

123 URBAN DESIGN

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LOCALISM



VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Arguably, the human bottom was not designed to be comfortably seated for any great length of time, but as we rapidly urbanise and 'civilise' the planet – becoming permanently attached to running our lives from various handheld electronic devices while meandering about in the public realm – the relationship between our bottoms and urban design requires more attention. The traditional local authority attitude towards public seating varies between avoiding the provision altogether, to gathering seats in rows in parks, or perhaps commissioning a few significant 'artwork' seats which don't really function for sitting on. Public seats are a nuisance – they have to be mowed around and cleaned around, they attract undesirables who might sleep on them, and possibly teenagers who

might try setting them on fire (there must be something better to set on fire, surely?) or skateboard over them causing damage and maintenance issues.

However, seating is fundamental to the attraction of a public space, a critical element in urban design and it needs more attention from public realm funders and designers. Enjoyment of a public space can be experienced by striding, cycling or dawdling through it, while occupying a café chair on the edge of it, or while happily seated on something in a location which allows for observation or interaction, aloneness or company.

This last capacity – to choose somewhere to sit which is not a function of commerce and not in the flow of others moving – is the most important contributor to our use of public space. We want to pause and linger – to smoke, to text, to read, to lunch, to take the weight off, to chat to friends, to watch the world go by – we also sometimes want to snooze, spread out, play games or music, and do other things that could be deemed slightly

anti-social but still are human activities generally carried out from a seated (or prone) position. There should be enough seating, in public spaces of a reasonable size, to accommodate a variety of these activities without compromising different users.

Comfort is very important – seats with backs for instance are better than those without – but so is arrangement and opportunity. Seating that curves or seats set at right angles can provide better social potential than the serried rows. Alternatives such as high perches for short-term lingering, multi-use objects like large bollards, logs, sculptures or steps can also be successful seating, especially for children and those with flexible limbs.

There is no reason why seating should have a solo purpose, but it should be ubiquitous. We should not have to search far in public space for good seating and this is a plea for more pleasurable opportunities for putting bums on seats.

● Amanda Reynolds

UDG NEWS

The second Urban Design Education Symposium was held at the offices of MADE in Birmingham in April. Intended to provide universities with an opportunity to share experience and to promote closer working between academia and practitioners, this year's event brought together Katy Neaves, convenor of the UDG Education Group and representatives of eight UK universities, together with Richard Simmons, formerly of CABE.

The universities reported that, while they have more full-time international students, the part-time UK student entry has declined substantially. Ironically, though many UK based academics are interested in the nature and morphology of pre-industrial towns in other countries – in preference to seeing the global imposition of a western urban patterns – it is the western model of urbanism that draws international students.

The subject of 'oven-ready' designers was discussed. Do students graduate in urban design ready and raring to design? Or do they require further training? How much time does it take to turn out a skilled urban design

practitioner, especially if their first degree has not been design-based? One important point raised was that, whilst the ability to draw is beneficial, though difficult to master, there is a great deal more to urban design, including an awareness of how urban areas work – from the scale of a place to a city region. But perhaps the core skill was an ability to nurture multi-disciplinary teams, enabling and fostering collaborative working. Some of the universities claimed that their students had no problem walking straight into a job. Unanswered though is the question of how to create an urban design genius. Research suggests that in almost any field, 10,000 hours of dedicated practice or study are required for an individual to perform exceptionally. How would you recognise one of these people? Would it be in the quality of design or in the speed of their work and success? It is said that a professional can do for £1 what any fool can do for £5...

Research formed a major part of the discussion. One key theme that emerged was the need to produce better methodologies for quantifying and monetising the benefits and costs of design. The trialling of innovations in urban design is difficult as the planning system, guidance and standards tend to preserve the status quo. However, as

demonstration projects for individual houses exist, equivalent ones at the larger scale of urban design should be feasible. One of the most challenging and overlooked areas for research was the issue of governance. A town or city needs to be led and managed through services such as police, litter and waste collection, ensuring that budgets are robust and expenditure is controlled. But above all it is about long-term leadership: developing visions for individual streets, neighbourhoods or the city as a whole, and bringing this vision into effect. When politicians do take that long-term urban design role, they are outstanding. But so often local politicians focus only on the day-to-day or the year-to-year and distance themselves from their urban design role. Instead of providing drive, energy and passion, the political process sits in disinterested judgement of the ideas of others, bringing delay, expense and lost opportunity.

As the human race becomes more powerful and ever more able to change the face of the planet, it is essential that its systems of governance take responsibility for the long term. Has there ever been a more important time for education and research in this area?

● Robert Huxford and Louise Ingledow

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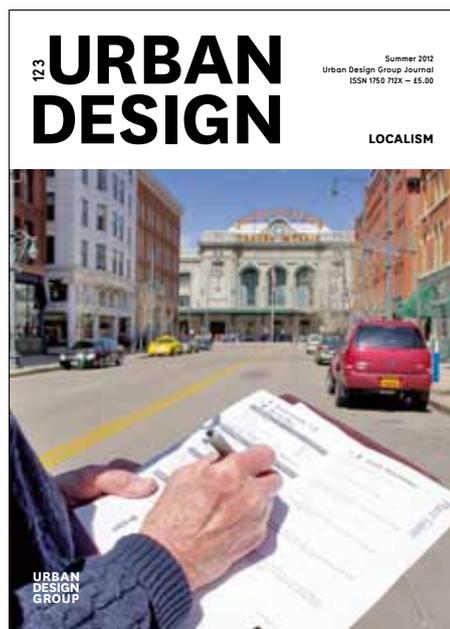
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DIARY OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, all LONDON events are held at The Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ at 6.30 pm. Tickets on the door from 6.00pm. £3.00 for full price UDG members and £7.00 for non-members; £1.00 for UDG member students and £3.00 for non-member students. For further details see www.udg.org.uk/events/udg

WEDNESDAY 11 JULY 2012

Urban Design & Localism

What does localism mean for urban design? Has localism always been at the heart of urban design? What are the best ways of involving local people positively in the future of their community? Expanding on the themes covered in this issue of Urban Design, this event will address the localism agenda and how it works in practice.

THURSDAY 2 AUGUST 2012

Serendipity, Urban Design and the life of William Holly Whyte

Miriam Fitzpatrick from University College

Dublin explores the life of William H. Whyte (1917-1999), celebrated urbanist and author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*.

TUESDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

Sustainable Masterplanning

Assessment methods being developed to ensure that new development is as sustainable as possible, will be presented by Scott Brownrigg and Atkins.

WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2012

Compact Settlements

This event is being run in collaboration with CPRE. Case studies from the CPRE 2006 booklet on Compact Sustainable Communities housing projects will be examined, addressing developments which have taken place since.

THURSDAY 9 OCTOBER 2012

SUDS & Green Infrastructure

An evening looking at the latest practice in making the most of water and nature in the built environment. Speakers include Peter Owens of Colour Urban Design Ltd.

18-20 OCTOBER 2012

The National Conference on Urban Design University of Oxford's Saïd Business School

and Oxford Brookes University

This year's conference - the UDG's 30th - will address the timely theme of The Value of Urban Design. Experts from a variety of backgrounds will examine the many different arguments around the value of urban design - including financial, social and environmental benefits - and consider how best to convey these to clients and decision-makers in the face of spending cuts and risk aversion.

The conference is being run in collaboration with Oxford Brookes University's Joint Centre for Urban Design (JCUD), which is celebrating its 40th anniversary. It will include a hands-on master class centred on one of Oxford's major development opportunities, walking tours, and the UDG's unmissable annual dinner in the beautiful setting of Pembroke College.

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2012

Urban Design in the Middle East

This event, which ties in with UDG issue 124, will look at the challenges of urban development in the Middle East, including the tensions between traditional and international models of urbanism.

LOCALISM VS NPPF

An ideological government has passed two planning acts that are in contradiction with each other, the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act. The first is aimed at simplifying planning procedures and favouring development; the second wants to devolve control to the communities which potentially means additional scrutiny and lengthy negotiations. Presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' (however defined) will not necessarily be welcomed in Ambridge or the Cotswolds. That the government has started to understand these possible conflicts was already evident in the modifications between the draft and the final texts of the NPPF act. Equally the Localism Act has been altered to satisfy business interests scared by the potential powers of residents associations. Both acts are new and have not yet been tested in the courts. Undoubtedly lawyers will be kept busy in the next few years and, not for the first time, will be the main beneficiaries of the legislation. Communities on the other hand are unlikely to have the resources or the skills to take advantage of it.

In this issue potential and actual approaches to localism are discussed by a number of practitioners with different levels of experience, some in Britain and some, in a very different context, from abroad. The relationship between localism and urban design is what interests us most. What emerges is – not surprisingly – that localism is not easy, it is hard work and it needs specific skills and resources. It can also have dangerous side effects, certainly NIMBYism but also leaving out groups that are not part of the mainstream.

For the time being, it is not possible to judge whether urban design will benefit or suffer from the changes: the signs are not too good, but in principle, there should be opportunities to work with communities open to new ideas and to help them improve the quality of their public realm in its widest sense.

● Sebastian Loew

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The Developer and Urban Design

The Gallery, London 7 March 2012



This well attended event was a panel discussion between developers and an audience of urban designers. Ben van Bruggen chaired and structured the debate between Louise Wyman of the Homes and Community Agency (HCA), Steve Sanham of Argent, Mark Latham of Urban Splash, Ken Dytor of Regeneration Investments Limited and Charles Brocklehurst, a surveyor and developer who moved to Wycombe District Council. The latter two had contributed articles for the topic of Urban Design issue 121 on the same subject.

The Evening Economy

The Gallery,
London 21 March 2012

Towards the end of a stimulating debate, a member of the audience commented that he expected to learn about the evening economy but most of what he had heard was about the problems caused by drinking. This entirely fair comment highlighted the relationship between the two issues; coincidentally, the next day media reported that binge drinking was high on the government agenda. Nevertheless the first speaker, Prof. Marion Roberts of the University of Westminster opened her presentation with the fact that 11.5 per cent of employed Brits start work after 18.00 hours, in addition to those that may start earlier but finish later. This indicated that there wasn't such a sharp division between night-life and day life as people generally think. But more problems occur at night, particularly in urban areas where entertainment and drinking facilities are concentrated. Marion suggested that recent changes to the Use Class Order and to the licensing laws had not made too much difference but that if planning and

Does good design add value for those who commission it? According to Wyman quality of place was a major objective of HCA, although she observed a degree of erosion during austerity times and budget cuts, which accelerated site disposal without design conditions attached. Brocklehurst felt it important to sustain spatial strategies to improve the urban environment such as shared spaces, as they attract investment even during leaner periods. Unlike HCA, when Wycombe council sells land it imposes design quality criteria on the developer. Sanham stated that high urban design standards were the key to the success of the King's Cross development. Quality design adds to long-term returns, an indispensable perspective for such a large and complex development. Argent retains the urban designers who prepared the original guidelines complementing the masterplan, in order to monitor and guarantee the high quality of design through a long term staged development. Latham pointed out that good urban design has been the trade mark of Urban Splash from its inception; they would welcome national design quality guidelines. The scale of a development played a role in the amount of high quality urban space that could be provided, offering certainty to future investors in individual buildings as part of a high-yield area. Dytor found the procurement process a major obstacle for investors to deliver high quality. He was not sure whether good urban design would add value for money in other parts of the world where the development process takes place at vertiginous speed.

licensing authorities worked together (which at present they don't) some progress could be achieved. She also suggested improvements to transport facilities and a better mix of activities as possible ways forward.

The second speaker was Philip Kenyon, not a specialist except for the fact that he is a member of the South Shoreditch Residents Association and has lived in the area since 2003. Shoreditch has experienced a decline in night-time problems – mostly related to drink – since more restaurants and other 'non vertical drinking' establishments have opened, and thus redressed the balance of the local night-time economy. An increase in the resident and working populations have also been influential: now the area is more mixed and has a vibrancy during the day as well as in the evening, making its economy also more sustainable. Kenyon pointed out that the complexities of licensing laws work against extensions to licences being stopped.

Janice Gibbons from Islington Council was the third speaker; she explained how Clerkenwell had successfully obtained the Purple Flag Award, given by the Association of Town Centre Management to areas that fulfil a number of criteria in relation to their night-time activities. The criteria related to wellbeing, movement, breath of appeal and

A trickier question was whether the value added by urban design could be measured on balance sheets. Urban development and regeneration involve a large number of stakeholders with diverse demands on their returns and these affect the relevance of high quality urban design for each of them. The message from the audience was that urban design panels should be preserved in order to guarantee some minimum standards. Participants felt that the capacity of evaluating the design quality of projects had been weakened by both the loss of urban designers among local authority staff and the merger of CABE with the Design Council.

Three important issues came out of the debate: the distinction between short term investment and long term interest in the place; the importance of setting land price at a level that doesn't kill the quality of design; and the role of investment finance.

Revisiting who should be in charge of promoting good urban design raised the question of who should be the judge of good urban design. Urban designers consider it their preserve, yet volume house builders continue to sell their products even though they are judged as being of poor quality; other criteria including cost and location tip consumer choice. One way of putting the message across that urban designers are the custodians of quality would be to attract developers not only to a panel discussion but to join as members of the UDG, together with other stakeholders who are 'making' the built environment instead of designing it.

● Judith Ryser



quality of place. Clerkenwell with a thriving night economy, a strong historical context and a growing residential population implemented measures to achieve these criteria, but the Council was conscious that obtaining the Purple Flag was not the end of the matter, and that continuous monitoring and action were needed to sustain the quality of life for residents and visitors.

A prolonged debate followed and a multitude of ideas were put forward though nobody could offer the perfect solution to the problems. Nor was it clear that urban designers could do much about them!

● Sebastian Loew

Sustainable Drainage Systems and Urban Design

Seminar and Workshop,
Nottingham, 14 March 2012



The event held at the New Art Exchange, Nottingham was organised in partnership by the Urban Design Group, Leicester City Council and the Landscape Institute, and sponsored by the partnership and Marshalls. The

delegates involved in urban design came from a wide range of backgrounds and included local authorities officers, students and civil engineers. This mixture was a big bonus for the workshop as the range of views and ideas made the exercises interesting and dynamic.

After welcome words from the Urban Design Group, David Singleton from David Singleton Associates opened the event with an entertaining and dynamic explanation of what Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) are. 'SuDS are not simply about providing good drainage solutions, and they are certainly not the answer to flooding. SuDS are about looking at a scenario with a holistic approach in order propose the best water management solution possible for the site...as designers, it is our responsibility to put people at the centre of design', stressed David. He then presented a series of examples of successful Australian water sensitive urban design schemes. He concluded by presenting the examples of Manor Park in Sheffield and Moor Park in Blackpool, showing how SuDS techniques can contribute to all urban environments and under most design conditions.

To follow, Chryse Tinsley from Leicester City Council continued with a refreshing and

informative review of the regulatory framework and an introduction to the forthcoming National Standards, indicating that the key change in the current legislation is responsibility: 'all development will have to go through an application process', Chryse said, stressing the importance of thinking about the options at the very early stages of the design process such as during the pre-application discussions. 'The new National Standards will assess design on four main topics: destination, quantity, quality and function, and the approval process will run in tandem with the planning system', Chryse explained, and presented examples both from the UK and abroad, which highlighted that SuDS need to be used more as a prevention method and less as a control tool.

The speakers then led workshops using four different scenarios to demonstrate how to initiate discussions with a developer, how to compile early design thoughts, where to obtain information and coaching on SuDS design, and how to assess different possible solutions. This event was both informative and entertaining, as evidenced by the feedback from the satisfied delegates.

● Laura Alvarez

Temporary Urbanism

The Gallery, London 25 April 2012

Four authors who had contributed to the topic on the same subject in *Urban Design* Issue 122, presented their work at this UDG event. Except for Florian Kossak of Sheffield School of Architecture, they reiterated their articles. His position is that temporary urbanism is not new and takes a wide variety of forms. Experimental buildings for temporary use can lead to the best architecture (Crystal Palace), just as stage design can open new perspectives for cities. Much of temporary architecture is done by people themselves, be it stalls in informal markets or basic shacks. But how temporary is temporary? Shantytowns tend to last for a long time while modern buildings in China may be torn down within two decades. Temporary structures are not necessarily small and can be self-regulated. Many can act as tests for future architecture: innovative



experiments took place between the 1960s and 1970s, epitomised by archigram or space-buster, which colonised spaces under flyovers. In Kossak's view, temporary urbanism is a political project. Squatters invented new forms of communal living when working with existing architecture. In Glasgow, temporary urban interventions became a political forum which attracted investment. For him, the Occupy movement is producing temporary urbanism in unlikely places. Finally, mass political demonstrations in places like Tahrir Square confirm that spaces should be able to accommodate all types of spontaneous activities, rather than only those intended by urban designers.

During the discussion, the presenters were challenged on the long-term effect of one-off interventions by urban designers. John Harrison conceded that it was difficult to see how their contribution could be sustained once they had left, yet it was preferable to attract temporary activities to places in decline and prevent them from deteriorating into lasting stigma. Interventions brought

fun to these places for a short while: putting activities back into empty shops and engaging people to play badminton on the town square returned life into the town centre, and lifted the spirit of local inhabitants. It is less clear whether establishing a gated caravanserai in the East End, where the local population is alienated by the gating of and around the Olympic site, can make them feel safe behind their own gates, and it contradicts the culture of life in the public realm and in direct contact with the street.

Urban designers in the audience, involved in many and diverse regeneration projects, raised the contradiction between temporality and transition. Was it not the task of the urban designer to generate more lasting physical improvements to assist the local economy and raise the quality of life of inhabitants, workers and visitors? Should one-off activities not lead to more sustainable purposes of underused spaces? Surely, urban design should be more transformative than ephemeral, more about long-term results than one-off events. In fact, the three Danish examples published in the same issue of *Urban Design* were transitional, either engaging squatters into a less marginal position or testing improvements step by step with temporary measures, and establishing them more permanently when proven successful. So we should ask whether what the speakers were doing was really temporary urbanism, or simply initiating temporary activities, without evolving them into means to transform the declining areas into a dynamic built environment where new more permanent activities could flourish?

● Judith Ryser

Designing Place

International Urban Design Conference, University of Nottingham, 2-3 April 2012

This exciting and enlightening event organised by the Urban Design Research Group, University of Nottingham, welcomed colleagues from 21 countries and a variety of disciplines, cultures and environments. Over two days, delegates could attend three plenary sessions and 41 different parallel sessions, all of them intriguing and inviting. Dr Katharina Borsi opened the event with a warm welcome stating that '...the notion of place cannot be delineated theoretically nor fixed by guidelines for practice. Instead, we hope to engender a discussion across cultures and disciplines about the definition, scope and instrumentality of place as a tool for design'. Three speakers followed and the highlight of this first session was the work of Dr Adetokunbo Ilesanmi (Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria). Dr Ilesanmi explored the cognitive, psychological and social connotations of place on local people, in order to understand the impact of population relocation following a natural disaster. His findings will, surely, set a platform for further research in the social effects of emergency urbanism.

Professor David Porter (Clement Porter Architects, London) opened one of the afternoon sessions with a provoking presentation on how people make sense of their environment by understanding how the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. He looked at the potential of anthropological and psychological theories exploring the move from space to place, and from perception to cognition. At the end of his talk, delegates were eager to learn more and to discuss the application of some of his theories and ideas to the higher education curricula.

Amanda Reynolds, Chair of the Urban Design Group, amused the audience with her after-dinner speech, reflecting on how good design can contribute to the creation of places, and how buildings should be carefully conceived as an integral part of their environment, not as disjunctive objects which create leftover spaces that do not constitute places.

Dr Camillo Boano (University College London), with a very different and highly intellectual yet pragmatic, point of view, examined a series of overseas case studies and discussed design as the simultaneous production of physical form, the creation of social, cultural and symbolic resources and the means to facilitate processes which enable activism. He highlighted the need to examine and always consider the relationship between design and politics.

Dr Harry Charrington (University of Bath) and Mike Devereux (University of the West of England) surprised and excited the audience with their proposal for a reform of the planning system, arguing that the current

one is aimed at protecting the status quo and regulating land use, leaving little place for design. The team proposed the introduction of a combination of strong local plans and detailed development briefs, written and agreed by multi-disciplinary teams prior to the design stage. The point was made that this approach would require the introduction of systematic training for key players, but on the other hand it would give architects greater freedom to design and force them to be more committed to place-making. Later in the afternoon, Ali Madanipour (Professor of Urban Design, Newcastle University) stressed the need for all professionals involved in development at any scale, to be focused on place.

After a heated roundtable discussion, the event finished with a tribute to Steve Tiesdell, who died on 30 June 2011 (see UD 120, p. 4). Colleagues remembered Steve presenting some of his latest work and explaining how it set precedents for further research.

THE END OF PLACE-MAKING?

During the conference, a general consensus of what constitutes place emerged across disciplines and nations. Despite minor etymological differences, a significant number of researchers referred to the notion of place as a combination of three interlinked and closely associated elements: the physical form or geometry (locale); the function or the activities hosted by the space (social); the meaning (symbolism). It was repeatedly stressed that a space cannot become a place if one of those elements is missing.

There was a collective urge to find out reasons why some public spaces never became places and the topic was thoroughly discussed. For a space to become a place it has to have a social meaning, which is most commonly developed naturally by the community over time. The meaning of a place does not have to be shared by all, and it is certainly not necessary for it to have one sole meaning. More frequently the meaning differs between social groups, age groups and even between individuals. This process of assigning symbolism to a space is highly linked to the development of a sense of belonging. Through our biological needs, we

generate a degree of dependency on a place, our psychological needs make us become attached to it, and our cognitive nature assigns identity to a space, making it a place. Professor Ali Madanipour argued that we cannot 'make-place', as the assignation of meaning to a space has to occur naturally as a means of appropriation. After these statements, professionals should perhaps think about designing for place-enabling, giving the opportunity for natural social processes to take place in the public realm. Perhaps we should review whether place-making is possible at all.

A PLANNING REFORM?

Dr Harry Charrington and Mike Devereux's proposal for a reform to the planning system provoked a heated discussion. Generally supported by the audience, the proposal brought to light a number of questions. The lack of urban design skills within both public and private sectors is already notoriously problematic, and possibly the main constraint in the delivery of good quality urbanism. How would the new system overcome this existing shortfall? What would ensure the government's commitment to the qualified consultancy structure necessary for the success of the proposal?

The pair consistently stressed the importance of a strong, specific, carefully designed local plan, and the even more critical need for a well qualified multi-disciplinary team to draft a development brief suited to each application. Perhaps some developers would agree to an increase in costs at pre-application stages against a greater design freedom, and a quasi guarantee of consent prior to detailed design stages. This would be more likely to apply to large schemes. On small applications, the challenges would be different. Currently, unnecessary constraints and requirements can, in some cases, become meaningless and bureaucratic. The challenge may therefore be to adapt the proposed system and make it commercially viable for projects of all scales and nature?

● Laura Alvarez

All abstracts and presentations are available on request. udgeastmidlands@googlemail.com

Bordeaux and other baroque cities

UDG Study Tour 12–20 May 2012

Twenty UDG members and friends set off by train from St. Pancras find out how some of the great Western European classical urban set-pieces have adapted to today's world, and in particular how trams have created a civilised means of access to historic centres.

The Middle-Rhine was the location of the seats of many 18th century rulers of small principalities. This was the age of absolute monarchy, and many rulers aspired to its trappings, as exemplified by Louis XIV's Versailles. The result was a flowering of grand palaces and gardens, and towns laid out as adjuncts to them using classical layout principles.

Our first stop was Darmstadt, former capital of the Grand-Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. A broad axial street focuses on a massive memorial column to Grand-Duke Ernst Ludwig, beyond which little other than the 16th-18th century palace complex, complete with moat, seems to have survived the Second World War bombs. However, all of the street frontages have been rebuilt in modern style, and the central pedestrian zone is threaded by modern trams using a network that was never disbanded in the mid 20th century. Grand-Duke Ernst Ludwig's greatest gift to posterity, however, is the magnificent Jugendstil Artists' Colony in the suburb of Mathildenhöhe, graced by buildings designed by some of the leading lights of the Vienna Secession.

The Electors Palatine, at their seat in Mannheim, went one better by designing their whole city as an adjunct to their massive purpose-designed palace, the biggest in Germany. The city is laid out as a rational



checkerboard with 142 identical blocks, each identified by a letter and number. As Kerstin Ruppenthal of Mannheim's planning department explained, the original two-storey buildings redeveloped in the 19th century to four or five storeys, were largely razed during the Second World War. Today's modern street frontages are to the same scale, with the two intersecting central axial streets pedestrianised, though penetrated by a metre-gauge trams, part of a network that extends as far as Heidelberg. The metre gauge has prevented integration of the system with the rail network, and transport planners feel that current capacity does not warrant replacing it underground.

Visits to two summer palaces, that of the Electors Palatine at Schwetzingen, and the Prince-Bishops of Speyer at Bruchsal, with their extensive Versailles-style garden layouts, were a suitable preparation for visiting the seat of the Margraves of Baden-Durlach at Karlsruhe, in which the palace forms the centre point of an array of spokes radiating on one side into the forest, and on the other constituting the streets of the town. The market place, on the central axis, is a dignified grouping of classical facades, but wartime bombing has resulted in modern frontages to most of the other streets. The promotion of the state to a Grand Duchy in the early 19th century gave a boost to the town, extended its urban area and resulted in its railway station being moved to a more peripheral location. As transport planner Axel Kühn explained, the consequence was that commuting journeys involved switching from trains to trams. Karlsruhe's pioneering response was to plug many suburban railway lines on to the ends of the tram system, a

↑ Grand-ducal palace at Darmstadt with trams threading pedestrian square
 ⌘ Mannheim: pedestrian main street with trams
 ← Karlsruhe Market Place

possibility as both have the same gauge. Thus tram-trains from relatively outlying places make their way through city centre streets. The success of this flexible system has resulted in city centre congestion and adoption of the expensive, and paradoxically inflexible solution of undergrounding the city centre sections.

A short hop across the border into France brought us to Nancy, capital of the one-time independent Duchy of Upper Lorraine. Duke Stanislas-Leszczyński, decided to make the town worthy of its status by laying out two intersecting axes at the junction of the former old and new towns, creating a new focus in the elegant Place Stanislas. This composition focuses on civic buildings rather than Stanislas's palace, set apart at the end of the subsidiary axis at one side of the old town. Nancy is also interesting in that its main shopping street is traversed by a tracked trolleybus, a sort of tramway-on-the-cheap which does not necessitate digging up the street to install.

On arrival in Paris, we sought out urban set-pieces contemporary with those we had already seen: Place des Victoires, Place Vendôme and Esplanade des Invalides. These were all designed to create opportunities for property development whilst at the same time glorifying the monarch who presided over the city, Louis XIV.

● Alan Stones

Alan Stones' Eurotravellers were joined in Paris by a small party for a three-day visit to Bordeaux, a city that was transformed into a rich and grand provincial capital in the 18th century. During the reign of Louis XV and under the direction of his Intendants, the medieval maze of streets was overlain by a baroque plan with a number of set pieces and beautiful rows of town houses facing newly laid avenues. A significant contributor to the quality of the townscape is the honey coloured limestone uniformly used in the construction, that is probably at its best when the sun shines – one element unfortunately

absent from this trip!

The visit started in the very grand 18th century town hall (formerly the archbishop's palace) where M. Fabien Thierry explained the history of the city and how it was reflected in the current plan for the conurbation of around 750,000 inhabitants. Limiting sprawl by making the centre more attractive is at the core of the local policies. The regeneration of brown field sites and the rehabilitation of historic neighbourhoods are the main instruments to implement them, in addition to the transport network which has been developing for the past 15 years. UDG members' questions confirmed their interest in the potential lessons to be learnt not just for Britain but for Australia.

The intensive use (and photographing) of the excellent tram during our visit was a proof of the success of one of the city's policy. This was in contrast to one of our first stops to see a 1970s deck access development which was being partially demolished in front of our eyes. Opinions varied regarding the 1990s law courts designed by Richard Rogers. During the next 24 hours, the group scattered in different directions to visit a number of neighbourhoods in the historic centre, a UNESCO world heritage site. The city has been beautifully renovated and restored in the past 20 years and particular attention has been given to the public realm; one striking example is the fact that in sensitive sites, the tram's overhead cables have been replaced by a third rail. In front of the magnificent Bourse building there isn't even a sign for the tram stop. Perhaps one drawback of this expensive approach to heritage,

Urban Change in Iran

Forthcoming Conference
 University College London,
 8–9 November 2012



Isfahan photo: Courtesy of Thomas Schulz



is that it is mostly limited to the main spaces. Frequently, just around the corner the condition of buildings is not great and social problems are apparent.

The group left the city core to visit a different kind of heritage: Le Corbusier's Cité Frugès in Pessac built in 1926 for a philanthropic industrialist. Most of the 53 houses built (originally the plan aimed at more than 100) are still standing in varying conditions. One has been transformed into a museum. This neighbourhood is one example that shows the human side of the architect, very different from his grand urban gestures, and from historic Bordeaux.

● Sebastian Loew

This international conference intended for academics, professionals and students aims to provide a forum for analysing the dynamics of urban change and the ways in which this dynamism can be managed. The conference will bring together the knowledge of urban change and urban management in the context of contemporary Iranian built environment, within the broader historical and regional context. It is also aimed at path-finding future directions by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Of particular



↑ Bordeaux, place de la Bourse tram stop
 ↑↑ One of Le Corbusier's houses in Pessac

interest are the socio-cultural aspects of urban transformation, the impacts of exposure to natural hazards and the way in which they have been responded to.

The idea of the conference grew out of the particularities of urban transformation in countries in transition, as exemplified by Iran. As one of the oldest civilisations in the world run by a state government, many of the origins of urbanism can be traced back to Iran (or Persia as it was called until 1935). Iranian architecture and urbanism have been a major influence in shaping the tradition generically considered as that of the Islamic city. Today, Iran is a modern developing country with a long history of adopting town-planning regulations, with the second largest population and the second largest area within the region.

The conference will host a mixture of formal presentations and workshops on national, regional and global dimensions of urban change, as well as thematic interest areas. A related exhibition will be displayed during the conference. *Urban Design's* topic for the autumn issue will be on the Middle East and will include articles from selected countries in the region.

For more information email conference@urban-change-in-iran.org

The Urban Design Interview – Laura Alvarez



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

I have been working for an international architectural practice, Lewis and Hickey Architects, in central Nottingham since July 2008.

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

The first time I can remember thinking about a career in urbanism, I was 10 years old. I became involved in a school project where we had to make a scale model of our city. I spent a long time looking at it, thinking how some land uses would benefit from being placed elsewhere. I initially followed a career in science, obtained a certificate in Chemistry and started studying Physics in Argentina. I soon realised something was not right, as I kept drawing plans and elevations of virtual projects in whatever spare time I had. In 1995, I took a wise career turn and switched to an Architecture and Urbanism course. It soon became apparent that I had a natural inclination to observe the whole picture, and that I found urban matters more interesting than architectural details. Urbanism was, without a doubt, the right path for me.

What do you find exciting about your work?

I have always found problem solving very interesting, thus I become excited when I am involved in challenging schemes. I also enjoy the social aspects of my current job: meeting different people and travelling, having the opportunity to be somewhere I've never been before.

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

The ability to relate and empathise with different people and social groups is definitely the most important skill of an urban designer. A scientific approach is a huge advantage. The multiple variables we are constantly considering can make our job vulnerable to interferences and biasing. Having an analytical approach to problem solving is a key skill for succeeding in urbanism.

The capacity to be critical of our own work as well as that of others is also fundamental. Ours is a social profession; we are committed to contribute towards a social goal and, therefore it is professionally ethical to admit that a scheme could have been resolved in a more efficient manner. To me, every scheme is a learning process and a contribution towards that collective utopian model we are aiming for.

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

I would like to be researching and lecturing in urban design, becoming more involved in education, knowledge dissemination and design guidance writing.

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

No. I was never keen on favouring one view over another, nor on following a path traced by someone else in different times and circumstances. I believe that as professionals, we should be capable of looking at other people's work with a critical eye and an analytical mind in order to form our own opinions and establish our own values. I do, however, admire the way some people resolve problems, and come up with innovative and challenging theories and design solutions that sometimes set precedents for centuries to come.

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

There is something special about New Larnark. When one reaches the site entrance, at the top of the hill, the breath-taking view of a man-made heaven becomes apparent. Each step down the road becomes a magical journey through. The scheme was sustainably built for function, utilising local resources to optimise what was closely available at the time. By function I mean not only its use but also the ability to combine the elements of social and individual wellbeing the scheme was promoting. From a morphological point of view, the exclusive setting dictated the organic growth of the development. The apparent natural relationship between the building layers and the waterfront generated a unique sequence of public spaces; the combination of an appropriate scale and a good balance between the built-form and the voids creates a sense of wellbeing and harmony.

Where is your favourite town or city and why?

I could name many picturesque places that I have visited, some with a large cultural heritage, others with a charm second to none, a few with the most amazing social environments; however, there is no city I admire more than London. It has remained true to its traditions whilst constantly recovering from catastrophes and adapting to change. I find particularly attractive the way the city combines a diverse demography and extreme cultural elements whilst still maintaining

a seemingly continuous urban grain and streetscape. London is currently the best example of a harmonious multicultural metropolis.

Where is your most hated place and why?

Las Vegas. I regard honesty as one of the most valuable attributes of mankind and segregation as the most despicable action. Las Vegas is the antithesis of everything I believe in.

What advice would you give to UD readers?

I think we are all too deeply involved in today's concerns, though they are vast and immensely relevant, but by doing so, we sometimes forget the essence of urbanism and design. I would advise readers to take a deep breath from time to time and to focus on the sensorial aspects of design. Our responsibility is to move forwards designing for the future; but to do it successfully, at times we must go back to basics and explore the simple aspects of human nature and the way we perceive our environments.

I would also challenge the readers to become more involved, to participate in activities and to support the work of the UDG. Knowledge and experience mean nothing if they are not shared.

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

Continue the good work and increase the exposure. There is still a long way to go to advocate good practice: most developments in the UK are almost exclusively financially led, which means good design has to be justified in monetary terms when, as we know, its value lies in a multitude of factors. I am convinced that, as part of the natural process of adapting to a constantly evolving environment, we will find solutions to problems such as scarcity of resources, social inequalities and climate change; however, moving from financial motives to good urbanism might be one of the biggest challenges of our generation.

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

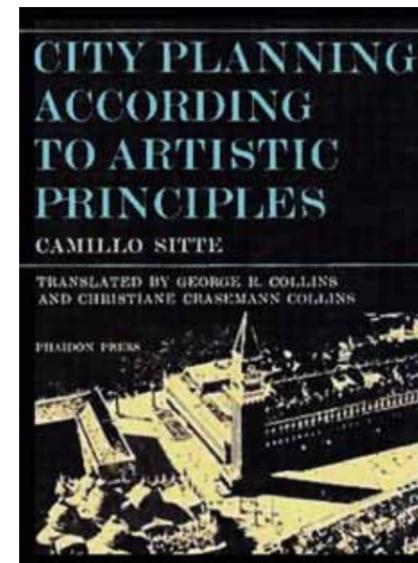
Prince Charles gets another vote. For many reasons.



↑ Ysolda Original Patterns, www.ysolda.com

The Urban Design Library #5

Camillo Sitte: *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889)



In 1889 when the Viennese architect and art historian Camillo Sitte published a collection of essays under the title *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, it was to create an impact that went significantly beyond the somewhat parochial Viennese cultural milieu within which Sitte was immersed. The book's lengthy subtitle, *A Contribution to the Solution of Modern Problems or Architecture and Monumental Sculpture Especially with Regard to the City of Vienna* is revealing: Sitte's immediate motivation was his disillusion with the 19th century transformation of his home city. In fact, the Viennese City Planning Office took little notice of Sitte and his status as a bureaucrat seemingly barred his entry to the Austrian cultural elite. However, although the book remained without an English translation until 1945, as a counterpoint to the increasingly dominant modern planning practices it was to find considerable favour amongst the architectural wing of the planning professions within the Germanic speaking countries and beyond.

At the time of its publication, both the nature of the city and also, the practice of city planning were in a state of transition. Across Europe, the industrial revolution had given rise to the economic, physical and social transformation of the city in ways that presented a number of challenges. To accommodate growth, the structure of the pre-industrial city required radical surgery – and in some cases, complete renewal – encouraging new approaches to building densities, land use patterns, traffic and utility provision. Dismayed by the increasingly heavy

bias towards the technical aspects of urban planning, Sitte derided the manner in which city building had ceased to be considered as an art and instead was being regarded merely as a technical problem. He believed that the regularly formed, symmetrically balanced proposals were designed and executed without the spatial sensitivity of the pre-industrial world. As a response, he embarked on a critical study of a number of European cities whose incrementally developed centres had survived, and which would therefore allow identification of a set of artistic principles that could be used as a guide to the design of new urban areas.

Although the initial reaction to *Artistic Principles* was positive, support faded in line with the increasing dominance of a modernist view of the city which maintained that Sitte's outlook was at odds with the requirements of the machine age. Famously, Le Corbusier asserted in his *Urbanisme* of 1929 that 'Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going. The pack donkey meanders along... he takes the line of least resistance'. It is considered that Le Corbusier is referring to Sitte as the pack donkey, a very derogatory analogy in itself! Indeed, while almost every planning student will be aware of *Urbanisme*, few will have engaged with *Artistic Principles*. Why then, 120 years after the initial publication of *Artistic Principles* would one advocate rediscovering or even, discovering Sitte?

Years before the townscape movement emerged, Sitte advanced the notion of sequential movement and outlined the need to create visually stimulating, urban environments in which public space should be enclosed and well defined by the relationship between the depth of the space and the height of the encompassing buildings. He defended the role and purpose of both crooked and straight streets and also, the value of creating a rich public realm that befitted pedestrian over vehicular movement. Pocket parks are essential and these should be connected as part of a wider landscape strategy. Sounds familiar?!

In over a century of technical advancements, urban design has evolved to a point where it is necessary to re-engage with Sitte's principles. In Sitte's time it was the detritus of the industrial city that was held to pose a threat through social and environmental diseases. Today, many see the motorcar, which strongly influenced planning ethos in the 20th century, as being the main problem. In response, planning authorities consider measures such as increasing the quality of public transport and promoting the health benefits of cycling and walking. They also create better quality public spaces meant for people rather than for the motorcar. While whether Sitte had envisaged this cannot be determined, there is certainly a connection between his principles and the objectives of contemporary planning policy in Europe and North America.

In the past decade or so, the practice

of urban design has been propelled into the digital age and a wealth of new computer programmes, simulation tools and digital media of varying forms are now available to the practitioner. Add to this the core social, economic, environmental and political considerations, and the design of the built environment has become a fully integrated process. However, whilst admiring this well prepared soufflé, it is perhaps valid to once again review the role of aesthetics as a defining ingredient. In this regard, *Artistic Principles* offers a type of early design code document; it is Sitte's attempt to rationalise the aesthetics of urban design and translate them into a format that can be understood and applied by practitioners.

And yet, somewhat paradoxically, it can be difficult to nail down Sitte's principles. These are embedded in an elaborate narrative and as such, the meaning can be extrapolated and interpreted in a subjective manner. To my mind, the style in which the book is written is one of its most enjoyable and uplifting attributes: it is a direct reflection of its own purpose for being. This is not a list of ten, fifteen or twenty principles that city planners should follow as a doctrine. Rather, it can be read as an idealistic description of the character of aesthetically appealing urban environments and vibrant public spaces. Essentially, it becomes irrelevant if you approach the book from a technical or an artistic disposition or even if you succeed in extracting a list of design principles; *Artistic Principles* is an inspiring and evocative text because it dispenses with instrumental justifications for artistry and advocates, on its own terms, the virtues of a visually stimulating built environment, a rich public realm and a strong sense of place. For me, this is the real joy of the book.

● David Edwards is an architect and an urban designer. He has practiced in the UK, Scandinavia, Africa and the Middle East.

READ ON

George Collins & Christiane Collins (1986) *Camillo Sitte: The Birth of Modern City Planning* (Dover, New York)
Gordon Cullen (1961) *The Concise Townscape*, (Architectural Press, London)
Italo Calvino (1972) *Invisible Cities*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Neighbourhood planning

One of the new areas of work for Design Council Cabe has been to work with communities and specifically to support them in developing neighbourhood plans, as part of the Localism agenda and the changes to the planning system. We have been running *Design in Planning* events for local authority planners and exploring approaches to involving communities. We are aware that delegates and their colleagues are keen to learn from those who have embarked on neighbourhood planning in earnest.

Over the last year we have supported communities in two ways. Firstly a small grants programme funded 13 projects where local design organisations worked with communities across England. Specific charities like Sustrans, local architecture centres and civic organisations delivered design support to a range of projects, from exploring ways to improve the street environment of a village in the Chilterns to helping a community in Sneinton, Nottingham to develop a vision for their neighbourhood. Secondly we provided direct enabling support to 14 projects helping communities and local authorities place good design in the heart of their neighbourhood plans.

Our support has included training on master-planning and design, helping people to map out ideas and think spatially about their priorities, conducting walkabouts and providing support with policy-making to turn evidence and aspirations into viable neighbourhood plans.

The initial evaluation of work to date has produced useful lessons for all.

NOT ALL COMMUNITIES ARE THE SAME

While this may seem rather obvious, there is a huge variation in starting conditions for different communities. Some have existing structures and a resilient capacity to get started with neighbourhood planning. Typically this may be the parish council or an existing community group. A few projects have shown how tensions can arise where either community capacity is limited or there are conflicting factions and personalities. In such situations and if both sides agree that mediation is required, a third party enabler or a local authority can be a neutral broker and bring different groups together.

Some community groups have been emboldened by past triumphs to take on further projects. The Andover Estate in Islington is a good example: after the community had achieved a transformation of the central space of the estate, Open City used a grant from Design Council Cabe to work with the community to establish the potential for new housing and redesigned space. However the



legacy of unfulfilled past projects can scar future potential and demotivate key community leaders.

LEADERSHIP AND CONFIDENCE

Often community groups focus on leadership and rely on people who have the time, energy and motivation to bring the group together and sustain momentum. While many have good leadership, developing a neighbourhood plan or project requires specific expertise such as in design, planning, publicity and communication, working with partners and running events.

Some communities, especially deprived ones, don't necessarily think they can influence design; past planning decisions may have resulted in negative outcomes because they've not had the skills to object or to make their case in positive terms. More prosperous communities can be more articulate but may have had only limited exposure to the planning system and to urban design thinking.

One prosperous commuter belt community we enabled in the South East saw the planning system in black and white, and the role of neighbourhood planning as merely a mechanism to control development and keep the place as it is. Techniques we used included scrutinising historic maps to show how the place had evolved, and how different character areas, routes and foci of activity had emerged. The process enabled them to feel more confident about the issues to focus on, what to preserve and enhance and what to improve/replace or add to. It was a revelation that a plan could improve the locality and address the village's future needs, including thinking positively about future residents.

One particularly enjoyable project showed how, with appropriate guidance, a confident community can tackle complex design decisions using its local knowledge. This group, based in Erith, South East London was facing the redevelopment of its tower block estate. Enabler Amanda Reynolds (UDG's chair) took the group on a series of visits to comparable schemes to explore the

characteristics of good quality public space, seating, movement and landscaping. Visiting examples of good design helps to quickly get across points difficult to explain in isolation.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT IS CRITICAL

Some communities were struggling to positively engage with their local authority and to obtain surprisingly basic things: venues for meetings, stationery and printing, access to mapping or data already collected by the local authority. Some planning departments may fear to commit officers' time. However, those involved in our projects said it was gratifying to see communities thinking positively about change in their area.

IT ALL TAKES TIME

Some groups evidently were looking for an easy off-the-shelf manual to follow, and expected speed and certainty. Neighbourhood planning is new and there is no manual. The best groups understood that gathering good evidence, strong leadership, clear communication and a good working relationship with the local authority were much more important than trying to be overly prescriptive. The whole point of a neighbourhood plan is that it is for a particular neighbourhood, and not generic. This requires a contextual response, the seeking out and balancing of local views, and sufficient time for thinking, drafting and reviewing to ensure it be widely accepted, and ultimately useful for the neighbourhood.

Design Council Cabe will be undertaking further neighbourhood planning projects. If you have a suitable project that you want to bring to our attention please contact info@designcouncil.org.uk or 020 7420 5200.

● Brian Quinn, Advisor in the Localism and Planning team, Design Council Cabe

URBAN RIVER CORRIDORS: MODELLING TO INFORM DESIGN

Laurence Pattacini examines the potential of urban modelling through a regeneration case study

This study of the Wicker Riverside is part of the research project Urban River Corridors and Sustainability Living Agenda (URSULA), funded by the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research council. Its objective is to investigate different urban forms, to analyse and evaluate them to inform the development of urban riverside spaces, and so to contribute to the sustainable development of the city. Urban modelling technology is used to illustrate the performance of the various options in relation to key issues of urban development and sustainability along rivers, such as flooding, integrated water management, microclimate, and connectivity.

SHEFFIELD RIVERS AND THE WICKER

Following changes in usage and perception of urban rivers and riparian sites in industrial cities like Sheffield, river corridors have become valuable for urban regeneration and are instrumental in the development of these cities. Sheffield was established around five waterways which played a key role in its industrial development in the 19th century, providing natural power as well as an open sewer. Nowadays they provide natural links with the surrounding countryside, but they also create an important flood risk, which proved particularly dramatic in June 2007. Sheffield is therefore an ideal location to study urban rivers and their corridors in relation to sustainable urban developments.

The case study site, Wicker Riverside, is earmarked for future development and was at the heart of the flooded area in 2007. It is representative of historic industrial areas along rivers elsewhere and therefore any guidance generated here may be transferable to similar sites in other cities. The site is strategically located close to Sheffield city centre in a meander of the River Don at the foot of the hill where the medieval Sheffield Castle stood. The main access from the city centre is through Lady's Bridge leading to the Wicker, an important commercial street as well as the main route to Rotherham. Part of the flood plain, it was only developed in the middle of the 19th century with the present grid layout of streets giving access to back to back housing, works, goods sheds and mills, including Hazlewoods Mill, still standing

today and converted into offices. The large steel works were demolished in the 1970s and 1980s liberating valuable space in a city centre location and providing opportunities for a radical transformation of the area from industrial to residential and commercial.

PROPOSED URBAN FORMS

The site provides contextual and physical constraints to stimulate the design process but the proposed urban forms remain utopian to explore contrasting conceptual design options. Consequently the brief consists more of a set of general principles for the regeneration of the area which are compatible with the development strategy of Sheffield City council for the site, but do not include specific requirements related to uses or users. The proposals do not consider the local community and its future aspirations and needs, but focus on conceptual physical changes of the built environment. The four contrasting conceptual masterplans consist of the existing situation as a base line, Sheffield city council's design strategy for the site, and two radically different options developed as part of the URSULA project.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DESIGN GUIDANCE

Images generated by various computer modelling software and illustrating data related to flood risks, integrated water management, urban climate and connectivity, have been analysed to try to identify transferable design guidance to optimise the sustainability of urban forms in a riverside context. Each model was examined independently to draw lessons to improve performance and inform design improvements.

URBAN FORM AND FLOODING

On 25 June 2007, 100mm of water fell in 24 hours, the three rivers (the Don, the Loxley and the Sheaf) which meet in Sheffield city centre, rose to unprecedented levels and the drainage system was overwhelmed, resulting in widespread flooding in the case study site. Without protection, extensive flooding would recur every 50 years. The design strategies and approaches of the proposed options range from radical clearance of the river channel and heavily engineered flood defences (Council option) to making space for water through

↓ Sheffield's Wicker River floods, 2007
 ↓↓ General objectives for the regeneration of the Wicker Riverside site



THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES UNDERPINNING THE DESIGN INTERVENTIONS

- Develop a new mixed use neighbourhood
- Re-connect the area with the river and enhance its role as a recreational and amenity resource
- Enhance the connectivity of the area and the quality of the circulation network to promote sustainable mobility including walking and cycling
- Capitalise on the development opportunity of the waterfront location taking into account the microclimatic and environmental factors
- Respect the historic heritage
- Improve the public realm
- Improve access to the river for leisure activities such as walking, fishing and canoeing
- Address issues of flood protection including the use of green spaces to reduce the risks
- Modify the physical aspect and profile of the river banks to increase the ecological value
- Remove or modify some weirs to restore the sinuosity of the river and facilitate the fish movement

a channel bypassing the bottleneck effect of Lady Bridge. The Street option is an intermediate one, using some engineering in the form of deployable flood barriers, combined with permeable paving and retention of the riparian vegetation.

The flood modelling exercise confirmed the largely accepted assumption that engineered, physical barriers are required to prevent flooding in urban

environments, where flood plains are densely built and where the flow of rivers are constrained within tight channels and culverts. It would therefore be important to fully integrate these physical barriers in urban design proposals rather than adding them on as an afterthought. There might also be scope to explore more innovative form of physical barriers not only fulfilling the function of flood protection, but also contributing to the quality and sustainability of the environments. Making space for flooding water in the urban realm has proved not to be the most efficient protection from flooding in normal circumstances, especially considering the economic implications of this type of solution. However it would have a significant positive impact on water levels in case of a major obstruction under Lady's Bridge as occurred in 2007.

URBAN FORM AND INTEGRATED WATER ASSESSMENT

The graphs generated by the Model for Urban Stormwater Improvement Conceptualisation (MUSIC) programme shows unsurprisingly that the URSULA options, including some form of sustainable urban drainage perform better than the 'as is' option, where the impermeable hard surfaces are drained through pipes connected to the sewer system. The flood option with its large open space running through the site provides a slightly better permeability performance. The general conclusion is that integrated water management measures must form an integral part of the design process especially in areas at risk of flooding. However this particular modelling does not provide tangible evidence related to design typologies of sustainable urban drainage.

The two URSULA options are designed to illustrate two radically different types of integrated water management approaches. In the Street the urban environment is designed to absorb water wherever it falls, through green roofs, permeable paving, tree pits and rain gardens, and therefore the water disappears and does not contribute to the urban character. In the Flood Channel water is highly visible through retention ponds and a wetland area in the flood channel: water forms an integral part of the design and contributes to the visual aesthetic and amenity value of the urban environment.

The appraisal of these different design solutions depends on people's qualitative values and therefore cannot be done through computer simulation. Another consideration which might be usefully explored further to inform the decision process but was not investigated in this study, is the value of absorbing water versus capturing and storing it for use in buildings.

URBAN FORM AND CLIMATE

Rivers and the presence of water in general have a proven impact on temperature, but this impact diminishes rapidly, having little effect beyond 30m from the water body. For this reason the design of the two URSULA options includes other elements susceptible to mitigate the urban heat island effect such as extensive tree planting in the public realm in the Street option, and the large open space formed by the Flood Channel. The research showed that both scenarios performed better than the 'as is' option, achieving lower air temperatures in the simulation of a summer's day. The Flood Channel reaches cooler temperatures throughout. The two URSULA designs intended to illustrate different approaches to achieving urban cooling: shade versus wind. In this particular case, higher wind velocity seems to be more effective than shading. However high winds are often perceived negatively and therefore even if a windswept urban environment is cooler, it is certainly not comfortable. This demonstrates the necessity to be cautious with quantifiable evidence provided by computer modelling, which might have to be analysed further in relation to more qualitative evidence linked to people's perception of their environment and human comfort.

URBAN FORM AND ACCESS

The case study site is structured around a street block structure with numerous access points and crossings. The simulations confirm the well-established urban design principles that this structure ensures high level of connectivity. The three options structured around this type of circulation system perform well in the model. The Flood Channel creates a physical barrier impeding comfortable movement through the site, but it could be argued that for the physically able, the large open space offers an opportunity to

enjoy the freedom of moving following desire lines rather than the inflexible street pattern. However the latter would be difficult and sometimes impossible in periods of important rainfall or flooding.

OPTIMAL DESIGN SOLUTION, UTOPIA OR REALITY?

The use of urban modelling undoubtedly provides further data to inform the decision making process and is a useful tool to assess the performance of design proposals in relation to specific interventions and criteria. However, the results presented above remain very general and mainly confirm principles already well established in publications promoting high quality urban design: the use of integrated water management and sustainable urban drainage to reduce water runoff, the importance of street planting and open spaces to improve well-being and comfort, and the efficiency of the street and block structure to ensure high level of connectivity. Furthermore each of these modelling exercises is time consuming and requires specific expertise, and they yield tangible evidence only on radically different design rationales and data. For example in the case of the water management, the finding is that SuDS is desirable, but it would require much more time and refined modelling exercises to draw some more accurate and meaningful conclusions with regards to identifying the optimal type of water management. Therefore from a designer's point of view, the benefits of these simulations is restricted and do not answer fundamental questions or help producing an optimal design. However the images produced by these models are easily understood and visually attractive, which helps making the dissemination of scientific evidence to the general public easier. Urban modelling has therefore great potential to illustrate the predicted effects of design and provides evidence to facilitate the planning process and the development of design briefs for urban sites.

● Laurence Pattacini is an urban designer, lecturer and researcher at the University of Sheffield

↓ Brief description of the different options

				
GENERAL LAYOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Block and street structure on a grid pattern New Inner Relief Road breaks the grid and divides the site The highest footfall is along the Wicker, the main access route into the City Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grid pattern preserved new buildings replacing existing ones or filling the vacant spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bringing people to the river New street on the axis of the footbridge high quality dense urban environment Shared surface urban squares and streets extensively planted with trees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> making space for water Radical departure from the current urban and built forms Central open space allowing water to periodically invade the urban environment
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RIVER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> high risk of flooding Access to the river is limited to views from the pedestrian bridge or higher level pavements Few possibilities for leisure activities in relation to the water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terraced pocket Park on the waterfront forms part of the flood risk strategy providing closer interaction and direct access to the river for leisure activities Flood risk managed by constructing walls and removing sediment banks and bank side trees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban squares at higher level providing spaces for outdoor terraces Amenity spaces with direct access to the river for recreational activities Flood protection consisting of a linear low wall with seating and lighting complemented by deployable barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The flood channel contained by flood resilient buildings, walls and deployable barriers is designed to carry water at a 1 in 5 year flood event The river is experienced from the pedestrian bridges and higher level pavements
BUILDINGS AND USES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mainly three storey high buildings small industrial units, mixed uses including offices, workshops and retail underused, derelict and vacant sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New buildings with a minimum of five storeys limited private space in the form of narrow courtyards or roof gardens Mixed uses including offices, residential and retail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two to five storey buildings, terraced towards the river Generous private spaces in the inner courtyards of each block and in the form of terraces and roof gardens mixed uses Including residential, offices and commercial activities on the riverfront 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative, energy efficient curvilinear buildings four storey high and two eco-towers, 15 and 25 floors high Mixed uses including residential units with balconies overlooking the central open space, offices and retail
OPEN SPACES AND VEGETATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor quality public realm mainly hard landscaped with no public or private green space self seeded willows, alder and sycamore along the river Street trees along the Inner Relief Road and the Wicker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new pocket park including amenity grass and few trees Streetscape predominantly hard landscaped. extensive green roof planting Trees and sediment banks along the river have been removed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Urban forest' with extensive tree planting along all new streets and squares surfaced with permeable paving diverse types of planting in inner courtyards including private gardens, and rain gardens Trees and sediment banks along the river have been retained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large public open space in the form of the flood channel conceived as a low maintenance meadow the streetscape includes conveyance rills, swales and retention ponds with wetland type planting Wide sediment banks encouraging riverine biodiversity
				

WHAT DRIVES CITY BRANDING?

Richard Barkham and Claudia Murray evaluate the role of urban assets in selling the city



In the current age of globalisation, increased inter-city competition and public-private urban partnerships, cities have become firstly the object of marketing and more recently, branding. This phenomenon has sparked academic research based on case studies. The latter have focused mainly on individual types of marketing, such as advertising campaigns, landmark buildings or international events. These studies are not capable of measuring the quality and impact of branding for a city as a whole, let alone shedding light on the complex factors involved in selling the city to the world. In principle, there is a lot to be gained, by architects and urban designers and perhaps even community representatives, from understanding the processes which drive city branding. A more democratic, or at least more broadly based approach might yield a more creative outcome.

The aim of branding is to achieve some competitive advantage by means of product differentiation. Every city has a set of assets, tangible and intangible, which are capable of being utilised in defining a city's point of difference and projecting the experiences it can offer. There is a strong motivation for city government to be involved in branding, since success benefits the public at large, but individual private interests also stand to gain commercially. Our study in part

aims to examine the relative importance of public and private interests in selling the city.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

We drew on three different indices that express economic status and power to select the 32 cities on which the analysis is based. The first is GDP (Price Waterhouse Cooper). The second is the Economist Intelligence Unit index of 'liveability'. The third index was developed by the Globalisation and World Cities research group at the University of Loughborough and it measures the depth of knowledge-based services located in the city. We ranked global cities based on these indices and selected the top thirty for our analysis. Our initial hypothesis was that the degree of branding effort, amongst these well organised and competitive cities, would be somewhat related to the extent of their 'brandable' assets.

Tangible brandable city assets include the natural and built environment. This is measured in our study by counting the number of UNESCO World Heritage sites that a city has, be this a solitary building, a complex of buildings or a natural landscape. For our group of 32 high-order cities we have found a total of 163 UNESCO sites. Given the importance that the work of renowned architectural firms has in terms of media coverage, we include as

tangible assets the works of architects that have been awarded the Prizker Prize. This was established in 1978 and is the highest recognition that the global architectural community bestows on a living architect. To quantify the number of buildings designed by award winning architects, we collected names and quantities of completed buildings that each architect has in each city. A total of 22 architectural practices were surveyed yielding 359 completed projects. We consider these two lists – the number of World Heritage Site and the works of Pritzker winning architects, as potentially at least, key drivers of city branding.

INTANGIBLE ASSETS

A city's intangible assets include amenities, international events and education. In order to collect quantifiable data for each intangible brand driver, we made further divisions of categories. Amenities for example have been subdivided into theatres, concert halls, museums, Michelin three-stars restaurants and shopping centres. International events have been divided into Olympic games, marathons and annual festivals. For each of these categories we have compiled a robust set of data by using either chronological lists – for example for the Olympics – or lists compiled by global organisations such as the International Council of Shopping Centres (ICSC) which publishes an annual list of retail centres across the globe. We have also gathered data by compiling different ranking tables; in the case of education for example, we combined eight different university rankings with global coverage.

Even though most of these intangible activities occur inside the tangible built environment – for example shopping centres or restaurants – we still consider these as intangibles as their permanence can vary on a yearly basis for economic or other reasons (Michelin stars can be taken away for example if the restaurant does not perform to the expected standard). In addition, these assets' main contribution to a city's identity is via the service or experience that they offer.

FINDINGS

So, the database we have assembled includes precise quantitative indicators of the tangible and intangible assets

↳ Prada Epicentre, New York described by OMA as an exclusive boutique, a public space, a gallery, a performance space and a laboratory. (Image courtesy OMA)
→ Enhancing the shopping experience. Beijing EuroPlaza Shopping Centre. Haskoll Architects

that we thought, a priori, were likely to be associated with a city's branding effort. We have also devised a method for assessing the quality, range and impact of a city's actual branding effort. As said, we expected that it would be the cities with the most extensive range of brandable assets, in particular those with the most notable architectural heritage, that would be the most active and effective in their approach to branding. In fact, on the basis of regression analysis, we find that it is the highly organised commercial leisure activities which are the main drivers for city branding. To be more precise, it is the cities with the most shopping centres and the most heritage that seem to put the most effort into branding themselves. Cultural activities are extremely weakly associated with branding effort and the quality of a city's architecture has no impact on its branding effort at all. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this. The origins of branding are in the fast moving consumer goods industries. The cities with the greatest dependence on pedestrian flow are those most active in promoting it. Our research project is ongoing and we are now in the process of correlating our findings on brand effort with other data on tourism, migration and investment to further assess the strength of architecture and urban design relative to commercial activities such as shopping and tourism in driving a city's branding effort.

We seem to have found quantitative evidence supporting current ideas of the commoditisation of urban space and architecture. For example Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas argues that shopping is the last surviving public activity. But instead of turning into another critic of consumerist society, Koolhaas has embraced the idea and tries to subvert urban commoditisation from within. Indeed through his theory and practice he endeavours to bring together commercial and popular architecture with the high brow critical avant-garde type which has always been considered to be out of touch with wider audiences. Our preliminary results show that the commercial imperatives of shopping centres, and what are now known as urban entertainment hubs, are driving city branding. It might concern those who claim the moral significance of high quality architecture and urban design, for instance UNESCO

sites and award winning architecture, that these play so little a role in driving branding strategies. But should urban designers and urban marketers recoil with horror or should they, like Koolhaas, embrace and tackle the problem?

A ROLE FOR URBAN DESIGN

In 1998 Pine and Gilmore described the 'experience economy' as memorable events provided by businesses for their customers. According to the authors, the services offered by companies have become the stage, while the products are mere props in the production of experiences. Following the same line of thought, marketing experts nowadays discuss the experiential consumption, which aims at enhancing the value of the process of consumption rather than just the final product. It can be argued that designing urban spaces and creating memorable experiences is an important objective of urban design. If the prevalent public activity is commercial, then this should not be taken as society's doomsday. Much more useful will be to use it creatively to ensure that the time spent by consumers in public spaces can be enhanced with other activities. Again Rem Koolhaas is at the forefront of this approach. The Prada New York Epicentre (completed in 2011) consists of a cultural public piazza at the core of the consumer space of a high-end brand. Questions can be asked regarding the openness of these types of space to all sectors of the society. But the idea of creating a non consumerist public space at the very core of commercial activities is something that urban designers should consider.

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LIST OF CITIES

Amsterdam
Osaka
Beijing
Paris
Berlin
San Francisco
Brisbane
Sao Paulo
Brussels
Seattle
Buenos Aires
Seoul
Calgary
Shanghai
Chicago
Shenzhen
Frankfurt
Singapore
Hong Kong
Sydney
London
Taipei
Los Angeles
Tokyo
Madrid
Toronto
Mexico City
Vancouver
Milan
Washington DC
New York
Zurich

LOCALISM



↑ Mind-map drawn by artists during Joe Holyoak's presentation on the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan at the Frontrunners conference

Local used to be determined by the distance that someone could walk from the village and back in a day. That was the neighbourhood. The railway changed all that, and we have since been extending our boundaries and living in an increasingly unlocal way. But in this globalised world, the local neighbourhood retains its relevance, and under the pressure of the

sustainability agenda, is indeed of increased importance. The compact city enables us to reduce travel and consume less energy, as does local sourcing. We look for ways to increase local distinctiveness, in a world rapidly homogenising. The coalition government's Localism Act aims to increase local autonomy, by devolving planning powers from the (sometimes distant) centre to the local neighbourhood. This move will be of considerable significance for the way we live and for how urban designers operate professionally.

Here we assemble a diverse group of advisors, mediators and brokers of community-led collaborative design, to examine the considerations that drive localism, and the challenges facing its successful realisation.

Richard Simmons reviews the historical and political dimensions of the localism ideology, identifying policies aimed at driving growth by removing opposition to development, as well as fostering quality through more collaborative design. Jon Herbert surveys the Neighbourhood Planning Frontrunners, the first government-funded plans, and finds that gaps in resources and local expertise present fundamental barriers to developing effective spatial plans. He argues that the role of urban designer is more

important than ever, but requires a shift in emphasis.

Chris Brown points out that both developers and local planning authorities need to change their practices. Developers should recognise that working with the 'community as client' saves time and money in the planning process, as well as giving increased social, environmental and financial benefits. From the USA, Fred Kent's Project for Public Spaces (PPS) demonstrates what it means to harness the expertise and passion of committed citizens to drive long-term visions at the local level. One of PPS's celebrated strategies is *Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper* – incremental steps, trying low-cost experiments, and tapping local talents to test a masterplan and incubate uses before capital-intensive development. Christchurch, New Zealand, took a similar approach to its reconstruction efforts after the 2011 earthquake. In an unprecedented collaborative effort, co-ordinated across the entire community, the *Share An Idea* campaign was launched to co-create the Central City Plan.

Hugh Nicholson and Fiona Wykes describe the design-led strategies used to bring people together to shape the Plan. An important thread running through these strategies is

the power of social media-driven online tools. Flick Harris and Jos Townend highlight the importance of meaningful pre-application consultation with disability groups, to ensure plans are inclusive, well-designed and accessible.

Michael Kohn reviews the democratic design tools that are being used to support Bloomsbury Neighbourhood Plan. He argues that although these tools do not replace the power of face-to-face meetings, they do provide greater transparency and reach different groups of people beyond the usual suspects. Indeed, the need to offer different groups the opportunity to shape plans is one of the greatest challenges to localism.

● Noha Nasser and Joe Holyoak

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE BANANAS

Richard Simmons considers the roots of localism and their manifestation in design policy



'Uh, oh, here comes the maps', exclaimed a disgruntled resident when a planner was introduced to a public meeting in the 1960s. We've all been there. The public meeting; the sceptical response; the descent into something close to riotous assembly. Maybe not enough has changed in the intervening 50 years. Yet it doesn't have to be like that. John Howell MP's promise, promoting the Conservatives' *Open Source Planning* policies, to find an example of collaborative design for every outburst of NIMBY intransigence surely wouldn't stand rigorous testing; yet most of us know examples of engaged communities involved in design, producing better outcomes. Is that what localism is all about?

It is, of course, more complicated than that. Localism's *raison d'être* includes concerns with design, but emerging policies entwine quantity and quality in ways endemic to English planning, which may or may not produce good design.

LOCALISM'S RAISON D'ÊTRE

Community involvement in planning, architecture and urban design has roots in attempts by the radical left to shift power from developers and planners to local people, so it may appear surprising that the Coalition is advocating localism. True, local empowerment has long been a Liberal Democrat core value. Conservatives, though, might be expected to shy away from radical approaches to place-making. Yet they are driving localism.

This seems strange until one recalls other roots in the community engagement's family tree:

- After the 1969 Skeffington Report, participation and, later, community technical aid were co-opted by professionals and politicians to reduce opposition to plans. In a statement in March 2011, Localism Minister Greg Clark made it clear that one aspiration for localism is to smooth the way to planning permission for developers who work with local communities, giving 'people the chance to exercise meaningful choice over the look and feel of places, the location of new homes, shops and offices, the choice of materials used'. His aim? Creating 'conditions where people begin to welcome rather than resist growth'
- The Conservatives' predilection for civil society over local authorities led them to fund community technical aid in the 1980s. The same philosophy is apparent now, with NGOs such as Planning Aid, Design Council Caba and PlanLoCal funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to support localism pilots, or offer advice on engagement
- Rod Hackney and other early community architects were motivated partly by conserving existing character. Housing minister Grant Shapps was also quoted in March 2011, calling for local expertise, knowledge and materials to be used to reflect the identity of neighbourhoods. He hoped that community voting could aid

designers 'who are more sensitive to the look and feel of the place in which they are building'

- Participation was, and remains, an important dimension of the Prince of Wales' engagement with design. The Prince's Foundation for Building Communities is another NGO funded by DCLG to support neighbourhood planning.

Clark was clear that a key motive for localism is to break the logjam in house building to help reboot the economy, and that localism is 'unashamedly pro-growth'. In the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) he says the purpose of planning is sustainable development, and development means growth.

Recognising that localism resonates in both coalition partners' histories, ideologies and current policies, enables one to see some of its logic. It is not coming from the counter-culture. It is, at least in part, about driving growth by removing opposition to development, and fostering quality to make building more palatable. Quantity and quality entwined, then.

NEW IDEAS EMERGE

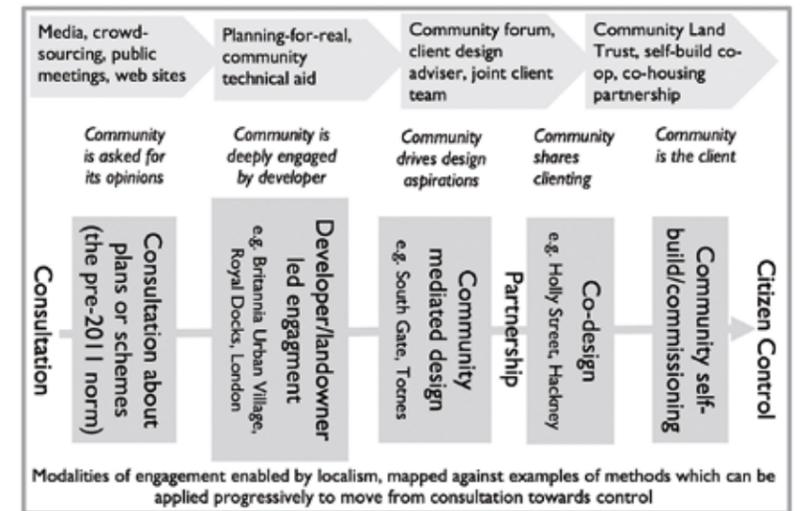
To judge localism as a cynical ploy to inveigle and bribe communities away from being NIMBYs and BANANAs would, though, be naive. For a start, localism is intended to be a two-way street. Developers are obliged by the Localism Act 2011 to consult. The NPPF expects planning applicants 'to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community' and says such applications should be looked on more favourably.

What's more, the government's zeal to reform planning is but one dimension of its deeply held convictions about leading fundamental societal change. Some of the thinking behind this comes from ideas which are also influencing urban design theory.

In December 2010 Nick Boles MP hit the headlines when he said that David Cameron and coalition partner Nick Clegg don't believe top-down planning can work and that, instead, 'chaotic ... is a good thing ... chaotic is what our cities are when we see how people live, where restaurants spring up ... where people move to'. The Guardian had a field day, but Boles didn't mean the government wants cities to be a mess.

Boles was talking about emergence, a theory which proposes that cities are best considered as complex self-organising systems. Chaos theory mechanisms underlie complexity and emergence, an easily misunderstood technical usage. Emergence is one of a set of ideas which appeal particularly (though not exclusively) to those promoting the effectiveness of individuals and self-organising groups as shapers of society and places, over state intervention. In the formation of localism, emergence sits in importance alongside the 'wisdom of crowds' – the proposition that crowds of non-expert individuals often take better decisions than experts; and claims from behavioural economics that incentives which nudge people into making virtuous choices work better than regulation.

This comes from the top. The Prime Minister says that governments need such intellectual foundations for policy, that 'residents know best



how to make their neighbourhoods better places to live' and that localism plays a pivotal role in the Control: Shift he wants to make from state to community decision-making. His agenda includes design, giving communities 'more powers to plan the look, size, shape and feel of housing developments'.

For the built environment professions, emergence theory is prompting a fascinating debate about whether morphology or design has primacy. So far, the most explicit practice-based connection of emergence with public involvement comes from Kelvin Campbell. In *Massive Small* (2011) he calls for a move 'away from the tired, old place making agenda to ... condition making'. To create the conditions for emergent urbanism, he advocates an 'operating system' including a 'Public Protocol ... a working method for enabling ... communities to deliver growth and change ... With the right skills, communities can be smart... They should be able to create effective systems that will help govern and shape their own development in new ... ways: the eyes on the street that Jane Jacobs celebrated ... amplified by the ... tools of the networked age'. The principles of Campbell's condition-making protocol are:

- Self-organisation – communities make their own decentralised decisions collectively, based on simple rules
- Diversification of knowledge – harnessing the

↑ Modalities of public engagement enabled by localism and plotted along Arnstein's 'ladder of participation'
 ↑↑ Holly Street, Hackney. Residents played an active part in specifying the designs

↑ Landowner/developer led engagement: Britannia Urban Village, Royal Docks, London



↑ Dalston Peace Mural, London. Hackney Council required muralist Ray Walker to consult the community about his sketches.

countryside, and the professions, local government and developers, worried that localism could subside into confusion or NIMBYism.

So, neighbourhood plans are now optional, and must conform with a Local Development Framework prepared by the local authority. There is less scope for local determination than a truly bottom-up system would have allowed, and no certainty that neighbourhoods will have a plan at all. Plenty remains, however, to encourage urban designers seriously to engage with communities.

WHAT SORT OF LOCALISM ARE WE GETTING?

In response to advice and lobbying from CABI, the Design Council, the RIBA and others, the NPPF, and *Laying the Foundations*, the November 2011 national housing strategy, contain some of the firmest policies justifying and demanding good design seen so far in English planning policy. The government's aim goes further than neighbourhood planning. It favours collaborative design between developers and communities. 'Communities taking the lead in shaping the design of development' is explicitly encouraged by *Laying the Foundations*, as is the role of urban designers specifically in 'making design advice more accessible for communities'. Localism seems to create a space where at least four

There is less scope for local determination than a truly bottom-up system would have allowed, and no certainty that neighbourhoods will have a plan at all

'wisdom of crowds'

- Indirect collaboration – prompting individuals to make small changes to a shared structure or idea, inspiring others to improve it further
- Dissemination – unleashing energy and awareness to evoke positive change.

Whether or not Campbell's methodology is widely adopted, it encapsulates perfectly the fusion of ideas that inspires localism.

HOW IS LOCALISM EMERGING IN PRACTICE?

In February 2010 the Conservatives consulted about possible content for *Open Source Planning*. They tested the water for a deeply localist system, with Neighbourhood Planning Frameworks 'cohering' to a National Planning Framework (both being spatial plans), without an intermediate layer of local authority prepared Local Development Frameworks. Local authorities' roles would have been to define neighbourhoods (unless already parished), stitch neighbourhood plans together, and mediate between neighbourhoods and across authority boundaries.

Parts of this radical approach survived the political complexities of drafting the Coalition Agreement, the Localism Act 2011 and the NPPF. Other features were lost on the journey. The government was caught between the Shires, fearful that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' would lead to concreting over the

modalities of engagement could flourish: developer/community co-design, developer/landowner-led engagement, neighbourhood mediated projects, and client-led self-build. Questions remain, though, about whether localism will deliver.

Campbell reminds us that communities need skills to be smart. This is recognised in *Laying the Foundations*, and in the grants to NGOs already mentioned, as well as in the RTPI's evidence to the Communities Select Committee on the Localism Bill. Whether sufficient resources are available to support localism is, however, doubtful. Thinking that the development industry might supply disinterested capacity to local communities under its duty to consult seems wishful.

The balance of power has tipped back towards developers and away from communities as *Open Source Planning* has evolved into law and policy. The role of communities in preparing neighbourhood plans is unarguable, but their locus in designing developments seems more contingent at the moment. It is clear in the case of Community Land Trusts, and the government obviously wants – the NPPF says 'expects' – developers to involve local people in designing mainstream projects, but it will probably take case law to determine whether 'taking account' of a community's views means doing what it asks.

Some of the specific policies in the NPPF are also ambiguous. Although promoting local distinctiveness is encouraged, the NPPF says

that design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail, concentrating instead on things like scale and massing, and that there should be no imposition of architectural styles or particular tastes. This will please architects but could disappoint locals, who might have anticipated greater powers to go into the detail of what developments should look like through their neighbourhood plan.

One possible surprise, given ministerial statements about character, is that the NPPF also requires great weight to be given to innovative designs; and that, except where heritage is affected, well designed highly sustainable buildings should not be rejected just because of incompatibility with the existing townscape. This is not, then, a charter for traditional design. That too may be challenging for neighbourhoods where innovative architecture is unwelcome.

If resources can be found to enable designers to

fulfil John Howell's aspiration that they should act as 'experts at working with communities', they will need to bear in mind what is wanted from localism: not opposition which delays development, but lubrication to accelerate it. This is not an impossible demand but will be easier in communities which have already spent time building the kinds of structures Campbell calls for, and where people feel they have the power to make worthwhile choices. As Chris Brown points out elsewhere in this edition, developers with expertise in community engagement are few and far between these days. Most firms will have a steep learning curve if they are to offer such choices without risking unanticipated costs. Activists will have to make big adjustments if they are to broker opportunity in place of opposition. Will localism mean that, at a future public meeting a resident can say proudly: 'we drew the maps'? The potential is there but the hazards are many. The citizens' jury is out. ●

● Richard Simmons is Visiting Professor of City Design and Regeneration, University of Greenwich and was formerly Chief Executive of CABI

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING ONE YEAR ON

Jon Herbert reviews current practice and the role for urban design in localism



The concept of neighbourhood planning was launched by the government to much fanfare at the end of 2010. It was to signal a new dawn for planning, providing a real opportunity to deliver meaningful changes at the local level and helping local residents and groups to lead the plan-making

process. Many early commentators suggested that localism would be no more than a charter for NIMBYism. That certainly wasn't the government's intention as it saw it as a way of helping growth and development. As Greg Clark MP put it: 'When people know that they will get proper

↑ Interactive engagement techniques are an important part of the neighbourhood planning process



support to cope with the demands of new development; when they have a proper say over what new homes will look like; and when they can influence where those homes go, they have reasons to say yes to growth.'

Now more than a year on, what has actually happened? In early 2011, applications were invited by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for a dozen or so Neighbourhood Planning Vanguard to test the new approach before the Localism Bill became enacted. The Vanguards, soon rebranded as the Frontrunners expanded in numbers to 208 through five bidding rounds, each receiving £20,000 in funding.

With the Localism Bill becoming an act in November 2011, and with relevant parts of it being rolled out in April this year, it is a good time to ask what lessons, if any, have been learnt and can be learned from the first year of neighbourhood planning. An additional question is: what is the role of urban design in the process?

A NEW DAWN?

Is neighbourhood planning the new dawn we were led to believe? The answer has to be both yes and no. Locally driven and responsive plans have been embedded in the plan-making system since 1947. In the third reading of the Town & Country Planning Bill, 1947, Lord Silkin wrote:

'It is not merely landowners in the area who are affected, or even business interests. Too often in the past the objections of a noisy minority have been allowed to drown the voices of other people vitally affected. These too must have their say, and when they have had it, the provisional plan may need a good deal of alteration, but it will be all the better for that since it will reflect actual needs democratically expressed. In the past, plans have been too much the plans of officials and not the plans of individuals, but I hope we are going to stop that.'

This aspiration has, to some degree, been taken forward by the many village plans, parish plans and community planning statements that have been prepared across the country. These provide a good

basis for the production of neighbourhood plans. But perhaps the real difference between these and what is now proposed is that the neighbourhood plan will (if it survives the independent examination and the local referendum) form part of the statutory development plan. Therefore the wishes of the community, as expressed through the neighbourhood plan, will now carry very real weight.

Here though is the challenge. For the neighbourhood plan to be adopted as part of the development plan, it needs to be robust and justified, to have the support of the community and it needs to stand up to scrutiny at examination. Additionally the support of the local authority is needed even before starting the process. So, how can all this be achieved?

THE FRONTRUNNERS

A neighbourhood plan can cover many things. It can (and perhaps should) include a vision of the area's future, general principles and planning policies, identify development and opportunity sites, establish the scale and location of growth, and establish design parameters. There seems to be plenty of scope for urban design. But what is happening in practice?

Last year, SKM Colin Buchanan surveyed those applicants who had successfully received funding from the first four waves of the government's Frontrunner programme and accounted for 126 of the frontrunners. Responses from 45 were received, spread across the country, in towns and villages, parished and unparished areas. Feedback was obtained on who the neighbourhood planners were, how the plan was funded, what challenges or issues were faced, and what lessons had been and could be learnt. Some of the key messages emerging were:

- The vast majority of frontrunner neighbourhood plans are being led by communities; only five of the 45 were local authority led. So, the community is taking the opportunity forward.
- Many have spent time early in the process establishing effective governance, including involving local politicians. Those have a head

start and are able to make use of groups and forums, their outreach, governance structures and any community-led plans previously prepared. They are an excellent basis for taking the process forward. The findings of the work to date also suggest that project plans and terms of reference for the forum or steering group should be established at the outset. Strong leaders should be identified and the groups leading the process should try to involve all, including business and developers.

- Most respondents were unclear what the core purpose of their neighbourhood plan would be and what form it would take beyond the inclusion of general policies and principles. This is perhaps not surprising, given that many have spent time establishing the administrative framework within which the forum should operate, and consulting on issues and potential opportunities. The final form and content of the plan will emerge over time. However, this does raise issues about resources: a detailed masterplan for example might be visionary and engaging, but it may also involve additional technical and professional inputs and, importantly, costs.
- Conversely, nearly all were clear about what their plan would not include. Over 60 per cent of the respondents said their plan would not include information on the mix and quantum of development for the area. This suggests that they are not focussing on growth, but more on what their place should be like.
- There is a huge variety of approaches being followed by the Frontrunners and this should please ministers – but it remains unclear what some plans will actually deliver.
- Unsurprisingly, the biggest challenges for the groups preparing the plans are time and resources. Lack of knowledge and understanding of the planning system was also cited as an obstacle. Most respondents said that communities lacked resources and expertise. The question here is how local authorities will provide support.
- The majority of respondents see the process from commencement to submission for examination taking at least 18 months. How many communities will have the stamina for such a long neighbourhood plan process? Add in the examination process and the referendum and this could be longer. How many will make it to the finish line?
- Funding is generally being divided between officer support and handing it directly to the parish or neighbourhood forum. Some earmarked the funding for document production, the examination and referendum. Resources are thus being spread thinly and there are concerns as to how the overall process will be funded. Local authorities should identify and provide sufficient resources to help the process.

These issues are all worthy of in-depth debate in their own right. It would appear that to date, most groups have spent time establishing the appropriate framework for developing the plan: governance structures, roles, responsibilities and relationships with the local authority. This is all well and good, but it means that many have spent time on these issues rather than on the plan itself.



This could in part be a reflection of the guidance, or lack thereof, from DCLG on how a neighbourhood plan should be prepared and what should be in it. It also means that the production of the plan could take a long time. Experience of preparing Core Strategies and LDF documents would suggest that a quicker process is needed, particularly if the interest of unpaid members of the community, who are ultimately responsible for the plan, is to be maintained. With this objective in mind, a design based plan may prove to be the best route to take. Although many of the respondents to the survey suggested their plan would not include a masterplan or design guidance, nearly all acknowledged that it is the design aspects that can excite and engage, and, importantly, help communicate issues and opportunities.

Strong leaders should be identified and the groups leading the process should try to involve all, including business and developers

A ROLE FOR THE URBAN DESIGNER

The core strategy or local plan for an area may well provide sufficient detail on these matters and, if not addressed in the neighbourhood plan, they will continue to take precedence. However, some neighbourhood plans are seeking to provide design guidance and masterplans, and where this is the case, respondents to the survey indicated a real need for skills and advice to assist them. This suggests that the involvement of urban designers will depend on the nature and content of the plan, but it may not be so simple.

In some cases, the future of the high street or local centre may be the focus of the neighbourhood plans: on one level this can involve the type and mix of activities present and some plans are focussing on the preponderance of fast-food outlets and betting shops. But, dig a little deeper, and issues of grain, scale, adaptability and public realm quality start coming to the fore. The latter might not be fully understood but they are important principles for the making of good places and they can be

↑ All ages are encouraged to get involved and express their design ideas

↑ Newington Green streetscape, traffic and environmental improvements study by SKM Colin Buchanan
 ↗ Chatsworth Road Neighbourhood Plan area, where a design approach to change is being used



↑ Placecheck event for the Sudbury Town (London) neighbourhood plan Frontrunner

drawn out and explored through the design process.

Indeed, the design element and their involvement in it often excites people more than any other part of the plan-making process, and brings communities together, helping to create a sense of ownership and transparency in the plan. The design process can help to visually communicate issues and opportunities, and make lay people understand, get excited and engaged. And yet experience from the Frontrunners suggests that those plans coming forward will not include much by the way of design. This may be due to a lack of skills or understanding, or it may just be that the neighbourhood planners haven't got that far yet.

The design element, and their involvement in it often excites people more than any other part of the plan-making process, and brings communities together

A recent London Assembly report highlighted what it terms the 'capacity gap' in neighbourhood planning. It exposed the often bureaucratic and multi-layered planning process and the technical knowledge needed to navigate it, the lack of mutual trust between communities and officers, the lack of skills within the profession to facilitate and engage with communities. Beyond this, it may be fair to say that it is not just an understanding of the planning process that is lacking, but also the role and function of urban design. And this could be why so few of the Frontrunners are embedding design into their plan.

CHATSWORTH ROAD

Some places have been fortunate in having a pool of professional skills and resources residing in their neighbourhood, contributing to the plan, and compensating for the skills deficit. The Chatsworth Road Neighbourhood Plan in London is a good case in point. Although not a Frontrunner and with no central government funding, it is ahead of most Frontrunners. It has made great strides, drawing upon skills residing within the plan area

● Jon Herbert, Associate, SKM Colin Buchanan, Cabe Enabler and MADE Expert Panellist.

but also making full use of social media and other engagement techniques to involve as many people as possible.

A set of propositions and over-arching aspirations have been used as a way of exploring issues and opportunities. Simple and easily understood concepts introduced planning and design principles and helped people think differently about a place. So, those that don't really understand urban design can, through this approach, get a real feel for good place-making principles. Chatsworth Road's principle that 'our neighbourhood will embrace a diverse range of people and uses', leads to considerations about the scale, footprint, flexibility and adaptability of buildings. 'Our neighbourhood will be easy and safe to get around' leads to considerations about legibility, active building frontages, mix of uses, public realm and the balance between vehicular and pedestrian movement.

The challenge is that some of these considerations require long-term solutions that may not necessarily tie up with community aspirations which, given the potentially short life-span of a forum (maybe no more than five years), may focus on short-term change and quick wins. In this case the professionals can help by bringing both macro and micro-scale thinking; although it is important to develop locally-specific change that is deliverable in the short-term, an understanding of the bigger picture and longer-term thinking is important.

Euan Mills, who is leading the Chatsworth Road plan, espouses the concept of 'design thinking'. Though not necessarily a linear approach, it allows problems to be framed, the right questions to be asked, more ideas to be created, and the best solutions selected. It removes the making of judgements from the early stages, thus encouraging a greater degree of involvement by all.

Elsewhere, storytelling is being considered as a simple, yet interesting and engaging way to present the challenges and future opportunities for an area. CABE and Design Council have for some time been promoting this approach to the production of LDF documents. Well illustrated plans, strong on visual communication, will help people understand the importance of local character and identity, the spatial implications of change, and what is proposed or should take place, and why.

The urban designer clearly has a role in the process, but in response to localism and neighbourhood planning, the traditional role may have to be redefined, from one of planning and managing change to one of facilitation and communication. This will require much greater engagement, mediation, assistance and even education.

However as is more generally the case, the role and involvement of urban designers will depend on the availability of funding. In the current climate, when this is limited or even non-existent, neighbourhood planning perhaps provides scope for built environment professionals to make their contribution to the big society.... ●

THE COMMUNITY IS THE CLIENT

Chris Brown does not have high hopes for the effects of the Localism Act



The Localism Act contains the potential to completely transform the process of property development in England. Sadly, it probably won't. At present, we have a system where the highest bidder buys a development site, generates a profit maximising scheme, usually somewhat beyond the parameters of the local plan, and then tries to sell the idea to the local community and the local planning authority. This frequently brings a NIMBY reaction to what is often a poorly designed proposal.

THE FUTURE COULD LOOK QUITE DIFFERENT

In the future, the local community, through the mechanisms of a neighbourhood plan, neighbourhood development order, or community right to build, would identify what it wants to be developed. Then perhaps through a neighbourhood design panel, it would engage with the landowner or developer in a genuine, clean sheet of paper, pre-application consultation to come up with the best scheme.

Best practice would take into account the community's share of the receipts from the New Homes Bonus, the increase in Business Rates, the Community Infrastructure Levy, s106 and perhaps tax increment finance, which would go towards delivering community benefits in the local neighbourhood. It would also take into account all those benefits that the community value but are difficult to measure, and that the jargon calls social returns on investment. These could include the type of occupier in the retail units, or the allocation policy for the affordable housing, or the short cut through to the bus stop, or the space for food growing to help reduce the six-year allotment waiting list. Once the community was happy, a 'community permission' would be granted.

A GOOD EXAMPLE

If this vision of the future sounds naive I would give in evidence the Igloo regeneration scheme at Bermondsey Square in Southwark in south-east London. Here the local authority owned part of the site and worked with the local community (the Bermondsey Street Area Partnership) to produce a brief for the scheme. The developers were selected on the basis of their ability to deliver this brief which required a mixed-use scheme that included a community cinema, a hotel, a small supermarket, creative workspace and mixed tenure housing as well as the continuation of the antiques market in the historic public square. And as well as having this delivered, the community now has other benefits including a farmers' market and a community fund, financially supported by the new occupiers, that makes small grants to local good causes.

We take the view that the community are locality experts and in the same way that you wouldn't build a building without an architect (unless you are a volume house builder), you wouldn't develop a place without a locality expert. Local people bring enormous knowledge and understanding of the best ways to address local issues from housing affordability to pedestrian desire lines. to.....the list is endless. Liane Hartley of Mend, who advises communities on their role as clients, talks about developers needing 'social intelligence', which certainly strikes a chord with our experience of working in this way over many years.

When you work regularly with local communities you learn many things. Communities bring huge value to projects but you can't expect them to speak with one voice. I don't always agree with my neighbours, and the process of putting together a Bermondsey Neighbourhood Plan, which I helped

↑ Bermondsey Square after completion



↑ View from Bermondsey Square Hotel
 ↗ Castleford pedestrian bridge by McDowell + Benedetti

kick-start, has been really hard, although it has had some great spin-offs. For example we are now working together to find sites for affordable 'hidden homes' for local people on small plots of land around the neighbourhood. The trick is to incorporate the best bits of advice and continually seek consensus; as a result you'll get a better project and substantial, if not universal, support.

LAND PROCUREMENT

Many developers shy away from this process because of the way they buy land. This is either a secretive process or a competitive one. In either case, the last thing they want is for anyone to know about what they are doing. Hence, creating space to generate community value means changing the way development land is bought and sold. I have long been an advocate of the public sector owning land as it passes through the development process, but I don't think the changes to community consultation brought in by the Localism Act are likely to make a significant difference. Neighbourhood Development Orders will help where the community has the energy and foresight to be able to deliver them before land goes on the market, but the provisions on pre-application consultation will in many cases only trigger once the developer has bought the land. Community ownership would be the ideal, but it is likely to remain the exception, rather than the rule.

This means that for most developers, community engagement will remain a cost that they will seek to minimise while not generating opposition to their planning application. However, for publicly owned land, with a best practice public procurement process, the developer will be able to engage fully with the local community to optimise the benefits from the project. Unfortunately best practice procurement is rarely practised at present, and there is a huge need for a kite-marked guide in this area.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

The other missing, or rather developing, piece of this process is understanding 'social return on investment' for development projects. At Igloo Regeneration we are in the process of improving our ability to quantify these, often hard to measure, benefits, in particular those that contribute to societal well-being. It is a sad commentary on the market economy that unless benefits can reliably be



expressed in monetary terms, they seem doomed to be ignored. The key lesson here is that working in this way saves time and money in the planning process as well as paying back in increased values, social and environmental, as well as financial.

You also learn that much of the community consultation industry has become adept at manipulating local communities to deliver what its client, the developer, wants. According to CABE, the development industry, and housing builders in particular, generally deliver poor quality places. We have traditionally done this by imposing our ideas through a planning system that finds it very difficult to discriminate between good and bad design.

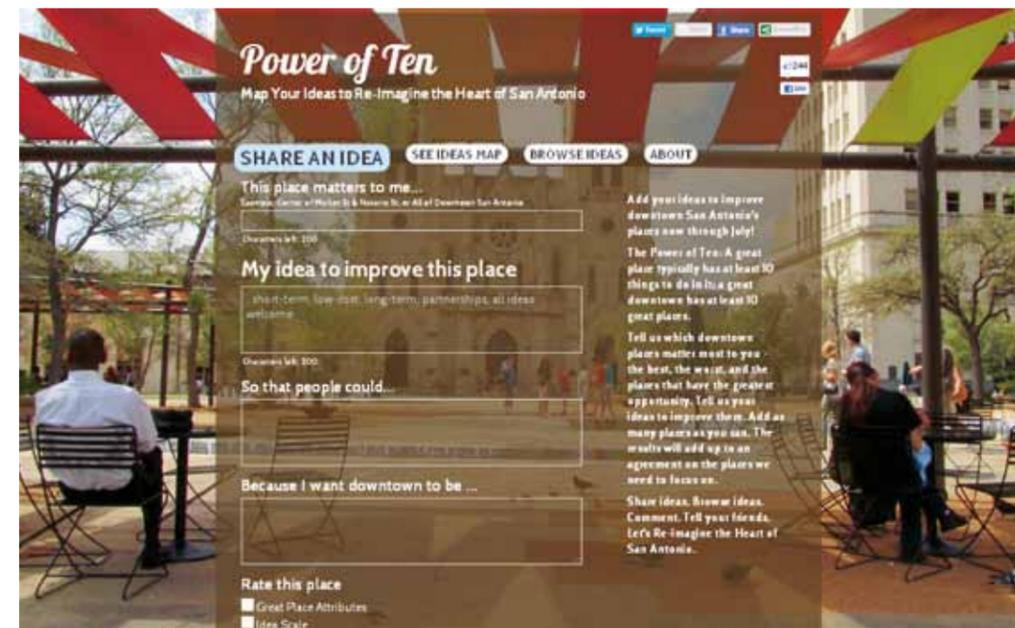
During the process of making the television series *The Big Town Plan* with Kevin McCloud, we created a process where the local community prioritised the required investment and selected the designers for the various schemes. They made choices that we, the advisory team, would not have made. Some of the projects were probably less successful as a result, but some like Castleford Bridge by McDowell and Benedetti, were definitely much better, and overall the commitment of the community to supporting the projects was vastly greater.

Here again, we relied heavily on the expertise of people in the community to guide the professionals towards the best result. David Barrie, who led the Castleford project, is another of those people with high quotients of social intelligence. He has the ability to extract the last ounce of value from a community's expertise and ensure that it is translated into reality by professionals, bureaucrats and developers.

So the Localism Act seems to set the template for a much better way of working. Indeed, one that the best developers have long recognised. But I doubt that either most of the development industry or many local planning authorities are culturally prepared to put the local community into the role of client. There is an ingrained fear of loss of control. Perhaps more people like Liane Hartley and David Barrie will appear to broker these relationships, and perhaps more developers will recognise their value, but my guess is that it will take time and substantial efforts to maintain the momentum, and push us across to this new cultural norm and way of working. ●

STARTING AT LOCAL: THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE A GREAT PLACE

Fred Kent describes some North American experiences of place-making



At the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), we turn the mainstream approach to city-making on its head: instead of starting with a design, we start with place. This inherently ties everything that we do to the ground level. One of the guiding principles behind our place-making philosophy is that 'the community is the expert': the people who live, work, and play in a place know best how it could be improved. Local residents know where the traffic is too fast, which blocks seem unsafe after dark, and what groups gather in a park at different times of day. As Chris Brown noted, the people who will be most affected by changes to a place have this inherent knowledge of how that place operates at present; this is essential knowledge for anyone looking to create a strong vision for development at a local level.

PPS was born in 1975 out of a desire to put into practice some of the lessons learned through the work of trailblazing writers and researchers advocating a more human-scaled, locally-responsive mode of city-making during the middle of the last century, when slum-clearance was laying waste to many American urban centres. Jane Jacobs is the best known of this group, though it was William Holly Whyte, author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, who had the greatest impact on our way of thinking about public space design. Holly once famously stated that 'It is hard to create a space that will not attract people; what is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished'. Armed with that same conviction,

we set out to challenge standard practice within the design community by creating places that were more responsive to the communities they were intended to serve, and inclusive in the process of their formation; to lead by example, by letting others lead us.

While planners and architects now pay lip service to community engagement, too many still try to impose their own ideas and sense of order on a site, regardless of local needs or desires – a practice that Ms. Jacobs quite astutely referred to as 'a vicarious way to deal with reality'. Fortunately, people are getting better at organising to make their voices heard, and to claim their rightful place at the table when decisions about their communities are being made. The American public is finding its voice as the place-making movement continues to grow, and this is a very exciting thing to see for anyone who supports localism.

A robust public realm is essential to the development of a strong society; public spaces are where we meet, mingle and exchange ideas, and place-making draws individuals into the process of shaping the world that they inhabit, chipping away at cynicism by allowing them to take part in creating visible change. Their experiences illustrate the empowering sense of community that Margaret Mead crystallised when she said 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has'.

↑ PPS created an interactive PlaceMap website calling on citizens to re-imagine the heart of San Antonio

● Chris Brown is Chief Executive of Igloo Regeneration, managers of sustainable regeneration funds including Chrysalis, Igloo Regeneration Fund and Blueprint.



Today, a growing number of thoughtful, committed citizens are changing the face of American urbanism. Below are three case studies from our recent work that highlight how ordinary people are taking back their downtowns, their waterfronts – and their sense of ownership in the places where they carry out their lives. It should be noted at the outset that, while we are thrilled to have been able to help guide these processes, the credit for the advances being made in these cities goes to the mothers, fathers, students, teachers, office workers, civil servants, advocates, and dreamers who learn to wield their passion for place to drive real change at the local level. Indeed, that may be the only level at which real change has ever occurred.

DIGITAL TOOLS

As part of an ongoing engagement with the city of San Antonio's government and citizens to help them bring downtown back as a vibrant, liveable place for a new generation of residents, PPS created a PlaceMap website focused on the core of this sprawling Texan metropolis. The interactive map, based on PPS's core Power of 10 principle, called on citizens to re-imagine the heart of San Antonio. And they proved ready for the challenge, mapping hundreds of ideas (with room for explanations and photos) over the course of three weeks. It's a great illustration of the way that online community engagement – digital place-making – expands and enhances the work that PPS does face-to-face with community members and municipal officials to create great places and to plan for more liveable, sustainable communities.

The fourth iteration of our PlaceMap tool was launched in June of 2011 as one element of our Place-making Academy for San Antonio city officials. Acting as strategic advisers, we led the city's staff to completely rethink the way they approach planning – not only in terms of community outreach, but in the way they work together and see the places around them. The PlaceMap tool augmented this process, allowing residents all over the city to get involved in envisioning a revitalised downtown – on their own terms.

↑ An example of the Buffalo canal-side Lighter Quicker Cheaper strategy to activate the waterfront

Ultimately, digital place-making cannot replace live collaboration, debate, and discussion, as Michael Kohn also argues in his article. We almost always deploy PlaceMaps as tools within a larger strategy for creating local change. But digital tools like this one can be powerful ways to draw new voices into the place-making process, which results in public spaces that are more inclusive and representative of the communities they serve. This is especially important at a time when many young people – so-called 'digital natives' – are getting interested in public space issues through seeing events like the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement. It is important to meet people where they are, rather than trying to get them to come to you.

LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER

For the past year and a half, we have been working with an inspiring and highly motivated group of people in the Rust Belt city of Buffalo, N.Y., which is pushing for low-cost, creative interventions that will bring immediate improvements to the local underused waterfront. The group hosted a two-day forum in November 2010 called Aspirations and Inspirations: Imagining Buffalo's Waterfront to kick off a visioning process to reinvent the area as a multi-use public destination sustained by local artists and businesses.

We were on hand to help guide that visioning process. Based on the challenges that Buffalo faced – specifically, public cynicism after decades of decline and government officials' erroneous belief that 'silver bullet' developments could save the city's waterfront – we focused on pitching what we call Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) strategies. This approach is based on taking incremental steps, trying low-cost experiments, and tapping into local talents to quickly translate a community's vision into reality and sustain momentum. Ideas can be efficiently implemented, assessed, then tweaked and customised based upon a community's response.

In a way, the idea of holding this kind of open community visioning process is very much in the LQC vein. Events like this signal a shift away from the traditional master planning process and towards a new, place-based agenda to transform our cities. Instead of a standard design charrette, Buffalo kicked things off with a festival meant to send a message to the decision-makers that top-down strategies were not acceptable to the people who would be using the space once it was redesigned. Aspirations and Inspirations united a diverse group of local stakeholders, illustrating how involving creative people at the outset of planning discussions, before moving on to policy debates, can set a new course for all aspects of future development.

After hearing what the community had to say, the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC), the authority which manages the waterfront, shifted their focus towards local ingenuity and entrepreneurship. The ECHDC brought PPS in to build upon this community visioning process to activate the waterfront, utilising Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper strategies to incubate uses and test the master plan recently completed by EEK/Perkins Eastman before capital construction began.

We conducted a series of workshops and meetings in early 2011, and helped ECHDC develop LQC strategies that were installed in the Canalside area of the city's Inner Harbour in May. These included a playground beach, a new take-out food pavilion, dozens of Adirondack chairs, painted in bright colours by a local company, and events and programmes, large and small, throughout the summer. As a result, an estimated 500,000 people visited the site that summer, exceeding expectations and helping to galvanise the belief that the Inner Harbour is on a new path to revitalisation. The massive attendance illustrated the excitement and yearning for a restoration of the waterfront to its former glory. As a *Buffalo News* editorial headline proclaimed, 'It is now the people's waterfront'.

LQC-style development strategies provide an iterative process through which an empty space can be incrementally transformed into a vibrant mixed-use development. A form of emergence as described by Richard Simmons, light development offers an opportunity to experiment and incubate the identity of the site, rather than jumping into capital-intensive construction driven strictly by market demand and over-regulation.

CHANGING GOVERNANCE MODELS

Over the past decade, several of our biggest success stories have come out of Michigan. The new Campus Martius Square in downtown Detroit is one of PPS's signature projects. The square, once a barren concrete island at the heart of a deadened downtown, has become a community magnet and has attracted over \$700 million in new investment around it. Most significantly a computer firm, Compuware, moved its headquarters and 4,000 employees from the suburbs to a new building adjacent to the square. 'Compuware would not have come downtown without the park', notes Bob Gregory of Detroit 300. 'They didn't want just a building. They wanted a lively district, where their workers would have things to do'.

The revitalisation of Eastern Market, underway today, was made possible by PPS's planning and technical assistance dating back to 1998. With the support of the Ruth Mott Foundation, PPS recently completed a three-year place-making programme in downtown Flint, and new vitality is emerging in places ranging from Riverbank Park to the Flint Farmers Market. Over the last 5 years, PPS has worked with the Michigan Association of Planning, the Michigan Municipal League, the health community, and many local municipalities to increase awareness about the locally-driven, place-based approach to revitalising communities. Accompanied by several local organisations actively working on place-making, there has been a measurable shift among public officials. Last March, Governor Rick Snyder released a Special Message on Community Development and Local Government Reforms, asserting that 'Competing for success in a global marketplace means creating places where workers, entrepreneurs, and businesses want to locate, invest and expand'.

Orienting the state's economic development strategy around creating and sustaining great places requires a new, collaborative approach to economic development. Built on broad, community-based partnerships, this approach



makes it possible for the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of Michigan's citizens to emerge. According to Nigel Griswold, regional planner with the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, 'the power of a place-making approach is that it's a sexier way to find solutions to traditional problems with land-use and investment strategies'. Sexy or not, PPS has always known that thinking in terms of creating great places brings together a wide range of skill sets and professions around a common goal.

Michigan's struggles are not unique; budgets everywhere are tight. Citizens are starting to see that they can't wait any longer for investments to come from the top to fix or improve their neighbourhoods. To create the changes they want to see, they will have to take the lead. And while the shift to place-making strategies for economic development in Michigan might have been motivated by the state's severe budget deficit and the need to make each tax dollar do more, the locally-focused, place-based approach to economic development encourages citizens to take a creative role in making the places where they will live. ●

↑ The revitalised Campus Martius Square, Detroit underpinned by an economic development strategy, was transformed from a concrete jungle to a community magnet

● Fred Kent is founder and president of Project for Public Spaces based in New York

SHARE AN IDEA

Hugh Nicholson and Fiona Wykes reflect on the process of recovery planning for Christchurch, NZ after the 2011 earthquake



‘Communities that take charge of their recovery have better recovery outcomes’

Doug Ahlers, Harvard University, August 2011

How do you develop a community-led plan for rebuilding a city when it is wrecked by a series of devastating earthquakes? On 22 February 2011 Christchurch, New Zealand, was hit by a major earthquake – the third significant quake in six months. It caused widespread and serious damage to infrastructure, housing, businesses and communities. The devastation included 185 deaths, over 100,000 damaged homes, more than 3,000 businesses displaced from the Central Business District (CBD), more than 1,200 buildings in the city centre demolished, 124kms of water mains, 300kms of sewer pipes and more than 50 per cent of the road network damaged, 12 schools displaced, and much more. As the world watched the event unfold on television and over the internet, many Christchurch residents having lost basic services including electricity, phone lines, water and sewerage, had no idea of the extent of the devastation. It would take months for some of these to be restored.

In the days that followed, the city was rocked by hundreds of aftershocks and there was never enough information. Access to buildings was classified red (no access), yellow (limited access) or green (open), based on a ten-minute external inspection by a structural engineer. Emergency demolition of some of the city’s finest heritage buildings was authorised within hours as part of search and rescue operations.

An emergency operations centre was set up in the city’s art gallery, located within the cordoned-off city centre, and emergency staff had to pass through army checkpoints to get access. In the gallery, trestle tables and computers requisitioned from nearby council offices were cobbled into a temporary network, and artworks were interspersed with scribbled notes stuck to the walls.

As the extent of damage in the eastern suburbs and the city centre became clearer, the central government took action, passing the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act (CER Act) and establishing a new government department, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA), to coordinate recovery efforts.

The CER Act gave Christchurch City Council the responsibility for developing a recovery plan for the city centre, which included the CBD and immediately surrounding residential and commercial areas. The first draft of the Central City Plan, as it became known, was written in four months to meet the overall timeframe specified in the Act. All this work happened while residents lived through five significant earthquakes, more than 10,000 aftershocks, and months of stress and disruption as they rebuilt their lives, homes and city.

HOW TO DEVELOP A RECOVERY PLAN

A dedicated interdisciplinary team of more than sixty staff and consultants was created to develop the draft Central City Plan. It drew on a wide range of skills including infrastructure planning, urban

design, landscape architecture, transport, policy and planning, business and economic development, project management and communications. The team included urban designers from Gehl Architects who flew half way around the world to live and work in the midst of a natural disaster.

Early estimates suggested that between a third and a half of the buildings in the CBD would need to be demolished, but it was not possible to identify which ones. As engineering investigations proceeded, it became clear that more than half of the buildings would be demolished, the reasons for demolition shifting from public safety to the economics of repair or replacement.

With so much uncertainty and so little time, much of the plan was developed in parallel. It was not possible to wait for the right information and to assess the implications in a measured way. The plan was developed in a headlong seat-of-the-pants fashion, making decisions with the best information available, with a willingness to revisit them as new information appeared. The final geotechnical report which confirmed that it was possible to rebuild safely in the city centre was completed eight months after the project started, just before the draft Central City Plan was delivered to the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery for approval.

SHARE AN IDEA

Share an Idea was conceived as a way of giving the people of Christchurch an opportunity to say how they thought Christchurch should recover, to see other people’s ideas, and to be part of the development of the draft Central City Plan. The website became a virtual noticeboard where people could upload ideas for others to see and to share their own ideas, helping to build a conversation. The scope of the six-week campaign included many alternative methods of recording ideas in order to encourage people to participate.

Share an Idea was launched with a two day expo attended by more than 10,000 people, and involved international and local speakers, a virtual tour of the city centre cordon, computer terminals and video booths for leaving ideas, questionnaires, children’s activity sheets, and even a Lego area where children were encouraged to rebuild the city centre. By using a combination of high-tech opportunities such as a children’s video, Facebook and twitter pages, and low-tech solutions, including the ubiquitous Post-it notes and writing directly on an enormous space on the wall, people were encouraged to participate and to share their ideas.

During the campaign more than 160,000 Christchurch households received flyers with information about Share an Idea, and YouTube, local radio stations, television news items and newspaper articles were used to build awareness. Weekly e-newsletters were sent to 7,000 people.

As Share an Idea progressed, both the audience and the issues became more focussed. The campaign took the headline themes raised by many people, and invited people to think about what these ideas might look like. The expo was followed by more than 100 stakeholder meetings, and ten public workshops. Rather than meeting with individual interest groups, sector meetings were arranged with representatives from many interest groups, to ensure that a broad range of ideas from



across the community was heard and discussed.

Over 106,000 ideas emerged from the six-week campaign. It was the highest level of community involvement ever seen in New Zealand. All of these ideas were read, digitised and classified. A qualitative software package was used to analyse them, in their different formats. The raw ideas were entered as they were received by teams of students, and then grouped into themes, which could be further analysed to understand what the emerging topics were. Text searches, word trees or tag clouds were used to get an understanding of the key ideas. This approach enabled the analysis of Share an Idea to be delivered within two weeks of the end of the campaign. Seven themes emerged and they became the chapters in the draft Central City Plan:

- Remembering
- Transitional City
- Green City
- Distinctive City
- City Life
- Transport Choice
- Market City

48-HOURS DESIGN CHALLENGE

Fifteen interdisciplinary teams of urban designers, engineers, architects, landscape architects and planners, including one student per team, were invited to participate in a design challenge where they had 48 hours to produce a design for one of several key sites in the city centre. It was an opportunity for design professionals to share their ideas for the redevelopment of the city centre. Elements from these designs were used to inform the development of the plan.

Eight inspirational speakers from the United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand were invited to share their experiences from other cities and communities around the world which have been subjected to natural or manmade disasters. The series provided an opportunity to reflect on the approaches taken and the lessons learnt.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The draft plan was shaped by the tremendous response received as part of Share an Idea. The

↑ A Lego area for children to rebuild their central city at the expo



second part of the community engagement, Tell Us What You Think, involved taking the draft plan back to the community to find out whether it reflected their hopes and aspirations.

The draft plan was made available on the internet, at libraries and other public facilities throughout the city. A summary document was

By avoiding jargon, using plain English, and presenting ideas graphically, the plan aimed to be accessible and easily understood by the community

delivered to every household in Christchurch, and more than 100 meetings and briefings were held with stakeholders, professional bodies and interest groups. The Council took the draft plan on a road show throughout the city, spending a week at the temporary events village in Hagley Park, eight days in suburban centres around the city, and two days at the University of Canterbury. More than 6,000 people visited the road show to see what had happened to their ideas.

↑ Collage of the proposed lower-rise 'green' urban form
↓ The opening page of each chapter includes residents with their ideas



With a draft plan on the table, some robust discussions with affected stakeholders were expected, but of the 14,000 comments more than 75 per cent were positive about the overall plan, ranging from excellent or brilliant to good or satisfying. The strongest reaction came from the business community, who feared that a number of the regulatory changes would discourage investment and were not economically feasible.

In revising the draft plan based on the feedback from Tell Us What You Think, the council worked closely with the business sector and met regularly with business leaders to ensure that revisions addressed their main concerns. Following the council hearings, at which 427 groups and individuals asked to be heard, the plan was adopted unanimously by councillors, and a standing ovation was given – an unprecedented experience.

A RECOVERY PLAN

'Make a plan that the community can support – that reflects their aspirations and values'
Charles Eadie, Santa Cruz, 2011

Every chapter of the plan starts with a page of quotes from Share an Idea, together with photographs of the people who shared the idea. Some of the quotes are from community leaders, but most of them are from ordinary Christchurch residents; they are representative of the key themes identified and provide a graphic illustration of the community's hopes and aspirations for rebuilding Christchurch.

By avoiding jargon, using plain English, and presenting ideas graphically, the plan aimed to be accessible and easily understood by the community. The extensive supporting information and technical reports are available in appendices.

The plan is shaped around a programme of actions. It is not a wish list and it is focussed on actions which support recovery, and which the Council and central government can influence. It seeks to do more than simply rebuild what was there before the earthquake; it proposes to improve the urban form of Christchurch, in order to try to recover the quality of life and environment which were damaged by the earthquake.

The plan was developed through a design-led process which placed people first, in order to resolve complex spatial issues with widely disparate objectives. It balances perspectives from the community, delivery partners, professional groups and businesses. While the plan was led by the community views expressed through Share an

Idea, the projects have been prioritised, based on the cost and the potential stimulus for recovery, and included in an implementation plan.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

'The good news is all post-disaster cities recover – the bad news is reconstruction takes a long time.'
Doug Ahlers, Harvard University, 2011

The revised document is currently with the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery for approval, but there is still a myriad of challenges between the plan and recovery. Not the least of these are the ongoing aftershocks which continue to cause further damage and to delay rebuilding, and difficulties in obtaining insurance cover for new buildings. The cordon around the city centre remains in place, restricting access, and the twin spectres of capital and tenant flight are distinct possibilities.

After more than 10,000 aftershocks over a twelve months period, the draft Central City Plan has provided the community with an opportunity to look forward and to create a shared narrative for a rebuilt Christchurch. It is a key milestone in the city's recovery, and while there are many challenges still to be overcome, the critical first steps have been completed. ●



● Hugh Nicholson, Principal Urban Designer, Christchurch City Council was the design leader for the draft Central City Recovery Plan. Fiona Wykes, Urban Designer at Christchurch City Council, prior to which she worked for Lichfield District Council in the UK.

↑ People at the expo could write their ideas directly on to an ideas wall

LOCALISM AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN

Flick Harris and Jos Townend expose the conflicts between localism and inclusive design

Progress towards implementing and developing inclusive design has been very slow, as planning legislation and guidance are neither comprehensive enough nor effectively understood or enforced. The localism agenda, with its focus on decentralising decision-making to local neighbourhood groups, an emphasis on geographical boundaries, and the reduction of regulation, has been promoted as an opportunity for more involvement. In fact it may adversely affect the promotion of inclusive design.

CURRENT BARRIERS

One of the current difficulties in promoting inclusive design arises from a lack of clarity about what is contained within the definition. Key national standards and guidelines such as British Standards 8300, contain limited guidance relating to people who have sensory impairments, who are neuro-diverse, learning disabled or with multiple impairments.

Not enough is currently being done to ensure compliance, and standards are inconsistently understood or dependent upon a loose regulatory system. Design and Access Statements (DAS) do not fully identify access barriers, especially for internal



specifications, and are often poorly presented to planning authorities, which are sometimes unwilling or unable, from lack of awareness or staffing constraints, to challenge a scheme at a pre-planning stage. Private sector organisations

↑ Old Mill St, New Islington: damaged and hazardous tree guards



meanwhile, inform architects and access consultants that they have little fear of challenge arising from the Equality Act or Equality Impact Assessments. National guidance also does not encourage inclusive design to be considered as an integral part of each of the DAS principles, or within the security or sustainability requirements.

THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The new *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) advocates planning 'positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development' as well as for transport and housing, and identifies the need to co-operatively engage and collaborate with voluntary organisations in the development of local plans. However, enforcement of these policies by local planning authorities is to be discretionary. Public sector cuts have led to a reduction in the numbers of access officers, and will also limit the capacity of planning authorities to effectively monitor and respond to poorly designed applications.

The government also intends to review, streamline and simplify current guidance rather than improve accessibility legislation, and may even put the DAS requirement at risk. Although the government recognises the need to provide support for local groups, none of the organisations currently funded to provide additional guidance to neighbourhoods have indicated that they will focus on equality issues.

In the *Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012*, consultation by neighbourhood forums will be mainly with local residents within geographical boundaries, who will have a maximum of six weeks to be consulted on proposals. This is not sufficient time to consult disabled people and equality groups, and allow consultees to produce detailed responses to what may be complex plans. In order to be inclusive to disabled people, small neighbourhood groups, usually without access to additional funding, will need to ensure that they provide accessible publicity and information, and venues with induction loops, interpreters, and with sufficient support available at public meetings to ensure full participation by disabled people. Even where local disabled people are involved in consultations, they are likely to be familiar neither with the barriers experienced by people with

different impairments, nor with good practice in inclusive design. Most specialist access groups, like other equality groups, operate on a local authority or regional basis, and unless planning authorities ensure that they are consulted, will be ignored in local resident consultations. The localism legislation contains no requirement for neighbourhood groups to involve or engage disabled people or other equality-based groups, such as those representing younger or older people or black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Open for All?, a research project carried out in the northwest by Voluntary Sector NW and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), and published in February 2012, has found that government policies have had a serious negative impact on equality. Its findings suggest that the new forms of representation such as neighbourhood groups are weak and exclude equalities groups, that spending cuts are damaging the voluntary sector's capacity to deliver effective consultation responses, and that the new policy framework is liable to reinstate old patterns of exclusion and discrimination. It is also clear that legal aid reforms, cuts at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the closure of key regional and national agencies, have made it extremely difficult for disabled people to use equality legislation, and for individuals or organisations to challenge decisions made by public or private organisations.

The localism legislation contains no requirement for neighbourhood groups to involve or engage disabled people or other equality-based groups

NEW EAST MANCHESTER

The regeneration company New East Manchester actively consulted with local residents over developments, but neglected to consult with citywide disabled people's organisations; it also ignored equality issues particularly for people with sensory impairments. Local consultations included open days for residents where plans, including electronic versions, were made available in a staffed walk-in shop. They were advertised through leaflets and letters, but only to local residents. The Manchester Disabled People's Access Group (MDPAG) and other disabled people's organisations were not invited or informed of any of the consultations, nor were the plans available in formats suitable for visually impaired people. This focus on local geographical consultations, and the developers' reluctance to consult with citywide disabled people's organisations in Manchester, have led to unsustainable and inaccessible public spaces, which have affected all local residents and disabled ones in particular.

OLD MILL STREET NEW ISLINGTON

The development of a shared space, in the middle of a through road in North Manchester, which removed kerbs and demarcations between traffic

and pedestrians to reduce traffic speed by design, was included in local resident consultations. Although conditions had been imposed requiring the design to be adjusted to meet the requirements of *Design for Access 2* guidelines (co-written by Manchester City Council and MDPAG), the details were never submitted and the construction went ahead. Having been alerted to serious access barriers by MDPAG, the Access team in the planning department, together with MDPAG, Shopmobility and Manchester Environmental Group of Blind and Partially Sighted People (MEGOBAPP) organised a meeting and visit with the developers, while the site was still being developed. They identified many features which were hazards, unsustainable and likely to provide barriers to access for all local people.

Members of MDPAG also held a meeting with the developers and regeneration staff to explain the difficulties presented by the designs, and to suggest ways to alleviate the problems. A further planning application was presented, which did not include the removal of all barriers to access, and MDPAG and a MEGOBAPP/MDPAG member worked with the Access team to provide an extensive and detailed response. Local people and the regeneration staff had not initially objected to the design and with political support, the construction was approved with most of the barriers to access still in place. The development however, provoked a major response from local people: as soon as the road was opened, cars displaced pedestrians and were parked on the pedestrian routes, forcing them, including children, to walk in the roadway. The single pedestrian crossing is unsafe, being not obvious to drivers or pedestrians. Even though a major medical centre, residential accommodation and a canal access are located along the route, the crossing is not a controlled one to make it safer for visually- and hearing-impaired people.

Although bollards, which are low-level, sharp-edged and hazardous, were eventually installed, dividing pedestrians and traffic, and cutting off most of the central reservation parking, many barriers to access remain, including obstacles in the pedestrian route, unsafe wooden barriers around trees, poorly-designed seating in some areas and none at the bus stops, inconsistent and unsustainable tactile warnings between pedestrian routes and traffic, lack of colour contrast everywhere, and poorly-designed and damaged road surfaces. Customised tactile paving, which is not designed to Department for Transport standards and is unfamiliar to blind people, is still in place. The central reservation includes parking spaces off a dual carriageway, requiring vehicles to exit using dangerous manoeuvres; it has no spaces for disabled people, and includes many hazardous bollards and barriers without clear definition or highlighting. The lighting features, also in the central reservation, create pools of light and dark, and the poles, which lack contrasting colours, are hazards not easily identified by visually-impaired people.

This project put current local priorities above the removal of barriers to access, by focusing only on responses from local residents, and ignoring the experience and expertise of local disabled people's organisations. Localism policies, without clear interventions from equality groups and planning



authorities at an early stage, are similarly likely to favour the short term interests and limited awareness of residents and developers to the detriment of inclusive design, and likely to rely on the discretion of depleted planning authorities to identify access barriers.

WYTHENSHAW CENTRE

A more collaborative and ultimately successful project took place a few years earlier, when Manchester's Wythenshawe Centre was redesigned. In contrast to the New Islington developments, the planning department facilitated a joint advisory group, which included members of MDPAG, the private developer, various council departments, representatives of the nearby tenants' associations and other local people to develop the plans. Initially sceptical, the developer and all participants found the experience very positive, as all parties contributed to the process and made suggestions and adjustments.

The involvement of access expertise at an early stage contributed to a range of access improvements, including the raising of ground levels, enabling all steps to retailers' premises to be removed. The access routes in the indoor and outdoor markets were improved, and clear pedestrian routes with no obstacles, accessible seating, good signage and the removal of clutter have made it safer and easier for disabled and older

↑ Old Mill St, New Islington: damaged and hazardous tree guards

↑ Old Mill St, New Islington: confusing design, poor maintenance, and bus stop with no seating or clear information
↑↑ Cars parked on the pedestrian route



↑ Wythenshawe pre-development: obstacles, different levels, no colour contrast

↑↑ Wythenshawe post-development: clear, level pedestrian routes, seating and flexible space

● Flick Harris, Chair of MDPAG, access consultant and trainer, co-writer of *Design for Access 2*
Jos Townend, architect and urban designer, MDPAG Trustee, principal of architectural practice

and MEGOBAPP for the Community Network for Manchester can be used to help make events accessible.

The NPPF suggests that local design review arrangements should be put in place. It is hoped that these would involve disabled people's organisations, which are funded to provide the experience and knowledge of disabled people. It also recommends the use of local access guidance policies, such as *Design for Access 2*, and the involvement of the voluntary sector in the development of local plans. The NPPF also requires that 'local planning authorities should aim to involve all sections of the community in the development of local plans and in planning decisions, and should facilitate neighbourhood planning', but where this does not happen no easy ways to challenge are in place. It is hoped that the community is defined by planning authorities as including citywide and regional equality groups. As few local neighbourhood groups or designers will be aware of local and national access standards, workshops and information would be helpful.

Many new websites are being developed to involve and engage local neighbourhood groups; they should include information about local access groups and accessibility standards. The Access Group Resources website www.accessgroupresources.co.uk and the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) also provide helpful information

The government could strengthen the requirements for inclusive design approval at the planning stage, including the internal specifications of buildings, and support the development and involvement of a network of well-informed disabled people's access groups around the country. These initiatives would support the development of inclusive design for local communities and 'create a high quality built environment' for everyone. The current legislation and political context, which focuses only on limited geographical consultations, and reduces the regulatory impact of planning, is not likely to promote inclusive design. We shall need to be rigorous in continuing to publicise and respond to further proposed changes, and to support and promote inclusion locally wherever we can. ●

people to use, and have increased the numbers of shoppers in the centre. Another outcome was the development of a local Shopmobility scheme run by local residents.

Without the initiative of the planning authority, the cost of and commitment to a similar advisory group or local access consultancy within the design process, is unlikely to be met by a local neighbourhood forum or by a local developer within NPPF and Neighbourhood Planning Regulations.

GOING FORWARD

For those committed to inclusive design, opportunities exist to work with and involve local communities and equality groups. Evidence shows that the integration of inclusive standards at an early stage ensures a cost-effective approach to development. However, the government has reduced funds available from the public sector to make consultations accessible. Developers need to be encouraged to help fund inclusive consultations. As well as ensuring that consultations are inclusive, planning authorities should ensure that information is circulated widely, including to groups outside the local neighbourhood, to ensure that networks of equality groups are involved. Resources such as the *Guidelines for Accessible Meetings and Events* written by MDPAG

DIGITAL TOOLS IN PLACE-MAKING

Michael Kohn describes how software can help communities have an input into planning



In his article Fred Kent points out that 'the community is the expert', and we have always believed it is a fundamental tenet of any design process. Communities exist in all shapes and sizes. That is why the absence of sufficient dialogue and feedback with an end-user community will always handicap the designer's attempt to make user-centred decisions, and increase the likelihood of design failure. The initial intellectual challenge in recognising this, is followed by the practical challenge of actually hosting dialogue, capturing feedback, and converting them into the type of design intelligence that can impact effectively on design decisions.

The traditional methods of consultation and engagement for design projects often struggle to convert ideas into action. The failure may be due to underfunding, leading to insufficient communications, poorly planned meetings clashing with work or child care commitments, and unclear motivations or incentives to participate. Sometimes consultation fatigue has already set in from the last time the community was approached but its requests not answered. This results in widespread and mutual distrust of consultation processes by both community and professional consultants alike. Community-led projects, on the other hand,

may not suffer in the same way as consultant-led consultation, but since the need to capture local expert knowledge and convert it into action remains, expert consultants are still required to enable dialogue.

TESTING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Wishing to innovate in the field of end-user dialogue and feedback, the team of Slider Studio architects and software engineers set out to develop 'democratic design tools'. Over the course of several projects, a general tool to support more visual dialogue called StickyWorld was developed. It is a web application which helps clarify communications, regardless of professional expertise, by presenting 2D and 3D visuals and inviting specific comments or questions as sticky notes posted in the context of the visuals. After almost three years, StickyWorld is now used in a range of contexts including early examples of neighbourhood planning.

Slider built its democratic design tool with the development of web-enabled interactive software called YouCanPlan – a tool initially used to simulate possible design outcomes for managing new self-build housing developments at volume scale. Our 'what-if' scenario showed how local people could

↑ StickyWorld deployed for early stage neighbourhood planning by Bloomsbury Association



build their own homes on serviced self-build plots. Theoretically, the local authority would supply the land and planning permissions, and would partner with a developer to deliver the serviced infrastructure, construction guidance and a network of approved suppliers and local builders. Our method called Enabled Self-Procurement relied on the combination of a locally refined pattern book offering individual choice, set within a controlling urban design code to offer overall control of design quality for a local development. YouCanPlan allowed users to individually complete their own home designs on selected plots, communicating and collaborating online with neighbours via instant messaging. At the time, this was a mere simulation of an alternative, participatory, and arguably, more sustainable method to deliver better quality housing. The Localism Act now opens up the opportunity to develop this kind of community led development delivered through a Community Right to Build.

The interactive web site is just one tool in the box. Face to face workshops and meetings are important and can be carried out simultaneously

A subsequent project for Birmingham City Council deployed YouCanPlan software to help visualise housing-led regeneration options in the Lozells area, with the objective of engaging hard-to-reach groups. The software could be downloaded from the website, but importantly it was coupled with a large-scale physical model, 'printed' from the 3D data of the computer model. This in turn formed an interactive jigsaw puzzle which was presented at face to face events, alongside computer terminals and helped us understand how mixing participatory media, but using common data, could be deployed to engage different interests.

The weakness of these projects was that they both relied on professionals uploading prepared content for review and discussion by others. In

this regard, the framework presented was arguably too rigid and tended towards consultation, not participation. Hence the more generic technology of StickyWorld, was designed to help people share their exact point of view on anything visual, from a simple sketch on an envelope, a photograph taken from a mobile phone, a formal report or document, to a fully immersive panoramic photograph. If the software could also run directly in a web browser and if participants could easily upload content to a shared virtual space, subsequently called a StickyRoom, the process would be more democratic and accessible than the previous technology.

BLOOMSBURY VILLAGE

In 2011 we were approached by Jim Murray, chairman of the Bloomsbury Association which represents residents and small businesses in the area, to test StickyWorld's capability in the field of neighbourhood planning. The passing of the Localism Act presented the association with a new opportunity to raise awareness of the need to improve and regenerate the area known as Bloomsbury Village which lies south of the British Museum to High Holborn and between Bloomsbury Square and Bloomsbury Street, and is home to approximately 2,000 people. The area has tremendous potential but is blighted by empty and run-down buildings along New Oxford Street and Bloomsbury Way. The streetscape is neglected and there is a general feeling that a stronger pedestrian link should be established between Bloomsbury and Covent Garden to the south. By creating the Bloomsbury Village Neighbourhood Forum, local stakeholders will be able to work with developers, landowners and Camden Council, to improve the area and achieve some of their aspirations. The initial challenge facing the group was to highlight the need for improvement before approaching the council with their intent to pursue the opportunity of neighbourhood planning under the Localism Act. Murray describes this opportunity as moving from consultation culture to one of dialogue, whereby all the stakeholders are involved at the early planning and design stage, giving them the opportunity to actively contribute their ideas and opinions'

Initially our team helped Murray with his own StickyRoom, adding a virtual tour of the area

(including the courtyard spaces where Google's Street View doesn't go), and making short videos of local residents and business owners discussing their area. Murray manages this room, is able to upload further content such as reports and workshop material to new rooms and can invite others in his team to collaborate. The first StickyRoom for Bloomsbury has been embedded in a few websites and, at the time of writing, has received over 8000 unique visits (four times the numbers in the community), with 40 visitors signed-in enabling them to leave comments, and approximately 100 sticky notes, many with replies. Most of the comments posted are ideas recorded by community planners in meetings, but there are also pertinent conversations between local shopkeepers.

The StickyRoom works primarily on the basis of its presentation value, but being able to comment on the specifics of the area renders value to the community and transparency to the process. It is however only one component of the dialogue. Our StickyRoom allows us to communicate in real time with all the stakeholders. This allows developers to engage at an early stage with the community and local businesses in a way that they were previously unable to do – but it is important to realise that the interactive web site is just one tool in the box. Face to face workshops and meetings are important and can be carried out simultaneously. We believe that by using all these methods we will be able to engage with more people, not just the usual suspects!

The Bloomsbury Association is still at the start of the process. Later it will hold planning briefings and invite council planners and the developers to contribute. A number of working groups made up of Forum members have been set up and will need to become familiar with the regulations and planning laws. This in turn requires more co-learning and teaching, an area where online tools and resources can help. Murray points out:

'The main challenge for communities will be in understanding the likes of LDF, NPPF, and the role of the Mayor and London Plan – and what the developer is hoping to achieve and why – we will not be able to participate fully unless the developers and architects are willing to make a step change in the way they engage with us.'

The area is fairly unusual, right in the heart of the capital with large development sites on its boundaries with the potential of creating substantial employment. The higher the stakes, the greater the need for establishing a visible dialogue to allow the local voices to be heard. In this regard, the need for smarter tools and more comprehensive dialogue architecture and planning becomes very apparent.

POTENTIAL FOR NEW TOOLS

Neighbourhood planning offers an opportunity to explore new methods to help meet this new challenge in an effective and affordable way. Slider recently completed some research into the potential of web tools for neighbourhood planning. To complete the research knowledge was crowd-sourced from planners, consultants and community leaders attending three separate workshops. Over 150 existing web tools were identified, which could be deployed to support different stages of the neighbourhood planning



process, with a further 30 new tools that could be developed to help the process.

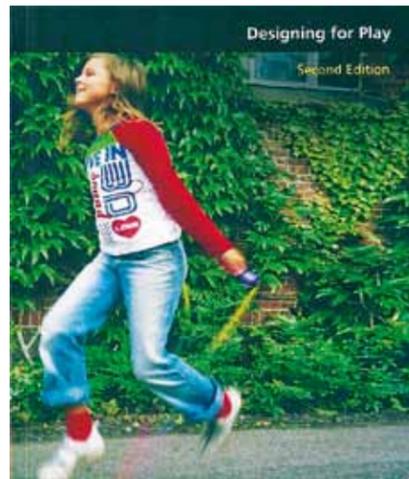
The trend is clear: the existing tools coupled with the spread of successful 'hyper local' websites and communities, a rapid growth in smart phones and apps, and the government's desire to drive even more innovation in digital public service delivery, suggests that mainstream adoption of digital tools in place-making activity will be achievable within five years.

There are however clear problems with technology in place-making. For many people the speed of change appears overwhelming and intimidating. It is hard for some to accept the paradigm shift that the advance of technology brings, let alone develop skills and confidence in how to use the existing tools. Not everyone has the finances to afford the latest gadgets on which some of these tools rely. There is no official salaried IT support team such as a corporate environment or online consumer service might provide, and large parts of the UK are still missing broadband coverage. Any IT related problem, whether related to infrastructure, hardware or software, only serves to increase friction in user adoption. In the spirit of Big Society, localism should mean local support for these new tools from within the community, from friends, neighbours and family. This in turn reinforces the necessity of regular face-to-face meetings. Technology simply extends these meetings, opening them up and increasing the possible channels where people can have their say, allowing them to choose how they input their ideas at a time and place to suit them. Recognising that the input can come from many sources, a new type of 'dialogue architecture' is therefore needed to help coordinate these various channels and interpret them. Future practice of 'dialogue architecture' will not only help community-led schemes such as neighbourhood planning, but may also open up new ways for other design professionals to capture and manage the expert voice of their end-user community. ●

↑ YouCanPlan Lozells 3D consultation software and 3D printed model for Birmingham City Council, in collaboration with Axis Design Architects

● Michael Kohn is director of Slider Studio and co-founder of the visual communications platform, Stickyworld.com

↑ Self procured simulation with YouCanPlan software: each pre-approved house design is configured by the householder, selecting from a pattern book



Designing for Play

Barbara Hendricks, Ashgate, 2011, Second edition, £35.00, pbk, ISBN 978 1 4094 0936 6

Appealing to landscape architects and urban designers (especially those with small children), this book provides a useful if frustrating resource. Hendricks challenges the ideas that have led to the boring and ugly playgrounds that are required in our residential areas. She begins by exploring the functions of play for both adults and children, and how aesthetics have a key role: they encourage play as people search for attractive and pleasant experiences, and all of the senses should be involved. As children experience so many things for the first time, they are more receptive to aesthetics, but adults rarely consider what really appeals to the child itself. Hendricks also examines whose criteria are important and relevant when designing for play – society and educationalists, children, or the designer – and is critical of all, except the child's perspective.

'Designing for play is about designing for living' is her recommended approach, whereby children can reinterpret places in many different ways. The book includes quotes within boxes and black and white photographs. Surprisingly, some of the photographs and their captions challenge our view of the success of spaces for playing: dramatic but static and inflexible play spaces are an example of this, and children usually play quite differently and randomly contrary to the designer's intentions.

Subsequent sections of the book examine play spaces in different situations – nurseries, public parks, and schools – and recent trends plus the magical ideas that work. Hendricks is scathing about adults' understanding of what constitutes nature, and what children would regard as natural and living, and therefore interesting. As the control of children's play has become a political rather than a nurturing issue, the adult aversion to risk, whether reasonable or minimal, governs too much of what is considered safe. The



book concludes with a useful if uninspiringly presented appendix, suggesting how to lay out a playground, covering both physical and social issues. Reflecting on the role of playgrounds in the future, Hendricks raises issues of allowing plenty of space for play, not the minimum, and the investment that play represents in the development of the next generation.

However, the poor graphic quality of the book is disappointing: the images could be bigger and more revealing in colour, and the text layout is in places confusing.

● Louise Thomas

By The City/For The City: An Atlas of Possibility For the Future Of New York

Anne Guiney and Brendan Crain (eds), Multi-Story Books, 2011, \$35.00, ISBN 978-0982086117

Published for New York's *Urban Design Week* in May 2011, this 350 page Atlas assembles the imaginative design responses to a brilliant initiative by the Institute for Urban Design: they first asked New Yorkers what they wanted to see improved in their city and then asked professionals to come up with ideas and designs to respond. Michael Sorkin, president of the IUD, hopes that the book can inspire and goad those with the power to implement change, and link those with dreams for the city with members of the design community who can help find succinct, legible and happy expressions. The 602 dreams submitted online by New Yorkers were grouped by the editors into five broad trends: Accessibility, Beauty, Connectivity, Enjoyment, and Social Equity. Many of the 'Wouldn't it be great if...' suggestions such as improving subway entrances, cleaning streets and improving recycling, were eminently sensible. Many imaginative landscape ideas included linear parks and 'wouldn't it be great if 21st Street at Astoria became a boulevard with planted median'; 'wouldn't it be great if

...all schools had gardens, streets had more seats and bike racks, bike lanes and public art, street markets and rooftop farms, and trees, trees and more trees'. Ideas for Coney Island Boardwalk to have commercial frontage, 50 per cent of advertising billboards to be replaced with public art and a cross-town monorail, will warm the cockles of urban designers everywhere. The 137 illustrated responses from designers around the world include the idea(s) reference number(s) and show how they think it/they can be realised. They range from photos of prototypes of jaunty cup hooks on lamp posts to encourage convivial meeting spots, photo montages of the car-less city and neat plans of practical bike networks, to 3D CAD illustrations of fanciful megastructures. Two schools of thought over roofs are apparent: white roofs to cool the city, or planted roofs to green it. The full version of entries is on the interactive website www.urbandesignweek.org which invites comments to keep the debate moving along. This is an inventive initiative and many ideas are applicable to other US cities and could be adapted to European situations. It would however be more fun if we came up with our own 'wouldn't it be great if ...' list of problems and the imaginative design solutions to them. London may be the obvious place to start, but given that cities such as Manchester, Birmingham or Newcastle have been more successful at implementing urban design, any of them could be the one to organise (with the UDG?) this experiment in bottom up planning and localism.

● Malcolm Moor



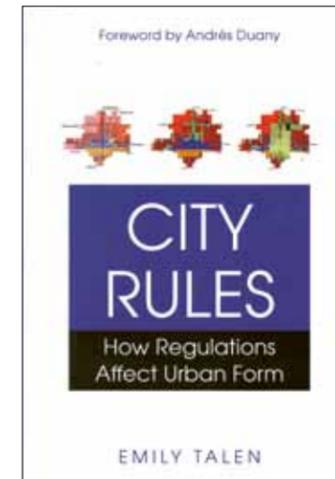
Spatial Agency. Other Ways of Doing Architecture

Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, Routledge, 2011, £25.00, pbk, ISBN 978-0415571937

This is an interesting book, not so much because of its content but because of its timing. Its thesis, after a lot of throat clearing, is that we are so constrained in the way we think about, and create our built environment that we need to take stock and look for different ways of creating our social spaces and housing ourselves. The critical focus is the role and interventions that an individual or community can make to act as a catalyst for change. The book justifies this stance by first setting out its thesis and then listing influences and agencies that have met its criteria. Is it a polemic, a directory, or an anthology of exemplars of other ways of doing architecture?

Four contributions about alternative architecture promote the idea of 'spatial agency': placing urban design and architecture in a broader social context that reflects community involvement, the dynamic and flexible nature of space, and a reversal of the politicisation and commodification of social space. The soft-left tone of anti-corporatism is bound up with ideas taken from Giddens and LeFevre on the role of the individual (and community) to change their environment. From this stems the argument that there are other ways of doing things, often influenced by small initiatives that challenge the normative nature of what urban designers do.

And yet, if the book was to follow this thought through, the second part might have been more political and polemical, as the publication BAMN (By Any Means Necessary) was in the '70s. Instead we get a mixed bag of 136 examples of other ways of doing architecture that includes NGOs, agencies, practices, historic and other disparate examples catalogued in alphabetical order, when a themed approach would have served better. There are some anomalies such as the inclusion of ARUP and similar agencies. More interesting and relevant is the inclusion of plotlands,



early co-operative ventures such as Letchworth, and even the Whole Earth Catalogue! Although John Turner and Nabeel Hamdi are cited, lessons from the favellas, barrios and other informal developments where there are few rules, and yet rich, vibrant and mixed neighbourhoods can be established, are skirted over. Much could be learned from these.

This is why the timing is right: In these economic times, alternative ways of addressing social and housing needs in the face of sclerotic institutions, must be found. They include new forms of finance, tenure, typologies, and land disposal. Precedents must be revisited: why did plotlands work then but not now? Learning from other countries is also valuable, and if this book widens our perspectives, it fulfils a useful function.

● Jon Rowland

City Rules

Emily Talen, Island Press, 2012, £22.00, pbk, ISBN 978-1-59726-692-5

No, this is not a piece of graffiti on a Manchester wall, but a very interesting study of the way in which urban form can, for better or worse, be produced by the application of a set of rules called, at different times zoning, regulations, or codes. It's an American book, written by an American academic, and nearly all the examples are of US cities, although much credit is given to pre-20th century European precedents such as the 18th century London Building Acts or Reinhard Baumeister in 19th century Germany.

Talen claims in her introduction that 'this is a practical book' but any reader wanting to write an urban code would not gain much assistance from it. Instead, it is primarily historical, tracing the origins of urban rules in the USA, the various ways in which they have been applied, and the arguments for and against which they have generated. The story is fascinating and well told.

Early manifestations of the idea of zoning

in the early 20th century, were aimed at making towns and cities healthier, more orderly, and less congested; they were concerned with among other things, the regulation of form, and they generally produced good results, though with some dark elements of class and racial segregation. Later, partly under the influence of modernism but also in reaction to the growth in car ownership and usage, zoning degenerated into a procedure that had little concern with form, and more with the unimpeded flow of vehicles and the simplification of land uses. This had disastrous consequences for quality of life, and it promoted sprawl, not the result of the absence of rules but of too many of the wrong rules. In the last quarter of the century, reaction against this degeneration led, not to a desire to do away with rules, but to replace them with better ones. 'Zoning bad, codes good', might be the book's four-word condensation.

Talen's narrative is polemic, and an argument for New Urbanism, but although Andres Duany has written the Foreword, this alliance is not spelt out explicitly. In her conclusion, she strongly supports the use of form-based codes (FBC), as a way of generating liveable, diverse, walkable, sustainable towns and cities. She makes clear that there is an ideological tug-of-war between prescription and flexibility, but argues that they are not incompatible. The issue is how to draw the line between what a code prescribes and what it leaves to be freely decided.

For UK readers, much of the content may seem rather exotic: fascinating and educational, but very different from our experience. With the convergence of good urban practice definitions, British use of codes has learnt much from Duany and his colleagues. However, we do not entirely share a common vocabulary, and a glossary would have been a useful addition. *Platting* is not in use here, although we can understand what it is. But what on earth is the meaning of the verb to *grandfather*?

● Joe Holyoak

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

● Laura Alvarez, architectural technician and urban designer, UDG regional convenor for the East Midlands

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● Sebastian Loew, architect and planner, writer and consultant

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Walking facing the traffic

In March a friend of mine, Ben Waddington, ran the first Birmingham Walking Festival, *Still Walking*, with 14 themed walks over three weeks. A nice conceit, as Birmingham is not the first place you associate with the pleasures of strolling. Interestingly, the first two walks to sell out were the one Ben was leading on Brutalist architecture, and mine on the inner ring road, *Walk the Queensway*, both dealing with characteristic elements of the city's notorious 1960s reshaping. My walk was undertaken in a spirit of irony, of course, as the inner ring road (built between 1957 and 1971) was not intended to be walked on; someone on foot could only cross the 'concrete collar' by 52 pedestrian subways and two bridges. We began at the historic point where in 1990 a subway was filled in, and for the first time one could cross by walking on the road surface – a radical revisionist step.

The walk was full of ironies – I shall mention two. We ended at Smallbrook Queensway, the first section to be completed, in 1959. It is the only part that resembles an urban street; the dual-carriageway has wide

pavements on either side, and buildings sit at back of pavement, with shop fronts at street level. All later sections of the road were detached from the built fabric and from pedestrians, creating a hostile and bewildering environment. But the eminent head of the Birmingham School of Planning at the time, Leslie Ginsberg, wrote an article in the *Architects' Journal* in 1959, criticising Smallbrook Queensway as being old-fashioned: '(It) has a very 1920 look about it, and with its lining of commercial and civic buildings takes one back to the leisurely almost pre-motor car days of Edwardian Aldwych rather than a modern urban highway'. Its old-fashionedness has of course meant that it is now the only part of the circuit that is acceptable in modern urban design terms; since 1990 the city has been tearing down and reconstructing much of the rest.

On the way we passed through St Chad's Circus, next to Pugin's great red brick cathedral, now an isolated object building rather than hemmed in by terraces of houses as Pugin designed it to be. His Bishop's House, opposite the west door, was demolished for the new road in 1960. St Chad's Circus was one of a number of big roundabouts with a pedestrian realm inside it, reached only by subways (all, incidentally, with names – they were clearly intended to be identifiable public spaces). In the last few years the circus

has been demolished and replaced by a complicated surface level junction, with many light-controlled road crossings, hundreds of metres of pedestrian barriers, and a large area of grass. It is just as much a product of highway engineering as was the former circus. The irony is that the original 1960s design had more of a sense of place than the formulaic junction that is there now.

The pedestrian realm was a bizarre place. It was on several levels, including a bridge which seemed to take you to where you wanted to go, but then delivered you back where you started, rather like the perverse path that Alice follows in the Garden of Live Flowers. Around a pool there was a big mosaic memorial to John F. Kennedy, subscribed by the city's Irish community, which has been dismantled and will be re-erected soon in the Irish Quarter. There was an even bigger mosaic mural about the Great Western Railway, whose Snow Hill Station was opposite the cathedral. In 1990 a sculpture by Kevin Atherton, an oversized frozen-kinetic version of a child's swing, was added. There were always a few individuals sitting there, enjoying this strange modernist enclave, while the traffic swirled around, mostly hidden from view. So far I haven't seen anyone sitting at the new junction.

● Joe Holyoak



FIG. 1

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FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4



FIG. 5

1. GRANARY WHARF, LEEDS
2. NOTTINGHAM SCIENCE PARK
3. GREEN STREET, NOTTINGHAM
4. BERMONDSEY SQUARE, LONDON
5. ROUND FOUNDRY, LEEDS
6. PORTH TEIGR, CARDIFF

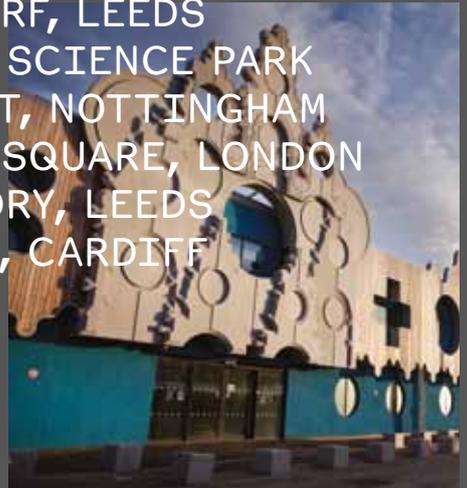


FIG. 6

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