UDG CHAIRMAN, DUNCAN ECOB’S THOUGHTS

The end of year looms for students of design, engineering, the architectures and planning. Many of them will go on to have a profound influence on our cities and towns, together with others that gain formal qualifications which legitimise their role in shaping the places in which we live: whether through physical interventions or the differences they make to the social and economic decisions that affect our society. Many of these will not consider themselves to be urban designers - yet some of them however, will take an early leap and choose to broaden their experience and study urban design either through a formal route of education, or through the school of hard knocks - job experience.

Urban design covers many professional boundaries: not solely those in the built environment, but the natural environment and social and economic sciences too. It is a ‘generalism’ rather than a ‘specialism’: one that is defined by the needs of society today, rather than some historical tradition.

How can we encourage all this fresh new talent to embrace the opportunities that their structured learning has given them, and expand this into other areas of skill that affect place? Dialogue is key, so that a shared language can evolve. By softening the edges of the professional disciplines (undoubtedly this will involve many of them sitting together), by sharing experience and knowledge, infinitely more can be gained than offered, and with nothing conceded.

Urban design is not the preserve of one profession or one school of thought, nor is it only about the physical environment. The broad range of skills that combine to create a place that brings delight to those that inhabit it, needs different stories from all the participants.

At the UDG we must continue to embrace the opportunity for this dialogue and encourage and facilitate it at all levels. From the freshest student to the seasoned pro there is much to offer. If within the professions we open our edges maybe our hearts will follow.

UDG DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Be a Leader in Urban Design

There are many opportunities to get more involved in urban design, and to take a leading role in what happens in the future. Here are some suggestions.

GET INVOLVED WITH THE URBAN DESIGN GROUP – LOCALLY OR IN LONDON

We welcome individuals to join in the running of the Urban Design Group, or developing new ideas, initiatives, policies and publications. We would welcome summaries of core documents, including policy statements, and seminal publications. There are also active people in many regions of the UK, and the latest is Georgia Giannopoulou from the University of Newcastle who is running an event in 2010 on Transition Towns and opportunities to join with them.

SET UP A LOCAL STREET GROUP

For young professionals and students interested in urban design. People can be drawn from anywhere at all: the wider the better. The recipe for success is to have free or very low cost events, that won’t take more than three hours out of someone’s life, or weekend. Popular activities include site visits, guided walks, bike rides along new cycle routes, discussion evenings in pubs.

SET UP AN URBAN SALON

Invite a group of people from diverse backgrounds as you can find, including banking, transport, health, science, and so on, to meet together once a month at a quiet wine bar or similar venue to discuss the changes that are happening around us. The ideal number of people for a salon is about six to eight.

HOLD AN EVENT IN URBAN DESIGN WEEK 2010: 18-26 SEPTEMBER

Urban Design Week is an annual national event that champions urban design by promoting and encouraging awareness of places through good practice, fostering innovation in the built environment, and celebrating urban culture and lifestyles. Urban Design Week was first launched in the United Kingdom but other countries are encouraged to participate by promoting it to make this a truly international event.

Activities can include:
• a lecture, seminar or award presentation
• a walkabout or urban safari, a workshop
• a petition, a campaign
• a street audit
• a street make-over or an exhibition
• or direct action

If you would like to run an event, let us know and we will help publicise it. If your organisation or company is interested in sponsoring Urban Design Week please get in touch to find out how you can get involved.

UNIVERSITIES AND STUDENTS

The UDG is also very keen to support students and lecturers, and earlier this year held an impromptu meeting between the Chair and some of the key UK courses. As a result in spring 2011 there will be an event for people who run courses in urban design, providing an opportunity to exchange best practice and to discuss the development of urban education.

Use your enthusiasms, ambitions and interests to help lead the profession. Please don’t hesitate to contact the Urban Design Group office (see details on p.3).

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 7 JULY 2010
The Language of Urbanism
Rob Cowan, author of The Dictionary of Urbanism, will trace the emergence of specialist languages within the built and natural environment professions, including how this confounds understanding, consumes resources and compromises the public good.

WEDNESDAY 25 AUGUST 2010
Public Realm Interventions: A free two hour walking tour: Paul Reynolds will guide us around public realm interventions currently being realised within central London, including Oxford Circus, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, and the Crossrail proposal at Tottenham Court Road. Start: 6:15pm, outside Café Nero on the corner of Great Castle Street and Regent Street. For further details contact admin@udg.org.uk.

FRANCIS TIBBALDS AWARD

SHORTLISTED PROJECTS

Hampshire High, Ashford 34
Kettering Town Centre Action Plan, Savills Urban Design 36
Waterfront Wakefield, FaulknerBrowns 38

BOOK REVIEWS

Ground Control, Anna Minton 40
Designing High-Density Cities, Edward Ng (ed) 40
Politics, Planning and Homes in a World City, Duncan Bowie 40
Gated Communities, Samer Bagaeen and Ola Uddu (eds) 41

PRACTICE INDEX 42

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ENDPIECE

Six Towns in Search of a Centre, Joe Holyoak 49

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WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2010
Secure By Design?
It is now more than 30 years since the IRA’s threat led to anti-terrorism interventions in the urban environment. Speakers from the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and the National Counter Terrorism Security Office will discuss the challenges we face and how urban designers can be at the forefront in making our built environment safer for everyone.

WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER 2010
Urban Design for Developing Cities
Three speakers explore the challenges and lessons to be learned from urban design in developing cities: Ed Parham on the unplanned settlements of Jeddah; Prof Nabeel Hamdi on community centred urban programmes from around the world, and Tony Lloyd Jones on sustainable development and strategic urban design in Africa.

THURSDAY 21 – SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER, 2010, LEEDS
The National Conference on Urban Design: Urban Design on the Edge
What happens to places in an age of austerity? What role do those involved in shaping the urban environment have to play in an era of cuts in the public sector and when the private sector is being starved of funds? How should urban designers work with and alongside local communities and their elected representatives to help fulfil their potential? This conference brings together a wide range of people who have already begun to address the challenges facing our neighbour- hoods, towns and cities. It will hear from those involved in innovative projects that have successfully engaged with - and made the most of - the relationship between design and local economic sustainability. Participants will have the chance to review and debate appropriate responses to key contemporary design, social, economic, political and environmental issues. The event will examine and explore the contribution practitioners in urban design can make to addressing current and future problems and learn through examples about what works and what to do next.
As a new government takes over, it is worth reflecting upon what has happened to the world of urban design in the past thirteen years. The list of notable events is pretty impressive: it starts with the publication of the Urban Task Force’s Towards an Urban Renaissance, followed soon after by the birth of CABE, an organisation that ever since has been advocating for quality in the urban environment and publishing advice to achieve it. One of these publications, By Design, has now become part of statutory planning through its citation in PPS1, one of several government documents that recognises the importance of urban design. English Partnerships (now the Housing and Regeneration Corporation) and CABE joined in on the act, publishing helpful manuals and promoting urban design. Beyond publications, the world outside has changed as well: shared spaces, improved public realm, successful regeneration schemes, bike lanes, new and improved public spaces, can be found in an increasing number of cities. It no longer is always necessary to go abroad to find good examples of urban design, and this magazine is happy to have shown some of these. Most of all, professionals and the general public seem to have, at last, understood the importance of quality urban environment.

And yet, much remains to be done. Articles in this issue paint a less than happy picture of the suburbs, the places where a majority of people live and where the mass housing builders operate, often with a free hand. That is the new frontier where we will have to campaign in the next few years. Can we hope that the new coalition government will protect the achievements of the past decade and not return to the bad practices of the 80s, when local authorities were not allowed to interfere in design and market forces were given free rein to ruin the environment? The UDG and its allies will have to be vigilant and reinforce their campaigns; Jon Rowland in this issue throws down the gauntlet with his proposal for a new Sub-urban Task Force.

If urban design consultancy is seen by some as the glamorous face of the development process, then urban design in Local Planning Authorities (LPA) are where the hard yards of delivering real improvements in our everyday environment are won. Tim Haggard, Development Control Team Manager at East Hertfordshire Council in Hertford and Neil Double from Tower Hamlets Council gave revealing insights into the planning process as seen from a market town and inner city borough perspectives and how they aim to raise design standards. An amendment of the Planning Act 2008 stated that LPAs must have regard to the desirability of achieving good design; so, if the language of government in the last twenty years has increasingly embraced urban design, how much impact is this having at the local level? CABE’s 2003 survey found only 15 per cent of LPAs employed an architect, landscape architect or urban designer: it is clear that we have to train more urban designers and persuadethem of the value of spending part of their career in the public sector, just as an earlier generation found a spell at the GLC or the more progressive local authorities, a useful stepping stone in their careers. This would only be feasible if the image of planning departments were not seen as negative, reactionary and a burden, rather than the visionary activity at the heart of sustainable place-making that it should be according to a TCPA report. Ten years since the establishment of CABE, there is a strong sense that urban design is not yet mainstream in local government planning, and that attitudes could be more positive about the benefits of good quality development and less tolerant of the problems of poor design. Tim showed how the problems within LPAs can be seen as a result of shortage of resources, performance measures where quantity of output can be measured but not quality, disruption resulting from too many changes in structures and organisation, and conflicts where the adversarial legal system encourages disputes rather than promoting agreement.

If developers could be encouraged to spend more on better design to get planning permission quicker, rather than using expensive barristers to fight appeals, both the public and private sector could benefit from better quality development. Neil Double followed with a well illustrated Tower Hamlets Story summarising the way an urban design approach has been adopted in preparing Tower Hamlets LDP plan.

Who would imagine that urban morphology would be a subject to generate a heated debate? A well informed and intellectually challenging talk by Karl Krupf, director of REAL and researcher at the University of Birmingham, managed to get UDG members into questioning what morphology is and how they could be applied. Walter Benjamin, Karl’s own work in Leighton Buzzard added morphological analysis in order to identify specific character areas of the city. Karl mostly dealing with the boundaries of morphology: how far should it go, what parallel in the mind of the designer. The same advice is therefore given to the urban designer facing a geographical area, with the added complication that many seemingly distinct elements need to be combined in parallel in the mind of the designer. The audience had many questions for Karl mostly dealing with the boundaries of morphology: how far should it go, what should and should not be included, to what purpose? Not all of these could be debated in the short remaining time but members stayed at the Gallery, or adjourned to a nearby hostel to continue digging.
Renovation and Transformation in Central London

Walking Tour London 17 April 2010

Charlie Rose, Camden Council’s Urban Design and Conservation Officer, recently provided for Street a tour of Covent Garden and Bloomsbury, visiting past, present and future residential developments, and hidden churches, some of which had been radically refurbished.

The tour started in the colourful Seven Dials area of Covent Garden, where a brief history of local development was provided.

Walking back through Seven Dials we followed a straight axis from one of the radials to St Giles in the Fields and onto the new Sainsbury Central St Giles development. This mixed-use scheme comprises blocks of differing heights, facades, colours and angles, all of which help break up the overall mass of the development. Charlie brought with him a sample of the cladding terracotta tiles which was of considerable weight.

Next we visited the three churches on the tour, the Swiss Church on Endell Street. We were shown around by Isaiah Jost, President of the Consistory, who described the radical refurbishment of the Grade II listed church by Grafton Architects AG. The structure creates an irregularly angled elevation facing the hall with oak framed glazing of varying transparency, set away from the original walls.

Walking through Holborn we viewed a block bound by Southampton Place, High Holborn and Kingsway run by Sheppard Robson: the façade treatment of the elevations provided a contextual response to their neighbouring building of contrasting quality and success. As we continued Majewa Chase (facilities manager) invited us into the Grade II listed Great Ormond Street Chapel, a rare example of osteo-Franco-Italianate style; it is located inside the hospital, fol-

Keep on Walking

Urban Design Study Tour of Berlin, 19 – 22 March 2010

This energetic if brief weekend trip was enthusiastically lapped up by our odd dozen designers. Berlin is a great European city for the sciences, philosophy and humanities, was also one most hurt by the post World War II ideological rift, but which has taken longer than 20 years to recover from its traumatic past. The city population is still only half lower than at the fall of the wall in 1989 in spite of all the government led action to improve its infrastructure.

The Boulevard of Print (Berlin) now reclaim its place as a major axis at the heart of the city, evident by the restored Brandenburg Gate and French constructed Pariser Platz. It is undubitably, thanks to a major highway tunnelled beneath the central Tiergarten Park. The S-Bahn has been rejuvenated; its platforms are light and airy, sheltered under broad barrel vaulted roofs.

The Hauptbahnhof (main train station) is a fantastic multi-tiered cathedral of connectiv-

The teachers led us down into the Underpass and onto the new central axis, the Wall Path, which is evident in the extravagant international style of Potsdamer Platz. One benefit of this run is that it has established a new commercial centre for the whole of Berlin, which cannot be viewed as either west or east in character. Berlin has now established detailed area plans, the Plänewerk, with building codes to transform space existing urban fabric of the city. Strong design guidance is a feature of the German planning system with many plan-

Berlin, €106 billion spent in 10 years. The initial approach is part of Germany’s wider effort to build a Europa that has lost so much. The €450 million replica reconstruction of the City’s Royal Palace on its original site is controversial, although its defenders point to successful historicist reconstruction elsewhere. The initiative is intended, as it will be a replica classic building on two facades but of contemporary design on two others. For all the wartime damage, some conservation gems remain such as the delightfully restored Hackescher Markt station and the intimate courtyards of nearby Hackeschen Höfe.

Our tour looked at examples of neighbour regeneration in inner city districts of old East Berlin. The quarter manage- ment approach is part of Germany’s wider programme of social sustainability. The programmes are well funded, resident run and show demonstrable benefits. In Kreuz-berg Turkish community, investment has been on the softer skills of training and education to the tour the quarter, and by strategies to encourage the occupation of underused commercial ground floors, the Böshagener Platz area has become a very popular mixed use area with a lively evening economy. A main square can serve varying interests: apparently the original suggestion was requested by the police to maintain pub-

Berlin for seven years who provided local knowledge.

The city planners pursue critical recon- structive urban design, planning and design, and instead of using traditional tools, use a number of radical design tools to address the challenges of the 21st century.


easy going sustainable city living that many others only talk about, a target of 80 per cent of all city trips to be made by sustainable modes, 96 per cent of construction waste re-

British Green for housing is now nationwide. The gradual repair of the city with historical references, be it Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum or the rebuilt Berlin Palace is fascinating, I look forward to my next visit.

Many thanks to Alan and Thelma Stones, for their able organisation and to Neil Curneen, an urban designer and resident of Berlin for seven years who provided local knowledge.

Tim Hawkett

Top to bottom: City Centre model in Planning Department, Berlin City Palace; Hackesche Höfe; Sony Centre, Potsdamer Platz

News

Issue 115 – Summer 2010 – Urban Design – 5
The Urban Design Interview : Paul Smith

What is your current job and how long have you been there?
I am Director of Urban Design & Development at JMP, based in London Docklands. The company has its roots in the principles of land use and transport planning seen in the New Towns programme, having been set up by George Jamieson and Bill McKay on leaving Camberwell in 1964.

In the six years since I joined, the company has evolved from its core transport planning business to the creation of a single combined team of transport and urban design professionals which has proven very successful. This has led to this strategy being rolled out across the company; therefore for the last two years my role has been to champion JMP’s urban design capability nationally.

Can you describe the path that you followed to become an urban designer and what motivated you?
I started my career as a highway and traffic consultant working on out of town shopping centres in the early 1990s, before they fell out of fashion. Through a series of coincidences and happy accidents, I ended up working on the moon with Richard Branson designing Virgin City. The most important skill is that of observation; an ability to take an interest in the built environment and to observe new facets of a place each time, even if visited many times before.

What would you like to be doing in ten years’ time?
Working as part of a team masterplanning a new development where the built realm and movement network are seamlessly integrated and mutually reinforcing rather than in continual conflict and tension; alternatively working on the moon with Richard Branson designing Virgin City.

As an urban designer, do you have a role model?
Sir Frederick Gibberd (1908 – 1984) for his commitment to Harlow, the town he designed, saw built, and lived in until his death. He designed the town to be ‘an organism which would go on changing and being rebuilt’ and understood the need for urbanity in the creation of a new town. He was also a truly inspirational landscape gardener; I would strongly recommend a visit to the gardens of his house in Harlow; the Gibberd Garden, which he designed and largely built himself. www.the gibberd garden.co.uk

What should the Urban Design Group be doing now or in the future?
Leave early enough for meetings where you can walk the last part of your journey (or all of it, if it’s not far) and experience more than the inside of the train / tube / bus / taxi.

What advice would you give to UD readers?
Making urbanism work requires work. Supermarkets have gone from strength to strength through the economic downturn, to the point where they are becoming major players in defining the built fabric of our towns and cities. Their ambitious building programmes now include more mixed-use developments, with housing, shopping streets and schools clustered around the supermarket.

In large part, this is a consequence of government policy that has favoured integrated town centre development over out-of-town retail sheds. Such schemes often bring much needed affordable housing and community facilities. There is a downside though – vulnerable local authorities can feel under pressure to accept poorly designed schemes.

JMP has been planning over twenty supermarket-led mixed-use schemes where stores are typically around 4000 sqm (net sales area). The director of design teams find it a challenge to create convincing urban forms and attractive residential environments out of this new typology. We see schemes that are car focused and architecturally confusing. The housing they propose can appear to be an add-on to the store.

The problem is that planning a place in response to the needs of the retailer can get in the way of creating an attractive urban environment which contributes to local identity and a sense of place. In Bromley-by-Bow in east London, for instance, a new district centre has been planned to a Tesco-led master plan. We found it gave priority to the siting of the store rather than to the bigger design challenge, that of creating an integrated and sustainable neighbourhood. For instance, it plans a residential tower overlooking the busy A2 where noise, air quality and outlook for residents are at their worst.

CABE has also been critical of proposals that crudely superimpose housing on top of a standard format store box and multi-storey car park. As well as failing to create convincing architecture in their own right, such developments often produce a poor living environment for residents.

How to get it right?
For schemes to come to scale, supermarkets need to understand the nature of the neighbour- hood they are working in, and create a brief which responds to it. Can it accommodate buildings with a large footprint, or does the street pattern have too fine a grain? Can the standard rectangular floorplate be tailored to fit the site? Other types of use wrapping the store, such as housing, should also be designed at an appropriate scale.

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Being a local authority planner working on a Local Development Framework (LDF), can sometimes feel like being a passenger on a recently re-branded inter-city train. Just when you figure out where you are going, got a comfortable seat and discovered who is joining you on the journey, the destination changes and you no longer recognise the countryside.

Whilst being on this LDF journey, I started to question the extent to which this new system of spatial planning actually recognised and embedded urban design. This got me pondering, why is spatial planning so often applied without any real grasp of the concept of space and place? And why considering the necessity of space and place in urban design, is it so frequently tagged-on and watered down and not being recognised and embedded urban design.

Too many core strategies are focused on individual themes rather than integrating these themes into a spatial approach. This begins with getting back to basics, from the outset.

START THINKING ABOUT DESIGN FROM THE OUTSET

This article represents Neil Double’s personal view and not that of Tower Hamlets Council.

THE NEXT STEPS FOR SPATIAL PLANNING AND LDFTs

Only through a creative, design-led approach will the integration of physical strands with people based aspirations come to align with space and place, resulting in a better spatial planning framework system. CARE is of the view that local authority planners are well placed to drive forward this new positive, proactive planning system, and that more needs to be done to improve design, graphic and digital skills. Local authorities should harness the opportunities presented by multi-disciplinary working, not only in the benefits it can bring in producing a better end product but also the efficiency and resource savings it can bring. What is also needed is some consistency and certainty from central government, so that a focused, long-term approach to development can gradually take root across the country. This is not a 10-15 year project; this is a generational project, one that must take root in the planning inspectorate, the educational system and local authorities.

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Many more LDF documents, including a large dose of Core Strategies are likely to be submitted for examination over the next few years. It will be vitally important for someone, to step back at some stage to assess whether these new breed of plans have successfully progressed in the spirit and practice of spatial planning. Without this critique, we may find we have missed the final destination with which we all thought we were working towards, of an LDF system embedded in space and place.

Neil Double, Urban Designer at Tower Hamlets Council
Public space is the setting where history, culture, development, progress or even the pitfalls of a society become visible. In this sense, public urban space and the public realm are useful indicators for understanding how societies are coping with the new challenges posed by economic, social and environmental trends of the 21st century. In urban Mexico, different forms of public space production and consumption are observed. On the one hand, in the affluent areas of most cities, public urban space reflects contemporary economic trends and capital dominance; on the other hand, traditional areas and lower income neighbourhoods reflect completely different logics and dynamics. Lack of adequate territorial policies, unemployment, insecurity, social exclusion, insufficient social services, urban blight and fragmentation, precarious conditions of housing and urban infrastructure are the main problems in Mexico and these can be observed in the public realm. They are evident through the physical characteristics of the space, social interaction, political protests and all the appropriation practices that people carry out in city streets and squares, pavements, parks, market places and the urban space of their neighbourhoods.

MARGINAL AND CONFLICTIVE PUBLIC SPACES

In low-income peripheral neighbourhoods and some other fragmented environments, public space represents the precariousness and marginalisation of the society. We may think that the urban poor in Latin America are not interested in public spaces, but on the contrary, they aspire to urban continuity rather than discontinuity, integration rather than fragmentation and spatial quality rather than merely satisfying basic necessities, and this is shown through some public spaces developed in poor neighbourhoods, commonly created informally. Through the struggle to defend, protect and improve public places, residents develop a sense of belonging and attachment and learn to value public space, which leads to actions for improvement. However, this is not a general rule; abandonment and neglect are often the regular condition of public places in poor urban areas.

Nevertheless, from a different perspective, the urban population with more economic power is configuring new forms of urban space which promote privatisation and fragmentation through the creation of closed residential neighbourhoods protected by walls and gates and where only the residents and members of their community are allowed to enter. Moreover, shopping malls and global supermarkets come together with this new city growth where public space is only regarded as a space for motorised traffic and therefore lacks a pleasant pedestrian environment. In these areas, public spending for good infrastructure and services are also concentrated in favour of private investment; this is in contrast to the lack of investment and improvement of public spaces in low-income areas.

On the other hand, some cities are characterised by a public space dominated by violence and insecurity, and a lack of social values. The city of Juarez on the northern border, is a city where public space has lost its role of social integrator and linker. This is a sick urban environment characterised by drug dealing and killings in public space, and where murders of women have been a problem for almost a decade. To sum up, in cities like these, low quality and an arid and threatening physical urban environment are the main characteristics.

GOOD PRACTICE

In contrast to marginal and fragmented or privatised public spaces, renovation and beautification of public space in historic city centres has been the main focus in most Mexican cities during the last few decades. Since the country has strongly been promoted as an attractive tourist destination, historic centres play an important role for visitors. City centres have been transformed into spaces for tourism and retail, considering historic cores as urban spaces of heritage that should be preserved and revitalised in favour of economic regeneration. This has resulted in successful improvements; however, in some cases local inhabitants have been ignored, and social and symbolic identities that have characterised these urban spaces for many centuries, have been neglected. Interesting urban interventions are observed, for example in the revitalisation of Mexico city’s historic centre: a great number of public spaces, squares, squares and parks have been improved, together with the promotion of major development projects (hotels, restaurants, offices, housing). If we consider that for many decades, this central area was totally abandoned with great problems of insecurity, low property prices, public space invasion by street vendors and cars, low urban quality and very low housing occupation, the urban regeneration strategies implemented in this area have led to a successful transformation.

Another successful case is the development of Paseos Santa Lucia in the northern city of Monterrey. This intervention is over a 3 km long route linking the historic centre of the city with a former steel factory, converted into an urban park. The result is a canal where footpaths, fountains, green areas, public art, cultural spaces, and restaurants are located. This canal was built as a public space to link the Monterrey Macroplaza with the second most important zone of the city, the Fundidora convention centre and the Fundidora Park. Fundidora Park was opened in 2001 and also represents one of the greatest public spaces in the country, an amazing park of 16 has in the metropolitan area of Monterrey. These new public spaces have been a total success, giving a new face to Monterrey for the enjoyment and socialisation of both its own inhabitants, and visitors from all over the world.

DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPACES

In contemporary urban Mexico, the balance between issues of equity, inclusion and accessibility to matters of collective interest, has often been undermined. Public land for neighbourhood parks, playgrounds and other public facilities has been left at the mercy of corrupt leaders, authorities, politicians and many other individuals and groups who negotiate it in exchange for private interests, political or economic power. Authorities often neglect the interests of ordinary inhabitants, marginalising them in favour of powerful economic agents and urban areas where major economic gains can be obtained. However, in many urban neighbourhoods, residents are concerned about public space; consequently they struggle for their right to enjoy it within their communities.

The case of Ciudad Bicentenario in Metepec, in the State of Mexico, is an important example of real citizen participation to defend a great public space: here the state authorities intended to sell the land to private investors to build a new commercial and financial centre, putting at risk more than 10 has available for public urban space, and affecting the urban infrastructure capacity available to the city. The citizens organised the defence and protection of this space through strong urban protests, and forced the authorities to reconsider their plans. Instead of the privatisation of this public land, inhabitants achieved the planning of a park and public facilities for the city.

FINAL COMMENTS

Public spaces of quality which bring communities together, represent an important asset for the viable development of our cities. Without public spaces, urban societies do not have a future. A city without a public space that shares a common quality, interest and values cannot be visualised, if the significance of urban public space in the city is considered.

The vitality, identity and character of public spaces are sustained by people’s interactions, activities and participation in the creation and transformation of cities. Public space processes need to be collaborative and participative, and all interested parties recognised, respected and taken into account. Actors in charge of the management of our cities should make a great effort to promote urban development that takes into account and direct their policies to the values of social equity, environmental quality, economic efficiency, political participation, real democracy and pluralism.

Viewpoints

THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN MEXICAN CITIES

Mauricio Hernández-Bonilla promotes the creation of democratic public spaces for Mexico’s divided society.
TOWARDS A SUBURBAN TASK FORCE?

The issue of the suburbs has often been a source of amusement and disparagement. At the UDG’s Francis Tibbalds awards in 2008, I made a plea to redirect our attention onto the suburb. Our focus as urban designers had been on the city. We had re-acquainted ourselves with the complexities of the urban environment and the importance of interdependence between uses, transport, lifestyle, density and so on. The Urban Task Force had helped us rediscover urbanism, a general set of philosophies related to ‘smarter growth’ and how we wish to live. Perhaps we need to think of a Suburban Task Force as a means of articulating a more responsive form of development that reflects the social, economic and design philosophies of our time, and the nature, form, and role of the suburb of the future.

In this issue a number of thinkers, commentators and practitioners present their views as a way of starting a debate. I believe the UDG is well placed to act as a progenitor for a new Manifesto for the Suburb, one that doesn’t just knock the developer for poor quality soulless estates but puts forward ideas and an overarching philosophy for the design and development of the 21st century suburb. After all this is the environment in which most people in this country live. Please join the debate.

— Jon Rowland

CREATING THE NEW SUBURB

Isabel Allen and Kevin McCloud argue for suburbs to have their own narrative

Suburb: the very word implies an inferiority complex: a weary acceptance that the ‘urb’ itself is the real deal; that this is a neighbourhood which exists only by virtue of its relationship to somewhere else.

To the youthful and ambitious, getting away becomes an ambition in itself. Where previous generations learnt times tables and French verbs by rote, contemporary suburban teenagers know the bus timetable by heart. The bus stop becomes a gathering place, one of the few notable, sheltered, landmarks in suburbia’s public realm, but also the point of departure, the threshold between the suburban existence and the seductive promise of the city it serves. Social hierarchy is stratified according to potential for escape. Who has a parent who is good for a lift? Who has an older sibling that can drive? The ultimate rite of passage is acquiring the consequent lack of independence. Parents resent the role of chauffeur. Those without means of transport feel trapped in their own home.

MIXED-USED NEIGHBOURHOODS

As a society, we understand the creeping menace of isolation, but also of obesity, inertia and ill health. We know too, of the urgent need to make better use of scarce resources, and to abate our rampant appetite for fuel. We know, or at least we ought to know, that our primary responsibility as place-makers is to design places that encourage people to conduct as much of their lives as possible within walking distance of their home.

We need to push for economic and planning policies that encourage mixed-use neighbourhoods, small-scale enterprise, local food production and working from home. But we also need to create the spatial conditions that allow these things to thrive. Self-sufficient neighbourhoods need spaces to grow food, socialise and trade. They need spaces to stroll, hire a car, park a bike.

Making places is about more than increasing the range of goods and services to hand. If a neighbourhood is to have its own centre of gravity, it needs an understanding of community that is greater than the sum of the individual households. It needs public space and shared space; places that allow for the possibility of sharing, working together, socializing. Spaces that invite you to amble, linger, chat.

Our obsession with bureaucratic neatness has eroded ambiguous spaces from our public realm. The market doesn’t like patches of land that can’t be easily parcelled up and sold. Housing Associations deliberately seek to minimise shared spaces in a quest to avoid neighbourly dispute. However, in banishing awkwardness and mess, we lose the very areas where relationships are forged. Kitchen gardens, shared vegetable plots, community buildings and car pools offer endless potential for disagreement and abuse, but are also fundamental in transforming discrete family units into a functioning community. As with families, the most successful communities are those that can accommodate, and survive, a healthy dose of argument and chaos.

↑ The Triangle, Swindon
All images, courtesy of Glenn Howells
The Triangle, Swindon

The most successful communities are those that can accommodate, and survive, a healthy dose of argument and chaos.

But stories do not always tell the story they purport to tell. Here, the truth is perhaps less important than the stories themselves, and the insight into the mindset of the tellers of the tales. Individually they suggest a history of bitterness at broken promises and a sense of profound disempowerment. Whether rooted in truths, half-truths or fantasy, they have found fertile ground in an audience inclined to view the authorities with disillusionment and distrust. Collectively they speak of a lack of communication, a fractured community unable to agree on its own folklore, a passive acceptance that decisions are taken, and abandoned, somewhere else. They also speak of the fundamental human need to make sense of our surroundings. In the absence of information, Chinese whispers reflect the struggle to construct a narrative for the story of our lives. Stories are the lifeblood of communities. Yet suburbs, by definition, are resigned to being a subplot in somewhere else’s tale. We need to stop building places that define themselves in terms of commuting distance to town, a motorway turnoff, a bus route stop. We need to make places where the residents are the heroes of their own story, as opposed to bit players in a drama that is unfolding somewhere else. 

They are rigorously planned. They are chaotically laissez faire. They are horizontal. They are vertical. They are stucco. They are tile-hung. They are all bungalows. They are all terraces. The houses have stone columns. The houses used to be railway carriages. They are modern movement. They are merely ‘moderne’. And so it goes on.

Suburbs are so disparate, so various, that to speak of the suburb, as though of a monolith, is both futile and lazy. To speak even of, say, ‘the 1930s suburb’ indicates a failure to appreciate that a suburb’s essence (anything’s essence, come to that) is in the details, the specificities. Take two London examples: the astonishing half-timbered area around Queen’s Drive in West Acton is entirely different in character to the astonishing half-timbered area around Buck Lane in Kingsbury. The one is formal, repetitive, and claustrophobic; the other pretends to randomness, as though it all happened by merry English chance. Nonetheless there is one quality that suburbs have had in common, which justifies the use of the word ‘suburb’. In one context alone - their centrifugal bias. Many cities can be read as though by dendrochronological rings - the old walled town, the earliest extramural developments, the parks and villas beyond, the villages that are incorporated, the arterial roads and so on. Cities push outwards. This is especially the case in England where suburbs have a tendency to imagery and place names which belong to the country rather than to the city from which they thus seek to distance themselves. They promote the illusion of bucolicism. It is no more than an illusion. But in the case of such delightful mid 19th century exercises in rus in urbe as Nevill Park and Calverley Park in Tunbridge Wells or The Park in Cheltenham, it is a mighty powerful illusion. And suburb breeds suburb breeds suburb. Always moving out, always shifting away from the original core, always creating a new edge which is of course provisional, a crust which will be ruptured by the next wave. Suburb is virtually coterminous with suburb.

The Centripetal Suburb

However, over the past decade or so, we have witnessed the creation and spread of a breed of suburb which does not conform to this pattern: it is centripetal. It does not acknowledge that it is a suburb because it is situated in or close to the middle of the city. The people who inhabit such places would doubtless be insulted to be called suburban: quite why this word remains a term of denigration is puzzling, for about 80 per cent of Britain’s population lives in suburbs even if it is seldom willing to admit it. This new form of suburb situated like an organ rather than a limb - has several provenances.

The polarity of the inner city (deprivation) and the leafy suburbs (affluence) is propagated by unobservant politicians and indolent journalists: it is as accurate as claiming that Indian restaurants
are decorated with flock wallpaper. Such a division has been disappearing for half a century since the process which came to be called gentrification began in a faute de mieux: shabby properties in many inner-city areas (which had actually begun life as suburbs) were affordable because they were little more than slums. In the early 1960s a house in Notting Hill was cheaper than a comparable house in Bckenham. Of course London is atypical of Britain; indeed it has largely escaped from Britain. But the reclamation of the inner city by what France calls les bobos - the new bourgeoisie which believes itself bohemian - has spread. It can be seen most obviously in Manchester and Salford, but Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Southampton and Portsmouth are all in on the act too. The process has inevitably changed: it is after all, now in its third generation. What began with the restoration of clapped out houses mutated into the residential transformation of warehouses, factories, schools etc. Since the accession of New Labour thirteen years ago and then found its sites have been consumed by new buildings which conform to the urban idyll - synthetic-modern towers, a few neo-modern townhouses, IKEA modern 'continental' piazzas impasted with Carluccio’s, Costa, Monsoon, Nero, DKNY, Starbucks, Tesco Metro, Accessorise, Prêt à Manger. The dismal sameness of the self-proclaimed ethical businesses is matched only by the sheer hackneyed dreariness of the self-proclaimed sustainable domestic architecture.

The people who inhabit such places would doubtless be insulted to be called suburban

DENSITY MATTERS

This species of ‘burb has further causes or - in the debased patois of the current Regeneration Racket - drivers. The up a caricatured vision of long been conventional wisdom among architects and planners even though it owes more to faith in a (sub)urbanistic panacea than to an appreciation of the decidedly non-European way that England’s towns and cities have actually developed hitherto. It is, supposedly, not the conventional wisdom of the majority who suffer the misfortune to be neither architects nor planners. Nonetheless over the past decade and abit, it has gained both political patronage and commercial feasibility: volume builders who formerly constructed exurban estates of approximately Victorian, triple-garage villas, have transformed themselves into urban regenerators, energetically plagiarising the early modern canon. They have been the beneficiaries of Western Europe’s most unreliable public transport which has turned commuting into an overpriced nightmare. It is no doubt more convenient for those who work in, say, the City of London to live in Southwark and walk to work than to live in Chislehurst and wait for a train that never comes. The tendency is repeated all over the country, and so is the trend towards working at home. If we work at home we are deprived of the interpersonal contact of the conventional workplace which is the social centre of many lives: it is where people make friends and find lovers. Opportunities for kindred contact will be more likely made in a densely populated area than in exurban circumstances. The electronic cottage or bothy is a lonelier and less desirable place than the electronic apartment is situated in an inner ‘burb which is defended, quasi-collegiate, club-like: in its ideal form it will be autonomous.

High density is most ostentatiously and most obviously represented by schemes that are virtually free standing, typically on brown-field sites where such density can be absorbed.

A greater, though less noted increase of density is being achieved by stealth, by a sort of infill that dwarfs the host. It is no longer a matter of houses being built in back gardens here and there. Rather of entire quarters of towns, within their boundaries, being restructured to accommodate estates and the roads that serve them. This is a seemingly perpetual process. Victorian gardens were long ago swallowed up. Now the gardens of the houses which occupied them have gone. And so those gardens will disappear too. The long term effects of such construction are immeasurable, whether or not they are bristled as ‘eco’. Did anyone ever build an ecologically right-on terrace road?

This expansion is analogous to that of the new inner gated synthetic-modern ‘burbs. What it amounts to is a form of inner sprawl. Where towns and cities were once afflicted by warts that conventionally spread out they are now prey to verrucas which grow inwards. What with the UK’s doctrinaire refusal to build social housing and the result is class clearance. The haves are re-occupying the inner cities, centrally situated high rise blocks which are being gradually gentrified. The have-nots are increasingly forced out beyond the ring road, which is just the way things are ordered in most of Europe. It would be rash to claim that there is no reason to question that this model will be adhered to continue. But so long as the chasm between rich and poor increases (in a Third World rather than European manner) it is difficult to discern to what was the norm only throughout the late 19th and most of the 20th century - which, it must be said, constitutes a demographic anomaly. Burnside sets up a caricatured vision of a dull suburban life, all crosswords and Ovaltine, neatly mown lawns and lace curtains. Then, in a similar suburbanistic panacea than to an appreciation of the only era when cities were rendered insalubrious to foster a rich civil society. On the other side is the countryside - revered for its natural qualities, and which therefore must be protected from the encroachment of humankind. In the middle sits Kunstler’s sub-optimal, amorphous territory which social fragmentation is deemed to have replaced civic virtue, i.e, and where resource and space humanity drives ecologic catastrophe. As planners and designers become interested once more in the suburbs, can we start by questioning some of the existing, often prejudiced thinking about suburbia?

NIGHTMARE IN SUBURBIA?

Take for example Waking up in Toytown, the recently published memoir of the Scots poet John Burnside who describes his yearning for a life of banality, order and routine in suburban Surrey. Burnside sets up a caricatured vision of the suburban life, all crossovers and Ovaltine, neatly mown lawns and lace curtains. Then, in a similar manner he revels that behind his suburban dreamscape of seemingly quiet, safe and happy homes and streets lie, sinister, the centre crime, where office workers plot murders and single mums dote up their kids with Valium. Such images say little about the reality of the problem of an era of excess. One commentator refers to Vulgaria, a land of packaged developments characterised by the moral minimalism and conspicuous consumption of those that live there. Yet a view of the flabby masses conveyed from cul-de-sac to shopping mall in their SUV’s makes it clear that sprawl is really less rooted in spatial analysis than a moral judgement on assumed excesses of suburban lifestyles. As a result some designers have come to view their role as what one describes as creating ‘a way of life that is ethical, feasible and good’. I’ll leave aside the question of what business it is of designers...
to be meddling in individual ethics. For purposes of this discussion, the problem with an agenda based on shaping ethics is that prejudices as to how people should live, will override any commitment to meeting their aspirations. Instead of viewing people as rational beings whose hopes should be engaged, people simply become the targets of initiatives aimed at managing behaviour and shaping lifestyles. The inevitable result will be to undermine open-minded enquiry and experimentation into new urban forms or infrastructural solutions which, if pursued, might generate interesting new habitats.

It’s true that many who move to the suburbs will aspire to achieve more space, greater comforts, and, most problematically for many, better car-based mobility. Yet instead of viewing these as a problem, why not see them as design challenges? We seem to have retreated a long way from the commonsense assumption that suburbanisation is sub-optimal – lacking the density and urbanity of traditional cities.

RETHINKING MOBILITY AND SPACE

Lynch also argued that ‘as far as possible, an individual should have the greatest variety of goods, services and facilities readily available to him’. Today this is narrowly interpreted as requiring more local goods and services rather than developing greater reach through improved mobility. Yet in the rush to create greater localism, the benefits of improving mobility are usually ignored. For example, many view with horror the fact that average passenger trip distance increased by 56 per cent between 1972 and 2002. Yet not only did the time spent travelling remain broadly constant, but it expanded by 14 per cent the area that could be accessed for the purposes of working, shopping, and socialising. Improvements to mobility not only make economies more productive, but improve individual wealth and bring social benefits.

Much of the increase has of course been realised through car travel which is now deemed to be an unsustainable characteristic of suburban development. Yet even without considering the future technological improvements, the picture is more complex than it may at first seem. It is true that when compared to urban dwellers, suburbanites are more likely to own cars and to use them to travel to work. But as revealed by research for the Independent Transport Commission, travelling to work in the suburbs (counting all forms of travel) is quicker, taking on average 25 minutes with a door-to-door speed of 13m/h; in the exurbs people travel slightly further, but at 19m/h and take one minute less. This compares with times of 34 minutes for residents within big provincial cities and 43 minutes in London where resident commuters average 10m/h.

The suburb becomes shorthand for sub-optimal – lacking the density and urbanity of traditional cities.

Given that time rather than distance is the most important factor in people’s lives, the ITC report provides one reason for why suburban living is so popular. In this sense we can understand the car not as a problem but as potentially liberating. It also suggests that building typologies such as big box retail which have large amounts of parking and which are easily accessed from high-speed road infrastructure will continue to prove popular. Recently many have bemoaned the loss of traditional high streets and small shops. But surely it’s time to recognise that retail parks and leisure zones are for many a destination of choice. Why not seek innovations in those types of spaces with the same energy and commitment invested in shared space design?

WE CAN DO MORE THAN JUST SURVIVE

There’s a similarly constraining approach to the urban footprint debate. In the past I’ve argued against the idea that cities must be compact and dense merely to restrict the carbon emissions. It seemed to me that the problem solving mindset of humanity can solve emissions problems in a variety of ways without letting such considerations limit how we wish to live. As an aside, neither should we limit ourselves to suburban densities just because recent research from the University of South Australia shows the highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita are associated with urban cores with a predominance of multi-unit housing.

Today some arguments for lower density suburbs are based on a new survivalist mentality fearful of the complex, expansive human networks that have resulted from 20th century urbanisation. But the idea of retreating into localised pockets of resilience by developing permaculture and going off grid seems even more limiting than remaining tied to compact cities. Surely one of the great benefits of suburbanisation in the first place was the way human society expanded its reach and took control of more land, in the process offering people both space and connection over ever greater distances.

BEYOND THE SUBURBS

Perhaps the problem is that we have not yet broken from thinking about cities in terms of polar oppositions - between town and country, urban and rural. In this schema the suburb becomes shorthand for sub-optimal – lacking the density and urbanity of traditional cities, but viewed as a threat to the superior rural world outside the city. Yet the reality is that 21st century cities bear little relationship to historic forms of the city which cannot be recovered. And equally the countryside has already been humanised – it is part of a landscape that is now entirely artificial.

Recognising that our world is now manmade, gives us the opportunity to think differently about what until now we have known as suburbs. We can conceive of them not as sub-urb or sub-rural, but merely as points of intensity within a humanised landscape. It is true that new metropolitan forms can be confusing and seem to defy description. After all all how do we define somewhere like Ebbfleet in North Kent? Town? Suburb of a shopping centre (Bluewater)? Edge of a rural landscape? A belt of intensive development around London? Edge city? High speed commuter centre within a European network? Instead of trying to fit this new world into the old urban, suburban, rural continuum, why not move on? Over the years there have been a numbers of attempts to develop a framework to handle these new landscapes.
THE LOSS OF THE GARDEN
Tim Hagyard mourns the disappearance of a great suburban resource

A LEGACY OF GARDEN SPACE
Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City Movement did not set out to create residential suburbs, but self-sufficient communities of industry and agriculture, combining the best of town and country living. Later, as people’s incomes and mobility grew, private developers adapted the garden city ideal for speculative selling of housing at low densities with gardens on spacious plots, thus creating many of today’s car-based suburbs. Spacious early to mid-20th century suburbs provided green space, tree-lined avenues, amenity, good air and promised access to town jobs, services and the benefits of community living. However they were not self-sufficient communities and services have tended to move away from these areas. Their garden space however, remains a significant resource: for instance one third of London’s green space and two thirds of its trees are to be found in private gardens.

THE LOSS OF THE GARDEN
This article explores the UK’s steady loss of the garden in new and established suburban development, and asks questions about priorities for the future use of space and the impact on local character. With stricter planning controls and rising land prices, new suburban developments have reduced garden sizes, and more flat developments have come forward offering no private garden space.

A survey in the London Borough of Ealing revealed 64 per cent of front gardens lost to hard surfacing, two thirds for car parking, an area equal to 196ha.

PLANNING INFLUENCES ON THE GARDEN IN SUBURBIA
Following the Urban Task Force report in 1999, national planning guidance in PPS9 has set minimum densities of 30 dph (the average in Hampstead Garden Suburb) and promoted higher densities to support service provision and sustainability, the compact city model. Increasing high densities of development in the last decade have seen a shift to high rise apartments with varying, often quite poor provision of green space.

Planning standards for housing often require a minimum private garden depth of 10-12m to safeguard levels of privacy. As a contrast in Australia, the lack of such standards for low rise housing has resulted in suburban areas with almost no rear garden space. The debate continues as to whether new housing should be more or less generous in the provision of private green space and the amount of garden space is not a criterion of good design.

Planning controls are central to ensure the quality of development and its landscape context, and breaks green corridors of garden space for wildlife.

THE SPACE DEMANDS OF THE CAR
Critically, it is high car ownership levels, distance to services and lack of travel options that have led to the loss of front gardens. A front drive will secure lower car insurance, perceived reduction in vandalism and added convenience, especially in congested streets. Residents parking zones are not always popular due to the ongoing fees and are not common outside major cities.

The creation of private drives remove on-street parking at the dropped kerb and leads to a less efficient use of road space than shared on street parking; as remaining kerb space is reduced, the only way to secure parking is to pave over the garden, resulting in a domino effect along the whole street. While Highways consent is needed for dropped kerbs, planning issues such as street appearance or sustainable drainage are rarely considered.

New requirements for permeable paving were introduced in the General Permitted Development Order Amendment 2008. Garden outbuildings and extensions may still occupy up to half of a plot area without the need for planning permission. Paving can cover the full extent of rear gardens. In effect most loss of green garden is therefore not the subject of any controls.

Garden in-fill development causes disputes and divisions as the beneficiaries of garden development clash with the losers – their neighbours. Owners of homes with large gardens are sent unsolicited letters encouraging them to develop their garden, but not anticipating the demands of a protracted planning dispute that damages relationships and the local community. Residents in gated backland housing are less obviously part of the established neighbourhood, and less able to interact.

The environmental impact of the loss is also important; it can damage the image of an area and even mental wellbeing, it harms the distinctive olympian character of areas. Less habitat is available for birds and other wildlife. Trees and green surfaces provide urban cooling benefits, increase absorption of rainwater and so reduce storm water runoff. Less space is available for urban food production.

RE-VALUING THE GARDEN IN THE SUBURB
The value society places on green space needs to change given its importance for our basic health, well being and in adapting to climate change. The loss of the suburban garden is an outcome of myriad individual interests and actions. The problem is not therefore addressed via individuals acting independently but needs a well coordinated response, a street programme or neighbourhood urban design strategy that can benefit the interests and amenity of all.

Levels of car ownership and use generally exceed the capacity of the original designs of suburban areas, but only national policies combined with local travel and transport programmes to promote car sharing and enhance sustainable transport options, are likely to reduce the impact of the car. So lower car use and ownership, with a shift to non-car sustainable transport and travel patterns, would need to be an integral part of giving priority back to the garden. As yet there seems little sign that the political will or leadership is available to enable this change.
FORGOTTEN SUBURBS AND SMARTER GROWTH

Nicholas Falk and Barry Munday offer ideas for a suburban renaissance

What should be done with the many forgotten suburbs, those low rise public sector estates on the periphery of our towns and cities, including New Towns such as Harlow? Modelled after the original garden cities, these suburbs were developed in the first place for people who were working in factories that relocated from major cities such as London. People from overcrowded inner city areas came to expect the council to provide all the services. Some bought their homes under the Right to Buy which resulted in a flurry of home improvements. But as social surveys continue to show, there can be cultural problems which make it harder to integrate new housing for sale alongside existing estates, and economic challenges as the proximity to sources of unskilled employment or good public transport is reduced.

Yet the suburbs are often in ideal locations for smarter growth, close to motorways and railway lines (though possibly suffering from poor connections). They contain large amounts of underused open space, and are not far from areas where family housing is in high demand. Housing growth could not only help fund improvements to the infrastructure, but also make it easier for those working in the area to find the kinds of homes they are looking for, and thus commuting and congestion. They might even attract ‘eco pioneers’ who are looking for space to try out new ways of living, and who might invest sweat equity as they once might have done in gentrifying inner city areas.

Suburban Housing at a Turning Point

As a national priority we need to address the future of these forgotten suburbs. After the Labour government set up the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, it had been put into upgrading former public sector estates with the aim of cutting spatial inequalities and improving housing prospects, the results are patchy and the gaps between them and the rest of the country have hardly narrowed, judging by the official evaluation of the New Deal for Communities Programme. The notable exceptions, like Castle Vale in Birmingham or the Eldonians in Liverpool, are where residents have been empowered to redevelop their own estates. Cooperatives seem to be having a

SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES

As urban designers we have tended to view low-density suburbs as fundamentally unsustainable and lacking diversity. Advocacy of higher-density sustainable solutions should not condemn the established suburbs as an historic error. These areas are significant and are not going to disappear. Neither must we overlook their strengths. If the autonomous green house, living off grid in the countryside, is accepted as sustainable as their grand designers and architects will proclaim, then there must be an adaptation of the suburbs that can enable sustainable living.

The challenge is for the lower-density suburbs to become sustainable at around their current densities by focusing on behaviour, lifestyle and resource efficient buildings. In many cases it will be possible to increase densities without damaging their distinctive leafy suburban character, or the valuable green infrastructure that provides it.

New partnerships of local action are needed where councils, designers and residents groups work together to regenerate suburban areas at increased densities while also increasing green space. Diversifying the range of uses within the suburb would return them to the vision of the original garden city, securing sustainable patterns of living but enhancing their distinctive character.

Newer suburban developments can therefore respond to lifestyle and demographic changes and develop morphologies that create more communal green spaces than the private spaces of 20th century housing. These can be usefully and managed better and would not be so vulnerable to garden grabbing development.

A variety of approaches will be needed but each one must take the principle that sustainable design includes an integral and distinctive landscape development opportunity.
new development to help fund upgrades to the transport infrastructure and local centres as well as community based renewal schemes that involve local people in making better use of open space.

RENAISSANCE IN HARLOW

Whilst most local authorities and other public bodies are severely constrained financially, many have underspent assets in the form of land and property. Post-war suburban New Towns are generally well located and the basic infrastructure is in place. There is an ageing stock of housing which would benefit from some modest increase in density (say 50 per cent) together with a broadening of tenure. Homes that are structurally sound need to be brought up to high standards of thermal efficiency, which will be made easier by the fact that they are generally unconstrained by heritage or conservation factors.

The roads coming into former New Towns like Harlow are congested in the mornings with staff driving in from surrounding villages and smaller towns. They do not live locally both because of the limited housing choice, but also the stigma of living in or near what was once New Town housing. The impressive performance of local colleges cannot allay middle-class fears about their children being dragged down, or erase the hostile image that post-war town centres present, with monotonous concrete blocks, cut off by a busy ring road. This has all sorts of implications for employers and investors. They need attractive homes for senior employees and directors as well as high-quality services, particularly schools, if staff are not to send all their spare time commuting. The exemplary new localities of Newhall in Harlow is promoted on posters at Totten Hall Station as being in North Chao to avoid any unfavourable associations.

Within Harlow, the public open spaces or green wedges are fiercely guarded by the residents, particularly those who can still remember moving out of overcrowded cities, even though these in spaces often lack quality and amenity, and are prized just because they are there. They could be restructured and increased in quality or made productive (and more attractive) by growing fruit and vegetables, which would reduce food miles and provide a new source of activity. Similarly measures such as bus rapid transit linked to initiatives to promote walking and cycling, plus a new link to the M11 could reconnect Harlow residents to wider opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

It would be helpful to guide suburban renewal to have an agreed set of principles, rather as the Communities Quality Charter for Growth is being used to shape new housing growth. Here are five ideas and possible indicators:

• Collaboration: finally we should measure what matters. Instead of being obsessed with building on brownfield sites, many of which should be allowed to return to nature, or maximising the numbers of homes built on a site, suburbs should be upgraded to improve the well-being of residents enabling them to spend more time with their friends and neighbours, and less time in their cars.

In terms of house sizes, densities, income levels and tenures; the resulting choice should enable people to move home without having to move neighbourhood. It should also overcome the stigma of living in a forgotten suburb.

Climate: live with nature. Renewal schemes should make active use of green space, and add to biodiversity, for example through community stewardship; we should also be cutting resource consumption, for example by insulating homes properly, or by creating streets that encourage walking and cycling. Success could be measured in terms of energy consumption per capita.

Community: building skills through learning and working together should be at the heart of renewal efforts, which is where mechanisms like development trusts and co-housing groups can play a key role. By starting with common interests and concerns, for example providing better play facilities, funds can be used to build better neighbourhoods, not just new homes.

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BUILDING A NEW SUBURBIA
Clare Mitchell argues that community and self-build have an important role to play

INTRODUCTION
Walking around a recent British suburb can be a depressing experience. In the UK the housing market is very much slanted towards the big developer, producing bland, monotonous estates. There are deficiencies in the system, which in other countries are tempered by greater market diversity. Self and community build is a sector which is greatly underrepresented in the UK. This article explores the potential of such schemes to provide innovative solutions to suburban development, the barriers to expansion of this sector in the UK and what structures have been important to support development further afield.

SUBURBIA
As urban designers we talk of our aspirations for the 21st century suburb: establishing visions for places that are sustainable, well connected, walkable and characterful. But do our new suburbs really live up to expectations? Despite the best efforts of urban designers and other professions over recent years, the majority of our suburbs fail to provide an inspiring living environment. A recent CABE housing audit found our suburbs fail to provide an inspiring living environment. A recent CABE housing audit found they were considered so poor they should not have received planning permission, when judged by today's standards. The Yard, Bristol offers a unique sense of place that responds to the current barriers in the market that limit similar development.

THE POTENTIAL OF SELF-BUILD
Unlike much of North America, Asia and the rest of Europe, few people or communities in the UK design and build their own homes. In Germany more than 55 per cent of housing is created using self-build and 45 per cent in France; this figure is as little as 10-12 per cent in the UK. While television programmes such as Grand Designs and community and self-build schemes - good design, innovation and emphasis on sustainability - but also offers the opportunity to reflect on the structures which enabled this scheme to succeed and the current barriers in the market that limit similar development.

THE YARD, BRISTOL
The Yard illustrates many of the good things about community and self-build schemes - good design, innovation and emphasis on sustainability - but also offers the opportunity to reflect on the structures which enabled this scheme to succeed and the current barriers in the market that limit similar development.

CONTEXT AND PATHFINDERS
A number of interesting schemes have sprung up in recent years which demonstrate the sector’s potential and provide a strong platform for its growth. Many of these schemes are small scale, involving small community groups or individuals who have been able to find a plot of land. There are however a few test cases which are beginning to explore a more European, public-private partnership, approach to development, such as New Islington in Manchester. These developments indicate that self-build can work in the UK. While these schemes are few in number, a small growth in the hands of the major house builders competing with one another for access to land and buying competitors for their land acquisitions. The house building industry is guilty of a lack of innovation, choosing to stick with tried and tested techniques that maximise profit, rather than listening to the demands of consumers.

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The Yard is a new community of 26 houses and a mixed-use block, nestled within the Victorian terraces of north Bristol. In 2000 the Ashley Vale Action Community Group formed a not-for-profit company to take control of the redevelopment. The site was purchased in May 2001 by sub-selling twenty plots to self-builders and six plots to a local housing association to provide homes for the elderly. The central green area of land and office block remained in community ownership. The office block has now been renovated by the trust and converted into a mixture of workspaces, flats and community space. The group saw community build as a way of avoiding the formulaic approaches to commercial development and to develop a community that attracted a diverse range of people and promoted sustainable and innovative housing approaches. The process also empowered the community to make decisions about ecological and energy saving design, while offering opportunities for creativity and skills training.

The development was based around a coherent master plan that set out individual plots, circulation areas and communal open space. Agreement was reached on the build standards to be met across the site, setting high standards for energy efficiency and materials (standard A in the Green Guide for housing specification), and construction began in 2002.

All new buildings are timber framed, and many follow a similar vocabulary of materials, height and scale. This, alongside the design of the terrace of six bungalows/old people's housing as a set piece and the consistency of the public realm give the scheme a solid coherence. At the same time many subtleties in architectural detail enrich the scheme and each house remains unique.

The houses themselves are far removed from the mass-produced house types that would more normally typify new residential development. Most houses respond in roofline, form and window articulation to orientation. The internal layout is also innovative. In a number of cases 'upside down' houses have been constructed, with bedrooms on the ground floor to maximise solar gain into living areas. The space and light standards are high, providing a high quality living environment. The area offers a unique sense of place that responds to the site by taking a more responsive and sustainable approach to development. The process of constructing the development together has also helped establish a strong community.

According to the National Self Build Association, the biggest barrier to self-build and community builders is the availability of land; this has occurred as much of the available buildable land is tied up by major house builders. The availability of a
THE NETHERLANDS

Community and self-build in the UK is very uncommon in comparison with our European neighbours. The better accessibility in other countries to this type of development can be understood through the consideration of typical European methods of planning and land supply. Strategic sites in Europe are generally developed as a joint venture between a local authority and a consortium of private landowners and developers who are jointly responsible for land acquisition, urban planning, engineering, commissioning infrastructure and allocating sites. Furthermore the absence of an oligopoly of national house builders has meant that there has been limited land hoarding, providing access to land for community and self-builders. This model of development is similar in many ways to the system that structured much of the UK’s 1930s development, where landowners often master planned an area, invested much of the UK’s 1930s development, where up to 10 – 20 years of housing land supply has already been secured by major house builders, there is little room for alternative approaches. However, when resources are available, as seen in The Yard in Bristol, new and innovative approaches to sustainability and house building can succeed. By contrast the European model offers a more structured approach to community and self build.

There are several key areas that are fundamental to the delivery of the European model:

- There has to be a strong public/private partnership that promotes and invests in the design and infrastructure planning for the site.
- A coherent master plan needs to be established that sets out plots, streets and open spaces.
- The master plan needs to be supported by other documentation such as design codes to ensure that, while design innovation is promoted, the final development has a cohesive townscape and urban form.

This model is currently being tested in New Islington, Manchester, indicating a potential future direction for self-build in the UK. Tutti Frutti is a joint venture between the Homes and Communities Agency and Urban Splash, offering 26 canal side building plots to self-builders. The project replicates many of the positive approaches in European case studies. The area forms part of a strong master plan and all the plots include a parking space and heat, power and water infrastructure.

Political weight is required to bring about change in the UK. New planning mechanisms would be required in order to promote and develop opportunities required to fully support self build. While it is unlikely that community and self build will ever form a large component of our housing stock, the potential and foundation for significant growth does exist. Increasing the opportunities for this approach will promote sustainability and architectural innovation, and provide competition to the house builders that could force them to reconsider and improve their design. The benefits, direct and indirect, could be highly significant and could support the development of a richer and a more diverse suburb.

Desires vs. feasibility

CARB research (What home buyers want: attitudes and decision making among consumers) provides an analysis of the current desires of the house-buying public. It concludes that the most desirable house typology is the detached house. A front garden is desired in order to provide a buffer to the street and the potential for car parking. A rear garden is deemed necessary for use as a children’s play space. Fences are an important feature in terms of privacy and security. Respondents to the survey also claimed that the sense of belonging and security the neighbourhood was more important than that of individual houses, stating that ‘within limits – a home should look similar but not the same as others in the vicinity’. Iconographic suburbia delivers these aspects as standard, therefore it can be concluded that suburbia offers the most desirable housing model within England.

England has a housing crisis; with an increasing population and reducing housing occupancy levels, it is predicted that the number of households within the country will increase from 20.9 million in 2003 to 25.7 million by 2026. In response, the Government has committed to delivering 2 million homes by 2016 and 3 million homes in total by 2026. This equates to the production of 240,000 units per annum by 2016. However, housing production is at an 87 year low; in 2009/10 a mere 123,000 units were produced in England and Wales. In addition, an increasing sustainability agenda demands an ever-increasing technical performance, with the Government seeking all new homes in England to be carbon neutral by 2016.

The question is, is suburbia a valid and responsible model to solve the housing crisis and to procure a sustainable, qualitative environment for future generations and beyond?

The suburban model was developed out of a desire for an idyllic lifestyle. Large, quality family housing set within a rural landscape, in close proximity to urban cores, was perceived to offer a superior quality of life and a more amenable and safe environment in which to raise a family. As more and more of us pursued this, ever-increasing swathes of suburbia have resulted in sprawl. This sprawl denies the founding concepts of suburbia, neither linked to city nor countryside. The resultant mono-functional sea of cul-de-sacs, populated by generic house types, is inward-looking, insular, de-contextual and banal. Modern suburban patterns are designed to maximise sellable, privatised space and therefore reduce collective...
THE 21ST CENTURY SUBURB
Jon Rowland puts forward ideas for the suburbs of the future

“The great question in the field once known as urban design is no longer that of Albert’s day – how to choose the site where a city or a given programme will be built – but how to accommodate sites that have now all been subsumed, in one way or another, by the suburban condition?”
Sebastian Marcot – Sub-urbanism and the art of memory – Architectural Association 2010

We are facing great development pressure on the edges of our towns as the amount of brownfield land in the centres runs out. The urban renaissance agenda has been successful when it comes to inner-city development. Where further thought is required is in the area which has been termed suburban design. Unlike the moves towards urbanism in the city, there is no longer an overarching philosophy for what we are trying to create in our suburbs. Should we continue to build just discreetly poor housing estates or should we consider imbuing them with spirit?

Many of the suburbs being promoted are just denser versions of what has been built over the years, with a convenience store and primary school if lucky. CABE’s audits on housing quality attest to the paucity of much of this approach. Their design suffers because we have no clear view of what we want from them. The challenge is to define a set of principles for the 21st century suburb.

THE SUBURBS TODAY
There have always been suburbs. They occupy the space between city and country. They represent steps into the wilderness beyond the civilisation of the town. They are aspirational, reflecting desires for health, wealth and quality of life and the escape from the evils and excitement of the city. How have we expressed these desires has changed over time. Each period has seen an underlying philosophy guiding the way the suburb has developed. The great planned suburbs and estates of the 18th and 19th centuries provided an opportunity to create a new urban form. The Garden Suburbs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were seen as implicitly anti-urban with new ideas on social order and movement underlying their design, whilst access and democracy were keystones to the post-war approach to the building of our new towns.

In many people’s perception the quintessential suburb rests somewhere between the Garden City and the image of the market town, and imagery from Jut William, Brookside, Neighbours or Desperate Housewives. Somehow it seems to hit a series of cultural buttons that create feelings of comfort. It has been left to volume builders to provide density suburbia, which provides the flexibility to house a business, a granny flat, or an extra bedroom. In addition, privatised external spaces offer places that are secure and overlooked for children to play, room to fix the car or erect a shed. It is the ability of residents to adapt their dwellings in support of changing requirements that allows the creation of life-long dwelling, which in turn results in the formation of the city.

The desire for safe, secure and desirable typologies that are, by their nature, individual and unique entities, leads us to a suburban pattern. However, suburban’s potential problems lie in its own success: endless sprawl dilutes its character and compromises its functionality, resulting in banal, generic places to live. A re-evaluation of first principles is required in order to gain clarity on the qualities of good suburbia. Suburbia needs to be contextual and it has to have a relationship to a landscape character, which must be protected through the prevention of sprawl. The densification of the current suburban model can result in medium-density suburban clusters set around existing mature core cities.

There are profound adaptations to this suburban model as understood in an English context, which make it more sustainable whilst safeguarding the qualities of both existing cities and landscapes. The suburban clusters are holistically masterplanned within a regional landscape strategy, which leads to the creation of distinct

space to a minimum. Geographical isolation from the city and any amenities, coupled with inadequate public transport infrastructure, results in suburbia being holistically configured around, and reliant upon, the car.

LEONS FROM THE NETHERLANDS
The Netherlands, to a greater degree than England, is facing a profound housing shortage. In order to cater for a growing populace and to equip its physical infrastructure for the 21st century, the Dutch Government created Vixen; a policy framework for expansion with holistically planned housing procurement across the country, for an initial 10-year period. Vixen policy seeks to primarily utilise brownfield land although it acknowledges that there is insufficient available. Therefore, Vixen positively accepts and identiﬁes areas for urban expansion, which takes the form of medium-density suburban clusters set around existing mature core cities.

There are profound adaptations to this suburban model as understood in an English context, which make it more sustainable whilst safeguarding the qualities of both existing cities and landscapes. The suburban clusters are holistically masterplanned within a regional landscape strategy, which leads to the creation of distinct

neighbourhoods of character. In effect, suburbia within the Netherlands is contextual and the fixing of definitive relationships to landscape ensures that this character cannot be diluted, as there will not be any future sprawl. The existing urban cores remain key employment and entertainment centres, and crucial within this strategy is the quality of the links to the city. In order to ensure this, central government has been instrumental in financing and delivering public transport improvements in advance of major expansion developments, and the close proximity to the urban cores facilitates other transport modes, namely cycling, in order to reduce reliance on the car.

A QUESTION OF DENSITY
There is increasing evidence demonstrating that the medium density model of development is the more sustainable. Lower density models have smaller ecological footprints as biodiversity can exist within them. Equally, medium density allows for the integration of sustainable infrastructure such as water management systems, renewable energy farming and small-scale food production within gardens and communal green spaces. Simultaneously, medium density ensures the critical mass to support a good public transport network and social facilities such as schools and healthcare centres, reducing the need for and therefore reliance on the car.

Mike Davis (Magical Urbanism: Latinos reinvent the US) argues that in social and financial terms, the medium density model is the most sustainable. Medium density offers space to extend and adapt properties in order to meet the resident’s changing needs and expectations. Houses can be extended to house a business, a granny flat, or an extra bedroom. In addition, privatised external spaces offer places that are secure and overlooked for children to play, room to fix the car or erect a shed. It is the ability of residents to adapt their dwellings in support of changing requirements that allows the creation of life-long dwelling, which in turn results in the formation of the city.

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How did the suburbs we know and love or hate come about? The main catalysts were:
• The desire for clean air, healthy living and safety, a response to the poor conditions within existing cities for many families
• The ability to achieve this through the new railway and public transport so that the suburbs did not have to be the natural accretions of existing settlements, but could create their own environment
• The opportunity to establish parks, have gardens and till allotments, all within the development that would satisfy aspirations for a better environment but also add value

“Ypenburg, Netherlands: medium density family housing linked to green spaces and the wider landscape”
• Arup contemporary
• Ypenburg, medium density family housing linked to green spaces and the wider landscape
• Generic semi-detached houses: Skelmersdale, Lancashire

Kevin Logan is an Architect and Urban Designer and an Associate of Maccreanor Lavington

Issue 115 – Summer 2010 – Urban Design
The quality of architecture, design and development within an overall concept of arts, crafts and rural life, with many of the best life style developments responsible for iconic developments such as Hampstead Garden Suburb or Welwyn Garden City.

The desire for local convenience in the form of affordable to the expanding middle classes – the Englishman’s castle.

A place to buy rather than rent that was affordable to the expanding middle classes – the Englishman’s castle.

The success of the suburb also relied on an overall concept of local identity. Ebenezer Howard’s views outlined in Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform, published in 1898.

A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

That was then, what should our design philosophy for the new suburb be now?

Many changes have taken place since Ebenezer Howard’s time but they offer no consistent view(s) of what the new suburb should be and what models and patterns are appropriate. In promoting the components of a philosophy for the 21st century a number of guiding principles emerge, including:

- Sustainability – reflecting a range of attributes from energy efficiency to compactness that demands interdependency. Some of the key technical challenges relate to reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint; others to cultural and behavioural aspects. Lifestyle has always been a driver; what constitutes the good life needs redefining but, as Harriet Tregonning says “You can only go so far by telling people to live differently for the good of the planet. They need to be shown how they might benefit right now, in their waistlines, their wallets, and their own backyard.” (It’s sprawl, but it’s my sprawl – Urban Design Futures, Routledge, 2006). Until we answer that conundrum, expect the poor quality of suburban development.

- Connectivity – linking suburbs and integrating them with adjacent development, establishing networks whether information, social, or movement, without forgetting a decent public transport service, rather than establishing insulated estates.

- Accessibility to resources, services, employment and places is key. Many planning policies still deter a sustainable mix. The new suburbs are not only places for people to live but are the progenitors of much of the economy of this country. People will be spending more time in the suburb: that means access to places that will make the suburb pleasurable to be in, day and night. Perhaps our challenge for the new suburb is to create a greater array of accessible components, other than a standard supermarket and petrol station, with the aim of diluting the residential mono-culture and establishing a more sustainable neighbourhood.

- Flexibility – built in redundancy in uses and typologies to ease accessibility, by promoting hybrid typologies and clusters of activities within the housing areas. Over three million people work at home, and that excludes those choosing to work from home one or two days a week. Whilst local centres can be strengthened, local workshops, managed office space, flexible dwellings, small retail and commercial units could be better integrated into the residential areas.

- Security and well being – safety, child centred development, health and security is not just about crime statistics but relates to a perception of comfort rather than threat. It would be an interesting exercise to invert the paradigm and set out what gives us pleasure, makes us feel we belong to a place and makes it memorable. Shared space and place making should be at the core of our urban design approach. This moves away from the introverted nature of much of the suburban development.

- Civility – the cultural values and enrichment, from beautiful buildings to diversity, including street and public realm design. The new suburb could return to the enclosure and comfort of managed and maintained streets, which are designed as social spaces, where it is easy to meet people, and where the priority is to the pedestrian and cyclist, not to the driver. This is a return to a fundamental principle of civility.

- Quality – the sense of identity and character that can provide distinctiveness. One of the Garden Suburb’s main attributes is perceived to be its greenness. Suburbs have been characterised by large gardens, communal open spaces, village greens and large areas of parkland. As suburbs have become denser, so they have become dirtier and less green.

- Social sustainability – people and where the priority is to the pedestrian and cyclist, and part of the place-making agenda.

- Economy – the creation of social neighbourhoods with appropriate communal values, meaning, memory and belonging. Currently there is tension between the commodification of a dwelling as an investment and the imbuing of the dwelling with family or personal experience. These are different forms of investment and the latter is more meaningful than the former.

- Longevity – many suburbs are being built out as part of long term programmes of growth: 10-20 years is typical. Yet the developer’s goal is to divest itself of the completed house as soon as possible. Long term stewardship, different forms of ownership such as leasehold, trusts and foundations and other similar vehicles where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community have proved to be a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community have proved to be a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community. These are different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community. These are different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community. These are different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community. These are different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community. These are different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership where a continuing stake is held by the developer, landlord or even community.

- Viability – making it work is a current crisis reflects the need to do things differently. New models for financing, ownership, partnership, management and procurement need to be explored. Buying space rather than rooms per hectare may be a better way forward. Procuring a new suburb is a complex programme. Having this process a solid foundation will determine how successful a development will be. The historic examples of long leasehold, co-operative societies, development corporations and more recently limited companies and Community and Development Trusts should be considered as a basis for creating, nurturing and managing.

The new suburbs are not only places for people to live but are the progenitors of much of the economy of this country.

- Low-energy solutions will become mainstream through fiscal, infrastructural and other mechanisms, including improvements to the energy market.

- Social sustainability will be addressed through special mechanisms designed to support community development throughout the life of the suburb.

TOWARDS AN UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY SUBURB?

The nature of continued long term stewardship through different ownership patterns like leasehold, or co-ownership will become the norm, recycling benefits over time. We will move from the individuality of the 20th century to a new community in the 21st, where ownership doesn’t (just mean being in thrall to the mortgage company, but having a physical, economic and social stake in one’s community.

The new suburbs are not only places for people to live but are the progenitors of much of the economy of this country.

- The suburb will be a lively and vital place with a range of commerce, retail and cultural activities with small squares and convivial meeting places in which these activities can take place.

- The opportunities for such a rich mix will be built into the development, through the provision of flexible and multi-functional space.

- New forms of housing will be designed to cater for the hybrid nature of life in the 21st century where work, living and play become more interrelated. Streets and parks too will take on this multi-functional role.

- The suburb will be a connected place, linked physically with its neighbours and virtually with the world, allowing a range of activities to occur and a more collaborative lifestyle to emerge through the sharing of resources.

- New forms of housing will also be designed and procured to maximise communal benefits through a range of organisations from self-build, to condominiums, housing cooperatives, as well as the more traditional route of delivered housing.

- Open space and greenness will provide a range of sports and leisure activities, amenity, and agricultural spaces, which through its organisation and management act as an integrator not separator.

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HANHAM HALL

HTA and Arup aim to create a sustainable housing development through a holistic approach

Hanham Hall is one of a number of flagship Carbon Challenge schemes promoted by the Homes and Communities Agency. These exemplary projects are intended to demonstrate how new housing developments can meet the exacting standards the Code for Sustainable Homes is designed to achieve Level 6 of the Code. The development will create 195 new homes, ranging from one-bedroom starter flats to five-bedroom family houses. Two thirds of the units will be sold privately, while the rest will be offered for affordable rent. There will be no visible distinction between the private and rented housing.

A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE

A pioneering and relatively high-density housing development in an unremarkable suburban setting “1km from the centre of Bristol, the scheme involves adapting a historic Grade II* listed building for new uses and working around an existing NHS mental health unit, which is landlocked on the site. HTA’s team of designers and planning specialists gained planning consent at the first attempt. The greatest challenge for the project was the complexity of the Carbon Challenge brief, and our multi-disciplinary team’s response was to explore each aspect of the community through a process of dialogue and co-design. Similar continuity and collaboration with the many stakeholders was achieved through workshops with South Gloucestershire Council, English Heritage, the HCA, the parish council and the wider community.

ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

Providing a transition between the residential suburbs of Bristol and the countryside of South Gloucestershire, the master plan identified a number of different character areas that reflect the site’s history as a family home and working farm. The layout, form, landscaping, scale and architectural style of the proposals for each area respond to the specific characteristics and constraints of the existing environment. This gives a new development a rich and varied character, which connects it both to its past and to its surroundings. The retained and refurbished Hall is central to the team’s vision for the site. As well as providing an important sense of identity and history, it adds vibrancy to the community through a number of non-residential uses, which include commercial space as well as a crèche and cafe.

Due for completion in 2011, Hanham Hall will be England’s first large-scale housing scheme to achieve Level 6 of the Code. The development will create 195 new homes, ranging from one-bedroom starter flats to five-bedroom family houses. Two thirds of the units will be sold privately, while the rest will be offered for affordable rent. There will be no visible distinction between the private and rented housing.

At a more detailed level, the overarching aim to reconnect with the environment is manifest in each home’s direct relationship with a quality open space, each part of a network that connects linear parks, formal lawns, road planting, greenhouses, playing fields, parks, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage, meadows and existing mature planting. The whole site is designed as a natural habitat.

PARKING

Despite the excellent provision for pedestrians and cyclists, most households are likely to need a car, and 252 residential parking spaces are proposed – around 1.3 per dwelling. The strategy in addressing this relatively high level of parking provision was to use a variety of different parking solutions allowing the most organic and responsive solution. The parking strategy – essentially driven by urban design decisions – was to devise a palette of parking options – on street, on plot and off plot - each interfacing with homes and streets in a different way depending on the immediate conditions, and resulting in the lack of dominance of any one solution. An example of this is the accommodation of parking in the secondary mews roads and courtyards – spaces which are active, well overlooked, and attractive.

The benefits of basic urban design decisions about how buildings and spaces are arranged, are often at odds with the benefits of maximising energy efficiency. This project succeeds in reconciling these differences; while achieving high levels of environmental sustainability, it has also created a place where privacy is protected and activity is encouraged – there are no dead spaces because all the buildings have to be oriented the same way. This has been achieved through the team’s integrated approach to design: the master plan has been informed by the design of the homes, and the housing design is responsive to the overall place-making objectives. For example, each housing type has a flexible plan, allowing the design team to rotate the living spaces to achieve maximum daylighting while the building is orientated predominantly east–west or north–south. These homes are also designed to avoid the inevitable conflicts between fronts and backs, public and private, when orientation for solar gain is a priority.

LESSONS LEARNED

On master plans of this scale, it is impossible to separate urban design issues from the intricacies of detailed housing design, and this project demonstrates that success can be achieved at every level and scale of design. While Hanham Hall has been tailored very closely to its specific environment, the underlying design approach provides a model for sustainable place-making that can be replicated anywhere. The key ingredients are a holistic approach to design and an understanding that people want to be empowered rather than coerced to live sustainably. The success of the scheme can be attributed not only to the quality of the design but also to a continuous process of dialogue with the many stakeholders involved in the project.

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A process of dialogue

A pioneering and relatively high-density housing development in an unremarkable suburban setting “1km from the centre of Bristol, the scheme involves adapting a historic Grade II* listed building for new uses and working around an existing NHS mental health unit, which is landlocked on the site. HTA’s team of designers and planning specialists gained planning consent at the first attempt. The greatest challenge for the project was the complexity of the Carbon Challenge brief, and our multi-disciplinary team’s response was to explore each aspect of the community through a process of dialogue and co-design. Similar continuity and collaboration with the many stakeholders was achieved through workshops with South Gloucestershire Council, English Heritage, the HCA, the parish council and the wider community.

Architectural and landscape

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Lessons learned

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KETTERING TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN
Savills Urban Design plan to transform Kettering town centre into a lively place

Over the past three years, Kettering town centre has benefited from a high level of commitment to regeneration from its local authority, Kettering Borough Council (KBC) and partners North Northants Development Company (NNDC) and Northamptonshire County Council. The market town is located only one hour from St Pancras Station and the heart of the Milton Keynes South Midlands (MKS) growth area. With its population expected to grow from 82,000 to over 101,000 by 2021, the opportunities for the town are obvious. In the meanwhile however, the town centre is currently failing. Despite having an attractive historic core, it suffers from a general lack of vibrancy, especially in the evening.

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH
In recognition of the importance of regenerating the town for both the present and future communities KBC commissioned a suite of development briefs, a town centre master plan and a public realm scheme for the town centre together with a suite of development briefs and strategies, a £1.2m public realm scheme and a new mixed-use development.

As with all good master plans, a thorough baseline analysis of the physical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the town centre and its context was undertaken. Movement and transport was an integral element of this, with Alan Baxter Associates guiding the structure of the master plan via an extensive review of vehicular and pedestrian movement both within the town centre and its wider hinterland. This resulted in the development of a number of options to illustrate how traffic movement around the town could be changed, including changing the direction of one-way streets, amending bus routes, downgrading junctions and introducing traffic-calming.

The historic character of the town was seen as an important opportunity. Savills Urban Designers and heritage specialists took a character-based approach to reinforcing this historic identity and respecting existing listed buildings and a conservation area. This also enabled areas that would benefit from a contemporary approach to development to be highlighted. Preceding recent CARR guidance on Capitalising on the Inherited Landscape, the master plan reinforced the existing identity of the town’s historic street patterns and architecture where appropriate.

The need for a sustainable approach to understanding the need and role of planning obligation policies and any additional grant funding requirements, including highways and public realm, input from planning consultants (Savills Planning & Regeneration) ensured that best practice guidance on emerging and current policy requirements was also followed.

Whilst using 3D computer modelling techniques that are expected of today’s urban designers, the Kettering master plan took technology a stage further, using an intelligent three dimensional model of the town centre that linked the master plan to the council’s GIS system. Team members VoxVue, incorporated a database of information into an interactive user-friendly model, enabling development to be monitored as well as setting out planning history and proposed policy requirements.

LESSONS LEARNED
Public realm delivery - a catalyst to change: the client recognised that a key part of the project was to incorporate a deliverable public realm scheme that would indicate to local residents and businesses that they were committed to change. Through NNDC and Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited funding, a £1.2m public realm scheme transformed the town’s Market Place from a little used space to a vibrant place.

The driving force for the scheme was to create opportunities for using the space for both informal and formal events, as well as an attractive place to meet, eat, and linger. The design team incorporated an amphitheatre as both a functional and sculptural feature, together with a bespoke canopy design which acts as an informal stage as well as a sheltered seating area. Using high quality materials, architectural lighting and an interactive water feature, the space now offers a vibrant place for the community to enjoy the town centre during both the day and evening.

This is already acting as a stimulus to the economy of the surrounding area, with KRC marketing it as the town’s new Restaurant Quarter, existing businesses investigating upgrading their properties and a new mixed-use development planned for the southern frontage of the Market Place.

In addition to the delivery of the Market Place scheme, a Public Realm Strategy, Public Art Strategy, Lighting Strategy and Wayfinding Strategy was also produced for the entire town centre. By providing a committed, integrated approach, all future private and public sector schemes will therefore be committed to visually unified place.

An iterative brief: whilst at the outset Savills Urban Design were commissioned to produce a master plan together with a suite of development briefs and strategies, it quickly became apparent that the outputs would be more robust and useful in planning terms if they could be written as an Area Action Plan. Following careful consideration both client and consultant decided that this would be the best way forward and the brief was amended, giving KBC a tool that will be actively used through the planning process.

Stakeholder’s engagement: the geographical scope of the project necessitated an inclusive and thorough approach to stakeholder engagement throughout the design process. An innovative and varied approach was taken, to help overcome local consultation fatigue and try and include hard-to-reach communities. Methods included leaflet drops, media slots, a movie, interactive exhibitions, design workshops, presentations, public walkabouts, workshops involving local school children and one-to-one stakeholder interviews. Technology was used to stimulate involvement, with design workshops, which incorporated interactive and adjustable computer models and a project website launched to inform and engage.
WATERFRONT WAKEFIELD

FaulknerBrowns reconnect Wakefield with its historic waterfront

Waterfront Wakefield is a £120 million mixed use master plan which, when complete, will create a sustainable future for a large dilapidated estate of listed industrial buildings and re-invigorate Wakefield’s historic waterfront. The first phase of this five-phased master plan was completed in summer 2008.

Phase one of the master plan consists of four buildings disposed around two historic wharves and a new landscaped public square designed by Gross Max Landscape Architects, as well as flood protection and highway work for the wider master plan. FaulknerBrowns designed the first phase buildings, all of which were new build, with the exception of the restoration of the Grade II* listed Calder and Hebble Navigation Warehouse, which was undertaken by BDP.

The master plan provides a setting for the Hepworth Gallery, a £26 million world-class art gallery, to house works by Wakefield-born artist Barbara Hepworth. Designed by David Chipperfield Architects, the gallery is presently under construction and scheduled to open in 2011.

With the completion of the first phase of the master plan and the Hepworth Gallery, Wakefield will be re-connected to its historic waterfront. The stakeholders in the project - British Waterways, English Heritage and CABE - will also have a completed case study in complex historic waterfront regeneration.

A DELIVERABLE MASTER PLAN

In 1997, CTP St James were selected via a competitive process to assist Wakefield Council and British Waterways in the redevelopment of Wakefield’s historic waterfront. Following the development of two unsuccessful master plans, in the spring of 2003, CTP St James appointed FaulknerBrowns to develop a master plan which built from the physical qualities of the site and offered solutions to the significant constraints of highways, flooding and fragmented ownership patterns which had promoted the current state of dereliction and separation from the city.

MASTERPLANNING CONCEPTS

The master plan is derived from the following concepts:

• Phasing strategy: Each of the five phases of the master plan is a mini mixed-use development, self-sufficient in terms of access, egress, servicing, flood protection and parking. The phases are carefully dovetailed with patterns of land ownership and the spatial strategy, so that individual areas of the master plan can be completed.

• Spatial structure and movement hierarchy: the master plan is designed to lead pedestrians through the development via a series of courtyards. East-west movement is characterised by the linear, open historic wharves running perpendicular to the water’s edge. North-south movement is characterised by the controlled and off-set connections offering intriguing views and glimpses. The cobbled surfacing of the historic wharves was carefully lifted, stored and re-laid upon completion of the works. The wharfs make direct and open connections to the water, but are some 1.2 metres below the required flood protection level. In order for the spatial strategy to work, it was imperative that the visual link to the water was not severed by flood protection measures. The adopted solution was to use a series of automatically actuated, hydraulic rising dams.

• Defining the development footprint: Determining to what extent the historic estate could be opened up with selective demolition, or repaired with new build, was based on an analysis of the historic figure ground of the waterfront. This was cross-matched against the historic significance of the various components of the estate. The value of this approach was to create a series of carefully scaled spaces which protect the character and setting of the listed structures and provide sheltered and intimate outdoor rooms.

PLANNING PROCESS

In order to balance the planning requirements demanded by the local authority with the prescriptive requirements of English Heritage, a parameter approach was proposed which carefully judged maxima and minima development volumes, and use quanta, to secure an outline approval. English Heritage supported this approach on the proviso that we submitted a design and specification methodology for the restoration of the listed structures that provided flexibility for a number of future uses. The need to achieve flexibility in use across the phases of the development and to secure a consent to deliver funding from both public and private sources, was crucial in creating a deliverable master plan.

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LEARNING POINT

Waterfront Wakefield is a complex regeneration project with a myriad of technical, commercial and process challenges to resolve. The successful delivery of the master plan would have proved impossible without the additional momentum generated by the support of the external stakeholders - in this case, CABE and English Heritage - who assisted us in persuading the Environment Agency of the value of our innovative proposal to use hydraulic-raising barriers to deliver flood protection.
Ground Control
In 240 densely written pages, Anna Minton challenges a number of the concepts that have been driving many projects currently involving urban designers. Anna Minton is not a designer, she is a journalist, and Guardian readers will be familiar with her crusading concern. This book brings home the need for urban designers to get up-to-date with their CPD on micro-climatic issues whether they work in temperate or hot urban environments. The well qualified contributors add to our sum of useful knowledge, with a wish that the publisher could have afforded coloured illustrations to explain the densely laid out data and illustrations. Maybe too weighted for the briefcase of the itinerant consultant but ideal to have on your e-reader, ready to jet off to those overseas masterplanning commissions. Is it available to download digitally?

Designing High-Density Cities – For Social & Environmental Sustainability
At first glance this may not seem to be a text book for urban designers but I wish that it had been available when I was working on large scale projects in Hong Kong. The concept of the Breeze Corridor to allow air movement within large high-rise developments was becoming adopted then, but detailed analysis of micro-climatic issues were not on the agenda and some pretty dreadful developments took place that would leave the spaces between without the benefit of light, view or breeze. The twenty-two contributors to this book comprehensively cover the gamut of issues of building at high densities, the growth of mega developments sometimes along class distinctions. Coming back onto design, many articles refer to Oscar Newman and his defensive gat es. Coming back onto design, many articles refer to Oscar Newman and his defensive gates. Coming back onto design, many articles refer to Oscar Newman and his defens...

Politics, Planning and Homes in a World City
Duncan Bowie gives a panacea of strategic planning for London and, in particular, a comprehensive analysis of London’s housing policies from the end of Ken Livingstone’s mayoralty. He assesses London’s experience of spatial planning under an elected mayor against planning theory and compares it with New York and Paris. Unfortunately, he does not refer to seminal in depth studies like Working Capital, which challenges the growth determinism of the London Plan, or Changing Cities, a critique of new conventional wisdom which figures large in London’s mayoral policy making. Bowie points out that Livingstone’s political choice of planning for growth benefited from prolonged economic and population growth, a far cry from Boris Johnson, who faces economic decline with continuous population growth.

Bowie shows the chasm between plan making and development control, the latter strengthened by the Greater London Author ity Act 2007 which enabled developers to negotiate with the mayor who had marginalised the Greater London Authority’s scrutiny powers. De facto bypassing Borough planning authorities, large scale developments were granted planning consent per se in contradiction with provisions of the London Plan, exceeding densities and underperforming on house type and tenure mix, space standards and design quality. Chasing numbers over livability may result in hard to let dwellings after economic recovery. Under the banner of ‘compact city’, both the government and subsequent into the hands of developers who leave a legacy of potential slums of tomorrow. An interesting dilemma noted by Bowie is that new developments below public housing standards should lead to relaxed standards or empty premises. It remains to be seen whether Boris Johnson will impose more generous space standards, less density, more evenly distributed housing growth and higher sustainable design quality.

Bowie shows that Livingstone was far from delivering his targets, even during the boom years, partially due to limited powers, but also for wanting development on the ground at whatever cost. The proposals in the conservative green paper Open Source Planning will pay put to any hope of sufficient spatially balanced provision of affordable housing in London where Johnson has already lowered targets. This leaves precious little chance of Bowie’s renaissance of a pragmatic approach to planning, whereby the public sector is interventionist and tough with the market. Bowie does remark that the cost of Londoners gets increasingly difficult to capture while its population is constant on the move and its transient lifestyle in contradiction with allegiance to London communities, and thus to the ideals implicitly present in the current planning agenda and designer visions of regenerating London.

Gated Communities – Social Inequality in Contemporary and Historical Gated Developments
This collection of articles differs from the mainstream literature on gated communities, owing to its ambitious geographic coverage, long term historic timeframe, and range of countries covered. The case studies have been selected. Examples include cities from the Middle East, Africa, China, Australasia, Latin America, France and the USA. Such a global coverage raises the question of whether there exists an ubiquitous concept of gated community in space and time? This question seems implicit in the book which concludes that everywhere contemporary gated communities are rooted in the history of their spatial development. Another common theme is whether and what design features are characterising generic gated communities. A third purpose is to challenge the conventional wisdom that gated community and design are intrinsically linked.

The problem with such an all-embracing collection of examples, presented in short articles is that the intricacies of the complex research postulates may slip through the crudeness of the mesh. Some of the historic references seem a little far-fetched. This is not to say that the historic context does not influence the shape of current gated communities. The book gives three rationales for gated communities: status through exclusivity; security against crime and fear of crime; feeling of belonging inside the gate, or a combination of these. However, the article on France shows other reasons, such as rent seeking and protection of property assets, traditional municipal governance, as well as legal frameworks and homogenising planning practices. Thus gated communities owe their existence to a much greater set of parameters than the three individual and societal motivations.

What the case studies expose inadvertently is the issue of scale. Gated communities range from a few houses or a boom across a dead end street to new developments on green fields of several thousand premises with services, autarchic infrastructure, management and security. The examples from China are relevant here, where cities of production are being turned into cities of gates. Coming back onto design, many articles refer to Oscar Newman and his defensible space idea. Another classic reference is that gated communities are socially cohesive akin to garden cities or utopian settlements. The examples from China show other reasons, such as rent seeking and protection of property assets, traditional municipal governance, as well as legal frameworks and homogenising planning practices. Thus gated communities owe their existence to a much greater set of parameters than the three individual and societal motivations.

The merit of the book is its appetite to extend the notion of gated communities worldwide and its attempt to identify their commonalities, including their urban design characteristics. What remains unconvincing is the merits or otherwise of gated communities, and their longer term effect on cities as a whole. There is no way to canvass people in gated communities, so perhaps they may hamper the democratic process for which cities and their public realm are essential settings.

Richard Cole
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Six Towns in Search of a Centre

I am a regular visitor to Stoke-on-Trent, a city which has a fascinating history and structure, although economically depressed and environmentally ravaged by the last two decades of deindustrialisation. The six Potteries towns of Longton, Fenton, Stoke, Hanley, Burslem and Tunstall were amalgamated in 1910. There was a tussle for civic supremacy among the six, which Hanley won, although the railway station and the civic centre are two miles away in Stoke. After a long stagnation, the six towns continued for a long time to enjoy both individual identity and some economic autonomy. But more recently, municipal policy has been to concentrate investment and growth in Hanley, inevitably at the expense of the other towns. Hanley is now defined as the city centre, and signs on the A500 direct drivers to City Centre (Hanley). The intention is that one of her targets is to achieve a Masterplan for Hanley which makes the town distinctive.

There is an interesting spatial partial to this monocentric vs polycentric issue, which may or may not be coincidental. I was recently in Stoke-on-Trent, running a peripatetic course on Creating Sustainable Communities for the Department of Architecture and Community Development. Hanley we met the City Centre Manager, who told us that one of her targets is to achieve a large event when a big event like a New Year’s Eve kicks off. The centre, with the presence of a big event, acts as a big attraction.

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