built up around the new planning system, it became evident that the area action plan was a rather blunt and cumbersome tool to take the Big City Plan forward in its entirety. Following meetings with DCLG, the Planning Inspectorate and the Government Office for the West Midlands a more varied framework was adopted.

For example, work on the transformation of certain housing areas to create a new, family-friendly city centre, and initiatives on sustainable development, could move forward as supplementary planning documents. New concepts relating to transport integration, digital information, the greening of the city, and the development of a network of existing and new water features to make Birmingham Water City, will have their own project programmes. The major development opportunities around the Wholesale Markets, New Street Station and Paradise Circus can be dealt with through development briefs. Simultaneously, transport projects such as improving connections across Queensway and developing more integrated public transport will be undertaken. And existing guidance for each of the quarters will need tweaking or amending to refresh it in accordance with the city's emerging ambitions. Much of the work on city centre strategy, branding and future growth, relates closely to the core strategy and is now being incorporated into that document.

The Big City Plan has become a living and developing entity with no end date. It is a household name in the city and has gained international recognition winning the BEX 2008 Award for best master plan.

Jonathan Bore works for Urban Initiatives

# BIG? SMALL OR BOTH?

The Plymouth example described by Neil Emery combines both



'Our aim is to make Plymouth a city of over 300,000 people so that it can take its place amongst the top ten cities in the country with all that will bring in terms of new shops, new community and cultural facilities and new homes.'

David Mackay, *The Vision for Plymouth*

Plymouth has a big vision, it also continues to develop well grounded community projects. This article reflects upon the role of both approaches in how to design places. Plymouth's emerging Local Development Framework (LDF), including its adopted Core Strategy, has been developed out of a clear understanding of local issues, combined with city scale and community aspiration. The LDF has made purposeful steps to avoid being formulaic, and to present a clarity in its vision.

'Plymouth aspires to take its rightful place as one of Europe's finest waterfront cities.'

The balance between big scale city vision and more localised interventions is at the core of how we currently aspire to design our towns and cities. The Plymouth experience offers many useful reflections on this.

Urban designers and architects from LHC Urbanism have been designing in the city of Plymouth throughout the last three decades. During this time LHC has influenced strategic

spatial plans and developed many smaller interventions which have shaped the city's neighbourhood fabric. As a result designers at LHC have a particular insight and perspective on the roles and relative merits of big spatial plans against small scale community driven design and delivery. Our instinct and experience tells us that shaping urban place at different scales can be mutually compatible and indeed complementary, provided that there is a real and on-going dialogue between the two.

## A PERIOD WITHOUT SPATIAL STRUCTURE

As elsewhere throughout the UK the last three decades have born witness to many changes in the ways in which Plymouth is shaped, some due to outside trends and forces, and others because the city likes to do things its own way! In 1996 the city became a unitary local authority.

During the 1980s and into the early 1990s, in the shadow of circular

Final sketch of the proposed Millbay



**Top** View of the proposed stage one  
**Far left** New development in Gunwharf  
**Left** Patrick Abercrombie's vision for the West End Dock  
**Opposite page** David Mackay Vision for Plymouth plan

22/80, Plymouth lacked clear spatial direction and so, in the main relied upon incremental change to achieve momentum in regeneration. Whilst Local Plans provided land use structure, spatial organisation of the city was largely developed from within neighbourhood projects. Within the city centre, Abercrombie's visionary 1943 plan for Plymouth which provided for the free movement of traffic and a single use retail core within a bold Beaux Arts town plan, still influenced decision making but its validity in the modern world became increasingly diluted.

Some development from this period can now be viewed with regret – particularly where opportunities to reconnect and regenerate neighbourhoods have been seriously impaired for the future. There were however many successes which continue to shape the direction of the city today. A notable example is the successful regeneration of the Barbican and Sutton Harbour areas. Significant public and private sector funding helped to shape change in the area, including for example the development of the National Marine Aquarium, new lock gates to the harbour and a new modern fish market. More investment in mixed-use infrastructure has followed and continues to be developed.

During the 1990s, regeneration work in Sutton Harbour together with other strategic neighbourhood led regeneration initiatives in Devonport, Millbay and the East End for example, have helped to shape the city vision, and to some extent ensure iteration between city scale and community based design. Neighbourhood strategies now form integral components of the city spatial strategy.

## Delivery of projects have a crucial role in legitimising the big vision and in demonstrating its value to local communities

### A SPATIAL VISION

Plymouth's LDF vision is rooted in this community strategy. A *Vision for Plymouth* led by David Mackay in 2003, proved a major catalyst for change. By showing what could be achieved on the ground, Mackay's team demonstrated that a step change in the city's fortunes was possible. It changed perceptions, promoted buy-in from local stakeholders (broadly across all sectors), and challenged all to aspire.

Out of the community initiatives and strategies which have evolved from the 1990s and before, the LDF and Mackay's vision for the city have established and articulated the city's long term vision. This enabled the focusing of resources into key areas of regeneration work to provide a foundation for 'building sustainable linked communities that stitch different parts of the city together'.



### THE ROLE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECTS

Whilst the more recent vision has developed and been articulated through the City Council's innovative approach to the LDF process, strategies and projects have continued to happen within local neighbourhoods. These drive and help to shape the wider vision and underpin successful delivery.

Plymouth's Core Strategy identifies nine priority areas because of the opportunities offered for change. For a selection of public and private sector clients LHC Urbanism and other local designers have in recent decades played a major role in influencing the quality of change and shaping the nature of delivery in the main city regeneration areas.

To secure sustainable delivery of the wider vision, projects developed on the ground need to do their job effectively. They need to grasp the challenge and meet the aspirations which Mackay's vision articulated. Delivery of projects have a crucial role in legitimising the big vision and in demonstrating its value to local communities.

### A PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF PROJECTS IN CITY VISION MAKING

In Plymouth, the National Marine Aquarium, designed and built in the early 1990s, provided a landmark for city change in the Sutton Harbour area. This was, to some extent, in the absence of a wider spatial strategy for the city.

In the last decade LHC has helped to drive quality change through a series of completed and emerging projects. Some have provided local strategic direction and others, buildings and spaces on the ground. Projects include for example the Millbay Strategy, Gunwharf in Devonport, a master plan for Ker Street; the West End Vision and Public Realm plan; Phase 4 of the Tamar Science Park and the East End Community Village. All have helped to sustain the momentum for change within

their particular communities and all have an eye to the bigger picture.

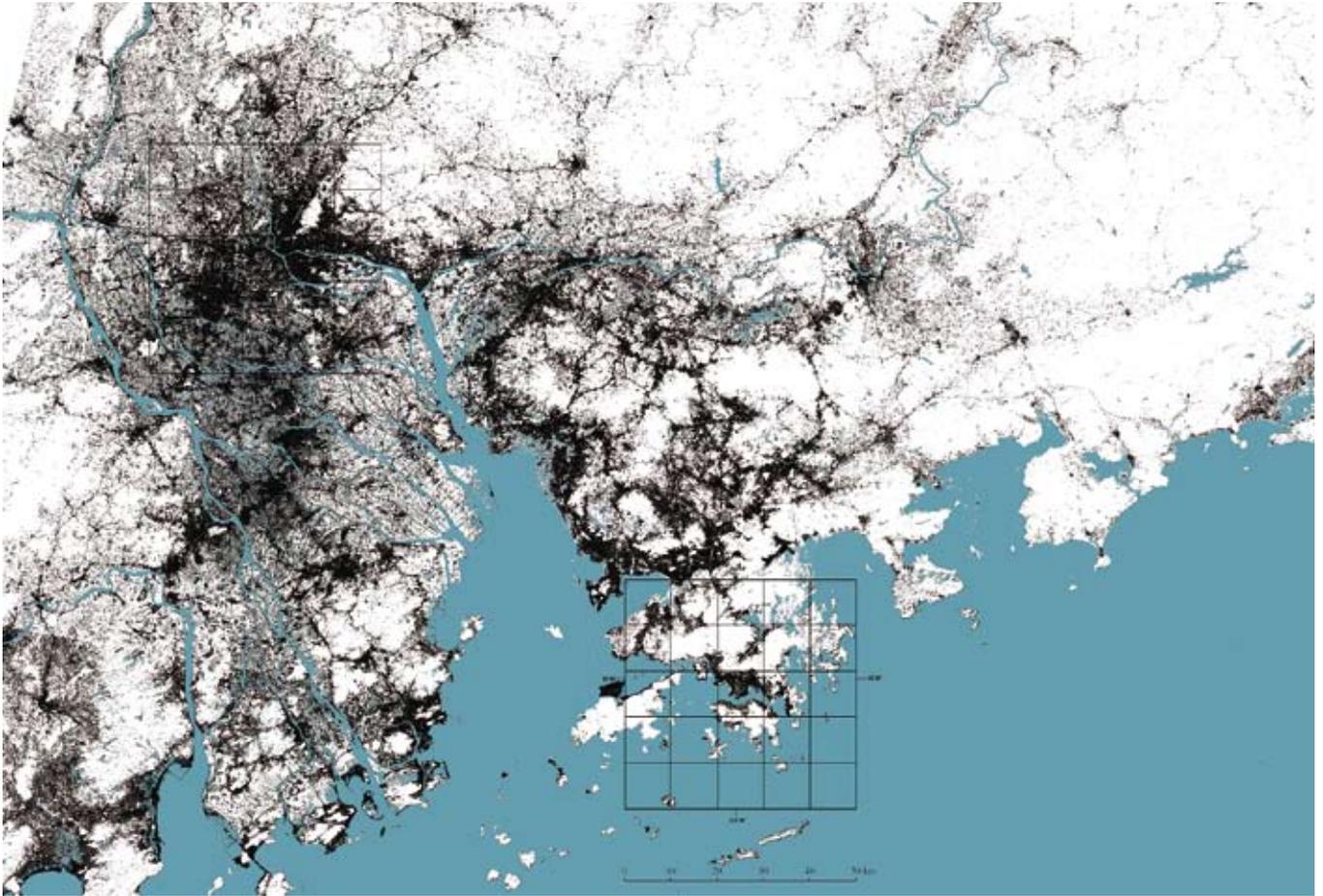
In the last three decades in Plymouth we have come to understand why plans should emerge out of local situations with neighbourhood support. We have also seen the role that successful neighbourhood projects play in informing and shaping the bigger picture. Complementary strategies at different scales are crucial to successful delivery. To ensure that momentum is not dowsed, big visions and local approaches need to be inherently flexible. This way they can adapt to the dynamism and changing circumstances that is characteristic of towns and cities, be mutually valued, and not stifle delivery.

Different settlements will always need bespoke design processes to properly deal with local idiosyncrasies. An important lesson from Plymouth is to ensure that the delivery of projects has a crucial role in breathing life into places and in allowing communities to shape the bigger vision.

Neil Emery, Group Director of Urban Design, LHC Urbanism

# URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

Peter Bosselmann looks at cities from a satellite



Pearl River Delta  
Cities in China: two  
superimposed 50 by  
50 km squares, one  
centred on Guangzhou  
and Foshan, the other  
on Hong Kong

Steen Eiler Rasmussen might have been the first to use a comparative method to show the continuous urbanization of cities when he explained the difference between Paris's compact form and London's sprawling configuration. Sixty years later, the differences in land coverage between the two cities is less pronounced. Today, the term *continuous urbanization* takes on a new meaning when applied to urban agglomerations in South East Asia. Around the Pearl River Delta, the cities of Foshan, Guangzhou (Canton), and Dongguan are now robustly connected with Shenzhen. From Shenzhen to Hong Kong, only some gaps are still visible on recent satellite imagery. Currently, a bridge is planned to cross the Pearl River estuary from Hong Kong to Macao. Once completed, the bridge will close a loop connecting a continuously urbanized area from Macao to Zhulai, Zhongshan to Shunde and back to Foshan. In the Pearl River Delta, in a pattern similar to the Randstad area of Holland, a rim of cities is emerging around bodies of water and agriculture. The number of people living inside this conurbation is conservatively estimated to include 55 million by the United Nations, and is probably much higher.

At present, it is highly relevant to watch the cities of the world from space, and not only the expanding cities of the developing world, but also the shrinking and dispersing cities in the developed world. When comparing the footprints of the world's largest cities, two observations stand out clearly. The first is that human tolerance for density, defined as the number of people per surface area, varies to a stunning degree. The second observation is related to form. There might be increasing similarity when city extensions are viewed on the ground, but when seen from space, it is clear that not two urban agglomerations are the same. The reasons for the distinctive shapes of urban agglomerations are largely related to local landform, especially water systems.

## THE RELEVANCE OF WATER

If one were to imagine for a moment that it would be possible to direct the transformation of cities in the developing world, not to stop the influx of rural migration, but to direct the transformation and expansion at their outskirts, future satellite images would show a web of linear gaps in settlement patterns, where now continuous urbanization occurs. These gaps would coincide with the existing water drainage patterns. For reasons that are well understood, new urbanization would stay at a distance from water, from creeks, rivers, bays, and estuaries. Of all physical measures, the preservation of land near water would provide the greatest benefits for human health, the health of vegetation and animal life, the quality of water and air, and a more comfortable climate. The same understanding of natural systems would direct the dispersion of cities in the developed world. In both worlds, the result would lead to a better integration of cities with the forces of nature.

This is not to be misunderstood, for some of the world's most memorable and intensely urban settings are located on waterfronts, along river embankments, harbour fronts and facing beaches. On the other extreme, we find that the marginal low lying land near flood prone urban waterfronts is home to informal settlements for millions of people. Notwithstanding the beauty of waterfronts in some cities and the destitution in others, what I have in mind is an intervention that is visible at the scale of satellite imagery. When seen from space, all cities seem to be shaped by water systems. Granted, there are some exceptions, but even the form of a desert city, like Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, is significantly shaped by the Riyadh river landscape that connects to the Wahdi Hannifah. Indeed, most large cities in the world had their origins in a river landscape like Cairo, Paris, London or Beijing. In a related category are those cities that are situated on river branches that form a large delta like Calcutta, New York or the cities of the Randstad. Equally numerous are cities that originated as harbours, like Mumbai, Jakarta or Chicago. Cities around a large bay, subject to tides like Tokyo, Lagos or Sydney belong to a fourth category. Finally there is a small group of cities that stretch out along the shores of an ocean straight like Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong, the Bosphorus or the Øresund.

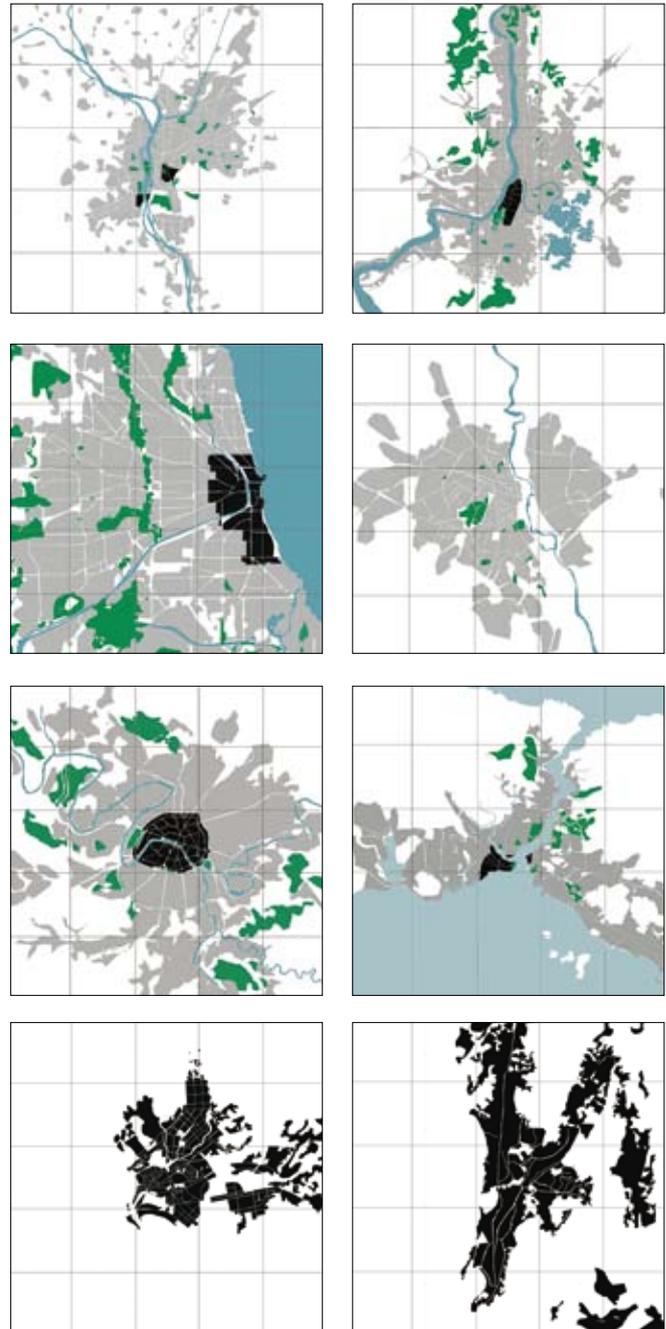
The original water systems of cities are sometimes severely challenged by growing settlement patterns. In some cases, like in Mexico City or Los Angeles, only remnants of the water system can be traced. But in many river cities, including Los Angeles, Paris, London, Milan and Calcutta there is a renewed interest in transforming the land along riverfronts that has become newly available due to industrial closures. The goal is not to repair the original water systems to their natural conditions, as that would not be possible, but to use such recently vacated land in a manner that repairs the natural forces of the river, and sometimes even makes room for periodic flooding, like along the Waal River just outside of Rotterdam. Or in the case of Riyadh, where the ground water that is pumped up to provide the city's water supply is treated and, as grey water, redirected back into an otherwise mostly dry riverbed. The same type of repair takes place in harbour cities and bay cities. Tokyo has large tracts of land around the bay under regeneration.

The observation that most urban agglomerations were shaped by their water systems instils optimism, because a better understanding of the natural systems that existed and that were altered can inform the design of new cultural landscapes, landscapes that can be designated as commons for a large metropolitan area. Such commons could improve the urban ecology of city regions as well as their social conditions. At the same time, the correlation between water systems and urban form is also a deadly serious matter. Some of the fastest growing urban concentrations, among the world's most populated cities, are situated barely above sea level. They are located in the flood-planes or deltas of large rivers and must depend on levees for protection from flooding.

**DENSITY**

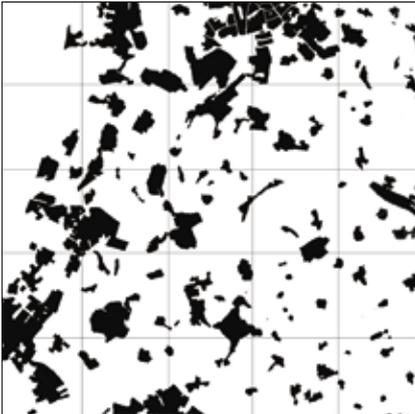
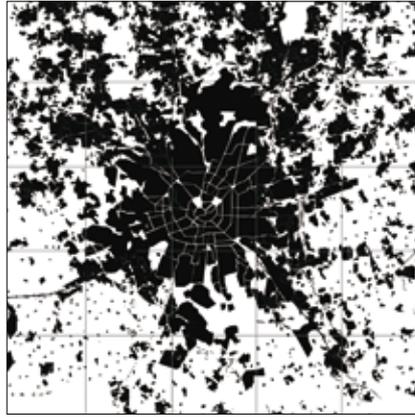
The second important observation when looking at a scale comparison of the world's largest cities is related to density, a concept design professionals claim to understand, but rarely fully grasp. It taxes our common sense to imagine how Calcutta with its almost eighteen million people could fit into the surface area of the city of San Francisco plus the county to its south, San Mateo, where altogether one million people live. Imagine that a space occupied by one person in San Francisco would need to be shared with seventeen additional others. People in many Asian cities live at such densities, and many additional millions will live under such conditions in the future.

A city designer's chief contribution to city transformation is setting the dimensions of streets and lanes, block and parcels, building setbacks, entrances and driveways, building heights,



...density, a concept design professionals claim to understand, but rarely fully grasp

Above Cities Shaped by Water: (clockwise from top left) Cairo, Calcutta, Delhi, Istanbul, Mumbai, Karachi, Paris and Chicago, all showing 50x50 km squares



**Left** Urban agglomerations with 7 million inhabitants: (clockwise from far left) San Francisco Bay Area, Milan, Hong Kong, the Randstad, all shown here within a 50 by 50 km square.

**Below** A three dimensional comparison of the intensity of human activities per unit of urban surface area (from the 2006 Venice Biennale)

**Opposite page left** The world's two largest cities: Tokyo in terms of population (31 million) and Atlanta (4 million) in terms of surface area, shown within 50x 50 km squares



the separation between buildings and the size of building footprints. The result of these decisions determines the scale of a city. These decisions also determine human experience of space: the length of a walk, the likelihood of human encounter, the amount of light that is received, protection from wind, exposure to noise, what is available to our eyes, when we feel intimacy, when we are participants on a civic stage. In short, city scale determines all aspects of human experience including the energy needed to transport us and the energy needed to heat or cool dwellings and commercial places.

## In comparing the scale of cities we reflect on the dimensions of the elements in the urban fabric

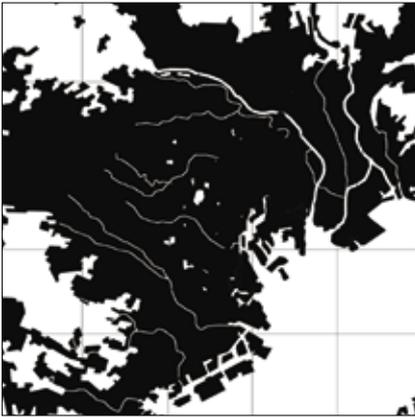
In comparing the scale of cities we reflect on the dimensions of the elements in the urban fabric, and how these elements relate to human experience. Everyone with a recently built computer can connect to a well-known global map server and slowly fly across cities. We have done just that to create a transect through a recently built suburban subdivision of the San Francisco Bay Area. Transects are known in biogeography as a sampling method

with reduced dimensionality; three frames are reproduced here along such a transect.

The top picture shows an office park on the eastern edge of the San Francisco Bay Area that emerged in the 1980s when large corporations started to move out of downtown San Francisco to office park settings. The next frame, a mile further to the east shows where the employees of the office's campus are intended to live. The third frame, another mile further east, shows the continuation of the same neighbourhood with a high school.

Like so many times before in history, former agricultural land has turned into a landscape of capital. Units of home and office space production have generated the form of the subdivision. Different, but typical of recently built subdivisions are the land development standards; mandatory dimensions have grown to ever larger scales of production. Starting with large earth moving machines, areas were graded to hold upwards of 400 homes of very similar design. Each home fills its parcel without leaving much space for a yard or garden. The width of the roads inside the neighbourhood is strikingly wide at 20m, as half the width would be wide enough for the number of cars that will travel on them. The arterial streets are even wider; designed as limited access roads, some residents might have the backs of their homes face such arterial streets, but have their address on the local street that runs parallel to the arterial street. The right of way measures 83m in width, which is just a little wider than the Champ Elysées in Paris. Notice that the left turn lanes, two of them right next to each other, are about 150m long. However, the connectivity of the street grid is very poor; only two streets generally connect out of a neighbourhood and onto an arterial.

The generous dimensions add up, generating great distances between places where people need to be. Extrapolated to the metropolitan scale, reducing such dimensions could save much space and energy. As a result, residents would not entirely depend on their automobiles. In the neighbourhoods shown, the automobile is a necessity even for short trips to take a child



to the home of a friend or to the ball field, or an elderly person to the shopping centre.

What will happen 30 years from now? Will it be possible to transform the subdivision shown here—like so many others—to use the space more economically, more efficiently with changing demographics in mind? Different from the urban renewals of the inner city in the 1960s, the needed transformation would not as much address the reuse of private properties, as private properties are intensely used; the renewal would have to deal first of all with all the land that the developers have deeded back to cities and counties, the roads and open space that became a by-product of the large scale grading at the beginning of the land development process. The conclusion to be drawn for the present is that the permitting authorities should insist on shrinking space standards. Space is a resource, just like water, energy, access to public transportation and so much else. City design remains a political, social and environmental affair.

Urban history cannot be explained without reflecting on the inertia that exists in city transformations. The demographic trends, environmental crisis and problems with social health and wealth have been identified for many decades, and collectively we know the coming decade will need to be decisive, because of the significant increases we can expect in urban populations and our competing need to live within the means of our diminishing resources. Of course, the same could have been said at more or less regular intervals throughout urban history, but that is the point. Urban history is again in such a decisive period. To direct, or at least influence the current urban transformations we need to evaluate what has influenced our professional practices and what knowledge is needed to direct urban transformation in the future.

**Peter Bosselmann is a Professor of Urban Design at the University of California, at Berkeley. His most recent book, *Urban Transformation - Understanding City Design and Form* was published by Island Press, Washington DC in 2008**  
The maps reproduced here are part of a larger map collection that appears in the book. They are reprinted with permission by the author and publisher

**Above** Transect through a recent San Francisco Bay Area Subdivision. Each frame contains a land area of 500 by 500 metres. From top to bottom: places to work, place to live and to shop, places to live and school

## ECO-TOWNS

Paul Fraser wonders whether the Eco-Towns programme is ambitious enough.



In February the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced the Eco-towns shortlist, setting out their strategy for meeting the future housing needs of the nation in a sustainable way. The government intends to deliver up to 10 new towns (five by 2016), each containing between 5,000 and 20,000 new dwellings by 2020. Each new settlement is intended to be carbon neutral, and will be delivered and maintained by a dedicated agency. These targets are set in the context of the Government's national housing targets of three million new dwellings by 2020 – a target that some argue they have already fallen too far behind to deliver.

### AMBITIONS AND CONCERNS

But what sort of places will these new settlements be? The government envisages new settlements, each with their 'own distinct identity', a good range of local shops and services, and good transport links to nearby towns and cities. Each settlement will house a 'mixed and balanced community', with a range of dwelling sizes and tenures, and will feature between 30 and 50 per cent affordable housing. Crucially, each will be supported by appropriate community infrastructure, including schools and leisure provision. Each town will also be an exemplar of environmental

technologies, so expect green roofs, sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), grey water recycling and on site renewable energy generation. International exemplars such as Hammarby Sjostad and Vauban, Freiburg are cited in the Government's prospectus.

So this is surely the answer to our housing needs – or is it? The proposals have drawn criticism from a wide range of organisations, including the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Local Government Association, who see significant failings in the strategy. The perception of Eco-towns at a local level has certainly not been helped by their status as a government initiative, so putting them outside the normal planning system. There is a worry that schemes will be pushed through irrespective of local concerns or even the views of the Local Authorities, and that there won't be any local control over design quality and detailed issues.

All this begs the question what sort of places they might become. The cynics argue that they will be dormitory towns, too far from a significant town centre to avoid car reliance and too small to support the levels of employment and service provision needed to give them a degree of self containment. Carbon neutral construction is in vain if the settlement form doesn't facilitate low carbon lifestyles. These criticisms are supported by the size of the proposed settlements – the smaller of which (at 5000 homes) are unlikely to support the range of services needed to make these places truly sustainable. The same is true of employment. While it will never be possible to secure real self containment with all residents working where they live, a critical mass and good range of employment opportunities is an essential ingredient in minimising car use. Although a small percentage of this employment might be housed out of town, most employers prefer to be (or have to be) near a local centre, offering their employees an attractive work location and their clients easy access with other opportunities for trade in the vicinity.

**DELAYED SUSTAINABILITY**

Much of the criticism of the Eco-towns initiative comes from those who believe urban extensions to be a more sustainable strategy for securing growth. All of the new towns on the shortlist will require significant investment and forward provision of infrastructure – roads, utilities, services and community infrastructure if they are to avoid being car dependant dormitories in their early years. It may be the case they could only claim to be truly sustainable once their target population has been reached. This must also be put in to the context of the current financial climate. The public finances are unlikely to recover for years to come, and we are entering a period of public spending cuts and serious prioritisation – so why spend additional money creating stand alone development instead of upgrading existing ones? In a depressed housing market, or even in a period of growth, a private developer is unlikely to be able to deliver all of the infrastructure required for a new settlement, in tandem with environmentally excellent buildings, affordable housing and on site renewables without serious levels of financial support from the government.

**UNSUSTAINABLE LOCATIONS**

It could be seen as telling that the precedents cited by the DCLG in their prospectus are urban infill (rather than new settlements), with a lack of new settlements of a comparable size to draw comparison with. The exemplar settlements currently being planned internationally are of a city scale (Masdar and Dongtan are regularly reported on), accommodating the critical mass of population needed to support a range of services and employment.

The concerns around new settlements are exacerbated by the shortlisted locations. Some of the settlements are proposed near to existing links but require new infrastructure: Cambridge for instance must fund a new railway station. Other sites that seem to have been selected due to the ease of assembly or single land owner, such as Ford Airfield, will require an entirely new transport infrastructure if the new residents are not to rely on private car trips to access goods and services.

**CREATING COMMUNITIES**

So a key challenge for the Eco-towns shortlisted as they progress through design will be the process of creating ‘community’ and ‘place’. Establishing a clear identity for each of the towns, evolving from an understanding of the physical location of the sites and the local people that are likely to become their residents, will be central in avoiding an identikit rollout of standardised ecoboxes. The sense of community in these new places will also be dependent on how self supporting they are from the outset. The phasing of mixed tenure housing along with the appropriate level of local facilities and community infrastructure will be essential in making these new towns feel like places in their own right – from the first phase.

**A DROP IN THE OCEAN?**

Eco-towns aside, we must also consider ‘the rest’. The Eco-towns programme is projected to deliver around 90,000 new homes, or 3 per cent of the Government’s target by 2020. So if 3 per cent is badged ‘eco’, how can we ensure that the majority of the new housing needed, delivered through the normal channels, meets the challenges of sustainable development? The development industry faces a panoply of standards – the Code for Sustainable Homes, BREEAM, Lifetime Homes, Building for Life, HCA Standards, tightening Building Regulations, many of which overlap and are inconsistently applied depending on the Local Authority and the client.



**Opposite page** Lessons can be learnt from the comprehensive settlement planning of Masdar by Foster+Partners

**Top** Hammarby: An example for sustainable communities in Stockholm

**Above** Vauban, Freiburg: Cutting edge use of sustainable technologies for urban infill

So it seems that if the issue of the sustainability of our homes and settlements is to be seriously addressed, then the elephant in the room is our existing building stock. Neither the Eco-towns programme nor the current development standards have the capacity to influence or encourage the enhancement of our existing stock. Of the three million homes to be delivered by 2020, the majority is new provision, leaving our stock replacement rate in the region of 0.25 per cent. This should drive an urgent set of initiatives at national and local government level to encourage the refurbishment of our existing homes, improving their resource efficiency and carbon footprint. Although the supply of loft insulation and some condensing boilers is currently subsidised, the programme could, and should go much further.

Paul Fraser Senior Urban Designer: Atkins Ltd



## Clearwater, Lower Mill Estate

Richard Reid and Associates describe the development of a new holiday village

### THE DEVELOPMENT AIMS

The site at The Lower Mill Estate, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire is a privately owned, former gravel quarry that lies within the Cotswold Water Park and covers some 550 acres with 7 lakes and 3 rivers including the River Thames. It is an area rich in wildlife and contains 2 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), one for rare aquatic plants and the other a wildflower meadow. An outline permission for 575 second homes existed, of which 81 were already built or in construction when Richard Reid and Associates (RRA) were commissioned to prepare the master plan and house type designs for the remaining development, starting with Clearwater. However, the aim of the developer is to create a balance between nature conservation and built development with one third of the site for development and two thirds of the land managed for wildlife.

### THE TRADITION OF THE HOLIDAY VILLAGE

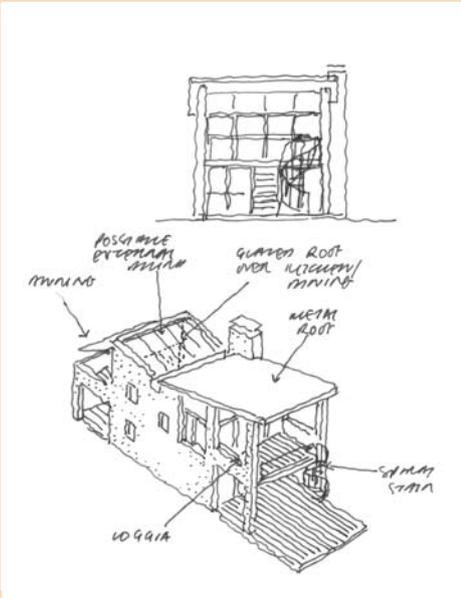
The concept of building a holiday village belongs to a long tradition of place making in the UK, from Aquae Sulis (present day Bath) which was developed as a town with a recuperative centre, through to the development of major post-reformation spa towns in Harrogate, Tunbridge Wells and Epsom, and then the later Victorian schemes in Malvern, Tenbury Wells, Matlock Bath and Buxton. More recent 20th century precedents include Clough Williams-Ellis's Portmeirion resort

in Wales; Venice, California; Addison Mizner's Boca Raton on the Florida Coast and Francois Spoerry's Port Grimaud. The 21st Century holiday estates are a part of this tradition.

### THE ARCHITECTURAL AMBITIONS

The predominant architectural language of these earlier resorts was that of the traditional vernacular building. Here the distinctive character of building in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire was formed during the 18th century building boom characterised by the use of local materials such as the warm, mellow limestone and slate for both the great Manor House and the simple vernacular terrace or cottage. Realising that it is difficult to design the vernacular on a drawing board or computer, despite Ernest Gimson's marvellous Stoneywell Cottage (1898), RRA sought to develop an analogous process of building and construction which would respond to the requirements and use of a holiday village here. Whilst using a more contemporary style of design, the variety of standard house types is the vernacular for the development. For the proposed architecture (or 'polite' house, to quote Brunskill) - the equivalent of the limestone mansions of nearby villages - a series of landmark houses are being designed by other architects, including Will Alsop, Sarah Featherstone, Piers Gough, Alison Brooks, Sutherland Hussey, Eva Jiricna and Roger Sherman.

Stylistically, the proposals mark an important transition from the direct interpretation of a vernacular language adopted in the first two



**Above** Figure-ground plan and early house type sketches

**Opposite page** various images of the Clearwater Lower Mill Estate

phases of the development, to a more contemporary aesthetic for both building (the standard house types) and the architecture (the landmark houses). These proposals were the result of a highly productive relationship between client, architect and local authority where Cotswold District Council's senior planning officers spent a considerable amount of time meeting with developer and architect to explore how the future phases of Lower Mill Estate would be designed.

### BUILDING AND ARCHITECTURE

All the house designs respond to the landscape of lakes and streams and the need to develop an architecture of leisure. A shared building language was developed within the master plan for the smaller vernacular or common building types, with a mix of pitched roofs, folded metal roof and mono-pitch roofs, with a street frontage clad in a mix of stone, board and batten or render with hole-in-the-wall windows, and a more open glazed elevation for the leisure side to the rear that opens out onto the water. Planned in a series of informal groups together with a number of communal barns, a village, store and spa, these houses have a shared building language. The plan also provides space for a series of landmark houses – the architecture of the development. These landmark houses such as the Somerford Villa which sits partly in the water at the tip of the narrow peninsula jutting out into Somerford Lagoon and is the precursor to the landmark house programme initiated by the client, act as focal points within the various groups.

### THE MASTER PLAN

Within the master plan, the grain of the built form is defined by the way both narrow and wide frontage house types are arranged in informal groups, subtly angled along a meandering building frontage

line in a landscape that is open and natural, with native planting and a regime of cut grass and long grass. None of the houses within the groups have private residential curtilages, and there are no boundary fences. This gives the landscape a unique open character with a prevalent sense of connection between land and water. Cars are accommodated in landscaped parking courts. There is a main spa and leisure centre and village shop, with a restaurant, cooking school and equestrian centre already planned, together with additional pools and related facilities.

### THE LESSONS LEARNT

The development of this brownfield site enhances the leisure facilities provided within the Cotswold Water Park, avoids driving up local property prices by grouping the second homes here, has a positive impact on the local economy, is a great employer, preserves and enhances the site's wildlife habitat and has a large nature reserve within the property which Lower Mill Estate manage. In terms of building design the proposed development happily explores the potential of combining both building and architecture in the place-making process. As Lethaby once wrote: 'It was the gravest mistake to foster the idea that there was a sort of building called 'architecture' superior in kind to ordinary building, the serious problem was how this ordinary building might be well done, for without that as a basis no higher building or 'architecture' would be possible'. At Lower Mill Estate, the landmark houses are the architecture and what rules there are, are those to be provided by each individual architect. But it is the standard buildings, or vernacular of the site, that provides the setting for the architecture and, in a sense, make the architecture possible, whilst advancing the sustainability credentials of traditional building.



## St. Petersfield, Ashton-under-Lyne

Planit-ie show how urban design added value to a pre-existing master plan

In 2004 Planit-ie were appointed by ASK and Tameside MBC to design and implement a public realm framework for St Petersfield, a new commercial quarter within Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester. Whilst an outline planning permission had been granted for a loose spatial master plan, our commission was to test, challenge, and add value to the proposed development framework through developing an urban design approach to the public realm.

### URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

St Petersfield occupies a key gateway position for Tameside, strategically located on the western edge of Ashton town centre and covering an area of 5.3 has. The site contains some important civic buildings such as the Magistrates Court and a listed former Victorian Baths. The historical context of the site provided the foundation for its unique character and identity, and an analysis of the 19th century maps revealed a wider Georgian gridiron plan established by the Fifth Earl of Stamford. The site itself comprised a series of squares and spaces, the urban morphology, scale, and proportions of which provided a distinctive European quality. The historical layout of the site – its building splays and pinch points – would have provided a series of hide and reveal spatial sequences experienced by its patrons travelling, either from, or to, the town centre.

Two strong visual and physical axes existed through the site, and are marked by a church spire, and the chimney of the Victorian Baths. This historic pattern became our inspiration. The urban design analysis identified that these spatial qualities had become eroded through the construction of highway infrastructure, associated paraphernalia, and poor quality modern buildings, which had only served to sever the site from its surrounding grid. Whilst an existing wider landscape strategy proposed a re-connection to a canal basin to the south,

it was considered that land ownership constraints undermined its deliverability, and an alternative route was identified which conformed more closely to the historic grid.

### URBAN DESIGN TESTING/EVALUATION

The urban design testing stage of the process therefore identified additional opportunities to:

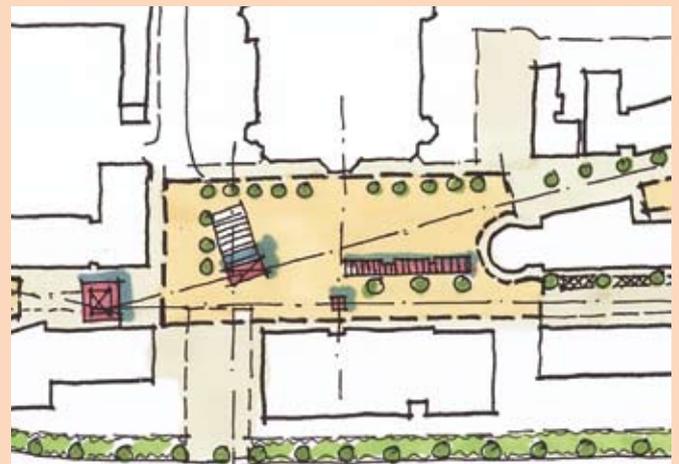
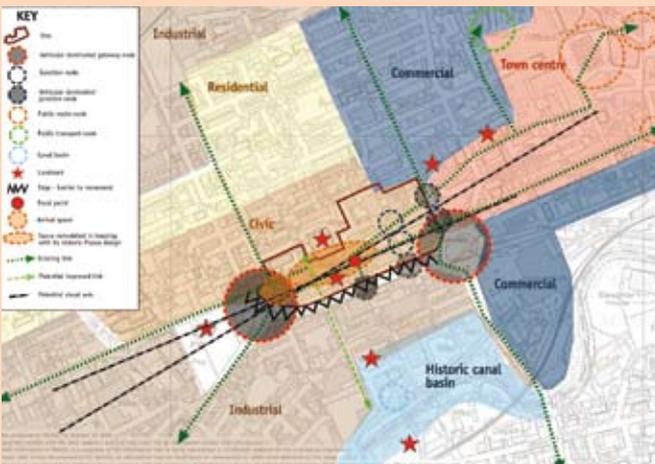
- Create a framework of streets and spaces which connects to the wider public realm network within the town centre
- Re-establish Chester Square junction as a pedestrian public space which forms the arrival point into the town centre from the west
- Alter the existing master plan to create a splayed entrance to Henry Square, in keeping with historical characteristics
- Re-model Henry Square in accordance with Georgian design principles, within a 21st century context
- Revise the movement framework to re-establish pedestrian priority within Bentinck Square
- Re-connect the site with the surrounding urban grid along deliverable routes
- Provide additional focal points along the key axis to improve legibility

### DEVELOPING THE DESIGN CONCEPT

The concept for the public realm site was therefore to re-create a series of connecting high quality streets, walks and spaces that when taken in the context of the proposed buildings, become a destination and a reason for visiting Ashton in their own right. It was to respond to the site's former historic urban grain, and re-establish the Georgian connection in a contemporary manner. This required



**Opposite page** Signage located along key axes complements the verticality of the chimney and marks key routes into town  
**Left** The developed master plan  
**Below left** Analysis which challenged the existing master plan  
**Below** Early concept designs enhance the visual and physical axes



amendments to some of the building footprints within the approved master plan in order to re-create some of the historical spatial sequences identified. The new urban spaces would be flexible and capable of being used for a variety of purposes in Manchester's range of weather conditions.

Further, the design of these spaces would be forward looking - reflecting and celebrating the regeneration of the St Petersfield quarter and creating a strong yet contemporary synergy between the new development and the site's heritage. Our aim was to create a framework of linked activity nodes and character spaces, each with their own distinctive characteristics and qualities that respond to the constraints and opportunities within their particular site location. The issue of existing servicing and highways were key drivers influencing the design of the public realm and the operational requirements of buildings retained. The servicing/highway strategy established the constraints for the public realm and set parameters from which the design proposals were continually tested.

The scheme proposes character spaces linked by the key axis and geometries of the site and building form. These will be enhanced by providing a clutter free public realm, and utilising landmark signage to add to the verticality of the chimney and church.

The design concept established a character and identity for each of these spaces:

- **Chester Square** - Arrival space/gateway: formerly a road junction, a pragmatic approach to highway design was required to reduce clutter and retain the spatial qualities
- **Henry Square** - Public gathering space/hub, 60% hard and 40% soft based on the requirements to provide for events, outdoor eating and drinking, as well as informal spill out areas

- **The Circus** - Dynamic transitional space: required a rationalisation of highway movements to establish spatial qualities
- **The Nook/The Green** - Tranquil green places which required careful design and development of street widths to integrate planting around services
- **Old Street Promenade** - Transitional street of a human scale which is perceived as a secondary route to the town

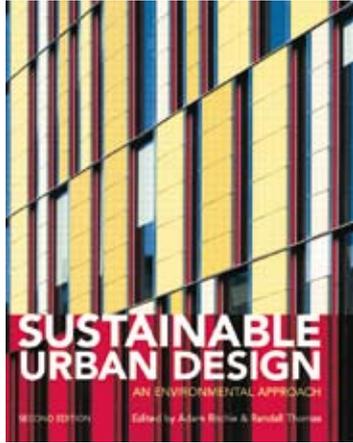
**CONSTRUCTION**

The public realm works within St Petersfield were delivered as one complete first phase (in advance of any buildings) utilising English Partnership grant funding. During the development of the scheme to RIBA stage D and E the proposals were constantly value engineered; however, by providing the right mix of higher quality natural materials with more standard products, located within key areas, and ensuring that a continual quality granite kerb and drainage channel permeated through the site, the integrity of the original design concept was preserved.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This project provides an example of how the process of urban design analysis, testing and evaluation, can add value to a scheme that had already received outline planning and approval and which was influenced by a wider strategy. Notwithstanding the fact that an earlier involvement in the project may have achieved a more connected development, by working with a responsive architect, a pragmatic highway consultant, an enlightened client body, and by having a sound urban design rationale, schemes can be amended, and value can added, throughout the latter stages of the planning and development process.

## SUSTAINABLE URBAN DESIGN, AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH, SECOND EDITION, RITCHIE A AND THOMAS R, TAYLOR AND FRANCIS, 2009, £29.99



ISBN 978 0 415 44782 9

*Urban Design* does not usually include reviews of second editions, but given the importance of the sustainability, coupled with the fact that for some reason we failed to review the first edition of *Sustainable Urban Design*, we thought a review of Adam Ritchie and Randall Thomas' second edition was very worthwhile.

Like the first edition, this edited collection is in three parts. A first part pulls the subject apart and includes chapters on urban planning, transportation, landscape, building design, energy, materials, water, and waste. Although the authors of each have inevitably been highly selective in their coverage, these are useful contributions that review some of the debates and priorities in each of these dimensions of the subject. A second section focuses on case studies and offers a range of built and unbuilt exemplars (most already well known to readers) that illustrate how to put the principles into practice. A final section offers, in a series of appendices, a range of technical information on different aspects of the sustainable design agenda e.g. air quality, acoustics, fuel cells, etc.

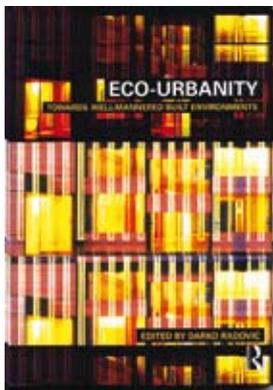
All together this is a valuable contribution to the literature, made all the more useful by the significant revisions and linking narrative added since the first edition. Collectively the

book puts the lie to the sceptic voices of some recent authors in *Urban Design* (see Issue 109) who have argued – seemingly with little evidence – that sustainability and vision can not go hand in hand.

My only concern is that in a fast moving subject such as this, these contributions may look quickly out of date as new internet sources such as CAFE's [Sustainablecities.org.uk](http://Sustainablecities.org.uk) come on-line to offer the latest and regularly up-dated thinking on the subject. The value of this publication, of course, is that the authors have stood back and reflected on the field and all its constituent parts. In so doing they offer us a more considered and digestible (if, at times, a little overly-evangelical) view of the field than other sources have so far been able to achieve. I would strongly recommend this attractive volume to students and practitioners alike.

Matthew Carmona

## ECO-URBANITY - TOWARDS WELL-MANNERED BUILT ENVIRONMENTS DARKO RADOVIC (EDITOR), ROUTLEDGE 2009, £27.99



ISBN 0 145 47278 4

What is refreshing about this thoroughly put together book, combining papers of 15 authors, is its eastern perspective. It was generated at the University of Tokyo where the editor Darko Radovic has a professorship. The book deliberately followed a loose-fit analytical model capable of accommodating quantitative and qualitative aspects of environmentally responsive and responsible practices.

Divided into three parts the book revisits first the idea of a compact city, its strategies and success stories, introduced by Radovic's essay on sustainable development in times of crisis and globalisation. It examines scale,

fine grain, density, availability of public spaces as contributions to sustainable urban living, applying it to Melbourne and Europe: Oriol Clos on Barcelona, David Sim on eco-villages in Sweden, traditional hill towns in southern Europe, public stairs in Edinburgh, shared road space in Copenhagen, the banks of the Seine in Paris, etc. Mike Jenks proposes a way forward to sustainable quality of urban life by design by 'defragmenting' fragmented large cities.

The second part presents new approaches to shrinking cities, a real issue in Japan; it raises problems of continuity in terms of form and culture under modernising pressures and critically reviews the notion of sustainable city by comparing sprawl in Melbourne and Bangkok. The third part discusses other scales and sensibilities. It analyses Jerusalem from a historic point of view, proposes a deliberate reintroduction of nature into Tokyo based on its times as Edo, and discusses other Japanese eco-design strategies, including energy efficiency for the urban scale down to accomplished detailing of buildings. Even the dead have a place in reflections about cemetery design as architecture with the aim to sustain cultural forms.

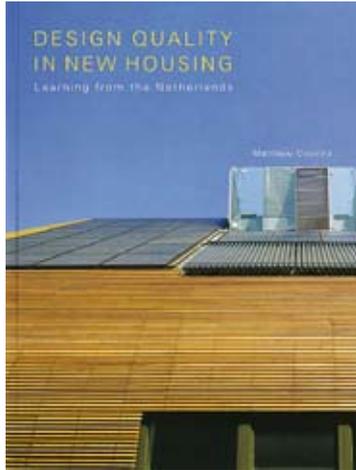
Radovic's erudite introduction and conclusion propose an original conceptual framework and how it can accommodate a wide range of design cultures and interpretations away from western design orthodoxy. In place of reductionist conclusions he prefers three tableaux of concepts related to environmental design strategies and actions: continuity, (de) fragmentation, shortage and responsibility; commonalities and contrasts related to scale; and finally design, collaborations, strategies and resources related to scale.

For once, lessons can be learnt from different approaches to design, and in particular from structural, ethical and cultural principles which do not necessarily rest on western values. Both the approach to, and the content of the book are well worth the attention of European and North American urban designers. It has a clear structure and includes many illustrations. Undoubtedly for cost reasons the colour pictures are grouped in a few pages which are difficult to connect to their articles. A bibliography would have been useful to provide an original compendium of less well known references.

Judith Ryser

## DESIGN QUALITY IN NEW HOUSING, LEARNING FROM THE NETHERLANDS

MATTHEW COUSINS, TAYLOR & FRANCIS, 2009, £39.99 (PB)



ISBN 978 0 415 44770 6

An attractively presented book, this publication addresses growing interest and respect for modern Dutch housing, and provides an illustrated review of new housing schemes. Its basis is the comparison between British and Dutch housing, from space standards, finishes, performance, policies, quality control mechanisms, and procurement processes, and it draws upon several English examples to show how quality has improved here. There is a discussion on the cultural context for house building,

and the Dutch government's schemes to deliver consistently better homes, which in turn reveal very different priorities, degrees of involvement and a passion for design in the Dutch initiatives. The skills that underpin both countries' development industry are also reviewed, and covers site based skills and trades through to professional attitudes.

The book provides sketch plans, diagrams, some dimensions, photographs and maps of nine case studies and assesses each against the evaluation tools promoted by the relevant government. These are the seven-point Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning from the Netherlands, and CABE's four-point Housing Audit. The five case studies from the Netherlands are from Borneo-Sporenburg and Ijburg in Amsterdam, Vathorst, Amersfoort; Leidsche Rijn, Utrecht; and Ypenburg, The Hague. From England are Staithes, Gateshead; Accordia, Cambridge; Donnybrook Quarter and Greenwich Millennium Village in London, with a brief review of the contribution by 'modern methods of construction' to design quality - the £60k House Initiative, Rogers' Oxley Park houses, IKEA's BoKlok, The

Lighthouse and BRE's prototypes.

Cousins concludes by setting out why and how we should learn from the Netherlands, and discusses four main themes: implementation, design quality through diversity and through good design, and urban design. By using a shared risk approach to development procurement, the Dutch housing building programme manages contributions from different designers and developers, learns from its mistakes, and does not operate primarily for profit. Appointing a development scheme 'coach' has ensured that quality has been pursued at all stages of several schemes. In both national contexts, the vision of the client, calibre of the design team, direction of the planning authority and rigour of the management plan each play a major role in creating exemplary housing. Cousins also concludes that in assessing housing quality, we should adopt the Dutch process of resident satisfaction surveys, rather than asking other professionals, to see how design is helping to meet needs and make better places to live, or not.

Louise Thomas

## THE INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF PLANNING PRACTICE

ED JUDITH RYSER AND TERESA FRANCONI, ISOCARP, NETHERLANDS, 2008



ISBN 90 755 24 226

The fifth edition of the *International Manual of Planning Practice* published by the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), is an immensely ambitious review of the state of world planning. The manual consists of a book and a CD, obviously the way to go for this quantity of information. The book contains one page syntheses of 101 countries, based on the contributions

by experienced local planners, whose CVs would have been welcome. It begins with an essay on the state of the art and future outlook of planning history which takes a broader view than the usual UK centric one by reminding us of how much South America especially has contributed to the development of planning. Trying to give a précis of the issues affecting 101 countries with the massive range of subjects ranging from public involvement and sustainability that dominate western planning policy to getting even the most basic infrastructure in place in developing countries, leaves one trying to get a grip on what or where the text is directed. Perhaps it could have been better to have tackled the issues relevant to each level of planning sophistication under a number of sub groups rather than trying a blanket coverage of where this vast subject is heading. Like most planning books the conclusion reminded me of why I am glad to be an urban designer as it spiralled into platitudes about flexible and responsive planning

balancing the aspirations of different groups in society, which does not reflect any planning department that I have ever dealt with.

The country studies on the CD contain a huge amount of useful information and statistics, some of which is unfortunately out of date: Abuja in Nigeria for example has ten times the population stated. Local contact names and addresses would have been useful though obviously difficult to keep current. Each contribution contains a section of how planning actually functions in each country, a tricky subject to address head on if the writer ever aspires to work in the country again. The bilingual France entry wins the prize for graphics and educational content for those wishing to brush up on their French planning terminology. The manual gets top marks for the scope of its ambition, quality of production and graphics and the work of the dedicated contributors and editors.

Malcolm Moor

## CONTRIBUTORS

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

**Rachel Leggett**, Project Coordinator for Inspire East, part of East of England Development Agency

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

**Malcolm Moor**, architect and independent consultant in urban design; co-editor of *Urban Design Futures*

**Judith Ryser**, researcher, journalist, writer and urban affairs consultant to Fundacion Metropoli, Madrid

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

## REGIONAL CONTACTS

If you are interested in getting involved with any regional activities please get in touch with the following

## LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

Robert Huxford and Louise Ingledow  
Tel 020 7250 0892  
Email [louise.ingledow@udg.org.uk](mailto:louise.ingledow@udg.org.uk)

## 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 [udgeastmidlands@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:udgeastmidlands@hotmail.co.uk)

## WEST MIDLANDS

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

## EAST ANGLIA

Daniel Durrant  
Tel 01223 372 638  
Email [daniel.durrant@rce.org.uk](mailto:daniel.durrant@rce.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 222 6006  
Email [georgia.giannopoulou@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:georgia.giannopoulou@ncl.ac.uk)

## SCOTLAND

Alona Martinez-Perez  
Emails  
[alona.martinez@urban-design-group.org.uk](mailto:alona.martinez@urban-design-group.org.uk)  
[scotland\\_street@yahoo.com](mailto:scotland_street@yahoo.com)

## NORTHERN IRELAND

James Hennessey  
Tel 028 9073 6690  
Email [james@paulhogarth.com](mailto:james@paulhogarth.com)

The North of England region and Wales require contacts

Directory of practices, corporate organisations and urban design courses subscribing to this index. The following pages provide a service to potential clients when they are looking for specialist urban design advice, and to those considering taking an urban design course.

Those wishing to be included in future issues should contact the UDG, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ  
Tel 020 7250 0872  
Email [admin@udg.org.uk](mailto:admin@udg.org.uk)

## PRACTICE INDEX

## ALAN BAXTER &amp; ASSOCIATES

Consulting Engineers,  
70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ  
Tel 020 7250 1555  
Email [abaxter@alanbaxter.co.uk](mailto:abaxter@alanbaxter.co.uk)  
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Croxton's Mill, Little Waltham, Chelmsford,  
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Tel 01245 361611  
Email [ama@amaplanning.com](mailto:ama@amaplanning.com)  
Website [www.amaplanning.com](http://www.amaplanning.com)  
Contacts Andrew Martin/  
Sophie O'Hara Smith

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## ANTHONY REDDY ASSOCIATES

Dartry Mills, Dartry Road, Dublin 6  
Tel 00 353 1 498 7000  
Email [info@anthonyreddy.com](mailto:info@anthonyreddy.com)  
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www.tribalgroup.co.uk/urbanstudioteam  
Contacts Simon Gray/ Simon Green

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Website [www.bcu.ac.uk](http://www.bcu.ac.uk)

Contact Joe Holyoak

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Email [landscape@leedsmet.ac.uk](mailto:landscape@leedsmet.ac.uk)

Website [www.leedsmet.ac.uk/courses/la](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/courses/la)

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Contact Ombretta Romice

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Contact Bill Erickson

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.

## TODAY WE HAVE NAMING OF PATHS

Here is a little linguistic mystery. We are all familiar with guide books to foreign cities which murder the English language. It is exceptional to come across one which appears to introduce to the reader an unfamiliar, and very useful, English word. Such was my experience in Lyon in January, when I bought a guide book containing the word *ondonym*, which it said was *a term designating a path*. Wonderful! Why hadn't I come across this before? A word under which we can classify all those various and evocative urban design terms from boulevard, parade and avenue, through street and lane, to alley, ginnel and shut. But then I found Rob Cowan doesn't have it in his *Dictionary*, and a Google search found no record of it, apart from some gibberish.

As I unsuccessfully scanned French and English dictionaries and other reference books, I began to feel like Jorge Luis Borges in his story *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*.<sup>1</sup> Borges and his friend Bioy Casares search fruitlessly for the entry in *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1917) on the region of Asia Minor called Uqbar, which appears to have gone missing between Volume XLVI (Tor-Ups) and Volume XLVII, which begins with an entry on Ural-Altai Languages.

'That night we visited the National Library. In vain we exhausted atlases, catalogues, annuals of geographical societies, travellers' and historians' memoirs: no one had ever been in Uqbar'.

Perhaps the best response to the mystery would be to start to use the word *ondonym* as though it actually did exist. After all, who could deny that a generic name for words for paths is needed? If a lot of us used it in print, its use would surely become validated, and Rob would be obliged to include it in a future revised edition of the *Dictionary*. There, I've made a start – over to you.

The Lyon guide book was an introduction to the locally characteristic and fascinating spatial type known as the *traboule*. These are complex pedestrian routes that penetrate dense street blocks in the old silk-working districts, built on steep hillsides to the north of the city centre between the Saone and the Rhone, and on the west bank of the Saone. They are entered through inconspicuous doors on the street, zig-zag up and downhill as narrow passages between buildings, sometimes open into small courtyards, and then go vertically up the sides of buildings in elaborate open-sided and arcaded staircases. Their origin is partly explained in terms of providing secure and sheltered routes by which delicate and valuable silk products could be transported safely around the district. But the *traboules* also proved invaluable in the urban insurrection following the silk-workers' strike of 1831, when the strikers' intimate and esoteric spatial knowledge of their localities enabled them to evade and outwit the military.

It is always a delight to come across spatial types which not only contribute to the local identity of a town, but actually structure it morphologically. But they are always ancient. The *traboules* of Lyon, the wynds of Edinburgh Old Town, the arcades of Bologna; all ancient. Shall we be able to invent something equally locally distinctive in the 21st century, a new name for which we can add to our catalogue of *ondonyms*?

Joe Holyoak

1 Borges, J.L., *Labyrinths*, Penguin Modern Classics, 1970.