

126 **URBAN  
DESIGN**

Spring 2013  
Urban Design Group Journal  
ISSN 1750 712X — £5.00

**THE VALUE OF  
URBAN DESIGN**



**URBAN  
DESIGN  
GROUP**



## VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

I have recently returned from a weekend visiting friends in Copenhagen. They live in Ørestad, a new suburb of the city, and one that according to the literature is based on the principles of an English New Town. It is a fascinating comparison. In the UK the term conjures up images of Harlow, Peterborough and Milton Keynes, and as we wrestle with our chronic undersupply of housing, it is according to the press, an apparent panacea.

It is also a term that strikes fear into many people, worried that it represents acres of green fields being subsumed by concrete and tarmac. However what is most interesting about Ørestad is that they don't mean the designed-around-the-car type of new town like Milton Keynes; they actually mean the designed-around-public-transport type of 1930s suburbs like Metroland on the periphery of London.

When Copenhagen needed to expand, the city authorities realised that the best way was through the creation of sustainable suburbs based on public transport. They also recognised that the way to fund the public transport was to use the uplift in land values

that it brings. This is how the Metropolitan Line was built here, and it has been replicated along the new driverless Metro line there.

So, would people be so concerned if they could see how the Danes had done it? After all, many of the buildings here can be found in the latest textbooks on modern urban design and architecture – they are the precedent images we all use in our projects and presentations. If the Danes are building according to the English New Town principles, and we seem to love Danish design, then why do we struggle to adapt and deliver to these very same principles?

This brings us back to the debate about how we get across the message about the value of urban design. Why don't we just get it, like our Scandinavian cousins do? In the UK, people love Scandinavian design, so why do we continue to question the added value that a well-designed place can bring? It is no different to the combined pleasure derived from a well-designed table or chair – something that is both functional and pleasing to look at. The late Steve Jobs is credited with saying: 'Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works'. This is just as applicable to a place as an iPad.

● Paul Reynolds

## UDG NEWS

In this issue we would like to welcome new members of the UDG:

Rumen Radanov  
Luis Torres  
Rebecca Frost  
Robin Buckle  
Daniel Kinghorn  
Ralph Taylor  
Penelope Tollitt  
Emily Woodason  
Ian Corner  
Arome Agamah  
Matthew Hulme

as well as Recognised Practitioner: Solmaz Tavsanoglu

### URBAN DESIGN DIRECTORY 2013-2014

The latest Directory has been sent in addition to our members, to a massive list of commercial developers, house builders, local authority design, planning and highways departments, elected members, planning lawyers, property advisors, and construction

and engineering firms. It is an important vehicle for promoting awareness of good urban design and the practices that can deliver it. Thanks go to Louise Thomas for organising and editing this latest edition. If you don't need your Directory, do give it to someone who does, such as a local politician, or developer. Spread the word!

### ENGLAND GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The UDG responded to the Government consultation, taking the additional step of undertaking a survey. The near 200 responses were strong in the view that good design principles were yet to be "mainstreamed" in the planning and development industry.

### URBAN DESIGN GROUP SOLENT

A highly effective multi-disciplinary group has been holding meetings and exchanging ideas on best practice and solutions to problems. At the November meeting Caroline Peach gave a presentation on the Bournemouth Town Centre Vision, on how to create a long-term programme of improvements to the public realm that survives from one election

to the next. The latest meeting in Eastleigh included presentations from ArchitecturePLB and the borough council on Eastleigh's Quality Places Supplementary Planning Document and the exemplar Cheriton development.

### NATIONAL URBAN DESIGN CONFERENCE 2013

This year's Urban Design Conference is being planned for October, in Newcastle. We hope to see you there.

### A BIG THANK YOU

The UDG is not a hard-nosed commercial organisation but a group of truly committed and concerned volunteers who believe in the cause of better places and better towns and cities. The basis is not profit and loss, but goodwill and enthusiasm. And through that goodwill we have held our two largest ever events in the last three months, the journal continues to improve in quality and we were very pleased to receive a very nice email from a member in New Zealand – thank you Mr Thresher – the more we encourage one another, the more we will all achieve.

● Robert Huxford, Director

### Current subscriptions

*Urban Design* is free to Urban Design Group members who also receive newsletters and the directory at the time of printing

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**Education** £100 (including a listing in the

*UD* practice index and on the UDG website)

**Local authorities** £100 (including two copies of *Urban Design*)

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The Chase at Newhall by studio | REAL  
(Image Rachel Aldred, studio | REAL)

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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](http://www.udg.org.uk/events/udg)

### WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2013

#### Intelligent Cities

Led by Riccardo Bobisse, this event will look at the growing importance of information in urban systems, both as a tool for the city and for urban designers and managers. Speakers will include Paul Fraser from Atkins, Karl Baker from the LSE Cities Programme and Rick Robinson from IBM Group.

### WEDNESDAY 30 APRIL 2013

#### The Urban Masterplanning Handbook

An evening featuring the new publication *The*

*Urban Masterplanning Handbook*, led by its author Eric Firley visiting from the University of Miami. Looking at case studies of major urban extensions and masterplans from around the world, this will be an invaluable event for design professionals, students and developers alike.

### THURSDAY 23 MAY 2013

#### Alternative Housing Models

This event, led by Amanda Reynolds, will examine the potential for better urban design through different procurement and ownership models, including smaller scale and plot based development, shared ownership and co-housing.

### WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE 2013

#### Trees in the Public Realm

(preceded by the Urban Design Group AGM)

In conjunction with the Trees in Design Action Group, this event will consider the value of trees including aesthetics, environmental benefits and the impact on human wellbeing. It will also address practical issues such as the importance of high-level policies, the practical detail of tree planting, the conflicts

with utilities and street lighting and the challenge of getting new schemes adopted.

### WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2013

#### Smart Phones: The implications for Urban Design & Urban Life

It has been suggested that the Smart Phone will have as great an impact on towns and cities as the motor-car. Focussing on currently available technology and apps, this event will examine the implications including public consultation, involvement and participative democracy, travel patterns and the potential for increased public transport use, plus the use of Smart Phones as a tool for urban design.

### TUESDAY 9 JULY 2013

#### China

China, the world's second largest economy, is undertaking a massive urbanisation and infrastructure programme. Linking with the themes covered in issue 127 of *Urban Design*, the event will look at the scope for introducing better urban design and the opportunities for urban designers. Are current developments creating a valuable legacy for future generations which will ultimately improve their quality of life?

# THE VALUE OF URBAN DESIGN

This special issue of Urban Design is probably the largest collection of papers on the same theme that the Urban Design Group has published, and they are all drawn from the National Urban Design Conference in October 2012. Held in Oxford and run in partnership with Oxford Brookes University's Joint Centre for Urban Design, the conference ran for three days, with parallel design workshops, tours, lectures and seminars, exploring the value of urban design in all its aspects. More than 160 participants took part in the events. The papers presented here cover five main topic areas:

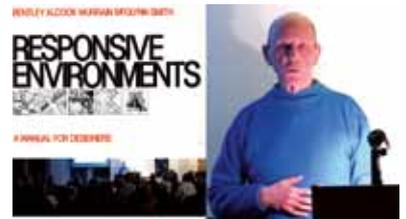
- The economic value of urban design to developers, investors, public bodies and politicians
- Different ways of measuring value, from urban centres to green infrastructure
- How and why communities

value urban design to meet their needs

- Place-making and why it matters, including a new charter for the suburbs, and
- Widening urban design understanding for investors, developers and other professions.

Some of the keynote speeches from the conference are available to watch again at [www.urbannous.com/urban-design-group.htm](http://www.urbannous.com/urban-design-group.htm). This online resource provided by UrbanNous is also the home of a very useful collection of digital multimedia presentations from Urban Design Group events held at The Gallery in London. Some of the most recent speakers are shown here, and we would encourage you to see what else you can learn from them about urban design and urbanism.

● Louise Thomas



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trockenbrot (Claudia Schenk and Anja Sicka)  
[www.trockenbrot.com](http://www.trockenbrot.com)

Printing Henry Ling Ltd  
 © Urban Design Group ISSN 1750 712X

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 preferably as jpeg

# THE VALUE OF URBANISM

Yolande Barnes advocates new ways of calculating value

The background to this paper is the interaction between the commercial sector of the building industry and urban design, within a global context. It considers how the markets are performing and the importance given to urbanism and place-making - terms that cover a wider field than just urban design.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD RATHER THAN HOUSING

Evidence collected from the UK suggests that top of the list of what is important to people is 'neighbourhood' (not the same as 'community', which scores much lower). Neighbourhood includes, but is not confined to, good schools, open spaces, a safe environment, etc. Where such new neighbourhoods have been created, research shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that these high-quality sustainable developments have higher total values per hectare of land than directly comparable, standard developments in the same locations. This 'neighbourhood premium', more than justifies any additional development expenditure incurred. But it is important to note that the value measured is the total development value, not that of the square footage of an individual house, which is the more often-used industry standard. This means that the value arises out of the best use made of a whole piece of land, not just producing a housing unit for minimal cost to the developer and maximum price to the consumer.

The value of design goes well beyond the architecture of individual houses. Studies undertaken by Savills and Space Syntax on the layout of streets in a London borough and the value of residential properties found a direct correlation between ease of movement (connectivity and permeability) and property values. Equally they showed that placing an unconnected neighbourhood centre in the middle of a site, negatively affects the value of properties. The empirical evidence therefore confirms what urban designers have been saying for a long time: the design of streets and neighbourhoods can be more important to value than the design of individual buildings.

Another observation is that density is only one element to consider in relation to land values, and that its impact varies. In some cases good design can allow for successful high-density development, but not always. Looking at London again, some high-density neighbourhoods are very high value and some low-density areas are low value. But in other parts of the country such as the New Towns or in the North, high density equates with low values. So, physical form does not explain everything; other factors such as industry, local economy and the people are especially important. What matters is the whole content of a place, what might be called the 'neighbourhood commercial uses'. These are fine-



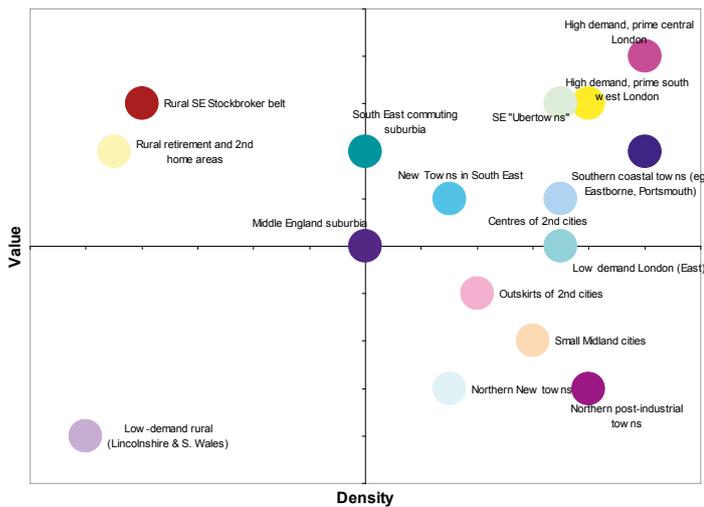
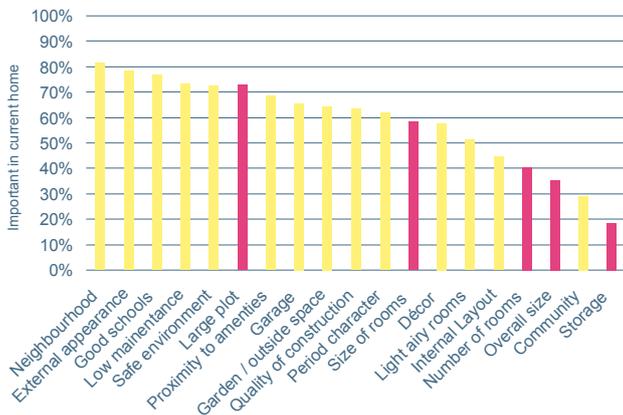
grained and include, for example, the corner shop, the florist, the key-cutter, dry-cleaner, jobbing builder, funeral parlour, pub, cafe, local solicitor – all the things that people use in their domestic lives and like to be able to walk to. This is what increases the value of an area, but sadly is rarely found in new or proposed developments. In spite of the evidence that exists, few new developments replicate the messiness and complexity of older places that are known and loved - and have a high value. A recent American study shows that schemes based on New Urbanism design principles not only have a higher value than standard suburban developments, but also show better value growth over time.

## POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

So, why is sustainable urbanism the exception rather than the norm in the UK? Why does it not get built here? One aspect, already mentioned, is the way that value is appraised: a client's property value is calculated by its area (in square feet), that is to say on the building, the house or apartment block. But real value accrues at street and land levels. Good urbanism will increase the amount of square feet that can be put on a site, and it will diversify receipts and probably speed up sales. There are also cash flow and value implications that go much beyond a particular building.

Future generations will probably look back at the late 20th century and see a property industry that had originally been about whole places, but became increasingly compartmentalised, specialised and with its different sectors not communicating with others: eg. commercial surveyors working separately from residential surveyors, public housing practitioners not

↑ Chinatown, London.  
Image by Sebastian Loew



and complicated process but is becoming more refined in notable cases.

Another element that helps explain why higher value development has seemingly been eschewed by volume house builders for more standard, lower value schemes is the land value equation. We have to ask the question: to whom does additional value accrue and over what time period? Studies have found that it is almost always the landowner or the end owner-occupier that benefits from value premia achieved through sustainable urbanism. Value uplifts that result from good place-making or regeneration also tend to accrue over a longer time-period than annual accounting process can allow for. It is no accident that commercial developers, with their longer time horizons have been more active in these fields. It is very difficult for the speculative house builder to capture place-making value because of the time that the whole process takes, and because the mechanisms of land release and land purchase tend to benefit the landowner. If there is a successful first tranche of development, the price of the land for the second phase will be much higher. Therefore the issue of ongoing ownership, and of actively managing good places in order to ultimately accrue the benefits, is one that needs to be addressed.

Overall the UK lacks alternative business models to deliver new housing: in most of the Western world the rate of self-build housing is between 30 per cent and 60 per cent of the total housing output. In Austria it is 80 per cent, yet in the UK, it is only 10 per cent, indicating that we are completely neglecting this possibility. The purpose-built, private rented sector has also been neglected in comparison to the US and other European countries.

### LONDON EVOLUTION

Ebbsfleet, in North Kent, is a major development that has the potential of becoming a new London borough; yet it is very difficult to imagine how it could develop into a real place, something like, say, nearby Greenwich today. Do we therefore have to accept only a kind of improved suburban sprawl, or can we think of a self-contained and self-sustaining place of the future? Can we then enable development to happen so as to achieve an environment more similar to that of a fully-evolved town or city, rather than a collection of homogenous housing estates?

If we look at London and how it has evolved, we see that in the 1950s, the high value areas had not changed much since the time of Oscar Wilde, when Belgravia, Mayfair and parts of St. James were the only places to be for his formidable, fictitious Lady Bracknell. Later, as London became the dominant national capital and prosperity rose, wealth moved westwards and in the 1960s, the bohemian King's Road was adopted as part of prime London. In the 1970s with the first influx of Middle Eastern money, investment moved north of Hyde Park, and as London became a stronger global financial centre in the 1980s, North American money was also invested in the capital, spreading the areas of high value further to places such as Holland Park. The expansion of high value London has continued to this day as the city seems to offer more choice and more variety than almost any other global capital.

What is important in this story is that there

#### The Ideal Neighbourhood List

##### Retail: high street

- Antique shops and storage
- Banking hall/ fronted office
- Boutiques/ clothes shop
- Greengrocer/ grocer/ deli
- Shop with workshop
- Stall/ barrow/ kiosk

##### Retail: non-high street

- Car showroom
- Petrol station
- Showroom and workshop/ store

##### Niche

- Accommodation in hospital/ clinic
- Laboratory and office
- Library/ gallery
- Funeral parlour
- Surgery/ consulting rooms

##### Leisure

- Amusement park
- Sports facility/ gym/ stadium

##### Business premises

- Builders yard/ depot
- Front office and yard/ parking
- Heavy and light manufacturing unit
- Kitchen, storage and micro office
- Office and garage/ parking/ workshop/ store
- Warehouse and office/ garage/ parking/ workshop/ store
- Micro/ small/ studio office plus storage

##### Community

- Classrooms
- Club house
- Meeting place/ hall
- Nursing / care/ residential home
- Police station
- Primary and secondary schools
- Town hall offices

##### Hospitality

- Guest house/ hotel/ motel/ inn
- Pub/ bar
- Restaurant/ cafe

↑ The key characteristics important to people about where they live, putting neighbourhood first.

↑↑ The correlation between high and low values and density in the UK

speaking to local planners, architects at odds with road traffic engineers, etc. In the 21st century, not only are finances compelling but our culture is also demanding a change of attitude and a rejoining of the various strands with all parties interacting for the best place-outcomes, rather than the self-interests of a single group. This has been a complex

is something inherently attractive, flexible and adaptable about the structure of the city that enables it to change and improve over time. The fundamental form, infrastructure and layout of London attract foreign investors and help to accommodate them as well. It may be described as the city's DNA – a combination of its physical form together with softer forms like a strong economy, good governance, culture and a great vibrancy – that helps to raise values. In addition, land ownership and management are probably also part of the reason for this success: the high value areas correspond to the large landed estates: Grosvenor, Cadogan and Howard de Walden, who actively manage their areas. Controversially perhaps, the arrival of new money can in some cases seem to diminish the vibrancy of some areas that are not so actively managed. Parts of South Kensington, for example, after the 1980s or even Notting Hill in recent years may have become more sterile and less diverse as the result of such a phenomenon. There is a risk that wealthy incomers can kill the very thing that attracted them to a neighbourhood in the first place.

The point is that London shows us, on a very grand scale, that good place-making is never solely about the physical form but about ongoing life in that place. What designers have to ensure is that the built form is flexible, adaptable and conducive to that life.

#### LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

So what can we learn from this past evolution and take forward into the future? Fundamentally, as already mentioned, place-making is much more than the design of buildings; it is less the extension of architecture than the inclusion of economics and sociology in the built environment realm. Now that the conditions seem to be right for developers to deal with large areas, they should concentrate their investment and design in streets and spaces, on a fine-grained instead of big box development, on creating neighbourhoods and not just buildings. There are too many examples of great efforts being put into spectacular big boxes and grand architecture, but where the spaces between them are dead. In contrast, fine-grained old Georgian streets can be vibrant and full of life as a result of active management over decades and the involvement of residents and shopkeepers. In both cases, architecture is important but it is the gaps between the buildings where life happens; so, it is the management of those spaces, the fine-grained uses of buildings and the adaptability of the street and the buildings that are more important.

The other advice is to look first at the whole value of the area and not of the pounds per square foot of building (£/sqft); and second, to consider the long-term income and growth potential, rather than the short-term returns. Global trends show us that the property world is already moving in this direction. It is now more based on equity than debt: investors are using equity to buy an income, and they look for yield over the long-term, rather than capital growth. Another shift is in the type of investors, who are more likely to be private individuals than corporate bodies. This is reflected in London by a greater emphasis on the West End than the City, and also by a more personal approach: investors prefer commodities to equities, and direct investment in



land, utilities, food and residential property, rather than derivatives. But it is not just individuals who have changed their approach; institutions such as pension funds are also looking for yield to be able to pay their members at a future date. Even globalism, which until now has resulted in uniformity, is being replaced by a 'world' approach celebrating the differences between places, and simultaneously using available global technology but interpreting it for a particular locality.

Two final examples from London can show how these global conditions affect investment in the capital. The first is the Olympic Athletes' East Village, which was bought with Middle Eastern money as an investment in residential property; the second is a major Canadian pension fund, Ivanhoe Cambridge, searching world-wide for an investment to get an income, and now investing in buy-to-let property in central London. So, the commercial sector is changing to adapt to these new global forces. As firms are competing for talent on a global scale and want to attract the best, they need to provide their workers with what they want – the corporate world is becoming more concerned with satisfying people's wishes, not just the quality of housing but what the workers will find outside their front door. Economic forces, demographic trends and social change are all favouring urbanism and quality of place, rather than just architecture. The challenge is how the industry and the built environment can respond to this challenge. ●

↑ From left to right, top to bottom: 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, early and late 2000s to 2010 growing high value areas or prime central London, where the pink colour represents the prime areas, and yellow is the next to rise.

● Yolande Barnes, Director of Residential Research, Savills, written for publication by Sebastian Loew

# A DEVELOPER'S PERSPECTIVE

An unconventional developer, Chris Brown explores the idea of value today and in the future



## ECONOMICS

Markets are virtually never 'free' in the sense of classical economics, and do not work according to the required assumptions of efficient market theory. Real markets are governed by psychology and complexity. They boom and bust, and property is a classic example in this respect.

In addition, many of the benefits people get when they buy a property are not convertible into money and not tradable in themselves. These can be the joy of knowing your neighbours, the mental health benefits of natural environments, or the physical health benefits of clean air. The economists call these externalities. They can be positive or negative, but they are not usually bought and sold in markets.

## VALUE

Because markets do not trade these things, it is hard to determine their value. But when valuers value a property they relate its financial value to the value of a comparable property in the same neighbourhood, which therefore enjoys some of these same untradeable benefits. The valuer's mantra of location, location, location does not just relate for example to the distance from the centre of a city, or from public transport, it also relates to all of these non-tradable characteristics in the neighbourhood.

So we have different kinds of value - financial value, social value and environmental value. What good urban design does is to maximise both the non-tradable and the tradable value.

## THE EVIDENCE

The problem we have with calculating value is one of evidence and in particular, data. We do not have an index of urban design quality, although potentially Building for Life (BfL) might be a simple one. Would it be possible to compare values of all kinds with BfL scores of otherwise similar schemes in similar locations to see if there is a significant difference? That is the sort of silver-bullet evidence that would get developers to take urban design more seriously.

Intuitively we notice that places like the Eastern Islands in Amsterdam, Western Harbour in Malmö, Poundbury in Dorchester, Bermondsey Square in London, Green Street in Nottingham or Homeruskwartier in Almere have values that are higher than otherwise similar places, which have not enjoyed good urban design. If we can establish the financial value of urban design, and find ways to make the non-financial value relevant to developers, then we can start to influence behaviour.

↑ Bustling market, Bermondsey Square, London

## POLITICS

Almost every serious property company these days is committed to environmental sustainability to some extent. Without that commitment, they fear that they will be shunned by their stakeholders, and they probably would be. I predict that health, happiness and well-being will develop in the same way. Already we see the UK Government producing well-being statistics, and in France the Government appointed a commission led by leading economist Joe Stiglitz to redefine Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to better reflect the non-monetary things they thought were important to society.

This is part of a world-wide political movement. In the UK, all of the political party leaders have recently discussed the role of business in making the world a better place, but they use different words:

- Nick Clegg talks of ‘a new economy, an ethical economy, moral markets and responsible capitalism’;
- Ed Milliband talks of producers and predators; and,
- David Cameron calls for ‘responsible business’, whose five objectives include improving skills, supporting small business, protecting the environment, improving quality of life, and helping local communities. It almost sounds like a recipe for urban design!

They each have slightly different views, but the overall message is clear – the tide is running away from money and free markets, towards an understanding that other outcomes are equally important.

I am sure we will get to a position where we understand the value of things that we cannot buy and sell, and we require the market to deliver them; and we understand the way that they contribute to financial value, and how urban design can deliver them. But what then will be the remaining obstacles?

## OBSTACLES

### • Measuring Quality, Outcomes and Impact

The first step is to be able to measure urban design quality – perhaps BfL12 can help with that. Then we also need to be able to measure the non-financial outcomes, for example health, happiness and well-being. Finally we need to be able to measure the impact of urban design on financial and non-financial value.

### • Client Skills

We are currently faced with a huge deficit in client skills. Great design requires both a great designer and a great client, and the latter is sorely lacking in much of the property industry and in house-building in particular. Most developers and most valuers cannot value good design. Most urban design isn’t even done by urban designers; it is ‘plotting’ by house-builders or their architects, who are often better at designing buildings than places.

But it does not end there. We lack understanding for example of the impact of micro-climate on human emotions, or the importance of noise to people’s well-being, so we have a lot to learn. It is about so much more than physical design: Jane Jacobs’ owner-managers choreograph the



sidewalk ballet, and seats in a sunny corner provide opportunities for valuable community connections.

### • Rules for People

Then there is the horror of rules – the havoc wreaked on designs by the size of highway engineers’ turning circles for the latest breed of mega refuse trucks. There are also rules on privacy or overlooking distances, and some have noticed that the distances differ in different places, but why? When I asked this question of a respected British urban designer I was told that this distance – usually around 21m or 70 feet – was determined by the distance at which a British working class male looking from his window at the property opposite would see the female nipple as blurred. In fact this distance was derived from Garden City design, before the age of antibiotics, when it was thought that disease could be conquered by sunlight. The actual distance came from the most cost-effective road layout. The same rule is applied today to a new home built close to an existing one, as well as to a complete street of new homes. Rules are not necessarily rational.

↑ Well designed streets, Poundbury, Dorchester  
 ↑↑ People designed and custom built, Homeruskwartier, Almere, Holland



new communities and helping them grow and work – about people and happiness – not highway design rules (or at least being able to change them to work for people).

The urban design profession needs to reinvent itself to be something much bigger than being good at drawing places

This tends to lead to a different type of urban design, and comes with different names including Organic Urban Design, Urban Acupuncture, DIY Urban Design and Guerrilla Urban Design. The enormous master plan is not the way forward...

In this exciting changing world, the urban design profession needs to reinvent itself to be something much bigger than being good at drawing places. Urbanism with an understanding and a research base that is much wider, encompassing topics like social value, place-management, micro-climate and the measurement of health, happiness and well-being feels like the way forward.

**CONCLUSION**

Well-designed places with happy people are valuable places, as we know. When we think about value, we need to think about it in its widest sense. Going back to economics, Enrique Peñalosa, the former mayor of Bogota sums this up in a simple but profound thought that goes to the heart of what we mean by value. He said ‘Developed countries are places where rich people use public transport, not places where poor people have cars’. ●



**SOLUTIONS**

Here are my suggestions on how we might break out of this dysfunctional circle that fails to maximise value of any kind.

Once we can measure, we can incentivise people. When selling public land, how about we first place developers in a league-table based on their ability to deliver great sustainable urban design, which includes social benefits and health, happiness and well-being? Only the premiership is then allowed to bid. The financial bids should never score more than 50 per cent of the evaluation marks, and when developers apply for planning permission, the premiership get the equivalent of speedy-boarding. Pretty soon, the bad developers will change their behaviour.

Another solution might be to take developers out of the development process altogether, and have an urban designer working with a custom build enabler. This is a real business opportunity for urban designers – no developers, but value for land-owners and purchasers. When the people who are going to live in homes design them, the results are almost invariably superior.

Then there could be different processes altogether: with the community as client, creating

↑ Well designed place, B001, Western Harbour, Malmö, Sweden  
 ↑↑ Children playing in Green Street, Nottingham

● Chris Brown, Chief Executive, igloo Regeneration

# WHAT URBAN DESIGN ADDS TO RESIDENTIAL SCHEMES

Chris Tinker of Crest Nicholson describes the challenges of place-making

As one of the largest residential and mixed use developers, we use a trading model that does not sit well with the ideas expressed so far, but in my view this is the only route for housing delivery in the UK at the moment. As developers of predominantly edge-of-town sites and urban extensions, we are rarely in a position to comprehensively plan for the facilities that are supported by large numbers of residents; this is basically the result of the current planning system and how residential land is allocated.

Today, we have some 40-45 sites, with around £30m mixed use ancillary development, building around 1,800 dwellings per annum. We have a more design-led approach than other house builders; the value added by better design puts us in an unusual position, between the top end of the market in London and the rest of the volume builders.

So why do we value design quality in our schemes? Customer experience is fundamental, and economic, social and environmental sustainability is essential. The WWF and Insight Investment conducted independent annual audits of the performance of the UK's house builders, sponsored by HBOS and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), looking at data and sites in detail leading to the a national sustainability NextGeneration Benchmark scheme. The scale of development undertaken helps with sustainability, but it is also a mind-set and requires a great deal of hard work to actually deliver it.

## WHAT VALUE URBAN DESIGN?

The average housing site in the UK generates just 2-4 dwellings sales/ month, which equates to around 30 sales per annum – a very low figure. This level of activity is really a cottage industry, and the current economic climate means that this level of sales cannot support the amount of capital employed to deliver the sites. Urban regeneration, which is more complex, is not possible in this context outside London (where the turnover is faster), and this is where urban design has previously been central to development.

We know that good quality development increases sales to around 0.7 dwellings per week, some 20 per cent faster, and this means 5-10 per cent higher values, with demand around the South East of England. There is also a broader market for high quality new homes: 40 per cent of our customers are 55 years old or more, and higher net-worth individuals, not first-time buyers. Yet delivering good quality is not easy and attracts very subjective views on whether development should be traditional or contemporary in style. The bolder the approach, the harder it is to achieve planning consent.

## WHAT IS QUALITY?

At Crest Nicholson, we expect our teams to achieve a Silver Building for Life standard (or higher) in their



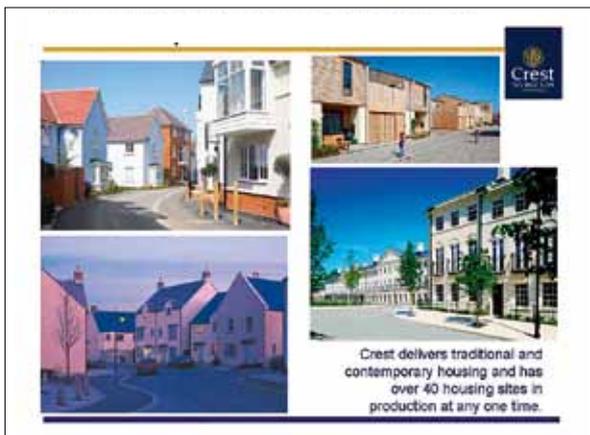
planning applications, and to think through the design justification and the value that can be added. We have won 9 Gold standard Building for Life (B4L) Awards, and to-date this has been the only way of comparing the housing quality.

Place-making is important to us as it helps to sell homes, whether on an infill site or in an area not yet built. People tend to buy into the design of the home, not its location. We have developed a 'contextualised local vernacular' response to places, with notable schemes in Bath, the Cotswolds and Street, and opinion is divided on which approach is right.

## A CLEAR VISION

It is important to have a clear vision for sites especially in the face of adversity and economic change. One of our best projects is Ingress Park in Dartford, which was very challenging to deliver but unique and very successful today. The site of a disused paper mill, it features the grade II listed Ingress Abbey as its centrepiece. Woolston Riverside, the former Vosper Thorneycroft site in Southampton being developed with the HCA, features three towers, which in today's economic climate would cost more to build than their value. Portishead Quays in Bristol is a 4,000 dwellings scheme, with 2,000 units at Bristol Docks. The architecture has generated mixed views, but the overall place is superb with cafes, schools, a Waitrose supermarket, no graffiti and well-kept spaces. Twice as profitable as Ingress Park, it has all of the ingredients on Yolande Barnes' successful neighbourhood list, and yet it too was very complex to deliver. Bath Western Riverside has taken over five years to get planning permission,

↑ Portishead Quays, Bristol



with many others spending at least ten years before us, all working to get an implementable planning permission for the site. With English Heritage, CABE and the HCA involved, it has taken a great deal of work to ensure that all parties were happy with the proposals, and we now have three different outline planning consents to deliver a good quality place with urban housing. We also believe that public art is an important place-maker, giving personality to larger schemes, and developing themes in the local area. Port Marine in Bristol's Portishead includes work by twenty world-class artists to capture the sense of place. Strategic land opportunities are also important for successful place-making, where there is greater scope for creating distinctive housing, streets and spaces. Taking the community with you is essential for larger sites, but inevitably it is hard to open discussions about quality, when people are concerned about the principle of development at all.

Working with the existing physical context is essential to a successful development: whether it

is integrating the landscape at Ingress Park or the flood defence spaces at Bath Western Riverside - this design allows for the river to rise by up to eight feet according to the seasons, yet creates attractive and useful places and routes for people to use at other times.

**SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The challenge for many developers now is housing a mixed population; 20-40 per cent affordable housing targets often include 70 per cent social rented units, and usually for people with very different backgrounds and support needs. How the public spaces work in these very mixed communities is a test for urban design and something of a social experiment. In a scheme in Portsmouth, we have 600 units of mixed property tenures, sharing four well-designed garden spaces and with clear management in place; these places have developed a great sense of harmony and social inclusion.

**ZERO-CARBON ENERGY**

We have worked with designers, who need to be increasingly technical in their knowledge, to produce the One Brighton scheme of 172 zero-carbon energy apartments with allotments on the roof and a CHP biomass plant. We know that there is balance to be found between building form, fabric and renewable technologies. But there is a mismatch between this need to innovate, available construction skills, local sites and circumstances, and the formulaic solutions of the volume housing model in the UK. The cost-effectiveness that the industry requires is at odds with this experimentation. With localism, we also now have each local authority adopting different approaches, making it even harder to design cost-effective schemes.

We also work with urban designers to deal with the long-term maintenance of new developments. Examples from Europe show a very different role adopted by local authorities; in Malmö, the public realm and infrastructure was provided in advance and maintained by the local authority, rather than as part of the development package. Our scheme for Park Central in Birmingham in the former Attwood Green area was enabled by Birmingham City Council giving a grant of £53m to add greater value to the proposals. The design created two large urban parks early in the delivery, raising expectations about the area and setting the scene for sales even in the recession.

Yet despite this and other strategic sites that we are pursuing, the scale of the urban design involvement is very different now. The focus is on new forms of housing, flexible living and other innovative solutions.

**WHAT UNDERMINES QUALITY IN URBAN DESIGN?**

One of the key issues for quality and hence the influence of good design is the undersupply of housing, where almost anything will sell and mostly off-plan, even in a recession and with the minimum of scene-setting. There is not enough land currently available through the planning system, and so land-buyers overpay for sites, or there are ill-defined policies in place locally. The same is not true for commercial developments though.

↑ Recent WWF and Insight Investment audit results for sustainability  
 ↑↑ The 'contextualised local vernacular' concept in a range of schemes  
 ↑↑↑ Ingress Park, Greenhithe, Kent

Too often planning and highways departments in local authorities are not focused on the quality agenda, frustrating good design with dogma and regulations. Good design can cost more to design and deliver: a bespoke design can cost around £4,000 per plot, while a standard house type costs around £300 per plot. It is volume and repetition that makes financial sense, and for many home-buyers it is a choice between quality and space, where space is usually preferable. The valuation process for new homes is also unhelpful, using 'second hand' market rates regardless of whether it is a newly created place.

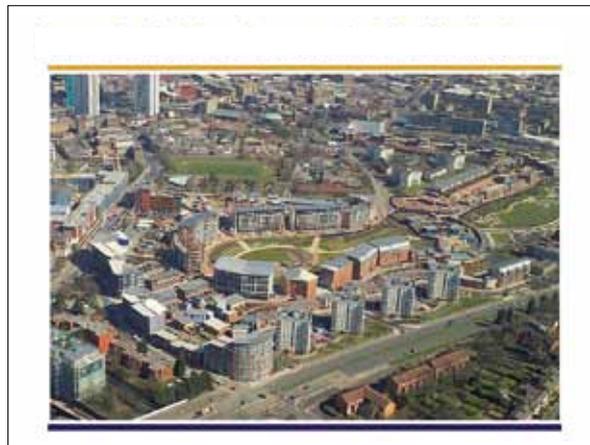
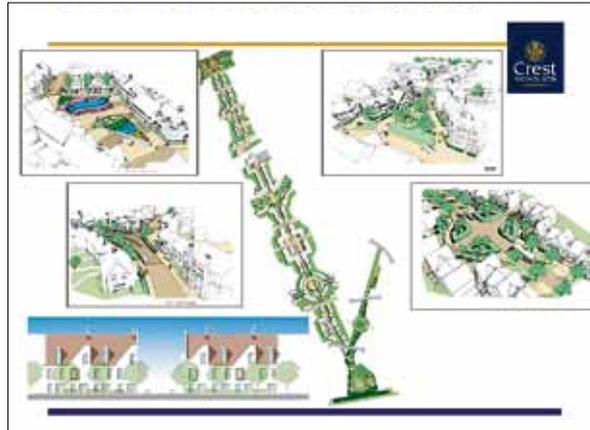
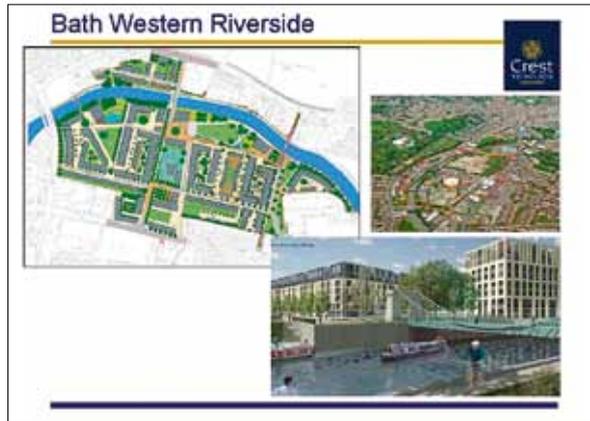
We know that quality developments sell well, appeal to more people, and add value over time. Taking the long view is the only way for developers to see risks rewarded

The number of new homes being built has also dropped, in both the social and private sectors. There is currently a shortfall of homes against actual demand, and even at a growth rate of just 5per cent per year for the next five years, we will struggle to get back to the 2008 rate of building 150,000 homes per annum. This low growth rate however has not previously been sustained by the industry, and so we are heading to a shortfall of some 700,000 homes by 2016-7. In order to overcome this there would need to be a step-change in volume production and standardisation, and the small-medium sized developers who have previously delivered up to 60 per cent of homes would be unable to compete with the major house builders for economy of scale.

Going back to our earlier average sales rate of 2-4 units/ month per average site, before the credit crunch Crest's 7,000 sites in 2006 resulted in 2.7 sales per site per month (or sales per outlet per month SPOM), or 135,000 sales. The average sales per site per month in 2011 was 1.9 on around 3,200 sites, or 80,000 units per annum.

If we are to build 232,000 units per year to meet demand by 2016-17, and assuming 25per cent is affordable housing, we need to be building 174,000 units per year - double the current number. At 2.5 SPOM, this means 5,800 sites are needed per year and with a 2 year consented land supply equates to 20 new sites in every local authority being approved each year. However only half of local authorities correspond to where demand actually lies, so this should perhaps be 40 new sites in 50 per cent of local authorities. This scenario is hard to imagine, but the industry needs lots of small sites now to increase housing supply quickly. Getting that scale of housing delivered is the challenge for urban designers.

Furthermore many design solutions are no longer viable in regional cities; undercroft parking is not affordable and needs to be accommodated horizontally, and 3-4 storey development is the most viable height. This is true for affordable housing too, as grant funding is no longer available. It is perhaps a very bleak time for urban design and regeneration as we knew it, and more about building homes.



**CONCLUSIONS**

The commitment to urban design and quality rests with the developer first, and needs to be sustained over time and on difficult to deliver sites. We know that quality developments sell well, appeal to more people, and add value over time. Taking the long view is the only way for developers to see risks rewarded, as values rise and the vision comes to fruition. The current development model where land is valued today in relation to its future (and now often historic) value, or overage, can make it unviable for the developer, especially for larger sites. In this context, urban design is very limited and constrained by viability issues in the detail or completely. The Government's private rented sector guarantee, which will enable housing providers to raise debt with a government guarantee by agreeing to purchase new homes for private rent, will help to reduce borrowing costs, increase the number of new homes provided and may well re-stimulate urban regeneration and the development economy as a whole. ●

↑ Bath Western Riverside  
 ↑↑ Larger sites provide more scope for place-making  
 ↑↑↑ Park Central, Birmingham

● Chris Tinker, Board Director and Regeneration Chairman, Crest Nicholson plc. Written for publication by Louise Thomas.

# SELLING URBAN DESIGN TO ELECTED POLITICIANS

Simon Eden explains how to get the message across



Everyone wants to live in a well-designed place. They may not put it like that: they might talk about being near to shops, safe places for children to play, or a sense of community. But they all come back to good design. Surely it's a win-win situation for all concerned to spend time on urban design, before the shovel hits the ground. Surely local politicians will recognise that they can only gain by investing in design - won't they?

The first decade of this century saw a real surge of interest in urban design – Lord Rogers' Towards an Urban Renaissance (1999) engendered a renewed debate about the built environment. Local councils began to talk about place-shaping, character and identity. For a while, the world began to make the links between place and social problems or economic prosperity, and to understand urban design. Elected councillors – at the heart of local decision-making – became champions of good design.

So why now is it suddenly much harder to get design on the political radar? Too often politicians – national or local – will see design as an add-on:

'of course design is important, but it's a luxury we can't afford in times of austerity' say those who once knew better. Developers will capitalise upon this arguing about viability, the impact of 'expensive' design on the funds available for affordable housing or highways improvements. Not all are guilty in this way, but it is an increasingly familiar refrain.

## JARGON

It part the fault lies with urban designers themselves, with talk of 'permeability' or 'legibility', and diagrams which consist of endless concentric rings joined by mysterious dotted lines. They have allowed politicians a way out, making urban design sound like an abstract intellectual discipline, best confined to a school of architecture - a luxury after all?

But the idea of place-shaping remains, and we need to sell the value of urban design using a new language. Politicians still want to see real change and improvements, but now talk of better outcomes – tangible differences in their local communities. Politicians want to solve problems, not be stuck with the silo-based language of service provision.

So now more than ever, a presentation on urban design needs to focus on what a scheme can achieve for local people and businesses; explain, for example, why improving the street scene improves footfall. The painted bollards in Winchester are a great example, because they helped to give a local square a sense of place. Or, say how sculpture allied with improvements to the public realm helps to draw visitors down a street which is off the main route...

Urban design needs to be sold on what it can do, not what it is. How does it help local politicians to achieve their ambitions for a community? Why will good design make the community welcome the council's projects? Councillors do not speak about legibility or permeability, their interest lies in whatever makes things better for their voters. Tell them what your design does for real people! This is obvious advice perhaps, but listen objectively to the next presentation from an urban designer at a planning committee and see...

## AUSTERITY

There is also a new language of austerity to adopt. Of course urban designers have always been good at making the case for lifetime costs. Perhaps now is the time to add in a wider perspective: if the design will make a place safer, or encourage healthy walking or cycling, then in these days of community budgets, it helps to try to quantify



← Re-imagining Tipner, by students at St Edmunds Catholic School, Portsmouth  
← Painted bollards, The Square, Winchester

these. It is not always easy to do, but a good design is always that much more attractive if you can show that it helps to make savings in other budgets.

But the debate goes beyond the immediate cost-benefit analysis of a scheme. Councils now talk about getting more-for-less, about 'transforming' services to find radical new ways of delivering what communities want. That means that councils now have to spend money in different ways, and the first question they will usually ask is about value for money.

When funds are tight, councils have a tendency to revert to basics and avoid what they see as luxuries, and so the task of the urban designer is to show how they can contribute to what Elected Members see as core priorities and issues. A recent project in South Hampshire used urban design to help improve learning and engagement in young people. Members wanted young people to have

a greater say in their future. This led to a project which involved local schools in planning a new community or re-designing their neighbourhood. The young people developed new skills and self-confidence, and for one even a new career path!

There is also plenty to do to find more cost-effective ways of delivering urban design advice. Perhaps smaller councils can no longer afford to employ a professional urban designer on a full-time basis. Nor can they afford to buy in design advice. So, groups of councils are pooling resources, sharing posts or a joint call-off contract for example. This could also include shared design training and design guidance.

Remember, it is all about language. In recent years the wider world has begun to understand the language of urban design, but perhaps now urban designers need to learn a bit of the language of local councillors. ●

● Simon Eden, Chief Executive, Winchester City Council

## URBAN DESIGN IN A CHANGING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Meredith Evans warns against complacency and how to avoid it

The 2012 National Conference on Urban Design coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University (formerly Oxford Polytechnic), and it provided an appropriate opportunity to reflect on how urban design has fared over the intervening years, the highs and lows, and what might be in store for practitioners in the years ahead.

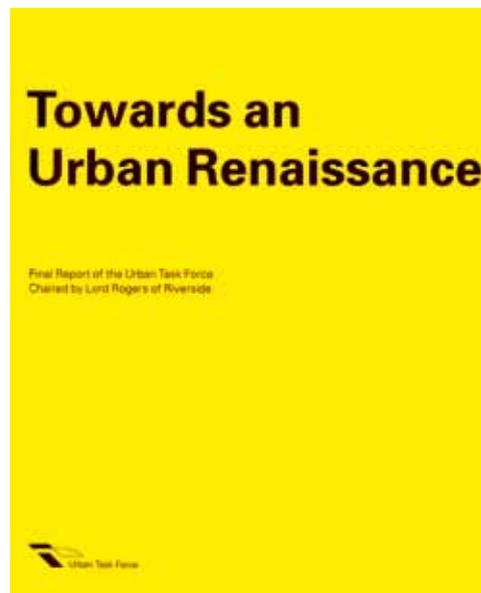
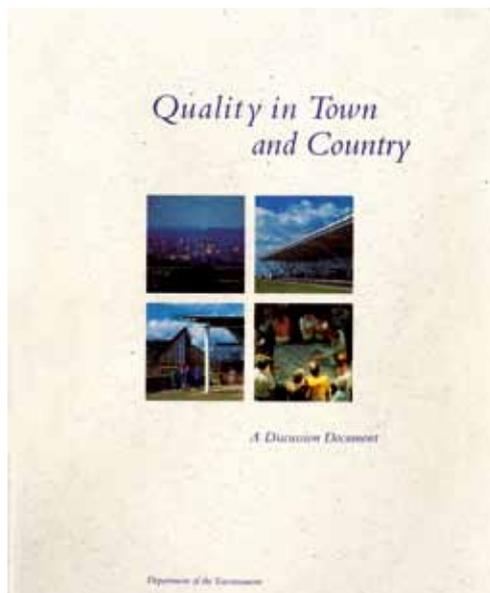
The evidence over the last forty years shows clearly that for urban design to flourish it needs political support both locally and nationally. Designing successful places requires a very long-term view, something that politicians often aspire to, but invariably find themselves succumbing to the pressures of current events, prevailing public opinion and elections every four or five years.

### A DISTINCT DISCIPLINE

It was in the early 1970s that urban design theory, as we currently recognise it, developed to a point where it became a coherent and distinct discipline worthy of academic recognition. However at

this time British practice was thin on the ground and was not on any political agenda. Promoting an understanding, let alone the application, of urban design thinking in local government could be described as missionary work in those unenlightened times. This was during the early years of the Thatcher Government promoting a free market approach to development and a much reduced role for planning. The central message of the infamous Circular 22/80 was that design was subjective and therefore not a matter for planning or planners to interfere with.

Yet within twenty years place-making had become established government policy and central to the work of planning and related professions. Two factors were fundamental to this transformation. Firstly, the creation of a sound theoretical base for the understanding and practice of urban design. In this respect publications such as P13 last article, col2 2 lines up from bottom, add in publications such as *Responsive Environments* (Bentley, Alcock, Murrain, McGlynn, & Smith) in



↑ John Gummer's *Quality in Town and Country* initiative, and Richard Rogers's Urban Task Force report *Towards an Urban Renaissance*

1985 were hugely influential. Secondly, the political climate began to change following the Rio Earth Summit of 1992.

#### REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

Urban design has always been closely aligned with environmental sustainability with many of its principles supporting more sustainable built environments. A key part of the government's response to the Earth Summit was the publication in 1996 of *This Common Inheritance* under John Selwyn Gummer's reign as Secretary of State for the Environment. The importance of this document cannot be underestimated. Gummer completely reversed the approach adopted by his predecessors. Fortuitously, it came at a time when the impact of previous policies in terms of the dramatic growth of out-of-town shopping centres, amorphous business and retail parks and declining high streets was creating great alarm, not least in the shire market-towns where many of the government's voters lived.

#### EVOLUTION

This evolution of political thinking accelerated with the arrival of John Prescott as Secretary of State for the Environment and Deputy Prime Minister following the Labour election victory in 1997. With added vigour, there was a shift to a more urban agenda focussing particularly on our major cities. At this time Lord Rogers was commissioned to set out an urban regeneration agenda which resulted in *Towards an Urban Renaissance* being published in 1999. Then followed urban design's good years with the creation of CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), supportive planning guidance and significant investment in urban growth and regeneration - all endorsing the then established urban design principles. For the first time in Britain, a significant body of urban design work could be seen and experienced by the public, whether in urban villages or regenerated city centres such as Manchester and Liverpool.

However, these designs did not meet with universal admiration. While many city centre developments have proved popular and commercially successful, recent research undertaken by Kent County Council has highlighted

a mixed response to 'urban village' type housing developments. Their strong urban character, incorporating terraced housing and limited parking provision, is not always popular and seen as inappropriate, particularly in suburban locations. But there is a related and potentially more serious problem for practitioners of urban design: while we are much better at creating places, these are increasingly looking like the same place. We are in danger of repeating the pattern book approach that undermined the pioneering *Essex Design Guide* in the early 1970s.

#### COMPLACENCY?

Nowhere is this more evident than in the production of master plans that regularly appear in the professional press. Complacency is creeping into urban design practice.

On the positive side, the National Planning Policy Framework puts place-making and responsive design at the heart of the planning system. But this significant achievement is somewhat devalued by the government's increasingly jaundiced view of the influence of planning on the economy. If we are to ensure the survival of urban design, it has to re-establish its relevance to today's needs and aspirations. Action needs to focus on four areas in particular:

- Continue to collect and publicise evidence of the value of urban design. Given the difficult times we are in, a focus on economic value would be particularly useful
- Refresh urban design thinking to reflect the lessons from what has been built over the last twenty years
- Ensure that development plans set out a clear vision of the place that local communities will want to live in
- Become more involved in neighbourhood planning, helping local communities to understand what makes their area special and how it can be enhanced.

Unless urban designers adapt to the changing world around them and acknowledge where mistakes have been made, we may well return to the dark days of Circular 22/80. ●

● Meredith Evans, former Corporate Director, Telford and Wrekin Borough Council

# URBAN DESIGN GOLD DUST

Alain Chiaradia and Angela Koch report on the value of public realm quality, form, and the strengths of local high streets

While previous research on the economic value of urban design has generally focused on office and residential development, this article highlights observations from two of our own research projects on ten London high streets in 2007 and 2008, and updated in 2012. These ten high streets are in North Finchley, Hampstead, Swiss Cottage, Kilburn, West Ealing, Chiswick, Walworth, Streatham, Tooting, and Clapham.

## PAVED WITH GOLD

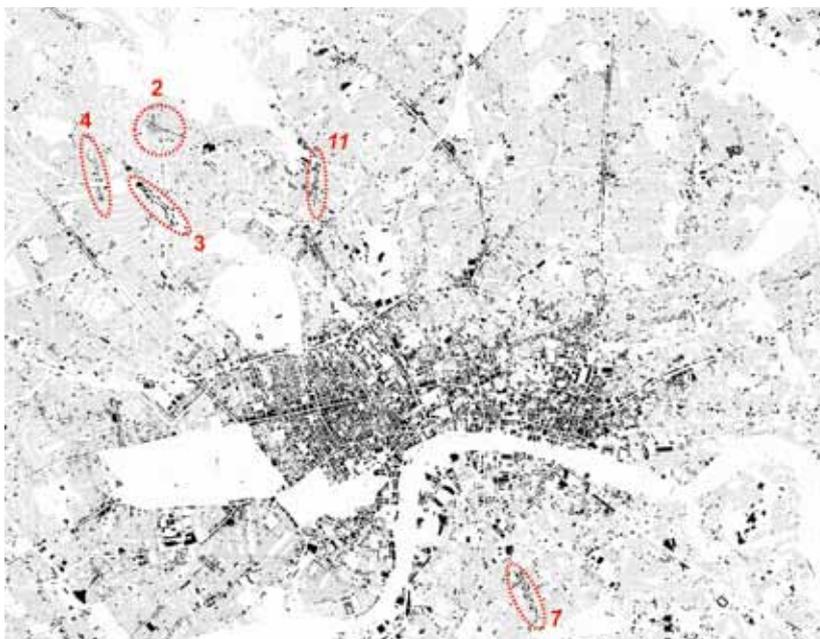
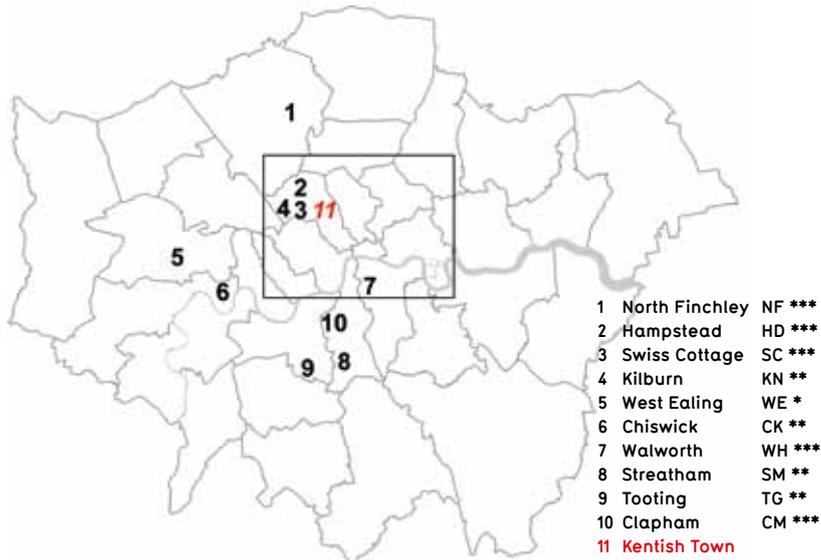
In 2007 *Paved with gold – the real value of good street design*, a demonstration project for CUBE, analysed a sample of ten London high streets. It found a quantifiable (in £s) and positive link between high street design quality improvements (measured with TRL's pedestrian street audit system PERS) and property prices and retail rents. It also allowed us to make a number of observations for those ten high streets:

- The areas up to 800m along high streets have much higher population densities: up to 140 people/ha for high streets in Inner London; 65-110p/ha in Outer London, while the average is 93 and 36 p/ha
- High streets are employment centres, where the job:resident ratios were 0.2-0.6, with an average of 0.4, well in excess of the expected 0.25 ratio for local jobs
- Pedestrian levels in high streets are proportionate to the surrounding neighbourhood population, and are linked to high street vitality and viability, as they are the highest spenders (Hampstead High Street and Walworth Road are comparable in their spending capacity, but sit at the opposite ends of homogenous socio-economic profile)..
- The more people live and work on or around a high street, the worse the public realm experience seems to be.

This piece of design-value research has since been used in many business cases, and the numeric expressions that we found are good estimates, and certainly much closer to the truth than the £0 previously put into business case spreadsheets. It seemed important to test this methodology with a much bigger sample of high streets and typologies. This study was subsequently carried out by Design for London, concluding with less robust findings, but nevertheless useful work, that further informed the development of the toolkit *Valuing Urban Realm* managed by Transport for London's Urban Design Team.

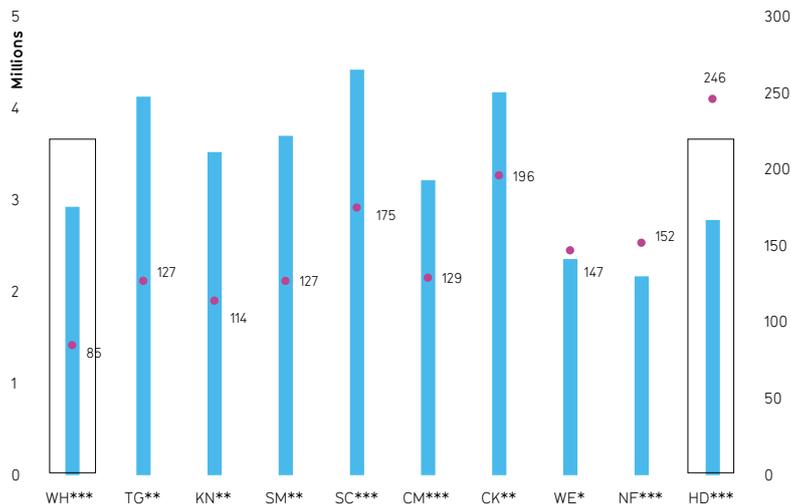
## FORMED WITH GOLD

The *Formed with Gold* demonstration research project was part of the *i-Valu*, UrbanBuzz's Building Sustainable Communities project (2008-09) with



thirty partners including CUBE. It took the same ten London high streets, and using Space Syntax analysis investigated the economic value of street design for ease of movement and legibility within 800m or 10 minutes-walk, and up to 2 km away (a bus ride or a short bicycle/car trip). The study supported qualitative studies suggesting that high streets are found on or near major arterials. High streets combine both local and global accessibility advantages, which explains traffic dominance in the street scene. Local accessibility is about the local market - the sometimes forgotten *raison d'être* of the high street. The study found a quantifiable positive link (again in £s) between high street design qualities and property prices,

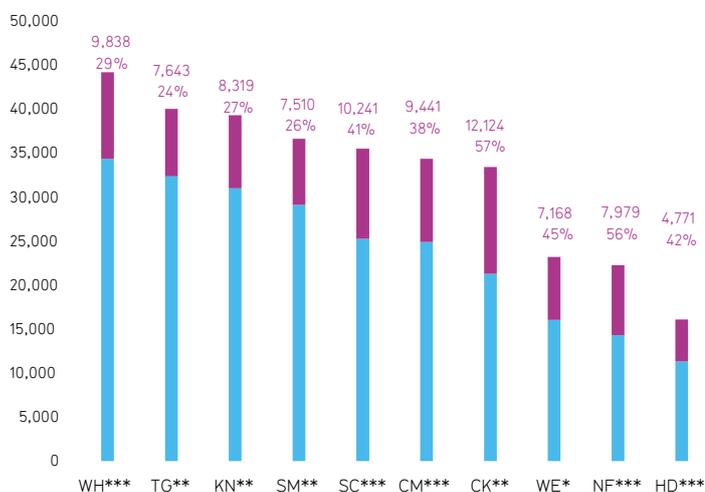
↑ The ten high street locations in outer London, plus Kentish Town  
 ↑↑ The inner London centres, with the residential hinterland in grey.  
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**Different high street economic profiles have the same economic potential**

Area weekly expenditure potential (bar in £m)

Average expenditure per capita (dots, £)



**High streets are jobcentres**

Residential population +Jobs within 800 m (≈ 10 min walk)

as well as retail rents. *Formed with Gold* focused on morphological layout details, and it identified important high street urban design characteristics:

- High streets and their associated neighbourhoods have a distinctive and linked local, as well as global, spatial layout signature: a place and a link bringing together local and global supply and demand
- High streets have shorter links with high permeability to their surrounding neighbourhoods
- High streets have smaller urban blocks in their immediate surroundings
- Both high streets and the surrounding neighbourhoods still have a lot of undeveloped land.

The most striking and obvious high street feature is its concentration of activities. They have a mix of land uses and hence a greater degree of specialisation compared to their predominantly residential surroundings. This combination of spatial layout, concentration of activities and specialisation suggests a distinctive relationship mediated by urban form. The modelling approach was then used experimentally to evaluate urban design layout options for a town centre master plan.

**GOLD DUST**

In 2012, during the recession, we partnered with the Local Data Company to revisit the ten London high streets studied in 2007 and 2008 to investigate the changes taking place and the strategies being applied by entrepreneurs to survive this perfect storm of recession, business rates and structural changes to the retail market through the internet and technological advances.

The ten high streets accommodate about 3,400 businesses and we found that since 2008:

- 1,000 had closed and 1,100 were created
- The higher the rate of closure, the higher the rate of creation and the higher the rate of survival (eg. Kilburn, Streatham, Chiswick, North Finchley)
- Comparison businesses were closing faster than they are created, consolidating by clustering,
- High streets with low levels of comparison businesses seemed to lose them faster, while high streets with high levels comparison businesses were retaining/replacing them better (eg Walworth, Chiswick, Hampstead)
- More comparison businesses meant less leisure ones, and vice versa
- Convenience and leisure businesses were stable;
- Businesses in the service sector were growing faster than they were closing
- As many multiple chain stores and independent shops were closing and being created, yet more multiples were staying
- High streets with more multiples (Swiss Cottage, Clapham, Chiswick, Hampstead) experienced the highest vacancy rates early in the recession (around December 2009), while high streets with mainly independent businesses were experiencing high vacancy rates at a later stage (Sept-Dec 2012). For the multiples, this was about control, command and economy of scale vs. the determination of the independent business owner to make it work
- In June 2008, only Kilburn had a higher vacancy rate (15.4 per cent) than London's Central Activity Zone (9.9 per cent); but in the last six months of 2012, Walworth, Kilburn and Streatham had higher vacancy rates than London's CAZ
- Kilburn and Tooting High street had lower vacancy rates in 2012 than in 2008, 11.2 vs 15.4 per cent and 6.3 vs 7.1 per cent
- Vacancy rates seemed to increase as the population decreased, but Tooting was the exception, as it had also the highest rate of replacement with 43 closures and 72 businesses opening up, of which 60 are still surviving.

**KENTISH TOWN ROAD 2001-2012**

Kentish Town Road does not look too different today from ten years ago. It is still a very mixed, busy and gritty street used by a somewhat eclectic range of local residents, employees and visitors - the latter mostly en route to the Heath or The Forum music venue. Pedestrians have more space on the high street, more crossings, and places to lock up bikes.

As with the other London high streets, many shops have closed down and opened up again in the last four years. Kentish Town Road properties are owned by a surprisingly small number of landlords, who control rent changes and investments in buildings. Business owners and residents have seen

residential and commercial property prices rocket over the last decade; this is particularly challenging with the recession squeezing household spending, and the internet making comparison shopping seemingly easy and cheaper. Between 2005 and 2010, rents and business rate costs have almost doubled according to Valuation Office data, while the level of council service provision and local spending profiles have not changed significantly.

However there is a new buzz: the refurbished public baths, community library, health centre, primary school, many reinvented pubs, and a big new French school are some of the regenerative forces at work, coupled with better orbital connectivity via the Overground train and the arrival of Eurostar at Kings Cross, only 5 minutes' ride away by tube or train.

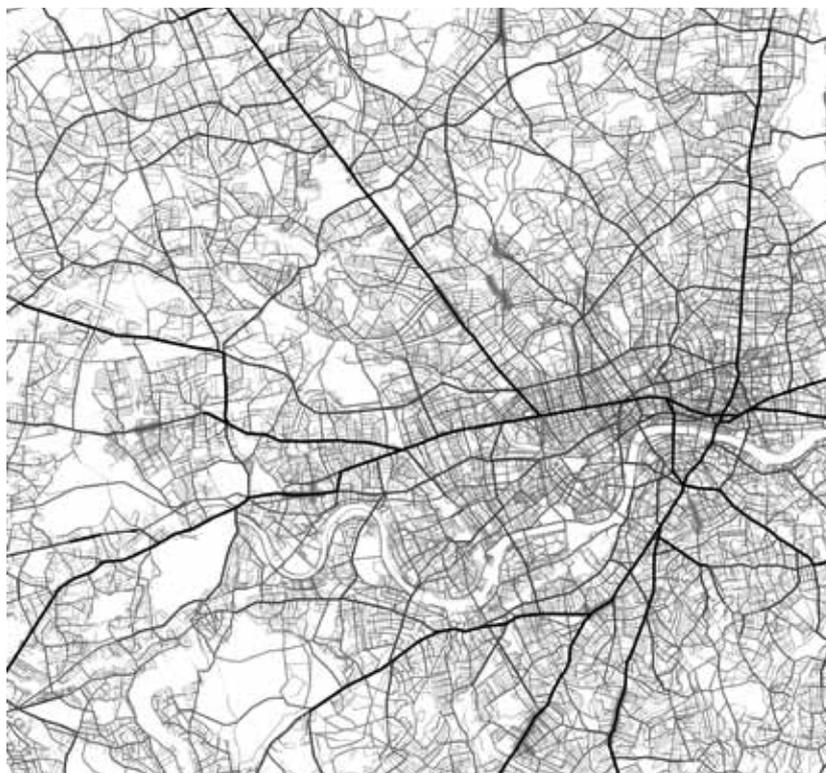
Costa Coffee, Prêt à Manger and Sainsbury's outlets have opened, and local traders operating in this context of commercial pressure, have expanded their floor space, modernised premises, extended their service and product offer, and are actively seeking conversations with customers. They are increasingly using social media to build closer ties with their neighbours and customers. A large number of food-based and service businesses have moved in or expanded from nearby centres (eg Bumble Bee, Cafe Dubbio Coffee Warehouse, Oskar Pink hairdresser, Phoenicia foodhall, Guanatabana). Local market knowledge has allowed these business owners to take risks in rather uncertain times.

The more peripheral stretches of Kentish Town Road have less footfall and ambiance, but lower rent levels and so opportunities exist for entrepreneurs and businesses that attract people and business from further afield, literally or virtually.

Kentish Town Road's most innovative old and new entrepreneurs are transforming the high street and the way that local people interact with them. Local businesses are showing a growing interest in closer relationships with their local and wider customer base; some have recognised fellow traders and entrepreneurs as important anchors in building an emerging new high street business model. One example is the relatively new but growing *KentishTowner*, a daily online magazine dedicated to local news on art, food, pubs, culture, community, history, architecture, local characters and music. The *KentishTowner* communicates and invites conversation on all things local including product and service reviews, and is an awareness builder and storyteller.

### URBAN DESIGNERS AS RESILIENCE BUILDERS?

In a recession, the positive short and medium term impacts of ambitious street design improvements may be receding, yet the specific spatial configuration of high streets well connected to their growing local market and invigorated by large numbers of entrepreneurs may provide the ingredients needed to support a new high street business model. That emerging model seems to look and feel like the very traditional model which was based on great customer service, with the big difference now that the successful high street business entrepreneur is also doing that for his or her online customers. Urban designers, being one part of this increasingly complex affair of managing resilient high street ecologies, could consider the



following:

- 1 Know the place and its people: the movers, shakers, landlords and innovators; population and socio-economic profiles, density capacity, supply/demand match/mismatch, and accessibility profiles
- 2 Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTALs) and capacity are changing. In London this drives permitted development, and so design and build higher population and employment densities on and around high streets, to increase the local base of activity, spending and demand, while allowing for businesses to extend upwards, sideways, down and at the back
- 3 Build to the highest quality and in context
- 4 Use social, community and cultural infrastructure strategically
- 5 Look at empty premises as signs of market adaptation and be an advocate for flexibility
- 6 Recognise that business rates should be fairer or partly reinvested directly back into local improvements (following the BID model).

↑ The high value of Space Syntax betweenness (thicker black line) is interpreted as a high volume of traffic flow. The high streets in the sample have such a location, and it is both an advantage and a curse

Paul Krugman in *Geography and Trade* (1991) suggested that in order to understand global specialisation - our current challenge - a good place to start is local specialisation. The British high street is a complex, constantly adapting and highly specialised ecology. ●

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● Alain Chiaradia, Lecturer in Urban Design, School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University, leading the *i-Valul* research project and lead author of *Formed with Gold*, and Angela Koch, ImaginePlaces, Kentish Town, and co-author of *Paved with Gold*, CABE.

# THE VALUE OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Sarah Milliken reviews its contribution and how to measure it

Well-designed, planned and managed urban green infrastructure can bring a wide range of benefits to local communities and places, and can underpin sustainable economic growth. Urban green infrastructure is the network of natural environment components – street trees, parks, rivers, and private gardens – within our cities. It also includes ecological engineering solutions, such as sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), green roofs and living walls. Investment in green infrastructure results in both direct and indirect economic outputs, cost reduction to the public and private sectors, and the management of risk. The key benefits of green infrastructure derive from the ecosystem services that they provide, and include climate change adaptation and mitigation, regulation of air pollution, flood alleviation, quality of place, health and well-being, recreation and leisure, and tourism. In addition, the creation of green space can encourage and attract high-value business, thus creating employment opportunities which lead to improvements in both quality of life and the local economy.

## TYPES OF ADDED VALUE

Urban ecosystems have ecological functions which provide various types of benefits easily understood by the public policy-maker and planner. For example, street trees:

- contribute towards urban cooling , reducing air conditioning costs and greenhouse gas emissions
- contribute to climate change mitigation by sequestering and storing carbon
- improve air quality by filtering particulates and other airborne pollutants, lowering health costs
- intercept storm water, reducing the need for flood control infrastructure, and
- enhance the quality of place.

In theory, a monetary value can be assigned to all of these benefits. Studies in the US have valued the net annual benefits of a small tree (below 8 metres in height) to be worth \$9, while those provided by a large tree (over 15 metres) are worth more than \$37. The i-Tree software, developed by the US Forest Service, is widely used to calculate the value of urban forests in North American cities, and has been used in assessments in Europe, including Torbay and the Victoria Business Improvement District in London, where the carbon storage provided by the trees was valued at more than £5 million and £45,000 respectively. However, when these sums are divided by the number of trees in each study, the average value is £6 per tree in Torbay, compared with £37 in the Victoria BID. This highlights the importance of size, age and species in the relative carbon sequestration and storage potential of trees: small, young Leyland cypress, ash and sycamore in Torbay, compared with much larger and older London planes in Victoria.

## MEASURING VALUE

While carbon storage can be monetised on the basis of its non-traded market price, other ecosystem services are harder to value. The table summarises different methods. Of these, the most commonly used is ‘benefit transfer’, where a value from a previous study is used to provide a ballpark estimate, as it is faster and cheaper than carrying out new primary valuation studies. However, unless the sites share the same vegetation and user specific characteristics, it is also potentially the least accurate, except for making gross estimates of recreational values. Benefit transfers can also only be as accurate as the initial value estimate.

The Green Infrastructure Valuation Toolkit provides a flexible framework for identifying and assessing the potential economic and wider returns from investment in landscape schemes. The toolkit uses the benefit transfer method to estimate the value of green infrastructure across eleven categories: climate change adaptation and mitigation; water and flood management; quality of place; health and well-being; land and property values; investment; labour productivity; tourism impacts; recreation and leisure; biodiversity; land management and products from the land. The valuations are discounted to give a present value figure so that benefits which accrue for different lengths of time can be compared.

## LIVERPOOL KNOWLEDGE QUARTER

Two examples of the use of the toolkit serve to illustrate its potential. Liverpool Knowledge Quarter, which contains three universities and a major teaching hospital, is identified as a strategic employment site within the Regional Economic Strategy, driving some 15 per cent of the city’s

SUMMARY OF METHODS FOR ASSIGNING A MONETARY VALUE TO ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Monetising method		Services	
Direct market value	Market prices	Observe market prices	Carbon storage Carbon sequestration
Market alternative	Damage costs avoided	Calculate the amount of public spending saved by an ecosystem service	Flood mitigation Urban cooling Air quality
Surrogate markets	Hedonic price method	Observe the effect of proximity to quality green space on house prices	Recreation and leisure Air quality Noise quality
Stated preference	Contingent valuation method	Ask how much people are willing to pay for an ecosystem service	All services
Benefit transfer	Benefit transfer method	Transfer a value from an existing study to provide an estimate	All services

annual GVA (Gross Value Added). However, the physical setting is fragmented, with poor pedestrian access, and it has some of the worst neighbourhood deprivation in Britain. An Urban Design and Public Realm Framework produced by URBED in 2007 set out a long-term vision to reconnect the area with a network of places and routes. A Green Infrastructure Enhancement Plan proposed 13 hectares of green roofs on the university and hospital buildings and 3,700 new street trees, amounting to a net gain of 7.7 hectares of green space. The value for money test shows that, on a proposed capital investment of £30 million, at the lower estimate of value, the benefits almost cover the cost of investment, while at the higher end of the range there is a definite positive return, as shown in the table.

The vast majority of this is attributable to quality of place, with investment and enhancement of green space potentially securing 3.5 - 4.6 per cent annual GVA growth rate over the next 10 years. This calculation is based on an assumption that up to 8,000 new jobs would be created, 20 per cent of which could be attributed to public realm improvement and, of these, 7 per cent to green infrastructure. The overall benefit value is likely to have been understated, since there will be considerable benefits to both hospital patients and visitors to the area, neither of which have been quantified.

**THE TRIANGLE**

The Triangle in Swindon is a small social housing development designed by Studio Engleback that contains less than 0.2 hectares of soft landscaping, including a central green space, swales and kitchen gardens. The Green Infrastructure Valuation Toolkit calculated a potential £450,000 increase in value to the £4.2 million investment, the majority of which is attributable to quality of place, measured by enhanced property values.

Given the high quality but very local nature of the amenity green space, it was estimated that the uplift in value would range between three and six per cent. The soft landscape areas of the scheme were designed to manage and infiltrate all the surface water run-off from the development on-site, thereby alleviating the local combined sewer system and entitling the Triangle's residents to a rebate on their water drainage service charge, estimated at £17,500.

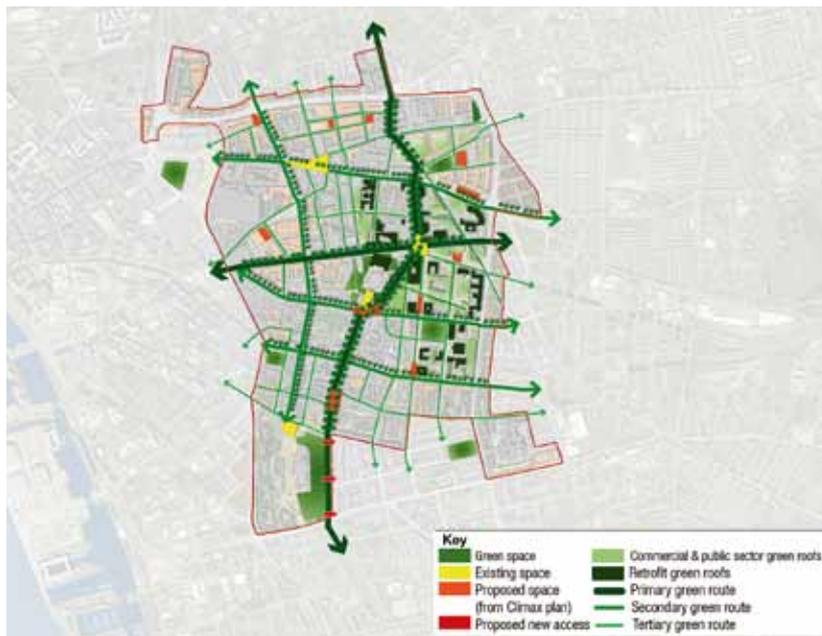
While 'recreational value' was calculated using willingness to pay measures derived from a similar neighbourhood space, the monetary value of 'place and communities' and 'health and well-being' was deemed to be impossible to calculate, despite the fact that the home-zone environment would afford abundant opportunities for social interaction and physical activity. The overall economic valuation is therefore a conservative one.

**EVIDENCE BASE**

These examples demonstrate that the economic valuation of the ecosystem services of green infrastructure is potentially a potent decision-making tool for urban policy-makers, planners and developers, and complement the findings of a growing corpus of studies on the value of green infrastructure in urban design. One such study is the five-year EU-funded VALUE project (Valuing

**LIVERPOOL KNOWLEDGE QUARTER**

Service	Measure	Present Value
Climate change mitigation	Reduced carbon emissions and heating costs	£3.4 – £4.7 million
Climate change mitigation	Stored carbon	£6000 – £18,000
Flood alleviation	Avoided surface water charges and reduced carbon emissions from water treatment	£1.6 – £2 million
Health	Air pollution control	£14,000 – £112,000
Quality of place	Land and property value	£1.7 – £6.7 million
Quality of place	Investment (job creation)	£23 – £32 million
<b>Total</b>		<b>£29.3 – £45.6 million</b>
Proposed capital investment for green infrastructure		£29.7 million



**THE TRIANGLE, SWINDON**

Service	Net Present Value
Carbon storage	£1,470
Water management	£21,800
Air quality	£50
Quality of place	£190,000 – £400,000
Recreation	£4,900
Land Products	£14,000 – £25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£232,000 – £ 453,220</b>

Attractive Landscapes in the Urban Economy), which has recently come to an end. The project produced economic evidence based on large-scale surveys highlighting what people are willing to pay for greener urban environments. Although the nature of these valuations was dependent on the size, location and functionality of each investment, respondents in each survey indicated that a greener environment was more valuable than the existing landscape. People relate the nature of an individual

↑ Liverpool Knowledge Quarter Green Infrastructure Framework. Image by URBED  
 ↑↑ The Triangle, Swindon. Image by Studio Engleback

green investment to its role in the wider network of functional green spaces, and they therefore assess its value in relation to the value of the wider landscape in their own neighbourhood. In this way, people make connections between the structure and composition of new investments and their contexts, and examine how they could be beneficial to their lives.

Such data can be used to support business cases for future green infrastructure projects by indicating that the initial capital costs produce wider local multiplier effects, and may be recouped directly through higher tax or rental payments or indirectly via increased property values and urban competitiveness.

It is clear that urban green infrastructure can underpin local economies and help increase GVA, just as it can create healthier, more cohesive, sustainable communities. However, it is important that, when considering how to maximise the sustainable economic benefits of green infrastructure, attention is not wholly focused upon those agencies and structures whose task it is to deliver economic growth and development. Of significance too are urban designers who plan the green infrastructure in the first place. An

understanding of the importance of integrating economic (and social) objectives into project development is essential if sustainable development is to be fully realised. As vital as the natural environment is to our communities, if it is poorly planned and piecemeal, it will fail to deliver against its huge potential, and the benefits that green infrastructure can deliver will not be realised. ●

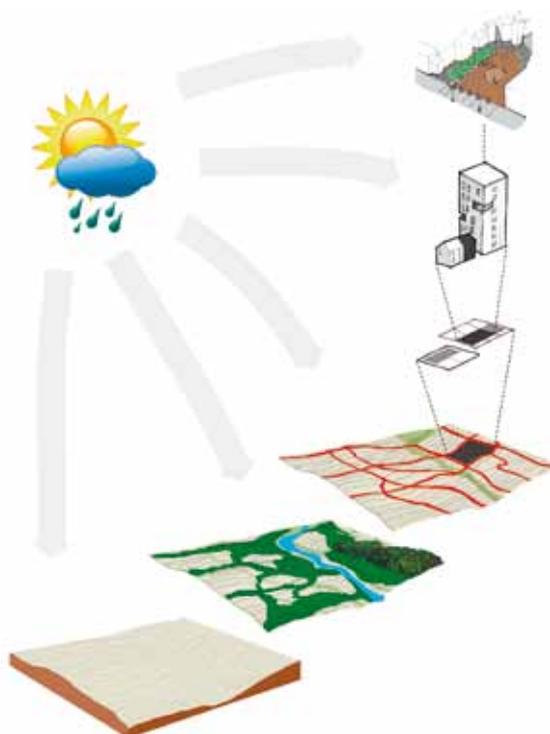
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● Sarah Milliken, Research Associate, School of Architecture, Design and Construction, University of Greenwich

# THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF COMMON GROUND

Ian Bentley describes how urban design helps better decision-making



Urban design's potential for generating economic value depends partly on evidence-based knowledge appropriated from fields such as space syntax and urban economics. Strictly speaking, however, economic value is generated not by knowledge itself, but by practical decisions that are taken based on it. The capacity of actors in the development process to take such knowledge-based decisions depends not only on the availability of knowledge itself, but also on the extent to which their professional frames of reference allow them to see its relevance and use it as a basis for action – individually and working together in positive ways.

This paper argues that urban design's main potential for creating economic value stems from its capacity to develop a holistic design approach, which can enable the current multiplicity of design professionals, researchers and other actors in the development process to work together. The International Network for Settlement Design (INSD) set up in 2011 is promoting this approach through training and consultancy practice.

**COMPLEXITY AND LAYERS**

Our starting point is that settlement design faces ever-widening issues and in order to address these, we need to understand human settlements

↑ The levels of settlement form for the Betim workshop

as complex systems. Like all complex systems, settlements are composed of subsystems in dynamic relationships. Occupying space and time at different scales, settlement subsystems can be thought of as layers of settlement form; each interacting with the others. In this layering, each layer has a degree of independence from the others, each typically has different cycles of change over time. Studies of complex systems show that interactions between their subsystems are crucial for the system overall. Design should therefore focus on inter-level relationships, as well as on individual levels.

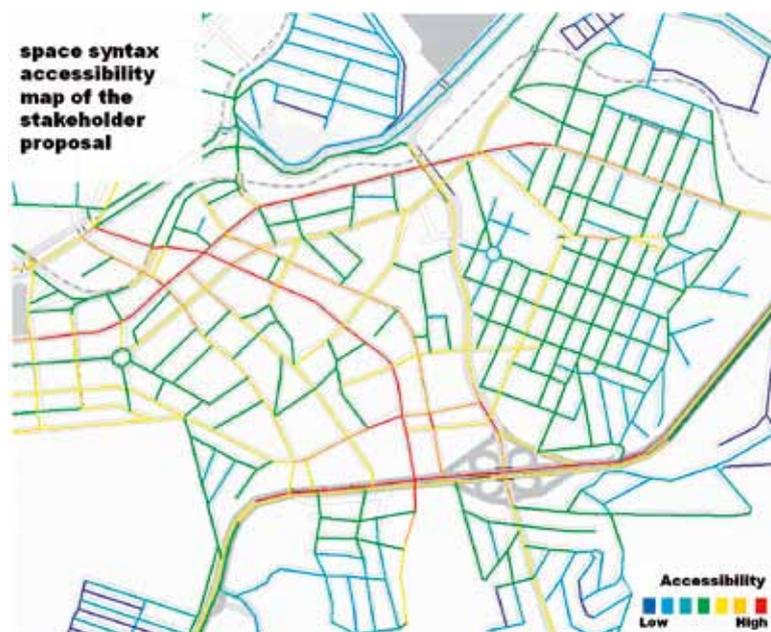
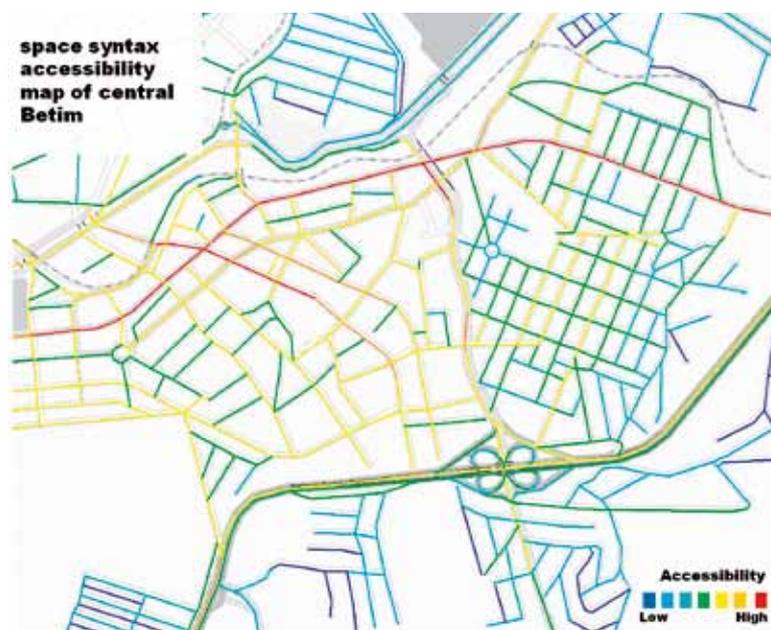
In the so-called developed world, however, design cultures have evolved to focus separately on particular levels: architects for buildings, transport engineers for roads, etc. This is not to deny the value of specialised knowledge - facing increasingly complex challenges we need it more than ever - but by focusing narrowly on particular subsystems, we easily lose sight of the settlement system as a whole, ending up in the situation which Bill Hillier in *Space is the Machine* (1996) calls disciplinary apartheid.

Disciplinary apartheid in any field has serious practical outcomes. In medicine, for example, it can lead to weaker interventions that are harder to evaluate, less likely to be implemented and to be worth implementing. This is obviously worst in fields like the built environment where, for example, the experts working for developers are often not trying to deliver the same objectives as those working for local authorities. To stop this, it is important that all actors see their efforts in a common conceptual framework. This paper reports on INSD's ongoing work using such a framework in the Brazilian city of Betim.

### BETIM – FERTILE GROUND

There are several reasons why Brazil, and Betim in particular, offer fertile ground for this. Firstly, Rohter (2012) discusses Brazil's culture in *Brazil on the Rise* as one that emphasises 'seeking common ground'. Secondly, Brazilian design culture is not yet fragmented – the continuing tradition of the architect-urbanist retains creative potential for developing the type of shared framework that is needed. Thirdly, at the scale of municipal organisation, the pioneering efforts of architect-urbanist Lessandro Lessa have led to the formation of a unified professional team in Betim, which brings together specialists from various fields in developing ideas for the city's future. INSD was asked to run a ten-day training workshop for the Betim team during May 2012, facilitated by Dr Paula Barros, with 30 participants drawn from seven different disciplines, ranging from civil engineering and IT through agronomy to architecture/urbanism.

An important aim of Betim's economic development strategy is to diversify from a current reliance on the car industry and distribution functions to knowledge industries. The products of the current development market do not chime well with this overall aim. During 2011 for example, the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region, within which Betim is situated, received planning applications for 74 million square feet of condominium housing, but relatively little else. The resulting places lack the liveliness and urban buzz necessary to attract the footloose professionals and entrepreneurs of



the knowledge industries, and therefore constrain Betim's economic development.

Currently, the expansion of Betim's central area for economic development is also blocked by the BR 381 regional highway, which forms a by-pass largely disconnected from the city's street network. Though it gives access to a new shopping mall and coach station, both currently under construction, the BR 381's lack of connectivity to the centre raises the danger that these will effectively become out-of-town facilities, contributing little to the liveliness of Betim as a whole.

However the BR 381 is due to be re-aligned further from the city centre, creating a major development opportunity. The workshop therefore focused on how to integrate the highway's existing infrastructure to form a catalyst for mixed use development. The course approach, and the design concepts that the participants developed are available on the INSD website ([www.interset.co.uk](http://www.interset.co.uk)), and published in both Portuguese and English. Particularly interesting from the economic value perspective are the indicative street layout proposals produced.

↑ Betim's Space Syntax analysis – before changes to the BR 381 highway  
↑↑ The new levels of integration with the stakeholder's proposal



↑ The environment around the regional highway

**COMMON GROUND?**

Predictably, participants’ initial layout ideas tended to be fragmented by disciplinary apartheid. Seen from a civil engineer’s perspective, for example, roads were traffic corridors, with design quality evaluated in terms of safety and congestion. From the architect-urbanist perspective, buildings were mostly seen in terms of internal convenience, energy conservation and external appearance, whilst land uses were seen as elements that could be positioned by designers to control urban movement patterns.

None of the participants’ separate viewpoints alone could help in designing a street layout to address the mixed use problem. Progress depended on finding a new way of thinking and feeling that would empower them each to break free from disciplinary apartheid by relating their own expertise to a larger whole that all could share. The participants needed to accommodate new knowledge that could only be used by working across disciplinary boundaries. New ways of thinking and feeling, of course, can only be socially constructed, but INSD’s multi-level framework seemed very useful as an aid in this construction process. In practice, probably because many of the participants were highly visually orientated, the process was facilitated by the ‘levels of settlement

form’ graphic shown, which seemed to badge our conceptual framework, and was constantly referred back to throughout the workshop.

As the workshop developed, participants became increasingly willing to open up to trans-disciplinary areas of knowledge which had previously been difficult to handle within established disciplinary boundaries. For example, Space Syntax ideas from network science enabled participants to understand how the connectivity of street layouts affects the intensity of movement within them, whilst ideas from development economics helped them see how levels of pedestrian flow affect business opportunities, and therefore the economic feasibility of different land uses and building types.

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Urban design’s potential for generating economic value stems from its capacity to develop a common framework

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Integrating these trans-disciplinary ideas with their established areas of expertise, the participants were enabled to develop a system of direct connections from existing city streets to a new street, which they named Avenida Nova Amazonas, on the line of the original bypass. As indicated by the network analyses, this proposal greatly increases the accessibility of parts of the old bypass, and with it the predicted levels of footfall. In turn, the increased business opportunities that this footfall creates, anchored by the new shopping mall and coach station, offer a credible opportunity for the Avenida to become a mixed use high street. By the end of the workshop, the idea had achieved enthusiastic support from all of the participants, notably including the civil engineer in charge of the city’s transport planning.

In conclusion, our experience of the Betim workshop confirmed our view that urban design’s main potential for generating economic value stems from its capacity to develop and promote a common ‘complex systems’ framework, relevant both to design and research. INSD’s evolving framework proved its utility as a tool for building common ground between professionals from varied backgrounds, and empowering them to collaborate in the production of economically-valuable design outputs. End-of-workshop feedback provided a rich source of ideas for the framework’s development, and showed that 90 per cent of participants evaluated our existing approach as excellent. This is very encouraging as economic value, like value in any other field, grows best on common ground. ●

● Professor Ian Bentley, Director, International Network for Settlement Design

# COMMUNITIES AND URBAN DESIGNERS NEED EACH OTHER

Sue Riddlestone points to sustainable communities, neighbourhood planning and building with the community

We live in interesting times in the UK, and there are many well-trained and experienced urban designers who are short of work. The Government is fretting over why are we not building more new homes and is giving communities a host of loosely-defined new powers through the Localism Act. Local authorities have had to make drastic cutbacks in staff and services, and part-time working and entrepreneurship is flourishing in response to the recession. All of this is against the continuing backdrop of climate change and the resource crunch, with energy, food and fuel prices rising as the world's population hits 7 billion people.

So what should we do now to create sustainable and resilient communities? I suggest we use our experience and our new legal powers to be entrepreneurial. Urban designers do not need to wait for the end of the recession to work with and within neighbourhood planning groups, as many already are. Together we can use the new community powers and incentives such as the Homes and Communities Agency's Custom Build - a loan for community build projects of up to twenty homes. This is not an easy option, but could lead to some exciting and rewarding results, as we at BioRegional know.

## LOCAL INNOVATION

BioRegional, an entrepreneurial charity, was started in the 1990s recession to find ways in which we could live and produce the goods and services that we needed in our area - our bioregion - in a sustainable way. Our most well-known project is the BedZED eco-village in Hackbridge, south London, which we initiated and developed with Peabody and Bill Dunster Architects (now known as Zedfactory), as we were renting space in the Sutton Ecology Centre and needed more room. We decided to build an eco-office, and found a site large enough to build 100 homes. Working with the architects and engineers from Arup, BioRegional brought a fresh perspective to enabling sustainable living, and the Director of Development at Peabody at the time, Dickon Robinson, decided to support it. Now we have our office and some of us live here too. This example could be replicated across the country, and as urban designers already know so much about the industry, it could be done in your own neighbourhood too. Enlightened self-interest is a very sound motivation, the extra love and attention you give to your own project pays dividends.

## ONE PLANET LIVING

If we are going to design communities, they absolutely have to be sustainable. We have to become resilient to external factors like energy



and food costs, and create new jobs in the local economy; there is so much that urban designers can do to facilitate this. At BioRegional, sustainability is very simple: it is about one planet living, where we aim to enable happy, healthy lives within a fair share of the world's resources, leaving sufficient space for wildlife and wilderness. We measure a fair share using an ecological and carbon footprint. The ecological footprint shows that globally we are producing pollution and consuming resources at a rate fifty per cent higher than the planet can absorb or replenish every year. In the UK, in common with other developed countries if everyone lived like us we would need three planets, when many people in developing countries do not even have enough to meet their basic needs. That is why we aim for one planet living for everyone wherever they live in the world. One planet living is possible in so many ways from sustainable communities to products and services like local charcoal and copier paper see [www.bioregional.com](http://www.bioregional.com) for more examples. And it does not need to cost more. One Brighton, the BioRegional Quintain and Crest Nicholson development of 170 apartments and community facilities, was built within the normal range of build costs and sold twice as fast as regular developments. Not only do residents reduce their footprint, they report higher levels of well-being and good health.

We formalised our BedZED strategies into ten simple design principles for sustainable or one planet living, which we use for all of our projects, and which are being used around the world. The one planet principles can be used by anyone and are free to download from [www.oneplanetliving.net](http://www.oneplanetliving.net).

↑ BedZED eco-village.  
Image by BioRegional



↑ Starting the neighbourhood planning process in meetings  
 ↑↑↑ The local centre, in need of much improvement

We used the principles to write the London 2012 Olympics bid sustainability strategy and now we are trying them out in neighbourhood planning.

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING**

Our local community in Hackbridge in the outer London Borough of Sutton is a typical, slightly neglected suburb with a lot of potential. The need for urban designers is obvious and we have appreciated their support already. Over 4,000 people live here, but more than 1,000 new homes are planned in the area in the near future. In 2008 Sutton Council committed to become the first one planet borough by 2025, and Hackbridge was chosen to be a pilot sustainable suburb to pioneer the approaches. In April 2011 we were therefore picked to be one of 17 neighbourhood planning front runners. At the beginning if asked about how long it would take to do our plan, we would never have guessed that the first draft would be out for consultation a full two years later. But it has all been about so much more than making a plan. It has been about neighbours getting to know each other and creating a buzz in the area. We are not sure how it will end, but the plan itself is not the end.

**MAKING A PLAN**

First we needed to get our constitution sorted out, then to understand each other's capabilities and

elect our officials. Community groups attract the full range of local residents and characters, and it often seems like an episode of the TV series of *The Vicar of Dibley* - in fact the vicar is a regular attendee. We found architects and urban designers among us, as well as local economic development experts. Our chair needed a bit of encouragement to take on the role, but has done an excellent job. It has been a good learning and life experience for all of us. One planet living worked very well for the group to talk to the many developers in the area: they could understand it and responded to it in their plans and designs. It worked less well however with some group members, although in conversation, they agreed entirely with what it means in practice. We were inundated with observers and offers of help, many from urban designers funded by DCLG, including Locality which has been a great resource. Having our constitution agreed, held consultation events, and worked with some of the developers, we tried to return to our plan. But we needed to get our group approved first and then, after another six weeks, our boundary. The boundary caused some ruffled feathers among various people, including local councillors and conservation groups. These formalities took the steam out of the plan making work, as did new local issues like a proposed energy from waste plant, which took some time to arrive at a considered group view in order to respond to the planning application.

The most recent distraction from writing the plan came from the threatened demolition of our one and only historic building. But the time has been well spent, our ideas have matured and we are now ready to get it done. We had the first Design Council Cobe review of any neighbourhood plan last month, which was a frank but helpful experience; we were encouraged to focus on its more unique aspects and keep it simple. To see the plan as it shapes up go to [www.hackbridge.net](http://www.hackbridge.net).

**PARALLEL ACTIVITIES**

There is a lot of activity taking place in Hackbridge in tandem with the plan as Sutton Council, BioRegional and other partners try to deliver elements of one planet living. The architects Adams & Sutherland are helping to make the area less car-dominated and bring forward ideas for a more unified town centre, supported by the Mayor's Outer London Fund. Hackbridge and Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Development Group have helped to shape and comment on the plans together. The group also went in force to a local area committee meeting recently to defend the plans after local councillors stirred up a storm by mistakenly calling it traffic calming.

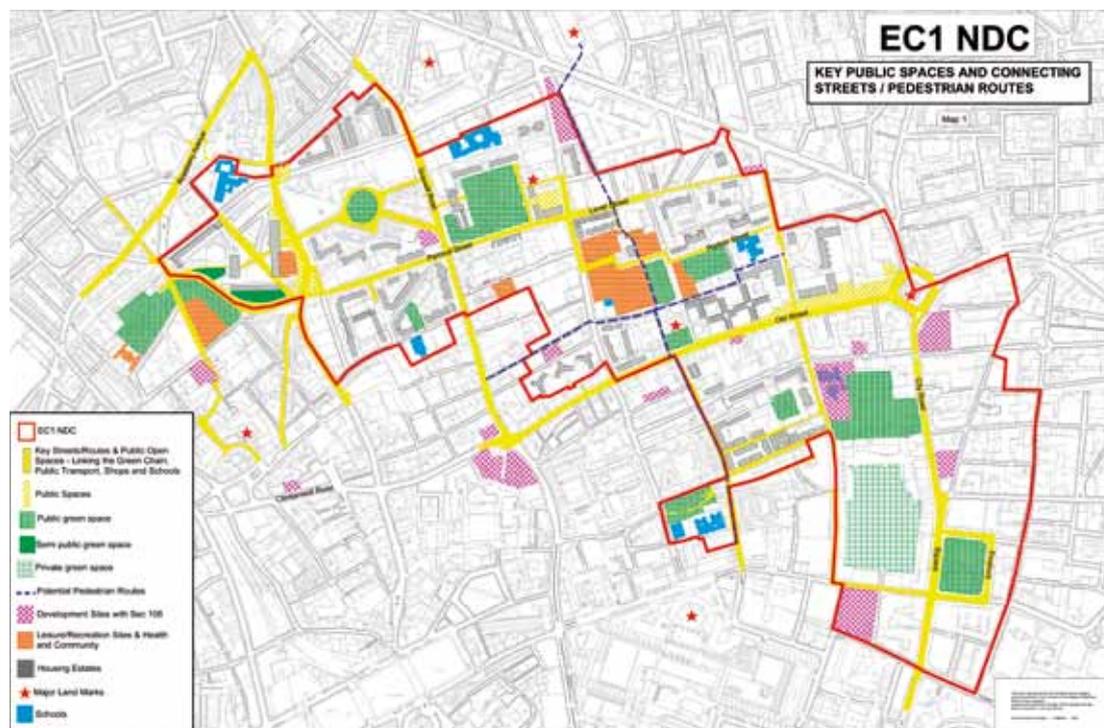
**HELPING ALLIES**

Communities and neighbourhood planning groups need the help of urban designers, but in fact urban designers need communities just as much. Communities can be great allies; they bring insights and legitimacy, and will work on implementation. But more than that, urban designers are part of communities. Every community needs to be a sustainable community, and they are great places to live and work. There are many opportunities, perhaps because we are in resource-constrained times. The government have given us some new powers, so let's use them! ●

● Sue Riddlestone, Chief Executive and co-founder, BioRegional

# TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Liz Kessler and Georgia Butina Watson set out the value of urban design skills for retrofitting disadvantaged neighbourhoods



With the current emphasis on localism and increasing recognition of the value of the environment around homes on health and well-being, what chance is there that the large number of bleak neighbourhoods can be transformed? What contribution can urban design skills and techniques make to this, and how can we ensure that those responsible for change have the necessary knowledge?

These are the questions that this paper is prompted by, reflecting on the lessons learned from one neighbourhood, the EC1 New Deal for Communities (NDC) area in south Islington, London, where much of the public realm and communal space around the local authority blocks of flats have been substantially redesigned. This has changed people's perceptions of the area and makes a useful case study for how similar improvements can be promoted elsewhere using urban design skills.

## POOR PLACES TO LIVE

Too many existing neighbourhoods, especially those with large social housing estates, provide an unsatisfactory residential environment, which has a negative effect on the health and well-being of large numbers of people. All too often these neighbourhoods are characterised by poor public space design, weak relationships to adjacent buildings, vehicles dominating streets, a prevalent sense of neglect and evidence of anti-social behaviour. Together these factors contribute to

feelings of a lack of safety and a sense that no-one cares, leading to parks and communal spaces being little used, all in areas where the value of neighbourliness and opportunities for enjoying attractive green open space are desperately needed and sought after.

Considerable public expenditure is spent in these neighbourhoods on general maintenance, as well as on a variety of measures to mitigate problems, such as the installation of CCTV cameras, new play equipment for a badly sited playground or a new community centre. Rarely is the focus on making attractive places for people, establishing good connections, and the interrelationship between the streets, parks and communal spaces on estates. This integrating work, the contribution of urban design, creates places that encourage activity, engender pride and lift the spirits.

## BRINGING CHANGE

The changes in EC1 were implemented as a result of a combination of two issues:

- design - to reshape the streets, parks and communal spaces on estates, to ensure that they fulfilled the needs and aspirations of those who would use them
- the development of processes to support implementation. This entailed an interdepartmental or multidisciplinary approach based on engaging with residents and stakeholders.

↑ The EC1 NDC Public Space Strategy



↑ and ↑↑ Brunswick Estate, before in 2006 and after the work in 2009. The open space now promotes neighbourliness, with allotments, seating and opportunities for play in an open and free environment.  
 ↑↑↑ Radnor Street Gardens in 2004

There is a general view that the value of urban design, and the public realm, is recognised especially in planning departments, and applied to new development. However this is not the case in retrofitting neighbourhoods and estates. The negative mindset of working within a set site boundary, not working holistically or interdepartmentally, or across council areas, often prevails. Streets, parks and estates are treated separately, if at all, with little reference to movement or usage, let alone delight. An understanding of urban design principles, skills and techniques is not common amongst decision-makers and officers responsible for estates, and this combined with the apparent complexity of doing things differently, means that such areas rarely benefit from an urban design approach.

**EC1 NDC**

The EC1 NDC area has a population of around 10,000 people, 94 per cent of whom live in flats on local authority housing estates, although not all are local authority tenants. In 2001 this area was designated as an NDC area and given £52m government funds to kick-start a programme of improvements to health, education, crime

and community safety, employment and the environment. Safety was a predominant issue as was the desire for a greener, more colourful and better maintained area. In 2004, following the production of a Public Space Strategy, the NDC agreed to contribute £6m to improving the streets, parks and communal areas surrounding the blocks of flats.

This Strategy, which was agreed by both the council and the NDC, was a short, simple document, based on urban design principles, skills and techniques. It had a clear vision, and identified areas within the neighbourhood that needed further detailed analysis and substantial redesign before carrying out improvements. It embedded the concept of a green chain - a network of green areas in parks, on streets and estates, interdepartmental processes for delivery, including the use of independent design teams, and it highlighted the need for engagement with residents and stakeholders.

The vision was that ‘by the end of the NDC period, 2010, there would be a significant improvement in the quality of the public spaces, their amenity, maintenance and public safety. The majority of parks, and much of the public space, will be well used and loved’. A great deal of work has now been carried out; some is still in progress and there is more to be done. What has been achieved however is sufficient to demonstrate the value of the approach, and its potential for wider application.

**PROJECT BY PROJECT**

Work was implemented on a project by project basis, within the context of the overall vision and Urban Design Framework Plans, which were generated for different parts of the neighbourhood. These plans were based on analysis and included initial designs for interconnected projects, with indicative costs. The process of developing designs and implementing these projects included many people:

- Local authority officers in planning, street management, parks and leisure, housing and other departments as required
- The NDC officer, with urban design training, working in partnership with local authority officers, coordinating the work
- Design teams
- Councillors, NDC Board Members, Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations, community groups and other residents and stakeholders
- Other public services: police, education.

Residents and stakeholders were engaged at all stages, from the selection of design teams to implementation; they worked closely with the design teams and officers, in Steering Groups and workshops, as well as in wider consultation events. The designers were problem-solvers, appointed for their design and communication skills, which were important to gain support for solutions and ideas that went beyond the experience of many involved, as well as for resolving conflicts.

**OUTCOMES**

The changes in the EC1 NDC area demonstrate that integrated public and communal realm improvements, based on urban design principles, skills and techniques, make a positive difference to people’s lives. All of the places are now well

used, showing that it is possible to alter how neighbourhoods (and estates) feel and function, without wholesale demolition or a major and problematic plan to deliver. The processes may seem complex and time-consuming - involving many people and stages of work, but they led to projects being delivered faster, with much more engagement than the norm, and better value for money.

### URBAN DESIGN

The NDC programme's focus on improving neighbourhoods and funding that could be used creatively, allowed urban design skills and techniques to demonstrate what could be achieved. For the benefits of this approach to work elsewhere, all involved (officers, councillors and residents) should have a basic understanding of the value of urban design, and the qualities that make the places around their homes work for people. They need to be familiar with basic urban design principles, skills and techniques including:

- Visioning
- Analysis
- Generating holistic plans for the neighbourhood, and its constituent parts - going beyond the red line
- Focusing on the needs and potential of places and their users
- Engaging with residents and stakeholders who know the area best
- Preparing Urban Design Framework Plans
- Design skills: architecture, landscape architecture, highway and street design
- Communication skills to work with residents, stakeholders, officers and councillors from a variety of backgrounds
- Working interdepartmentally
- Overall leadership, management and co-ordination
- Procurement options and a knowledge of appropriate practices to carry out works
- Partnership working
- Processes for delivery, including governance and politics
- Pulling together funds from a variety of sources
- Flexibility.

### FUNDING AND ADDING VALUE

EC1 benefitted from having an identifiable and time-limited budget from the outset. This was invaluable to create a sense of urgency, and acted as match-funding. Within the context of a clear strategy and plans, it was used to attract further funds including s106 contributions from surrounding developments. Circumstances are now different but there are still opportunities to identify and assemble funds, pooling resources across departments and organisations, and working with developer contributions. New development in many neighbourhoods could be a catalyst for similar change.

The value of working at a neighbourhood level is now better recognised, and embedded in localism and neighbourhood planning, providing the opportunity for urban design to influence existing places as well as new development. Realising this opportunity however requires a basic understanding of urban design to identify a neighbourhood's potential, begin the visioning



process, identify the scope of work required, develop briefs and then to appoint appropriately skilled teams to work collaboratively with residents, officers and stakeholders.

Ideally everyone working at a neighbourhood level would have this basic understanding from director to caretaker, local authority departments, as well as councillors and registered social landlords (RSLs). As staffing levels shrink and more reliance is placed on consultants, it will be vital to broaden understanding of these skills and techniques if some of the most problematic neighbourhoods and estates are to be satisfactorily improved. They are essential in areas undergoing change, as has been recognised by organisations supporting the development of Neighbourhood Plans. While consultants may have the skills and techniques, they are not well placed to influence the way in which local authorities work.

Recognising the social, economic and environmental value of urban design in new developments and existing neighbourhoods is the first stage; providing the skills and training, and embedding them at all levels is the next challenge and one that now needs to be developed and promoted. ●

↑ Radnor Street Gardens in 2009. The gardens have created a safe and attractive pedestrian route, opportunities for play, seating and a sense of community.

↑↑ and ↑↑↑ St John Street in 2004 and 2008. The dominance of vehicles has been reduced creating a more attractive social space with seating and a better pedestrian environment

● Liz Kessler, former urban designer for EC1 NDC and Professor Georgia Butina Watson, Joint Centre for Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University

# CREATING CITIES FIT FOR CYCLING

Mark Ames tells of how the cycling community came to appreciate urban design



It was the Saturday before the May 2012 Mayoral elections in London. The skies were black, the rain poured down, and a chill wind blew, whilst in the distance, thunder rumbled. Yet, despite these conditions, over 10,000 people assembled on Park Lane in central London, to take part in a bike ride calling for the next Mayor of London to make the capital's streets 'as safe for cycling as they are in the Netherlands'. Some 40,000 additional people signed the London Cycling Campaign's Go Dutch petition, which focused on how to design and build our streets and public spaces. Suddenly, urban design for cyclists was a central issue in the Mayoral election campaign.

↑ The flash rides attracted several thousand cyclists

The consensus on how best to care for cyclists and include them in urban design is changing. In 1934 when Britain's first cycle track alongside the A40 opened in west London, it was met with a frigid response by the bicycle lobby, according to *The Guardian* newspaper. The national cycling campaign was concerned that the introduction of cycle tracks would lead to bicycles being banned from carriageways and set to one side, so as not to inconvenience motorists who were newcomers to the highway. Since then, the number of cyclists on Britain's roads has declined, with increasing car ownership, bigger and busier roads, and car-orientated design. Where attempts have been made to build cycling facilities, they are often conversions of footways into shared-use paths, or off-road leisure routes. The debate has stagnated, whilst cyclist numbers have continued to drop, until now. So what has changed?

## QUICK AND BRAVE

Britain's approach to planning for cyclists is based on *Cyclecraft* by John Franklin (published by HMSO). Franklin advocates learning to cycle at 32km/h as the primary basis for keeping cyclists safe and learning to 'tackle most traffic situations with ease'. It soon became apparent that the majority of cyclists were fit young men aged 18 to 35 – namely, the quick and the brave. Currently, 75 per cent of all cycle journeys in the UK are undertaken by men.

When faced with this advice as a way of dealing with ever-widening and increasingly fast roads, the very young, the elderly, women, ethnic minorities and the less able choose instead not to cycle. Today, in London's Brent Cross for example the local community is divided by a road ten lanes wide where the North Circular road meets the A41 motorway. When faced with places like the Brent Cross interchange, hardly anyone at all dares cycle there; across the entire borough just 1.3 per cent of all trips is by bicycle and just 0.3 per cent of trips to school are by bike.

## CHANGE

But in central London a different story is emerging. According to Transport for London (TfL), cycling levels in the capital have increased by 160 per cent in 10 years. In Hackney, 14 per cent of peak journeys are made by bicycle, in Holborn, 42 cyclists were recently counted passing through a junction in a single phase of the traffic lights. With the arrival of Cycle Superhighways and the city's distinctive blue public 'Boris bikes', London is going some way towards becoming a cyclised city.

On Blackfriars Bridge new design proposals spurred the well-read and highly networked emerging cycling community into action in 2011, and created a movement that has snow-balled as

it gathers pace. Cyclists make up the majority of traffic on the bridge at peak times, and private motorised traffic levels have been decreasing year by year since the introduction of the Congestion Charge. And yet, TfL proposed to re-design the northern junction of the bridge by increasing the speed limit by 10mph, increasing the number of lanes for general traffic from two lanes to three and removing the cycle lanes.

### PROTEST

Blackfriars junction is a notorious place for collisions, with two cycling fatalities in recent years. Despite appeals to the Mayor's office, a letters campaign, and a unanimous motion passed by the London Assembly calling for a re-design, TfL were insistent on forging ahead with their plans. Cyclists took to the streets. A series of 'flash rides' culminated in several thousand cyclists riding in unison, filling the bridge in protest, and broadcast live on national television.

London Cycling Campaign also produced design proposals of their own, showing a solution for cyclists and motorists on the bridge, installing world-class cycling infrastructure, and without taking space away from pedestrians.




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People on bikes started to talk of the rights of all people in cities to be able to cycle to work and school safely

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### RIGHTS

Something had changed. People on bikes started to talk of the rights of all people in cities to be able to cycle to work and school safely. Protest rides were attracting large crowds, and the cycling community recognised that design can play a key role in promoting sustainable safety; the emphasis had previously been on increasing the skill (and the speed) of the rider. Armed with examples from Copenhagen and throughout the Netherlands, people called for best practice design to be applied to London. More protests followed, including a ride to Westminster on the eve of a parliamentary debate on cycle safety, following the launch of The Times' Cities Fit for Cycling campaign. There was a feverish burst of campaigning leading up to the re-election of Boris Johnson as Mayor of London in May 2012, following his agreement to Go Dutch after all.

### NEW DESIGNS

Consequently designs for London's latest Cycle Superhighway have been released following Dutch principles - separating cyclists from traffic flow, allowing two abreast cycling, and for people of all ages and abilities. At the national level, a Parliamentary inquiry into 'Getting Britain Cycling' begins in February 2013 covering the principles of cycle-friendly planning and street design.

Design practitioners must now ensure that they consider all road users, especially the most vulnerable, when thinking about the space between buildings. Having seen the damage that inadequate, poorly thought-out or dangerous substandard cycle facilities can do, it is clear that the political

will to want to build cycle facilities is equal in importance only to the design knowledge needed on how to build them. Designers should heed Jan Gehl's warning that our cities seem to have been designed from a bird's eye view, and dropped in situ from a great height without any consideration for conditions on the ground. They must constantly ask themselves (irrespective of what the design brief or highway engineering manual might say) whether their designs are fit for purpose, and how they will really work. It is essential that the design community is fully versed in the tools available to help create cities truly fit for cycling. ●

↑ Cycling is now attracting women again  
 ↑↑ Best practice from Europe will influence London's Cycle Superhighway

● Mark Armes, editor, i b i  
 k e l o n d o n

# PEOPLE, PLACE AND VALUE IN URBAN DESIGN

Sophia de Sousa, Melissa Lacide and Louise Dredge report on urban design as a process and shared goal



At a time of immense challenges and transformations for the social, economic and political landscapes, The Glass-House Community Led Design has been attempting to explore and unpick evolving attitudes to people, place and value and the relationship between the three. At the heart of this, our annual national debate series *Putting People in their Place* in partnership with The Academy of Urbanism, has been asking people all over the UK to consider where and what value lies in place-making.

This focus on value brought us to the UDG's National Urban Design Conference where we found many of the emerging themes married closely with our line of argument that involving and considering people in place is essential to great place-making. Current practice does not support a collaborative place-making process that effectively brings together people, place and value. Policy frameworks, funding models and procurement practices still have a way to go to facilitate a process which delivers sustainable urbanism and leads to great places.

The work of The Glass-House is rooted in the principle that the design and quality of place matters, that it has a huge impact on those who live, work and play in cities, towns and villages. We also believe that good urban design should be informed by local people, organisations and places, and that local knowledge and participation in place-making will lead to more successful and sustainable neighbourhoods.

## PARTICIPATION

To stimulate debate on these themes, The Glass-House delivered an interactive workshop 'Build Your Neighbourhood', using one of many participatory design techniques, to explore how places grow and develop; how a range of stakeholders interact with place; and the

relationship between people, place and value. Role-play within the exercise allowed participants to experience the perspectives of others and to explore how visioning processes may or not enable a spectrum of voices to be heard.

Workshop participants were divided into three groups and asked to design a neighbourhood using a combination of materials provided including building blocks, paper, post-it notes and pens. Each group was given either *people*, *place* or *value* as its theme, and participants were asked to take on various different stakeholder roles within their group. At the end of the exercise each group was asked to present its vision for their neighbourhood.

This was fast and dirty urban design, groups having only 10 minutes each to create their places. However, even within this short timeframe the groups produced some very interesting and vastly different processes, outcomes and visions, which illustrated how different stakeholder roles and priorities influence how neighbourhoods grow and change. It was also clear that the theme with which they started their discussion, and the participatory visioning process, had a marked impact on how they talked about and informed the places they were creating.

## PEOPLE

The group that focused on people were given different community stakeholder roles which were either interest groups such as young people, older people, faith groups, or organisations that provided some people-focused services within a community such as schools and local businesses. This group created a compact, low density, suburban neighbourhood that had a cohesive community and sense of shared vision around place serving the interests of the people. The outcome was a green spine that ran in the centre of neighbourhood, which included community gardens and

↑ Build Your Neighbourhood workshop with a community group in Sydenham, London 2011

allotments with links to local businesses. There was also a strong faith base and safe places were created to walk around. The vision grew from a neighbourhood that was organic but had a strong presence of planning principles.

### VALUE

This group was a mix of development project teams, divided into a local authority on one side and the property industry on the other. The physical outcome produced was a neighbourhood with a river edge to the town with development taking place near a cathedral and heritage area. The two groups struggled to negotiate: one team wanted to prioritise flood alleviation, whilst the other team wanted to prioritise the development of schools and major employers in order to attract new people to the neighbourhood. The group was caught up in conflict and made decidedly less progress than the other two groups, failing to create either a shared vision or a defined neighbourhood.

### PLACE

The place group was assigned a broad spectrum of stakeholder roles, including Network Rail, the local authority, local business owners, the police, civic societies and community-based organisations, tenants and residents groups. This group began by establishing the infrastructure network, creating an urban, high-density neighbourhood with connecting routes. The outcome was a walkable neighbourhood with a station square forming a central area for local businesses. Connecting routes from this area extended to higher density developments and a variety of house types that were further out, but within walking distance. There were also opportunities for allotments and local artisans. The vision grew from what stakeholders felt ought to develop in a neighbourhood and a place that generated movement.

### INFLUENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

One cannot draw sweeping generalisations from what was a quick exercise carried out by people who are all passionate about urban design. However, it was easy to see that the way the groups operated was influenced by their starting theme, by the combination of stakeholder roles and by the individual characters of the people around the table.

The creative methods and techniques used are a way to design and visualise a place without pre-definition and to enable participants to explore the concept of neighbourhood from a wider perspective. The simple but liberating 3D modelling, without the requirement of attention to scale or precision, helps generate ideas about the broad concepts of place and the different values we attach to it. The allocated roles help participants step into a perspective which is not their own, in order to explore the opportunities and challenges of a broad spectrum of interests coming together to inform how a place develops.

Community participation and leadership in the creation and improvement of buildings, homes, spaces and neighbourhoods can add cultural, economic and social value. Involving local people in the design of cities, towns and villages is a great source of valuable knowledge about how people experience, use and interact with places in different



ways. It provides insight into what different stakeholders value and can demystify that which they fear. It also builds local relationships and networks that may prove vital to the future life of the place.

### AGENTS FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

A well-designed place can in turn foster social interaction, inclusion and participation as well as lead to connections (to physical spaces and people), networks and neighbourliness. Great places impact positively on the health and well-being of people and can enable people to feel part of a place, as well as create a sense of identity and shared ownership. They create opportunities for activity and enterprise and for personal growth. All places have hidden assets, particularly skills and knowledge that should be tapped into and shared. Urban designers can assist communities to become agents for positive social change and creatively inspire communities in the process of place-making.

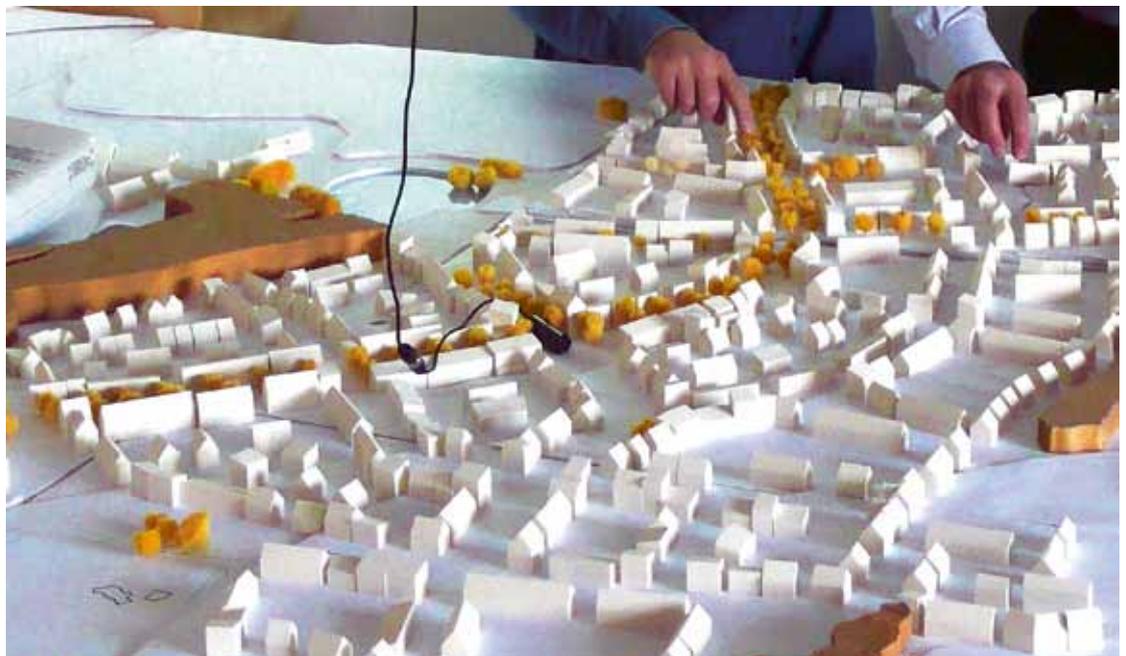
Good participatory design processes create the opportunity for different stakeholders and investors to come together, have an informed and sensible conversation about how places work, what they see as the qualities of an area that they would like to maintain and those they would like to change. Creating a shared vision for place does not mean that every person around the table will agree on every point. It is about a community in the broadest sense, coming together, setting shared parameters and priorities and building an understanding of the needs and priorities of a complex network of social, economic, political and environmental values. Great place-making can be achieved only when we understand and act on the value of what people can bring to the process. ●

↑ Mapping workshop in Loxwood, West Sussex 2012  
 ↑↑ Model making at Spaces by Design in Dunblane, Scotland 2010; all images copyright of The Glass-House Community Led Design.

● Sophia de Sousa, Chief Executive, Melissa Lacide, Senior Advisor and Louise Dredge, Communications Manager, The Glass-House - a national charity supporting and promoting public participation and leadership in the design of the built environment

# MODEL LAB: MAKING URBAN DESIGN REAL

Roger Evans explores this hands-on approach to improving urban design



## THE NEED FOR GOOD URBAN FORM

There is a maxim that 'writing about music is like dancing about architecture'. The comparison could equally apply to discussing urban form. Yet good urban form is critical in making successful places and should be a central consideration of urban design. Whether working at city-scale, neighbourhood scale or with individual streets, it is the spatial relationship between the components that will determine the quality and efficiency of urban areas. Put simply, the same quantity of buildings, streets and landscape can be arranged poorly, adequately or in ways that raise values and spirits.

Why do historic towns often have better urban form than much urbanisation from the last fifty years? The process by which urban plans are currently developed tends not to produce good urban form three reasons. Firstly, historic towns generally grow incrementally by plots and streets. This allows design decisions to be taken in succession i.e. groups of buildings can be added/varied in response to what exists, but with a broad rather than fixed notion of a wider plan. This is very different from a process where an overall diagram for a neighbourhood is produced and then the component elements filled in - a 'downward causation' where design decisions at a larger-scale level of organisation exert huge influence on smaller-scale levels.

Secondly, this incremental process enables design decisions to be made standing on the plot, being directly aware of the lie of the land, the direction of the wind and the relationships of surrounding buildings *at full scale*. Most new large-

scale development gets designed at a relatively small scale, working from an overall diagram down to smaller areas, in 2D (or 2D visualisations of three dimensions) and often remotely.

Thirdly, the form of historic towns often enables fine-tuning over time, in response to changing circumstances, through the *adaptation in both form and land-use* at plot level. Pieces of town that result from the involvement of many hands tend to be not only the most valued but the most valuable.

We appear to bounce between urban design preoccupations with either product or process, yet the study of urban form shows that the two are inter-related. How can we recapture the process by which towns and cities grow organically? How can we simulate the sensation of being immersed within a three-dimensional environment when designing? How do we facilitate conversations about urban form in a way that is inclusive?

## WORKING MODELS

I have always designed using working models and at studio REAL we have been developing a method of using working models in the urban design process that we believe helps to recapture some of the merits of the incremental growth process exhibited by older towns. We have dubbed the method Model Lab and it is enabling conversations about urban form and the production of urban design options in real-time using new technology, including the same micro cameras that are used by BBC's *Spring Watch* programme.

The approach is based on Christopher Alexander's San Francisco experiment which led to his publication *A New Theory of Urban Design*.

↑ The 1:400 scale working model of a development parcel, with the bullet camera projecting an eye level view as the model is adjusted



The two key aspects of Alexander's method that we have taken forward were to use working models at sufficiently large scale (Alexander used 1/32' to the foot), and a process which facilitated organic growth whereby each addition to the model has to take account of what exists and also contribute to a wider, future whole. So there is both a physical kit and a process that we have sought to build upon.

Rather than build every model part from scratch, we have built a modular kit of parts that replicates the building depths and storey heights of most building types: this comprises several thousand components. The total kit of parts is sufficient to model about 100 hectares of built form at densities of between 5,000 and 7,000 m<sup>2</sup>/hectare. In practice, the kit can model over 150 hectares when green infrastructure is included. Landmark buildings in a town can be simply CAD modelled for 3D printing.

We have found the scale of the model to be critical and use 1:400 (close to Alexander's 1/32'). This makes the models about 50 per cent bigger than the usual 1:500 scale and much easier to visualise urban spaces. The model is typically built on a contour base. A mobile gantry has been built which will span a model of up to 4 metres wide (in its shortest dimension) from which a digital SLR camera is suspended. This camera is used to record design iterations in plan form where a grid of photos is digitally assembled to provide scalable plans. A miniature video camera (or bullet camera) provides an eye-level view along streets or other parts of the public realm. Routes can be recorded as video animations and as a series of stills, for serial vision.

The method is simple and speedy to use. Large models of existing town centres can be assembled by two or three people in a day. Design interventions are recorded in real time. At the end of a one-day workshop, scalable plans derived from the overhead photographs can be generated in both hard copy and digital CAD formats.

#### **RULES OF ASSEMBLY**

We have developed Rules of Assembly which can be used to guide the relationships between different built elements. The rules or relationships have a default or standard value and have been derived from practice, observation or identified by other authors. By default values, we mean that such values are widely shared, although perhaps modified to a

degree by climate and culture. For example, most people would expect that a building is accessed from its principal frontage, or that a corner building would have its principal entrance off the more important street. The rules are not hard and fast, and breaking them can result in highly distinctive places, but if too many relationships are broken, then the resulting built environment is unlikely to be legible.

These 22 rules are organised into three spatial levels:

#### **LEVEL 1: SETTLEMENT PATTERN WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE**

##### **Topography and settlement**

- 1 Plan by watersheds: a hill town or contained town

##### **Location and movement**

- 2 Growth is best sited along the best-connected routes
- 3 Where possible, run streets with contours or perpendicular to contours
- 4 Create a logical street hierarchy

##### **Land use and density**

- 5 Green corridors should follow natural features and link areas of high habitat value
- 6 The best connected streets attract land uses which need high footfall
- 7 The least well connected streets are quieter and attract uses such as family housing
- 8 A clear hierarchy of local, district and town centres serve everyday needs within a ten minute walk.

#### **LEVEL 2: NEIGHBOURHOOD**

##### **Street pattern and urban spaces**

- 9 Streets generally follow fairly straight desire-lines (an aid to orientation). The more important streets in a hierarchy have longer straights or segments
- 10 The width of street corridors narrows through centres
- 11 Nodes should be located at the intersection of the most important routes; cross-roads are highly legible and aid orientation
- 12 Permeability should increase in and around local, district and town centres

##### **Plot and street**

- 13 Urban growth is by streets and plots, rather than blocks

↑ The overhead gantry provides scalable plan images to record options  
 ↖ The Chase at Newhall, which was informed by a design code derived from working models

- 14 Highest densities are along the highest footfalls
- Plot development**
- 15 A greater continuity of frontage is along the more important routes
- 16 Sites which are highly visible from one or more directions attract landmark buildings, prominent sites attract marker buildings.

**LEVEL 3: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PLOT AND STREET**

**Buildings and street**

- 17 Buildings address the street with public fronts and private backs to buildings, unless purposely designed as pavilions
- 18 On corner sites, front doors are located against the more important street with a secondary return frontage to the minor street
- 19 Important buildings are located on the streets uppermost in the hierarchy, often against the larger public spaces
- 20 Buildings on street corners address both streets and have principal elevation to the more important street in the hierarchy

**Urban space**

- 21 All parts of the public realm should receive natural surveillance from at least one habitable room
- 22 Formal green infrastructure should be overlooked by building frontages.

Our working method requires that at whatever level or scale the design exercise is being conducted, the effects at the two other levels are also considered. The Rules of Assembly are then used to inform a critical review of the design options generated, at all scales. Such rules could equally be applied to design exercises on paper, but working in three dimensions and at a scale that clearly visualises urban spaces makes the value of the rules immediately apparent – explicit rather than implied by a paper plan.

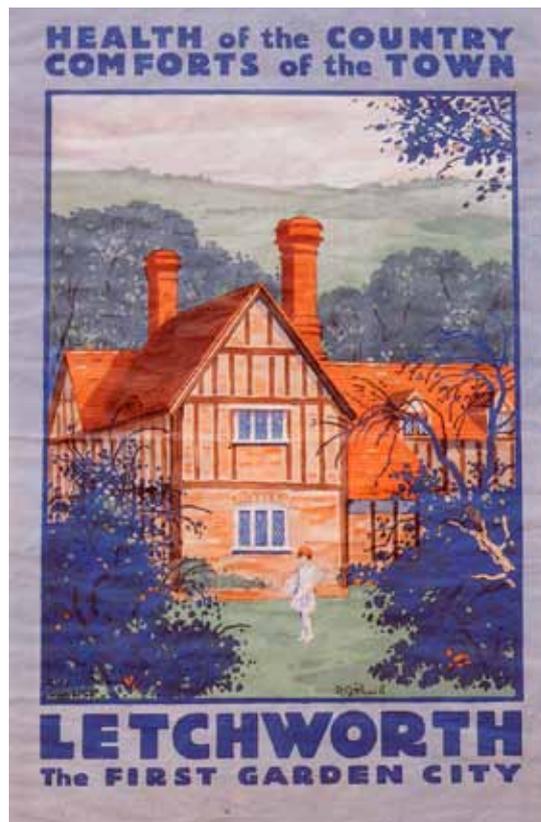
**CONCLUSIONS**

We have been increasingly using working models as a tool for designing and discussing urban form on most of our urban design and planning projects. The resulting built environments have benefited hugely from this design process. Participants readily read the models and engage in modifications far more willingly than with drawings. Working models certainly generate unexpected design outcomes that are often more in tune with the *genius loci* than always working from large area to small places, which is the opposite of organic growth. Above all, the models enable meaningful exchanges between all parties, often without recourse to words. The method continues to evolve and we welcome collaboration with others in helping shape urban areas. ●

● Roger Evans, architect and urban planner, and director of urban design consultancy studio | REAL

# THE OXFORD CHARTER

Jon Rowland and Nicholas Falk set out a manifesto for 21st Century suburbs



→ One of the early posters advertising the appeal of the suburban garden city

*Our task – as professional people and as citizens - is to formulate standards; to set forth as a conference ten or twelve propositions on which we are willing to stand up. Let us begin this, here and now.*

The Big City, *The Politics of Truth* by C Wright Mills (2008)

**HISTORIC MANIFESTOS**

The idea of a manifesto is a call to action, and is a reflection of times of political and economic uncertainty, like today. Any manifesto is a broad rhetorical statement rather than explanation of the detail. Since the demise of CIAM, not much has been promoted in the way of a charter or manifesto for the design of housing. Although recent polemics have focused on particular aspects of our cities, it is the more prosaic publications that have emerged through the political system that have made the most impact. Therefore the manifesto is perhaps no longer heroic but consensual. Domestic manifestos include *Quality in Town and Country*, *By Design*, *Responsive Environments* and *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. Parallel to these was the *Charter of the New Urbanism* (CNU), which was a response to placeless sprawl. Recently the important *Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism*, produced with the Academy of Urbanism, and the *Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth* set out principles to underpin sustainable city growth.

Excepting perhaps the CNU, these manifestos have skirted around the sub-urban condition, perhaps because direct action is politically difficult for housing. The government's decreasing ability to do anything significant, and corporate strength of major developers and volume builders, has led to paralysis in housing provision, disempowering communities. We are caught between individual values, developers' commercial interests and public values, and localism does not resolve these conflicts. Housing manifestos have become the stumbling block of political parties, where promises are made, but delivery is problematic. On the other hand design manifestos are often esoteric and metaphysical. So we may be on safer ground if we take a more integrated approach to promoting the way ahead.

### STATEMENT OF INTENT

In the absence of a Sub-urban Task Force, or an Academy of Sub-Urbanism and a certain reluctance by the UDG to commit to a manifesto, the time has come for a statement of intent. The debate on new suburbs was proposed to UDG most recently in 2010. One of the themes within the October 2012 UDG conference was the value of place-making, not just monetary value, but also social and cultural value. A group of delegates took part in a workshop exploring these. The outcome is the basis for what might be called The Oxford Charter for Sub-urban Design, which moves away from the top-down nature of many manifestos, to be based on the way people want to live in suburbs in the 21st century. If there is one philosophy underpinning this manifesto it is sustainability – and not just related to climate change and energy resource efficiency, but social and economic change as well.

### GARDEN CITY LEGACY

The Oxford Charter recognises the influence of a manifesto that still resonates with us, namely Ebenezer Howard's *The Garden Cities of Tomorrow* relevant today due to political opportunism. His manifesto saw housing as part of a proposition for social and economic improvement. Today's politicians have avoided the social compact of the Garden City movement and its application to the suburban expansion of cities, and concentrated on greenery. This movement held at its heart the general betterment of the urban dweller. It promoted the best of both town and country, 'no smoke and no slums', 'bright homes and gardens', where rents, rates and prices would be low, and where there would be 'freedom and co-operation'.

Howard's greatest idea was to create a network of settlements connected by high quality public transport, in which the increase in land values would be reinvested in community facilities. His ideas were foiled by the reluctance of investors to look to the longer term (unlike their Continental counterparts). Today volume house-builders, checked rather than guided by under-resourced local authorities, and helped by escalating house prices, provide illusory financial values to those who got on the housing ladder early enough.

Whilst the success of the Garden City was limited, that of the Garden Suburb, as an urban extension, has remained a cornerstone of suburban development. Parker and Unwin ensured its original principles were not just about design or landscape,

and Dame Henrietta Barnett in Hampstead, ensured that beautiful streets were underpinned by an ethos of co-operation and control. The Garden Suburb saw new forms of tenure other than renting and home ownership. It involved co-partnership (co-ownership and co-tenancy) and the sharing of facilities with all that that implies. To maximise the common wealth, an approach to land pricing, infrastructural investment and returns through raised values, rates and sales was proposed. Whilst the more political, social and economic aspects of the Garden City movement have fallen by the wayside, the image and branding of the Garden Suburb has become part of our psyche because it provided an answer to the social, economic and environmental challenges of its time.

### A PLACE FOR FAMILIES

Since then, the idea of the neighbourhood as place for families to put down roots has changed. Houses are seen primarily as investments. Changing household demographics, exacerbated by the corporatisation of the development market and its products, have led to anonymous developments, poorly designed and offering little quality of life. With the collapse of confidence in private banking in 2008, it is time for a new paradigm where housing is not primarily the mainstay of a credit industry but a place to live well.

If one looks at the Government's (DEFRA) Sustainable Development Indicators these challenges remain. Conspicuous by its absence and buried in the sub-heading of Land Use and Development (the responsibility of DCLG) is the statement about 'raising design standards so that the requirements for design are the most exacting yet.'

The question is why with all this good intent we have paralysis and inertia in the provision of housing, reducing numbers and quality, and what Nick Boles, Planning Minister, has termed the 'pig-ugliness' of British housing: 'We are trapped in a vicious circle. People look at the new housing estates that have been bolted onto their towns and villages in recent decades and observe that few of them are beautiful. Indeed not to put too fine a point on it, many of them are pig-ugly. In a nutshell because we don't build beautifully, people don't let us build much. And because we don't build much we can't afford to build beautifully.'

We could take issue with the last statement: the Government can't have it both ways – especially as current policies rely on an unimaginative private sector.

### DIFFERENT APPROACH?

But why build differently? According to WWF's *One Planet Living in the Suburbs*, 86 per cent of us live there, CABI's audits indicated that 82 per cent of housing is poor or average, and we only invest 3.5 per cent of our GDP in new houses compared with 6 per cent in Germany and France. According to the RIBA's recent survey on Future Homes, only 25 per cent of people said they would prefer a new home to an old one. This dysfunctional relationship and the barriers to improvement are set out in Jon Rowland and Clare Mitchell's paper *The Quality of Life in Cities – the 21st Century Suburb*, namely the contradictions between consumer choice, values, procurement and design,

institutional and invisible constraints. It points to the lack of a value system or philosophical underpinning to reflect what form we want our places and neighbourhoods to take, to the number of organisations and agencies involved, fragmented decision-making, and promotes the importance of Quality of Life Indicators.

In *Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood* (1999 & 2009), David Rudlin and Nicholas Falk explored models designed to meet 21st century needs and the issues that stop us building places where we would like to live. The conclusions and implications for local and central government were set out in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report *Building Communities that Last*, based on the experience of 13 new communities that are trying to be different. The principles were also set out in the *Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth*, based on places that work well in the UK, the Dutch Randstadt and Freiburg. It is clear that the implicit values of many of the new Dutch and German suburbs respond much more to Garden Suburb principles and offer greater consumer choice. The *Freiburg Charter* sets out 12 guiding principles that embed values such as diversity, cooperation, tolerance, and reliability, and has shown that not only can a city set a vision, but can promote, control and develop it. The result is that we now look to Europe for our suburban housing exemplars.

### CHALLENGES

The five design challenges that we need to meet are how to:

- accommodate a demographically changing population
- improve the design of our built environment
- make new housing more affordable
- address quality of life and other values
- reduce our carbon footprint and energy costs.

So the following draft Charter comprises ten interdependent themes that emerged from the UDG conference, and recognises the relationship between the hard urban design of physical masterplans and house design, and the soft urban design of support mechanisms to give place meaning. It tries to ensure that we build new places which are delightful to live in, that will sell well, and will also stand the test of time. ●

### REFERENCE

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) *Solutions: How local authorities can build sustainable urban neighbourhoods*.



# THE OXFORD CHARTER

A draft UDG manifesto for sub-urban Design

Our suburbs should be living places for the 21st century that reflect our changing lifestyles and values, where all of us would like to live for some part of our lives, rather than be pale copies of past models. We should stop planning and building large developments of poor quality housing, on the edge of towns and cities, that are badly designed, have few or no facilities, are not well connected, and reinforce opposition. The collapse of house-building and financial confidence provides a unique opportunity to draw inspiration from the best of places, and build communities that offer the long-term capital growth that financial institutions are looking for. The demand for the standard product from the volume builder is over. There is a need for a much more long-sighted approach to the design of our 21st century suburbs.

An analysis of the best models past and present suggests the following ten most important and interdependent design principles and values, for schemes of more than 500 homes or 20 hectares, each of which could be assessed and benchmarked:

### 1. AFFORDABILITY

**Strategic planning and spatial urban design should shape growth.** Much can be learned from European experience of local authorities working together at the sub-regional level.

- a Government should establish new fiscal mechanisms that bring down the cost of land and make new homes widely affordable, by opening up new sources of private funding, such as infrastructure bonds, and borrowing against the rise of values once development is complete.
- b New roles are required for our financial and other institutions, building societies, banks, insurance companies, utility organisations and social, economic and transport organisations. Greater investment in improving the quality of life in our suburbs through a Green Deal will help reduce our ecological footprint. This could improve the opportunities for people to part-share, or build their own homes over time as well as provide a greener environment, by designing



out 'invisible constraints'.

- c. Local authorities should lead the way in promoting, parcelling, and servicing development in partnership with landowners and developers.

## 2. CIVILITY

**Our suburbs should be places where it is a pleasure to live**, which are attractive, safe, well-connected and where families can grow, children can play, and where good physical design is underpinned by good social, economic and institutional support – (hard and soft urban design). They should be designed to provide a sense of place, identity, ownership and belonging.

- a. The neighbourhood should be organised to be understandable, simple, easy to get around, and be characterised by different areas with different identities and sense of place.
- b. A community focus is desirable. Shops, school and other facilities for new and existing residents, that reflect local needs help promote civic pride and community spirit should be designed and managed to encourage positive interaction. This may need to be on the edge where it can serve a large enough catchment area to be viable.
- c. Streets should be designed for the benefit of the pedestrian and cyclist, and enhanced through the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), tree planting, and informal spaces. Parking should not dominate but contribute to making streets look lively.

## 3. INCLUSIVITY

**The new suburb should reflect the wider demographics in age and income and social balance.** Establishing balanced communities of incomes and ages will add to the sense of community pride and identity, and allow a development to mature in an equitable manner without residents having to move away.

- a. Streets and neighbourhoods should allow for a full mix of residents and not zoned by tenure or cost.
- b. Covenants should ensure that the balance is retained over time (for example using a Community Land Trust).
- c. Existing communities should benefit from adjacent new urban extensions and not find themselves in a 'them and us' situation. That means an improved and integrated physical environment, increased accessibility to jobs, shops, leisure and other facilities, as well as the

certainty of visually attractive and beautiful development to provide them with a better quality of life.

## 4. CONNECTIVITY

**Connectivity and movement must be rethought:**

they are key elements of suburban design. Good suburbs offer a choice of jobs and services within easy reach. Layout and transport connections should give primacy to walking and cycling. Parking should be managed to make the best use of land and create livelier streets. Streets should be safer places for children through the uses of shared surfaces and home-zones where the car takes second place.

- a. New neighbourhoods should be located in places with adequate infrastructure, existing or planned, and be designed as walkable communities.
- b. Public transport should be good enough to attract people away from their cars.
- c. Densities should be related to the quality of public transport with higher densities closest to good transport connections.

## 5. DURABILITY

**Homes should be designed to allow for changes in lifestyle and demographics with scope for personalisation.** New and diverse forms of tenure and the rediscovery of previous ones are required. To do this the housing market should be widened through new fiscal and other mechanisms, and new more innovative developers and designers, including self-builders, co-operatives and local authorities, encouraged.

- a. New forms of tenure are needed, such as long-term leasehold and rent; co-ownership/co-partnership and co-tenancy; as well as shared equity, social and private rent, and owner occupation, and custom-building, and should form a significant part of the suburb.
- b. New homes should be large enough and adaptable enough to allow for a range of layouts and uses. They should be designed for longevity, capable of extension, with plots earmarked for later development. New typologies will ensure changing lifestyles can be accommodated.
- c. Homes should be marketed in terms of space and not rooms. The current system of using dwellings or habitable rooms/hectare as an indicator of density, or a determinant of economic value, has led to the UK building the smallest houses with the largest number of rooms in Europe.

↑ From left to right:

- Public play areas make for happier families in Reiselhof urban extension, Freiburg
- Giving primacy to walking and cycling, Houten, Holland
- Garden square housing with parking beneath, Dickens Heath, Solihull
- Photovoltaic roof panels to reduce energy consumption, whilst edible gardens provide sustenance and a living public realm, Graylingwell Park, Chichester



↑ Streets designed for the benefit of pedestrians and cyclists

↗ An 1843 house designed by Pugin has not changed much in 170 years

## 6. QUALITY

**Designs should reflect local traditions, and future priorities.** Local authorities should have robust design policies which, together with staged applications, design quality indicators (such as *Building for Life* criteria) and Design Reviews will help to ensure high quality design. Quality of Life Indicators should play a more important role in the design and delivery of our suburbs.

- a. The masterplan and design codes should be simple enough to be readily understandable by existing and new residents.
- b. Variety should be encouraged to suit individual taste, with streets and closes that are easy to navigate.
- c. The development as a whole should look of its time, securing economies where there is no loss of quality, for example through new forms of construction.

## 7. BIO-DIVERSITY

**The development should add to the natural capital.** The new suburb should have a green framework at its core that will enhance bio-diversity and improve the quality of open space and public realm.

- a. Space should be given over to food production and play to offer a full and healthy life.
- b. The boundaries between town and country should be broken down, improving links between the two.
- c. The development should support much more wildlife than it displaces by a well designed and managed green infrastructure of parks, green streets, SUDS, multi-use public spaces and hedgerows.

## 8. EFFICIENCY

**Addressing climate change is critical** and the design of the new suburb should help to reduce the carbon footprint and energy costs, and enhance the provision of renewable energy and resource efficiency. This means re-appraising supply chains, introducing new smart technologies, management techniques and changing constructions practices; (running costs should offer significant savings over older buildings). Resource utilisation and management should be considered from the outset.

- a. Local forms of renewable energy should be supported where densities allow.
- b. Water use and management should be turned into a feature.
- c. Waste management should be unobtrusive with the minimum environmental impact.

## 9. COMMUNALITY

**Collaboration between all parties involved is central to success.** Collaborative programmes of development and co-production are needed, with councils, developers and communities participating in the design of their neighbourhoods and the extension of their towns. Neighbourliness is critical, and promotes mutual support and greater sharing of resources, both in terms of social and economic initiatives and the provision of safe, secure and well-designed environments to live in.

- a. The basic aims and constraints should be set out and agreed at the start, in a Design Charter. Community ownership of land, community trusts, development agreements, covenants and other legal mechanisms such as codes are required to ensure that new development is visually delightful, as well as functioning well.
- b. Smaller building and development companies should be involved, including housing associations and self-build groups, by providing enough serviced sites.
- c. Land values should reflect the agreed development framework and not drive it.

## 10. RESPONSIBILITY

**Ongoing management should maintain quality standards and promote a sense of community.**

The establishment of longer term involvement by developers, in the form of stewardship, management, covenants and tenure will result in well-designed higher quality development. (Grosvenor Estates or Bourneville's garden suburban developments are examples of such historic and contemporary development).

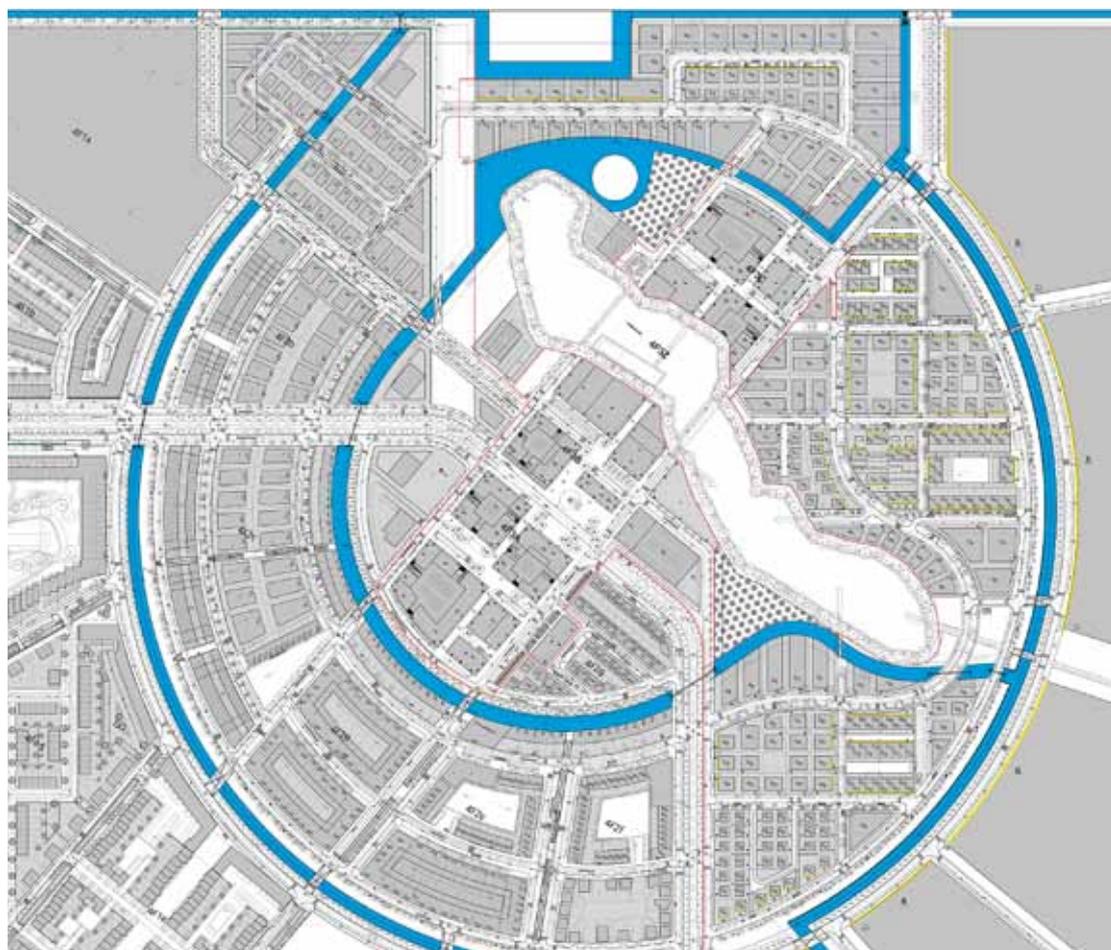
- a. Communal areas should be designed and managed in ways that engage local people as fully as possible.
- b. Standards should be written into covenants that future residents have to enter into.
- c. Sufficient funding should be allocated to supporting community initiatives that bring people together and enable them to realise their potential.

Finally, taking a cue from the Charter of the New Urbanism, we dedicate ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks neighbourhoods, districts, cities, and environments.

It is time for the debate to begin and a manifesto to be adopted. ●

# PLOT-BASED URBANISM

Jonathan Tarbatt's approach to empowering local communities



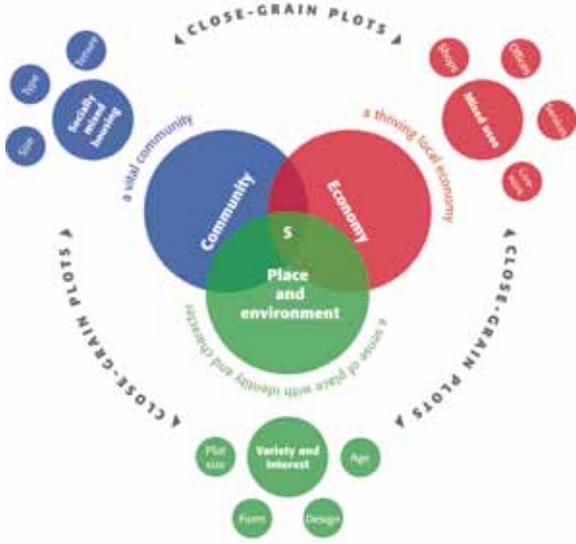
## INTRODUCTION

Many of the places that we cherish are characterised by diversity, variety and a close grain of mixed uses and mixed communities. They often appear to have evolved more or less unplanned, but they were all planned to some extent, however long ago. What is essentially different about these places compared to most new ones, is the close grain of plots that underpins them. Close-grain plots provide a substrate for generating a diversity of building form that can support *other* forms of diversity in the built environment: variety in the design and age of buildings, mixed housing types, sizes and tenures, and different land uses. Before the 20th century, plot-based urbanism was the norm rather than the exception. Now there is a tendency to master plan on a block-by-block basis, which results in more homogenous blocks with less variety, and much less scope for adaptation. As older towns and cities have been transformed by the gradual amalgamation of plots to facilitate larger buildings, we have in effect lost the plot. While there are many historical precedents for

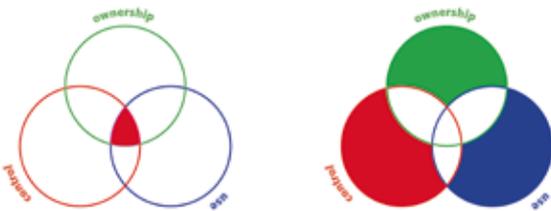
plot-based urbanism, until recently, it has been disregarded as an obsolete mode of development at odds with the demands of the modern property market.

Self-building might have the potential to give plot-based urbanism a new lease of life, while helping to build more sustainable places and communities from the bottom up. It offers an alternative approach to procurement that empowers individuals and groups to take a more proactive role in the design and construction of their own home (or business) than is currently the norm in the UK. This could range from building one's own home (or business), hiring an architect and building contractor, hybrid arrangements like fitting-out a building's shell, or to a bespoke or catalogue design. But local people do not produce good places spontaneously. For self-building to realise its place-making potential, plots need to be configured and aggregated to achieve broader place-making objectives with the necessary enabling mechanisms in place for communities to take advantage of them.

↑ Extract from OMA masterplan for Homeruskwartier Centrum, Almere Poort, by OMA Architects, courtesy of the City of Almere



S = sustainable development



**WHAT IS PLOT-BASED URBANISM?**

Plots are the smallest increment of land holding, and they have a direct relationship to the street. This means they can be developed differently from one another, and at different times; this is the key to their potential for generating diversity in the built environment, and, in turn, for empowering local communities.

Plot-based urbanism does not reject current urban design thinking about place-making, rather it tries to add back in a missing ingredient, i.e. the plot. Plots can facilitate mixed uses horizontally or vertically, accommodate lower density suburban housing development with high-rise housing typologies, and with fewer disadvantages associated with either. Aggregated into medium-high-density perimeter blocks, they can meet broader urban design objectives: enclosing streets, distinguishing between fronts and backs, allowing for variety and adaptability, incremental change, and so on.

Although plot-based master plans tend to employ the same block types, they differ in one key

respect: subdividing the block into discrete plots for release to the market before they are developed. This allows a wider range of parties to participate in the development process: individuals, groups, low-volume developers smaller design practices etc. and the end-user. In this sense, plot-based urbanism is synonymous with self-building, but the reverse is not. Plot-based urban design implies the creation of a plot plan – a cadastral master plan – through which self-building can be regulated. Its intended outcome is something more deliberately urbane or urban, than lone self-builders acquiring sites and building one-off houses.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?**

Academics have analysed the way in which ownership, control and use is distributed in different development models. In a typical social housing block, for example, ownership, control and use of the property are dispersed, because the building is owned by one party, operated by another and occupied by a third: the tenants, who, as a result of being deprived of both ownership and control, lack motivation to look after the property or the power to adapt it to their own needs.

This contrasts with a self-build plot-based development, where ownership, control and use of the property can be unified, allowing change to take place incrementally and with the user’s needs. One approach is resistant to change, the other adaptable, making it inherently more sustainable. Self-building also has more direct benefits to participants including lower build costs, greater choice, an intentional community, local multiplier effects, and pride.

**WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?**

The property market however tends to prefer larger developments that can achieve economies of scale. There is also a shortage of self-build plots, particularly serviced ones in the right locations. Most significant, land banks are owned by a small number of major players, and, in contrast to countries like the Netherlands, which is still making its own land, land costs are high. Providing serviced plots requires significant up-front investment that can only be recouped on sale of the plots, so it involves risk, and a longer-term approach to investment by the infrastructure provider. Meanwhile lenders are suspicious of the self-build market, particularly since the downturn in the economy.

**PLOT-BASED URBANISM AND SELF-BUILDING**

One solution is to reintroduce self-building as a mainstream procurement route. The significance of self-building or self procurement in general and cooperative self-building in particular, is that it infers a bottom-up approach to procurement instead of top-down. This means that it side-steps involvement by conventional property developers, and in doing so, shifts the rationale for decision-making away from purely economic considerations. Working in groups, building cooperatives can achieve savings for a smaller scale of development, which would otherwise be unattractive to conventional developers and volume house builders. Also, by coming to the market with the intention of working together,

↑ Oblique aerial view of Tübingen Sudstadt. Image by Manfred Grohe, courtesy Tübingen project development department  
 ↑↑ The potential benefits of plot-based urbanism (Tarbatt, 2012).  
 ↑↑↑ Dispersed versus unified models of ownership, control and use (Redrawn after Akbar, 1988)



building cooperatives can overcome some of the difficulties inherent in integrating different uses together, logistical arrangements, party walls and coordinating shared facilities. Some volume developers and house builders have also expressed interest in providing serviced plots for sale as part of their development offer. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is now beginning to include a requirement for self-build plots in its development briefs.

In addition, the government has introduced a raft of measures that individually or in combination can be used to promote community-led self-build projects. They include:

- New policies in the *Housing Strategy 2011* (England) and *National Planning Policy Framework*, which explicitly promote self-build housing, and require local authorities to take a more proactive approach to planning, monitoring and enabling self-build developments.
- New and underused powers in Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) and Local Development Orders (LDOs), Community Right to Bid, Community Right to Build, Community Land Trusts (CLTs), Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and Asset transfers.
- Financial support with £30m short-term funding for cooperative self-build projects
- Logistical support through allocation of government owned sites (7 so far)
- Advice via [www.selfbuildportal.org.uk](http://www.selfbuildportal.org.uk) and [www.communityselfbuildagency.org.uk](http://www.communityselfbuildagency.org.uk).

#### POTENTIAL AND PITFALLS

Pending the outcome of the Taylor Review, what the government has yet to do is provide any guidance on 'how to do' plot-based master planning.

Substituting conventional top-down developer-led procurement routes with more bottom-up community-led procurement has the potential to create a vacuum, leading to less successful places and communities, because it is intentionally less prescriptive.

Notwithstanding the design quality and environmental performance of the individual buildings within some self-build developments, or the strength of community spirit, many are low density, dendritic and lacking permeability. Alternative forms of control need to be introduced at the level of the street, the block and plot, which reconcile wider place-making objectives with community aspirations. This is where urban

designers can play a key role. Three key urban design tools are needed to make a plot-based master plan work:

- the cadastral master plan;
- design coding that controls how plots are developed; and
- a plot-specific document cross-referenced to the master plan: the 'plot passport' in the Netherlands.

The cadastral master plan (from the Greek *kata stikhon*, meaning line-by-line) subdivides blocks into discrete plots for sale. Ironically, to design something with no detail, it is necessary to know, or at least anticipate all of the detail possible, i.e. the building and its relationship to the street, etc. This is why design coding is so important for plot-based master planning. Unfortunately, design codes in this country have tended to reduce design to the lowest common denominator. To avoid this we need to reduce rather than to increase design control. Lastly, the plot passport sets out key constraints and opportunities. The City of Almere has used this hierarchy to regulate self-building in Almere Poort to positive effect, and without stifling innovation or individuality.

The transferability of these urban design tools to the UK, however, depends on identifying our own syntactic parameters (eg. the relationship of building fronts to the street, scale etc.), and matching them to metric parameters embodied in standards, rules and regulations which are unique to any given jurisdiction. Framing a code in this more abstract way, rather than in three-dimensional shapes, could help to avoid reducing the design to the lowest common denominator, but more research is needed on this area.

#### CONCLUSION

Plot-based urbanism is not a panacea for every urban situation, and plots by themselves are not a guarantee of making better places. Furthermore, empowering local communities does not mean they should be left to their own devices. Nor does enabling mean providing the financial means to build one's own home or business in the absence of any control over urban design quality. Plot-based urbanism can foster variety, mixed uses and tenures in new development, while allowing incremental change to take place in more unexpected ways. This enables local communities to take control of and make their own places. In other words, it is an indispensable part of the enabling toolkit. ●

✎ A scheme of 178 units, 10 of which are self build plots. Image by John Thompson and Partners  
 ↑ Almere Poort under construction

● Jonathan Tarbatt, Partner, Urban Collaborative and author of *The Plot: Designing Diversity in the Built Environment* (2012), RIBA

# IMPROVING URBAN DESIGN LEARNING

Laura Novo de Azevedo and Regina Mapua Lim describe a way to bring urban design alive



The motivation for the project The Power of Experience began with the realisation that although urban design principles aim to improve the sensory experience of the urban environment, its teaching mostly takes place indoors, fully insulated from the city environment. Lectures typically use a variety of visual material such as photographs and graphics to exemplify current design approaches, which are assumed to provide a high quality experience of the urban environment. However, by being situated out of context in an indoor environment, these lectures run the risk of imparting only a limited understanding of the complex interaction of urban form and social life that designers should address as they shape the environment. Although most students are capable of applying taught urban design principles to the design of urban areas, this project postulated that this may simply be a result of a direct transfer of accepted wisdom imparted during lectures, rather than a critical reflection and deeper understanding of the spatial and social consequences of applied urban design principles.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology proposed in this study was seen as potentially encouraging students to develop a critical understanding of their discipline by being given the opportunity to evaluate urban design principles through experiencing the consequences of their application on the urban environment, using digital media. By joining the experiential and instructional learning modes, it would also provide students with more opportunities to raise awareness of how urban design impacts on the environment.

Communication technology has always influenced our experience and perceptions of the world that we live in, from the printed page, radio, television and digital media. Different forms of media have changed not only the pace at which we process information, experiences and knowledge but also their quality and type. This affects how we experience and value our urban environment - according to the forms of media we engage with. Young urbanites who are media savvy in a digital context are therefore engaging in urban experiences in a special way which should not be ignored.

This concept of inevitable change among the youth culture, digital media and the urban experience, has influenced the way that we have developed this urban design teaching and learning experience: to enhance the way that our students perceive the city, and to give it value and an understanding that relates to current ways of knowing.

## PRODUCERS AND USERS

In this context, our approach made use of the portability and versatility of mobile technology (for example mobile phones and iPods) to promote a shift from didactic teacher-centred to participatory student-centred learning. By producing their final assessed work in the format of a short video, students change from users to producers of mobile lectures and become potential contributors to the Urban Design Experience website ([www.urbandesignexperience.com](http://www.urbandesignexperience.com)), which is an open educational resource to host the collection of mobile lectures. The final videos are assessed for quality and potential as a teaching resource. The active participation in the development of knowledge was also assumed as an encouragement to students to develop a critical understanding of their discipline, resulting in an improved learning experience and future improved practice.

## A PLANNING MODULE

The mobile approach was piloted in the undergraduate module City Design and Development during 2010/2011, offered by the

↑ The project handout

Planning Department of the Faculty of Technology, Design and the Environment at Oxford Brookes University. This focuses on introducing urban design principles to first year undergraduate students for the analysis and development of an urban area.

The conclusions of the work revealed that the approach added value to how students learn urban design in a variety of ways. It encouraged the development of collaborative learning amongst students, but also between students and lecturers where traditional role differences were questioned and changed, especially due to the use of digital technology. The approach was also considered successful at enabling students to learn how to learn. The mobile lectures seemed to have helped students to become more aware of the urban environment that they experience. Learning was

seen as fun and open to discovery.

The approach has also had an impact on the development of highly skilled professionals who can borrow from different means to communicate their ideas. This was developed through a series of skills workshops which covered hand drawings, computer modelling, interactive PDFs for document design and videos. The combination of research and communication methods was emphasised as a model to be pursued both for the coursework in the module but also in professional practice.

The open educational character of the Urban Design Experience project means that it can have a strong impact on planning practice, as it can be used not only by educational institutions but also by planning practitioners, working for example with local communities, charitable organisations and councillors. ●

● Laura Novo de Azevedo, Senior Lecturer in Planning and Urban Design, and Regina Mapua Lim, Associate Lecturer/ Researcher in Culture, Identity, Development and Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University

## DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE URBAN DESIGN

Debabardhan Upadhyaya advocates a value creation-led approach

Given the backdrop of a tough economic climate, making a strategic investment decision in the development industry that involves high quality sustainable urban design is perceived as a high-risk proposition for business planning and decision-making.

The notion of high-risk is usually based on an underlying set of beliefs, perceptions and misconceptions. Whilst sustainable urban design embodies all three social, economic and environmental factors, in the present climate, economic sustainability can be seen as more favoured, as it meets needs as well as promoting quick delivery. Although there is no harm in prioritisation, the problem for the delivery of sustainable urban design arises with literal interpretations of policy (eg. within the new simplified planning system) leading to looser definitions and greater short-termism, largely based on preconceived notions that sustainable urban design is capital-intensive and can be left for later stages of delivery. In the longer term, this will be counterproductive, with a lack of early detailed input allowing little room for manoeuvre in later stages of planning, budgeting and delivery.

In spite of a plethora of comprehensive guidance (from the Urban Task Force, By Design, CABE, Homes and Communities Agency, and the Princes Foundation's work on Valuing Sustainable Urbanism), it is not surprising that it is taking longer to break the cycle of preconceived notions of value creation.

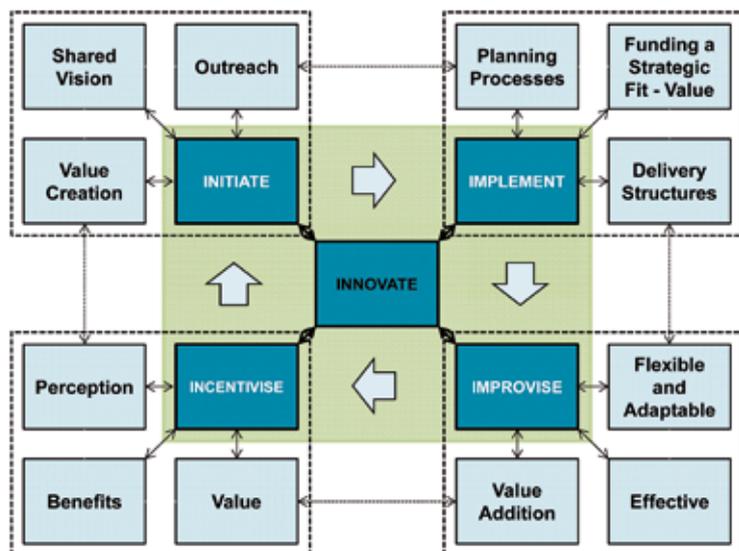


### VALUE CREATION

Misconceptions in terms of value creation are usually based on benefits (real or perceived), and actual costs and value (triple bottom line) i.e. a cost-benefit analysis. While both form the basis of value creation as a continuum in the eyes of wider stakeholders, others take a different view, which can lead to varying tangible and intangible interpretations of sustainable urban design.

↑ The Peace Gardens in Sheffield

## The 5I Framework



### Delivering Sustainable Urban Design : Value Creation as a Continuum

↑ The 5I Framework

Clarity and an underlying sense of purpose about value creation unlocks funds and resources within the development cycle, and raises the profile of the delivery of sustainable urban design as the norm

I would argue that the real value of sustainable urban design is as a continuum, and not an end product or outcome. In this context, for example the redevelopment of Sheffield city centre undertaken over the last decade, is a good case of value creation (both in terms of its perceived tangible and intangible benefits) through its delivery of sustainable urban design. Sheffield's success can be largely attributed to three key factors: leadership, funding and most importantly, a shared vision with clarity of purpose – which everyone is signed up to. This last point is important because anonymity (or a lack of clarity) leads to varied interpretations of the notion of value creation. In order to link this with business planning, sustainable urban design proposals can be assessed against four generic questions: Where are we now? Where are we going with the proposals/ initiatives? How we are going to get there? and, What does success look like? These generic questions help in getting the message and the decision-making process right.

Clarity and an underlying sense of purpose about value creation firstly unlocks funds and resources within the development cycle, and not in a piecemeal approach focussed primarily on viability and gap-funding. Secondly, it raises the profile of the delivery of sustainable urban design and value creation as the norm rather than an exception.

#### 5I FRAMEWORK

'Value creation as a continuum' is the mantra that we need to promote, wherein the drivers become

agents for change. Changing perceptions of cost, value and benefits enables strategic investment decisions for high-quality sustainable urban design to be made. This can be done using the business planning-led model - the 5I Framework:

#### 1. Initiate

For the successful delivery of sustainable urban design, the three vital components are key: clarity of purpose and buy-in through a shared vision, the scope of value creation and proactive collaboration

#### 2. Implement

In order to deliver the shared vision, three further components play an important role: i.e. planning processes, funding a strategic fit, and the role and function of delivery structure(s). Embedded within this component of the framework are leadership and project management

#### 3. Improve

To achieve value creation as a continuum, any changes in perceptions can be accommodated if the focus is on articulating benefits relative to price

#### 4. Incentivise

To support the delivery of sustainable urban design - its drivers and barriers - through advocating, realising and communicating the message of value creation as a continuum

#### 5. Innovate

To readjust, refocus and reflect on sustainable urban design initiatives, especially in responding to changes in externalities such as macro and micro-economic factors, which lie beyond individual projects and initiatives but impact on final outcomes.

Whilst delivering sustainable urban design, I believe that this 5I Framework has the potential to be a practitioner's narrative for outlining a case for value creation as a continuum. ●

● Debabardhan Upadhyaya, architect-urban designer, Spatial Planning Manager, ATLAS, Homes and Communities Agency. This paper is part of independent MBA research by the author and should not be interpreted as his employer's viewpoint.

# BUILDING FOR LIFE 12 AND THE URBAN DESIGN AGENDA

David Birkbeck, Paul Collins and Stefan Kruczkowski explain how urban design-led development is being promoted



*Building for Life 12* (BfL12) was launched in September 2012. This revision of a popular tool has attracted intense interest from the house building industry and local authorities, while also gaining the attention of politicians. But what are the reasons for the interest and why did the previous *Building for Life* (BfL) criteria need to be extensively remodelled?

## A NEW ERA

The advent of the coalition government triggered a catalogue of changes across central and local government. Government blamed the continuing low level of housing production on the ‘alphabet soup’ of regulation and other perceived barriers to enterprise. At the same time the forewarned ‘bonfire of the quangos’ removed key bodies in planning, notably Regional Development Agencies and their planning roles, while shrinking CABE from 100 staff to a small team within the Design Council.

Attention shifted to how to Get Britain Building again, without completely losing the focus on quality. The commitment to design quality is clearly expressed within the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), in part as a method of calming the anti-development lobby - an ambition to fight NIMBYism with design quality spelled out in sometimes strident language by the second planning minister of the Coalition, Nick Boles MP. The government is pro-growth but needs quality to persuade the public to accept greater land release

for house building: ‘This Government recognises that what we build is just as important as how many homes we build.’ (*Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*, 2011, HMSO, p.55).

How do we realise these aspirations when some local authorities have already cut or are considering cutting urban design and wider planning posts? With no prospect of positive change in public expenditure for at least the medium term, securing good quality urban design outcomes requires different strategies.

## REWRITING BUILDING FOR LIFE

The need to revise BfL stemmed principally from advances in Building Regulations that have continued to progress the challenge of sustainability in residential building design. Five key objectives influenced the rewrite of BfL:

- Making the language and style of the questions more accessible to communities thereby positioning BfL12 primarily as a tool for dialogue, and not just assessment.
- Exploring the potential to rationalise questions and to remove others.
- Offering house builders a much stronger justification for engagement beyond planning permission, by rewarding developments that were expected to meet the standard pre-completion, rather than post-completion alone.
- Strategically re-positioning BfL12 as an industry-led standard endorsed by government, as opposed to the national standard imposed on

↑ Kidbrooke – BfL12 recommends a 50/50 rule to help carry parking successfully when located in front of the plot. Image by Design for Homes



↑ A neat solution for utility boxes, which could have been expanded to provide space for waste containers.  
 ↑↑ BfL12 includes specific guidance to avoid common pitfalls. Images by Stefan Kruczkowski

industry concept – a subtle though significant aspect.

- Focusing on urban design quality rather than including the internal aspects of house design, with a particular focus on streets and landscaping.

A further fundamental change involved removing the ‘pick and mix’ nature of the 20 question version of BfL. Under this arrangement, a development could offer a high quality townscape but residents could be ten miles away from the nearest shop. This approach simply did not make any sense. Similarly, there could be a development that exceeded Building Regulations, had homes built to the Lifetime Homes standard but which sat within a poorly conceived streetscape with mean landscaping. A clear decision was made to focus on amenity and urban design, leaving issues relating to technical sustainability to Building Regulations and questions relating to internal spaces to wider debate and discussion.

Over a period of 18 months and with considerable support from professionals within the house building industry and urban design across both the public and private sectors, BfL12 was produced. North West Leicestershire District Council played a key role in the process, testing BfL12 on live planning applications and in turn helping to refine the questions and the process.

Whilst the original BfL was intended as a basis for dialogue, it was most commonly used

as a method of assessment. The emphasis was therefore placed on repositioning BfL12 as a tool for dialogue with questions seeking to stimulate early discussions between the house builder, local communities, local authorities and other stakeholders.

One aim is to encourage land buyers to allocate adequate funds to provide the boundary treatments and local or distinctive characteristics demanded by BfL12. Another aim is to encourage local communities to use it to test whether an application on their doorstep will function well.

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A fundamental part of BfL12 has been the introduction of a pre-completion award for house builders, recognising urban design quality at the point of sale

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### DEVELOPERS’ RESPONSE

Under the previous BfL scheme, house builders that met the standard could apply for a BfL Silver or Gold award. However, these awards could only be awarded post-completion. On reflection and after extensive discussions with industry professionals, it was clear that house builders would see greater value in recognition at the point of sale, rather than once all of their homes had been sold and were occupied. A fundamental part of BfL12 has therefore been the introduction of a pre-completion award for house builders, recognising urban design quality at the point of sale.

From February 2013, house builders with schemes that secure 12 ‘greens’ under BfL12 will be entitled to apply for Built for Life status (originally proposed as *Building for Life Diamond*). To qualify for this, a scheme will need to be independently verified by a local architecture centre. Built for Life status will entitle house builders to actively use the brand, helping them to market their developments, strengthening their appeal to the consumer, whilst also demonstrating their place-making capabilities to local authorities, and demonstrating a wider social commitment to the creation of sustainable communities.

This chance to turn good design into a competitive advantage during the sales period, while also building bridges with local planning authorities and potentially become a favoured bidder for any land sales, has provoked a very different response to the previous BfL. House builders now say that they want to see Built for Life flags flying above their developments.

The added knowledge that league tables will be published to demonstrate how well each house builder performs against BfL12 has been seen by some larger house builders that are currently investing in design quality, as an opportunity to secure a further competitive edge, whilst also competing to become the country’s best Built for Life developer.

BfL12 therefore represents more than a change to the questions; it could lead to an industry-led urban design agenda in residential development. We shall be watching progress and will share early findings here. ●

● David Birkbeck is Chief Executive of Design for Homes, Paul Collins and Stefan Kruczkowski work at the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at Nottingham Trent University.

# DOES URBAN DESIGN ADD VALUE?

Matthew Carmona sets out the evidence base and the gaps



For most readers of this journal, the answer to the question 'Does urban design add value?' will be a resounding yes. Just as the editorials in our national newspapers largely determine who reads them, if we did not believe that urban design was a valuable activity, we may not be reading this journal. Therefore those who are contributing to this issue of *Urban Design* are in large part preaching to the converted. Many others, however and with an important influence on how our built environment is shaped, will take a more sceptical view and a good deal more convincing. Despite many warm policy statements, collectively we have failed to make the case for urban design.

## THE BAD NEWS

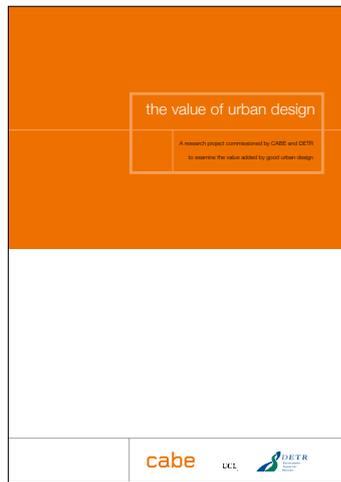
This fact is clear in the treatment of urban design by national and local government in England. Whilst the last twenty years has seen a gradual rise of urban design in political and professional consciousness

- we still have no statutory position for urban design in our governance systems (only design as part of planning and highways)
- urban design is often highly marginalised (still seen as a luxury, 'nice to have' if budgets are not too tight)
- urban design remains almost entirely discretionary, and many local authorities and developers hardly do it at all.

The recent downsizing or closing of urban design sections in local authorities represents a case in point. A survey of the urban design and conservation capacity of London's Boroughs at the end of 2010 revealed just 69 urban design posts across London (and a further 75 conservation posts) to deal with the outputs of a construction industry worth some £8 billion (on top of London's 1,000 conservation areas, 40,000 listed buildings and 150 registered parks and gardens). This represents £120 million worth of development for each 'public' urban designer, or an investment by the public sector of around 0.03 per cent of the output of this industry in securing wider urban quality. The situation elsewhere across the country is unlikely to be much different.

National government does even worse. Even at the peak of its activities, CABI cost just 0.02 per cent of the output of the construction sector across England (around £11 million), a figure which has since been dramatically cut, resulting in the sacking of 85 per cent of CABI's staff. As this article goes to press, even the 15 or so that remain face the removal of public funding altogether. The situation in the private sector is not much better as job-hunting students of urban design programmes can attest. Thus whilst some of the large international and signature firms continue to do well, for smaller practices focussed just on urban design (i.e. not part of a larger property, engineering or architecture

↑ One amongst many successes, the redesign of General Gordon Square in Woolwich has transformed a derelict degraded space into a vibrant hub of multicultural life



business), or on public sector work, the situation is dire.

If we had made an irrefutable case for urban design, even in tough times, would this be the situation?

### THE GOOD NEWS

Whilst we may have failed to adequately make the case for design, contemporary urban design as ‘place-making’ clearly has not failed. This is in sharp contrast to the period in the 1960s and 1970s when the grand civic designs of the era ensured that those who created them shone brightly, then crashed and burned, as the shaky foundations of Modernism proved to be unfit for purpose. For a long period after, the notion that cities could be positively shaped for the better was treated with much scepticism, as were city builders of all persuasions.

By contrast, today we have witnessed a generation of success and have much to shout about:

- suburban exemplars including Newhall, Upton, Greenwich Millenium Village, and Accordia
- renaissance cities such as Birmingham, Sheffield, Nottingham and large parts of London
- one-off exemplar projects, like post-bombing central Manchester, the Olympic Park, Crown Street, and Kings Cross in London
- a multitude of smaller projects, some high profile and others discrete, but each making a contribution to transforming the quality and liveability of their localities.

### CONVINCING SCEPTICS

So how can we convince the sceptics? Whilst we have been very good at producing the goods, we have been less good at producing the evidence to back up our claims. Perhaps the value of urban design seems self-evident, or we have been too busy designing to reflect on it much. Whichever it is, when urban design is still seen as a luxury, instead of a fundamental approach, something has gone wrong.

In my view, we need four types of evidence to make the case for urban design:

#### 1. ECONOMETRIC EVIDENCE

This is the holy grail: if one can prove beyond a doubt that there is a direct link between better quality urban design and higher economic value, then developers arguably will be clamouring for

more urban design. This was CABE’s thinking when it commissioned *The Value of Urban Design* (2000) from me, as almost the first thing it did.

This research began to place an empirical evidence base on the relationship between urban design and economic value by comparing the performance of three pairs of schemes (good and bad, and in three geographic locations) and tentatively confirming the intuitive sense that better urban design has a premium value. Moreover, as well as tangible social and environmental benefits, this premium is traceable in the delivery of higher capital and rental returns on investment, more lettable area, reduced energy and management costs, and occupiers reporting a more productive and contented workforce. All these are directly measurable in pounds and pence.

Sadly, while CABE pursued further econometric work, they were never able (or willing) to devote the sort of resources to such studies that more definitive evidence requires (for example for large-scale hedonic modelling). Thus whilst *The Value of Urban Design* remains influential, it was really just a pilot study with some small print that reads: research based on a study of just six office developments, in just three local markets, and relying heavily on qualitative data as financial data was limited and not always directly comparable. Demonstrating an economic dividend remains a major challenge for urban design.

#### 2. STRUCTURAL EVIDENCE

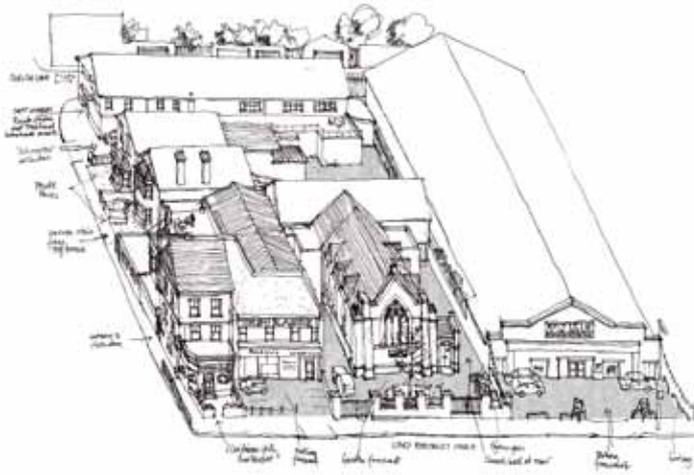
A second source of value can be measured in the structural properties of the urban environment, for example how many jobs might one form of development support over another, or what types of urban form offer the greatest potential for future development? This sort of evidence is relatively easy to gather when so much spatial data is readily available – on employment, land uses, patterns of movement, traffic, density, pollution, rates, rents and property values, and social information – yet surprisingly there are few systematic attempts to compare such data with the physical form in which the uses, activity and exchanges reside.

My own recent research for Design for London is an example, based on the observation that regeneration funds in London seem to get spent on large ‘easy’ brownfield sites, often away from existing centres of life. The research *High Street London* (2010), combining GIS with morphological analysis, gathered and presented data for the thin unbroken crust of mixed development that lines London’s arterials, and revealed some surprising results in the process. These were that London’s high streets (3.6 per cent of the city’s road network) support employment for 1.5 million Londoners (in retail, office and light industrial uses) and accommodate half of London’s brownfield sites. They are also the most neglected, congested, and polluted spaces in the city, stemming from a failure to understand (even less measure) the multi-dimensional value of the sunk investments already made in such places, and the value that their urban design continues to deliver.

#### 3. EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE

All this shows that value is a particularly slippery concept: some benefits are cumulative, many are not transmitted into direct benefits (eg. profits or

↑ *The Value of Urban Design* was published in 2000 and is still downloadable from Design Council CABE.



rents) but are indirect (eg. liveability, health and environmental benefits), and of course different stakeholders have different expectations. Despite this there is one constant and reliably measurable dimension of value: user experience.

A further recent strand of my research has explored stakeholder perspectives, practices and preferences relating to the design, delivery and management of public spaces. This work published in *Capital Spaces* (2012) was underpinned by extensive studies of spaces in use, deploying classic observation techniques based on time-lapse photography, followed by interviews with space users. The results were then compared with the dominant contemporary critiques of public spaces - that they are becoming privatised, sanitised, homogenised, less equitable, and so forth.

The work concluded that whilst much public space remains neglected, invaded by traffic and unintentionally exclusionary, in the main, the sorts of places that are being created and recreated in London are finding a ready constituency of users. These users greatly value the new spaces and that represents a key success for urban design. At the same time, people clearly value different types of experiences and therefore different types of places, and so there can be no one-size-fits-all prescription for public space. Understanding this and how it varies in different localities through gauging user preferences takes time. However it is nevertheless a vital element in understanding the value added by the public built environment, and ultimately in demonstrating what works and what does not.

#### 4. PROCESS-RELATED EVIDENCE

Finally, if econometric, structural and experiential evidence relates mainly to outcomes, then it is also possible to point to particular urban design processes that might add value over others. An exemplar of this sort of work was the Design Codes Pilot Programme funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and managed by CABI from 2004 to 2006. My own role in this involved evaluating the programme and writing the practice manual – *Preparing Design Codes* – that stemmed from it. Whilst the launch of this programme was met with much scorn and derision in the architectural press, the hard evidence from 19 case studies - many of which were monitored over an 18 month period as they evolved through processes of discussion, testing and negotiation

- confirmed that in appropriate circumstances codes are valuable tools to deliver a range of more sustainable processes and outcomes from development. Indeed, many of the most interesting residential developments of the last 20 years have used codes of some kind.

My most recent research published by the Urban Design Group in *Design Coding, Diffusion of Practice in England* (2013) reveals, six years on, a remarkable take up of design coding. In 2012, 42 per cent of local authorities require or commission design codes for schemes, and 93 per cent of those who have used design codes would do so again. The reasons for their use remain largely the same as identified in the original research: better outcomes from a more coordinated design process. The research confirmed that the very process of urban design can add value, and making the case for urban design is as much about good process as it is about good places.

#### THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

All of this leads to an argument about the power of knowledge. The more empirically-based the knowledge of urban designers, the more powerful their arguments are likely to be. Arguably this is why transport planners are so powerful, because non-specialists find it hard to challenge their seemingly scientific and technical models. Urban designers, by comparison, often lack power as their arguments are more intangible, and the evidence they cite to make their case is more subjective, open to interpretation and less empirically grounded. This is why, despite hugely encouraging words in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, the Government was able to slash CABI's budgets, why councils and developers alike are simply doing less urban design, and why urban design is still seen as a luxury instead of a 'must have'.

We need more evidence about the value that good urban design adds, and with a new voice to make that case on the national stage. The Urban Design Group is a small organisation, but perhaps this is its moment to lead a new drive for urban design. Its case will be infinitely more convincing with the evidence to match. ●

↗ A typical London High street, a thin crust and complex invisible hinterland. Image by Fiona Scott  
↑ *Capital Spaces*, published in 2012, reports on a two and a half year research programme to understand public space and its critiques.

● Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning and Urban Design, The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

# DO WE KNOW THE VALUE OF URBAN DESIGN?

Louise Thomas and Georgia Butina Watson review the evidence and suggest where further work is needed



In this collection of conference papers from the UDG's 30th national conference and the 40th anniversary of Oxford Brookes University's Joint Centre for Urban Design, we hear that urban design has a different value for different groups or individuals. There are many advocates, but also many more who we need to persuade and influence.

**For the development industry**, urban design represents a way of differentiating a product or scheme whether through simply being better designed and of higher quality, or more formal pre-sales approaches like Building for Life 12. Higher quality design helps to increase sales values, saleability and the speed of sales, which as we learn from Chris Tinker, gives the industry a better cash flow and allows it to deliver more homes. The key issues to tackle are balancing the need for building in volume, with place-making and sustainable communities, without compromising either. Post credit crunch, the scale of the urban design opportunity is about infilling local sites, with large and complex master plans rare and harder to finance.

**For property investors and land owners**, creating the 'neighbourhood premium', as Yolande Barnes describes, through good urban design means long term values are sustained and rise. The design of the house is a relatively small part of the value to be generated, with the layout and location of streets and neighbourhoods being far more important to an area's success in the long term. A fine-grained, mixed use and dense area (which today needs urban design input to achieve

it) is often more valuable than industry-standard models of retail or work space, and housing. The smart landowners retain control of their land and learn the lessons of traditional urbanism to manage their assets, rather than opting for development and a quick sale. As Chris Brown says, the social well-being and physical health engendered in these places is a significant factor in their own success. Similarly for **home owners**, the neighbourhood and home design are very significant, as Jonathan Tarbatt sets out, with plot-based urbanism a major contributor to better quality places, more adaptable homes, and consumer choice.

**In local authorities**, urban design awareness and policy adoption has grown in the last twenty years, as Meredith Evans and Simon Eden report; but much of this is dissipating with a lack of political support for the planning system. Urban design is about problem-solving, lateral-thinking about the built environment, and how places and facilities are actually used. Good design is most successful when it is invisible, understanding and addressing needs effectively and with 'delight'. Designing in multiple benefits and saving money across departments is very valuable to impoverished local councils, and challenging existing thinking in this way is one of the best aspects of an urban design training.

**For other professionals**, urban design represents a way of collaborating on design. Ian Bentley shows how creating common ground and shared visions allow a wide range of experts to see each other's priorities and devise solutions. Debarbardhan Upadhyaya sees the same clarity of vision that urban design brings as being central to delivering more difficult but sustainable and valuable places. The education of others involved in designing, building and managing the built environment for the common good is what urban design is all about. The process of urban designing with others often creates better value for money than if doing it alone.

**For local communities and neighbours** involved in improving the existing housing estates that Liz Kessler describes, or the division of the public realm for different road users as Mark Armes reports on, urban design is a shared language that many members of the public do not realise that they can already speak. The innovative teaching techniques used by Laura Novo De Azevedo and Regina Lima provide that introduction and insight early for students. For some it is about influencing top-down decisions about local changes or development; in the Glass-House's words, assisting communities to become agents for positive social change and inspiration.

**For businesses**, as Alain Chiaradia and Angela Koch reveal, the layout and management of our

↑ The Saïid Business School, Oxford - the 2012 conference location

high streets directly influences their success or failure. This is true for retailers as well as other employers in local centres, and relates to the links to other areas, block sizes and space for mixed uses. The fundamental structure of high streets and their supporting neighbourhoods makes a major impact on their long term resilience to change, appeal to customers, and viability for businesses. Urban design is unique in its perspective from the city to the neighbourhood, to the street, block and building type, and underpins the quality of local day-to-day experiences for a wide cross section of society.

Rarely linked are financial values and **the natural environment**, which as Sarah Milliken shows, is often highly productive when planned holistically. Maximising the benefits of green infrastructure lies largely in the hands of the urban designer, and this can range from carbon storage, flood mitigation, urban cooling to enhanced property values. Value for money assessments show the surprising financial returns to initial capital investments in green spaces.

**For the suburb dweller**, the Oxford Charter by Jon Rowland and Nicholas Falk shows that urban design is not just concerned with urban centres, but seeks to provide the quality of life once clearly associated with the suburbs, embracing sustainability and affordability. Roger Evans' work shows how to design better places by understanding how they are experienced. His use of models and rules of assembly allow others, especially clients, to see the importance of urban design as a process, and not just the production of master plans and photomontages.

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We need a reinvention of the urban designer as the client, not just someone who can draw, but understands how to deliver and manage places

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However as Matthew Carmona points out, there are clearly gaps in the evidence, as urban design is not valued in policy terms, and there is little real investment in urban design in comparison to the global expenditure on development itself. While there are many good examples of urban design across the country, the economic or financial value of urban design has not yet been proven, and this is often the biggest hurdle for developers and local authorities. The structural value – such as the number of jobs created – is another measure, and would lead to better understanding of where priorities should lie in improving our towns and cities. Similarly what we experience and enjoy – whether it is about microclimate, views or social interaction – has not been captured definitively yet.

So, there are lessons and warnings for the profession: as Chris Brown says 'the master planner is dead (in the UK at least), long live the urban designer'. A different approach to design is required to see the strategic context but deliver a finer grain of quality. Understanding how to bring about better health and happiness is becoming more significant; fewer regulations but more rules of thumb are



↑ The popular market square in Henley on Thames

needed to make each place work well. Urban design currently relies upon jargon and abstract academic concepts to communicate with others, and has standardised its approaches and 'products' as its influence has grown. We now need a reinvention of the urban designer as the client, not just someone who can draw, but understands how to deliver and manage places, whether as a custom-build enabler for communities, or working with localism and taking more control, as Sue Riddlestone urges us.

Incoming councillors, new graduates employed in planning, the media, finance, and development industries provide an ever-changing audience for urban design, which also needs to help communities to recognise what they can already see is good or not good enough. The demise of CABA may mean that there is less central promotion of urban design, but it may also mean less lip-service by others, and more room to convince those who matter of the full value of urban design. ●

● Louise Thomas, independent urban designer, Professor Georgia Butina Watson, Joint Centre for Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University

# URBAN DESIGN AWARDS 2013

*Louise Thomas provides an overview of the awards made this year*

The 2013 Urban Design Awards ceremony was held in the elegant setting of The Royal Overseas League, London on Wednesday 6th February. It was a gathering of today's leading urban designers and a celebration of the best urban design being undertaken. Awards were made for a Student Project, a Public Sector Initiative, a Publisher's Book, a Practice Project, Lifetime Achievement and, for the first time, a Fellowship of the Urban Design Group. The evening was generously sponsored by Routledge Publishers, studio REAL and URBED, joint winners of the 2011-12 Project Award.

The annual Urban Design Awards were launched six years ago with the first Project Award being made in 2008. The prime aim of the awards is to give greater recognition to high quality urban design work, with the shortlisted entries for practices, public sector and books being published in Urban Design. The categories have been expanded with the introduction of new categories and over all this year 45 entries were received.

The awards were presented by Janet Tibbalds, Chair of The Francis Tibbalds Trust, which funded prizes for the Student and Practice categories. In the other categories – for the Public Sector and Publisher – certificates were presented.

The awards were originally devised by John Billingham and are administered by Louise Ingledow and Robert Huxford. Amanda Reynolds was this year's compere.

The judges for three of the awards were:

- Sebastian Loew - joint editor of Urban Design journal and Chair of the judging panel
- Noha Nasser – University of Greenwich
- Rob West and Roger Evans, studio REAL – winners of the 2012 Practice Award
- Theo Goodall, Exeter City Council - winner of the 2012 Public Sector Award
- Stefan Kruczkowski, North West Leicestershire District Council – winner of the 2011 Public Sector Award, and
- Lindsey Whitelaw – Landscape architect and Patron of the UDG.

The Publisher's Book Award judging panel comprised: Juliet Bidgood, Marc Furnival, Jonathan Kendall, Laurie Menitplay and Alastair Donald, who chaired the panel. Six books were shortlisted and reviewed, and a winner was selected by the panel.



## PRACTICE AWARD

Introduced by Rob West

Winner: **Allies & Morrison**

for District //S, Lebanon, published in *UD* 124 pages 34-35

Shortlisted:

- **Atkins** for Belfast Streets Ahead
- **Burns + Nice** for Leicester Square Redesign
- **Fletcher Priest Architects** for Stratford City / 2012 Athletes Village
- **New Masterplanning** for Filwood Park, South Bristol
- **Richards Partington Architects** for Derwenthorpe Residential Quarter, York



## PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD

Introduced by Lindsey Whitelaw

Joint Winners: **City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council** for City Park  
**Partnership for Urban South**

**Hampshire** for SPUD 5X5: Youth Voices in South Hampshire, published in *UD* 125 pages 42-45

Shortlisted:

- **City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council** for Chain Street Goitside Urban Design Framework
- **Kettering Borough Council** for Reviving the Town's Market Place
- **South Norfolk Council** for South Norfolk Place-Making Guide
- **Stockton on Tees Borough Council** for Town Centre Urban Design Guide.



## STUDENT AWARD

Introduced by Sebastian Loew

Winner: **Richard MacCowan**, student at Leeds Metropolitan University for *The Gas Works - Canvey: Using the principles of biomimicry to develop an urban design framework on Canvey Island* (shown overleaf)

Shortlisted: **Chris Evans**, student at University of West of England for Truman Brewery Film School.



## PUBLISHER AWARD

Introduced by Alistair Donald

Winner: **Routledge Taylor & Francis** for *The Temporary City* by Peter Bishop and Lesley Williams

Shortlisted:

- Ashgate *Urban Maps* by Richard Brook and Nick Dunn
- Island Press *Making Healthy Places* by

eds. Andrew L. Dannenberg, Howard Frumkin & Richard J. Jackson

- MIT Press *ReThinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking* by Eran Ben-Joseph
- RIBA Publishing *The Plot: Designing Diversity in the Built Environment: a manual for architects and urban designers* by Jonathan Tarbatt
- W.W. Norton & Company *Urban Intersections: São Paulo* edited by Nina Rappaport and Noah Bilken

The panel's book reviews were published in issue UD 124, p46-49



#### LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD Kelvin Campbell

Introduced by Paul Reynolds and presented by Amanda Reynolds

Trained as an architect, Kelvin's early career was in the research and development of third world housing, self-build housing, new town planning and community development programmes - working for social change organisations, the public and private sector. He saw the rapid effect that small changes could have on delivering successful outcomes. Kelvin established Urban Initiatives in 1989, which soon became one of the best interdisciplinary urban design, development planning and transportation practices internationally.

Kelvin was the lead author of *By Design* (CABE) 2000, the national policy document on urban design, and the Mayor of London's *Housing Design Guide*. He has written *Re:Urbanism: A Challenge to the Urban Summit* (co-written with Rob Cowan), and *MASSIVE SMALL: The Operating System for Smart Urbanism?* (2011). He is the co-founder of Smart Urbanism, one of the largest online communities bringing together sustainable urbanism with social innovation, and now acts as a consultant director to Urban Initiatives Studio.



#### FELLOWSHIP OF THE URBAN DESIGN GROUP

##### John Billingham

Introduced and awarded by Arnold Linden, UDG Trustee

This unique title, awarded for the first time to John Billingham is in recognition of his contribution to the Urban Design Group over many years. In Issue 125 of *Urban Design* (p8-9), John set out his reflections on his work and what remains to be done in the future. John's support for the Urban Design Group has created a stage on which future generations of urban design practitioners will develop their skills and go on to serve society. He has adopted an 'off centre' position within the Group, influencing and improving its contribution to urban design's profile. This included being *Urban Design Quarterly's* (now *Urban Design*) editor from 1986 to 2003, producing *The Good Place Guide* (2002) with Richard Cole, and establishing *The Urban Design Source Book* (published from 1990-2004), and later the biennial *Urban Design Directory* first produced in 2006. Each of these has helped a far wider audience to recognise the value and contribution that urban design can make. These awards, funded by the Francis Tibbalds Trust, of which John is a Trustee, were devised, planned and gradually expanded by John to cover the spectrum of ideas seen here in 2013.



#### STUDENT AWARD SHORTLISTED:

##### Truman Brewery Film School

Chris Evans, Student at University of West of England

The objective of the brief was to create a film school in central London located in between Spitalfields Market and Brick Lane on the Old Truman Brewery site. The brief included a complex mix of controlled production, post production and teaching space mixed in with public exhibitions. A key focus was to integrate the building into the existing fabric by encouraging the integration of the general public with the scheme and its surrounding space.

A clear opportunity was to enhance the existing public space that was heavily used for events but often neglected outside of those times. London's outdoor public space is becoming increasingly privatised, limiting its time of use as well as the cross section of public that use it. Therefore it became clear from an early stage that maintaining the space's use by all members of the public as well as cultivating a 24-hour program was of great importance.

The site sits in a key area that highlights the divide at the City's edge. To the west of the site the commercial centre is rapidly growing, taking over and dismantling the existing grain. To the east is a post-industrial hinterland mixed with large areas of housing that hold a variety of cultures which make London such a vibrant mix. The project therefore had the opportunity to act as a catalyst to save this important space from the generic advance of the corporate city. ●

# USING BIOMIMICRY PRINCIPLES TO DEVELOP AN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK: THE GAS WORKSCANVEY

*Richard MacCowan identifies how nature can be used to influence the built environment*



Using nature as inspiration involves ‘mimicking the functional basis of biological forms, processes and systems to produce sustainable solutions’ (Pawlyn, 2011). As Janine Benyus (2012) states, ‘Biomimicry isn’t an answer; it’s a way to find answers’. This project explores the reasoning behind the use of biomimicry as a design-tool in terms of urban design for a potential brownfield development on the southern edge of Canvey Island, Essex.

## AIMS

Sustainability is at the forefront of design and as such this project will attempt to integrate a sustainability strategy using biomimicry principles to produce an urban design framework for the South West Canvey Long Term Regeneration Area. Project name: The Gas Works<sup>canvey</sup>.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

To understand how the project was to evolve, it was necessary to develop a number of principles based on integrating biomimicry with sustainable design:

- Connecting to the rest of island
- Providing seafront access
- Establishing diverse public spaces
- Creating appropriate building height, scale and form
- Achieving a mix of uses and activities
- Sustainable transport and urbanism

## DESIGN PROCESS

By challenging biology to find innovative design solutions, the goal was to minimise

waste and maximise output. Seven steps allow for the integration of nature’s form, function or processes into the urban fabric.

### 1. IDENTIFY

Using the procedures within the Essex Design Guide, a Context Analysis and Site Appraisal were carried out to enable nature’s genius to tap into in the discovery stages. These appraisals identified a number of design challenges.

### 2. DEFINE

The next stage was to define the context of the design challenges. This allows for

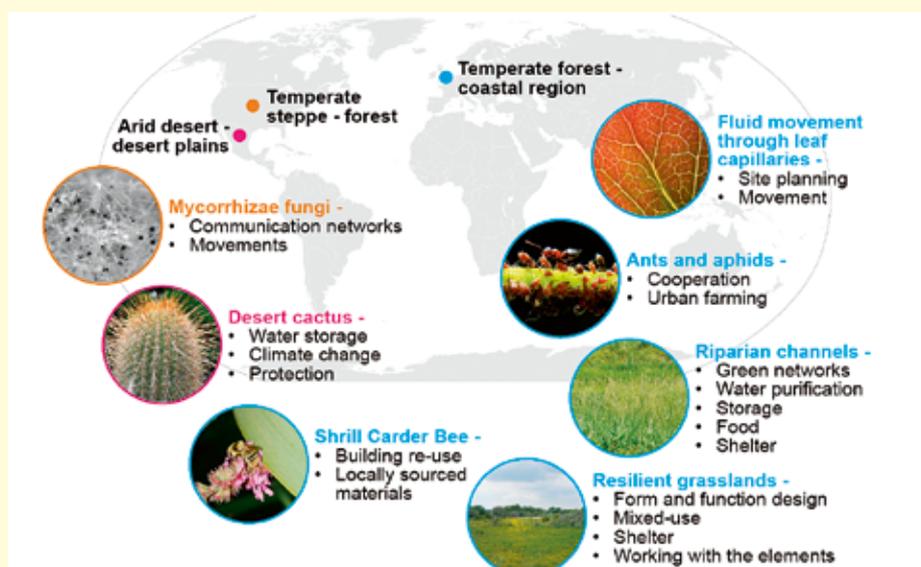
challenges to be grouped together into common elements (eg. traffic management and permeability relate to movement) and identifies those that can be solved using nature for inspiration.

### 3. ANSWER IN BIOLOGY

This stage finds solutions from nature to discover natural strategies. These are: movement, flooding, climate change, working with the elements, green infrastructure and resource efficiency.

### 4. DISCOVER

With the solutions to the design challenges identified, this stage discovers the



- ✓ Urban Design Framework.
- ✓ Abstracting processes, functions and designs from nature
- Sustainable closed-loop system
- ✓ Floating homes: variety of housing types, home zone, green space, flood-resistant
- ✓ Town Square: flexible space for a range of uses

biological strategies within nature that solve the challenges, both directly and indirectly. These are:

- Organism movement
- Adaptability to changing conditions
- Expansion
- Evolution

One example is using the functions and processes of the Shril Carder Bee. It lives in reclaimed burrows and recycles locally-sourced materials to construct nests fit for purpose. In addition, these bees live in a small manageable community that work together to provide for the hive.

**5. ABSTRACT**

With examples of nature found for the design challenges we can now abstract design principles from a number of organisms/ecosystems on Canvey Island and others located within different ecosystems. These are:

- Leaf capillaries
- Ants and aphids
- Riparian channels
- Resilient grasslands
- Shril Carder Bee
- Desert Cactus
- Mycorrhizae fungi

**6. EMULATE**

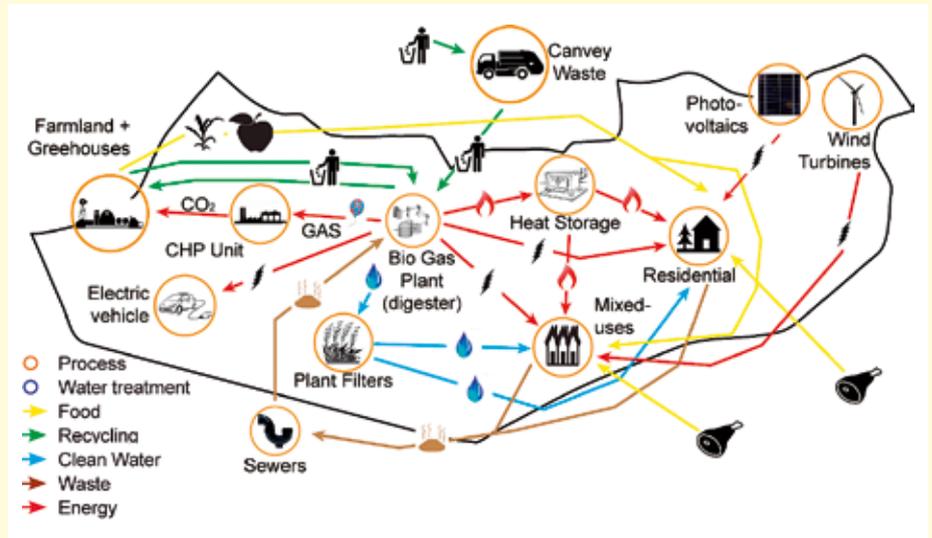
With design inspiration abstracted from nature, these were then used to solve the design challenges. By using the capillary movement through leaves it was possible to design a road and cycle network throughout the site. Mimicking the co-operation of ants and aphids ensured that partnerships were created along with urban farming throughout the site.

The resilient grassland informed the design of the buildings blocks and the riparian channels enabled a sustainable method of building water into the development with the addition of water purification. These ecosystems provided solutions to create a closed-loop system.

Throughout the design stage, it was necessary to continually evaluate the designs to ensure that the strategies utilised the form, function, or process to provide a more sustainable solution.

**7. EVALUATE**

By evaluating the project against the Life's Principles developed by J. Benyus (1997), the framework can be tested to find what level of sustainability can be achieved. It is



clear that the design for the development needs to achieve a number of objectives from the outset. The strategies adopted are interlinked, the same as ecological, environmental, economic and social sustainability are entwined.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The overall goal of using biomimicry is to ensure that awareness of the natural landscape is created by looking to nature for inspiration. In addition, it puts sustainability is at the forefront during the design process.

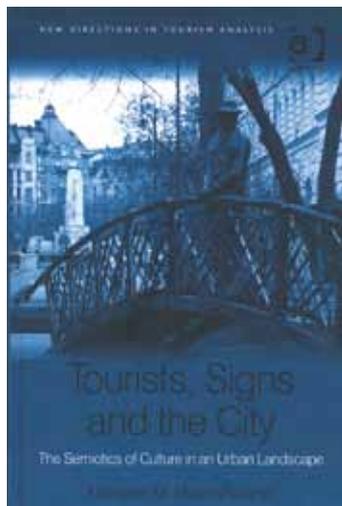
Nature recycles all materials using what is readily available, builds from the bottom up and doesn't use synthetic chemicals. The challenge was to attempt to mimic nature as closely as possible. Although

there are limitations, it acknowledges that there is the potential to create minimal disruption to the environment by actively learning from it.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Following the successful completion of the project, the following lessons were learned:

- Potential to minimise infrastructure demands of regeneration
- Promotion of team working by working with biologists and ecologists
- Successful strategies from micro to macro levels
- Raised awareness of the environment
- Integration of design for climate change ●



## A Better Read?

As our book review editor Richard Cole hands the role over to Jane Manning, he offers four new publications for consideration.

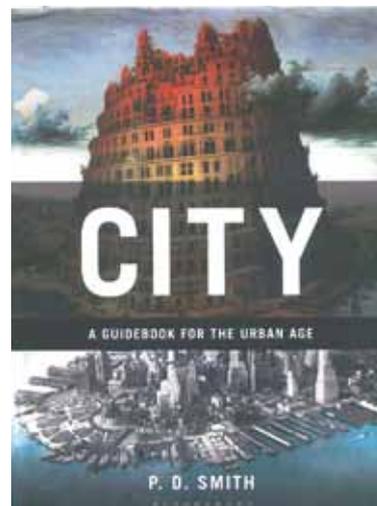
### Tourism Signs and the City

Michelle M Metro-Roland, Ashgate, 2011, £50  
ISBN 978-0-7546-7809-0 hbk, also available as an e-book

If the city is a series of signs, a book linking the understanding of signs (of every form) to the comprehension of the city by visitors, would seem to be potentially valuable. Unfortunately this expensive offering from Ashgate does not meet that expectation. The book is interesting and frustrating in almost equal measure and sadly flawed, not in content but in style. It is based on a PhD study by Michelle M Metro-Roland and focuses on studies made in Budapest.

Metro-Roland identifies three contributions that the study makes to understanding tourists' perception of the city. Firstly it can offer a theoretical framework for understanding how meaning is drawn from the built environment - something of interest to the urban designer. Secondly that it can bring the understanding of a geographer to tourism in urban areas. Thirdly it is claimed that it provides an insight into a tourist's perception of the everyday elements of city spaces. Finally it presents the results of field work and the author's analysis. The last claims would be of less interest to the urban designer.

What is particularly disappointing is that Metro-Roland appears to have been failed in some measure by her editor. To convert a PhD thesis into a book for a wider readership is difficult and made more so as Metro-Roland's style jumps from the colloquial to the technical at alarming speed. Inappropriate words also occur, for example 'the discussion of buildings *founded* upon any detailed discussion....' which should surely have read *floundered*? There are other examples and it makes the reader's task difficult. This is compounded by Metro-Roland's devotion to the pragmatic philosopher C S Peirce and his work for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. The book raises questions beyond its content, and much of the substance is drawn



from surveys which Metro-Roland undertook in Budapest using over 350 photographs. Despite careful referencing to many in the text, only a few very poor images are reproduced. Buildings and spaces are described at length yet there is only one map of Budapest. Ashgate or other publishers could print a hardcopy text that is linked to an app showing photos on an iPad or phone, as this is already in an e-book format.

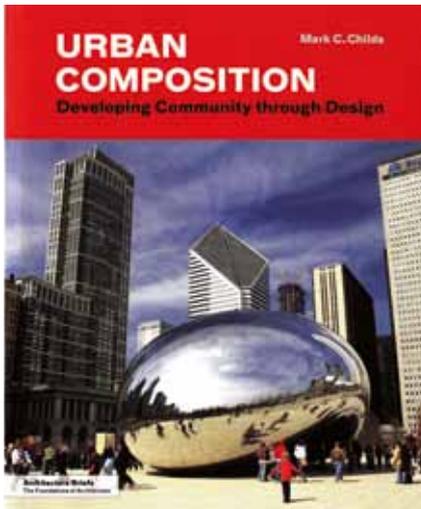
● Richard Cole

### City, A Guidebook for the Urban Age

P D Smith, Bloomsbury, 2012, £25.00, ISBN 978-1-6081-9676-0

Recently a cluster of books have focused on the character of the city. This offering is generalist in focus, well presented and strikingly illustrated. It is not an academic study, but a most readable and accessible guidebook backed up by a very full bibliography and notes. This is not a guide to cities, but to the human phenomenon that is the city. Take this to New York and you will get lost, take it to bed and you will be inspired. Peter Smith is a journalist and his easy style makes it a pleasure to read.

The guidebook is divided into eight broad sections: Arrival, History, Customs, Where to stay, Getting around, Money, Time out, and Beyond the City. Their order is odd, but the city is such a complex entity that any division other than a strictly chronological one, could seem perverse. Each section draws on a very wide range of sources not only from recognised academic works but from film, television and literature, both fiction and non-fiction. Within each section, opened with a signature full page photograph, there are several explanatory panels. These are colour-washed according to the section in which there are found. The topics explored range from Vertical Farms to Brasilia. Their choice seems arbitrary but each one is interesting. The sections are further subdivided and end with a keynote section, where an element



that typifies the main section is examined in more depth. Surprisingly the section called Getting around has an examination of 'The Skyscraper' at its end. Such is Smith's style: the breadth of sources and density of facts mean that any apparent illogicality is soon forgotten and one is carried along by the writer's clear enthusiasm for his subject.

Overall the book is an excellent introduction to the city, and should be on every student's reading list. It is a valuable scene-setter and allows the reader to dip in and out at will, which is exactly what a guidebook should do.

● Richard Cole

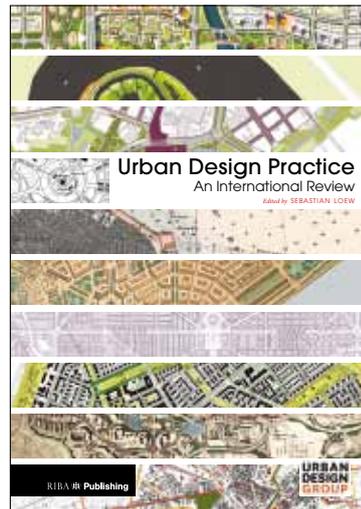
## Urban Composition, Developing Community through Design

Mark C Childs, Princeton  
Architectural Press, 2012, £15.99  
ISBN 978-1-6168-9052-0

This compact book is part of the Architecture Briefs series covering topics for professional beginners. It is an introduction to urban composition, a term not often encountered today, but which summarises what urban designers do.

The author's aim is to ensure that all those participating in the creation of settlements together achieve a result that contributes to the good of the collective. Although the material has been covered, it is not organised in a conventional way, as suggested by the chapter headings: Contexts, Built Species, Framing and Reframing, Infectious Design and Design Editors.

Childs starts from very first principles explaining what civil settlements are, debating the meaning of civil composition and the range of roles. The section on Contexts is probably the most important one: he emphasises that there are a great number of contexts, and that they can be interpreted and affected by a new project. He also describes different aspects of the context, such as the



site or existing structures, but also political and economic factors.

The text is full of examples and quotable sentences that readers may want to remind themselves of when working on a project. Indeed the readership of this book should definitely include elected members, policy makers and developers, as well as budding architects and urban designers. It is not that it offers amazing new insights, but it is well researched and covers a very wide spectrum of issues making connections between them. Each section starts with a question and ends with a short recommendation. For example, 'Each design should create excellent sites for smaller projects within it and enrich larger patterns in which it sits'.

A small but significant drawback of the book is the occasional use of obscure words or expressions, such as 'symbionts'; their use may be justified but it may deter people from reading an otherwise well thought out and clear handbook for urban designers. An index would be a bonus.

● Sebastian Loew

## Urban Design Practice: An International Review

Ed. Sebastian Loew, RIBA  
Publishing, 2012, £40  
ISBN 978-1-8594-6449-6

This book is truly ambitious in its scope, content and intentions. It was conceived as a global view of urban design, describing and analysing what is meant by urban design and how it is practiced. Its coverage of 19 countries is impressive, and as diverse as France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Dubai, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, China, India, Argentina, Brazil, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

In choosing these countries, there are of course gaps: little from Eastern Europe or sub-Saharan Africa, Russia, Mexico, Canada, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Denmark or Ireland - all countries active in the field. But

the intention is not to be fully comprehensive, but to be representative of the different regions of the world and systems of urban design there.

On the content, whilst chapters vary in their exact content, the contributions follow similar structures with discussion of what urban design means, the position of the discipline to other professions, the history of urbanism, a discussion of contemporary practices and concerns, and case studies. Each country concludes with 'a quick guide' to urban design, which is extremely useful for comparative purposes. Overall the book allows insights to be gained into each country and how urban design has spread.

Comparison is also the purpose of the final chapter written by the editor which was particularly illuminating. The idea of multiple and related, but distinct, paths to urban design comes through, as well as the influence of international practices and teachings, with particular traditions (and even the very notion of urban design itself) spreading and morphing on its journey around the globe. Yet the book concludes with a brief discussion of an area in which we are all still struggling: the inter-relationship between sustainability and urban design. On this, Loew concludes 'not enough is known about how to design more sustainable cities and little is being done'. As this assessment is based on such a wide trawl of international practice, this represents a damning indictment on our collective efforts. Yet as the book demonstrates, there is much work and practice of value to learn from and celebrate, if only we were aware of them.

This is where the true value of this well-conceived, well-executed and very well produced book lies: sharing best (as well as some less good) practice from across the globe. 'Having promoted higher densities, walkable cities, urban greening, the use of public transport and adaptation to context, urban designers are well placed to lead the search for sustainable cities'. We are all in the same boat, and in all its different guises, this boat is called urban design.

● Matthew Carmona

## OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

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

● Joe Holyoak, architect and urban designer

● Sebastian Loew, architect and planner, writer and consultant. Author of *Urban Design Practice: An International Review* (2012)

● Louise Thomas, independent urban designer

Neither the Urban Design Group nor the editors are responsible for views expressed or statements made by individuals writing in *Urban Design*

We welcome articles from our readers. If you wish to contribute to future issues, please contact the editors.

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## PRACTICE INDEX

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

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## ‘The future will be better tomorrow’

(Dan Quayle)

This is a version of a paper that I gave in the Oxford Brookes alumni debate at the 2012 conference, on the subject of The Future of Urban Design. It may be rather unrealistically utopian, but I hope it may provoke some thought. The Chair generously gave me three minutes to present it at the conference; I hope this written version may be a bit less garbled and more coherent.

From somewhere on my MAUD course at the Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford, (1979/80) I got the idea of the existence of two traditions of urban design; a European formal tradition (exemplified by the work of Aldo Rossi, the Krier brothers, etc), and an Anglo-Saxon/North American empirical tradition (exemplified by Kevin Lynch, Gordon Cullen, etc). Being familiar with 19th century architecture, I related this to the divide between the Classical and the Gothic modes of architectural design that split the profession. I think that to work in the formal urban design mode, you need to have a certain amount of scholarship, to know about proportion, composition, syntax, how elements fit correctly together and so on, but that this is not so essential in the empirical mode, which is more forgiving. I recall Ruskin’s description of the virtues of the mediaeval Gothic language from *The Stones of Venice*.

*If they wanted a window, they opened one; a room, they added one; a buttress, they built one; utterly regardless of any established conventionalities of external appearance.*

Translated into urban design terms, this empiricism is a description of responsiveness (a word I learnt at the Joint Centre), of working freely but sensibly within agreed parameters, and it typifies many fine towns that have grown without much formal planning, but which have developed a high degree of urban quality and liveability through consensus.

Setting aside the formal mode, as requiring distinct and special professional skills and scholarship, I would like to make a prescription for the rest – what we may perhaps call everyday urbanism. My thesis rests on the belief that, before the industrial revolution fractured the intimate connections within societies, there was a common and widespread knowledge throughout societies of how to make liveable places. This has been replaced by legislation and by professionalism, by the creation of a class of people – us – who know how to do it, and by a corresponding loss of knowledge among everyone else.

The prescription is that our task as urban designers is to restore the commonality of



↗ Urbanism without urban designers, the main street in Dent, Yorkshire and → Mojacar, Almeria, Spain. (From Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965).

urban design, by disseminating knowledge of how to make good places more widely, blurring the distinction between ourselves and everyone else. To a limited extent this is already happening. Excellent publications like the *Urban Design Compendium* and *Manual for Streets* are examples of a sort of pattern book, which seek to re-establish and promote the principles behind good places which have been buried under decades of misguided doctrine.

Although tempted, I am trying not to use the term common sense here, as I don’t believe that good practice can be reduced to this. It’s not that simple. I remember how John Berger defined common sense in his wise and moving book about a country doctor, *A Fortunate Man*: ‘Common sense is part of the home-made ideology of those who have been deprived of fundamental learning,

of those who have been kept ignorant’. True knowledge replaces common sense.

So my prescription for the future of urban design, perhaps paradoxically, is that we work towards making ourselves redundant. I recall that when I was at the Joint Centre there was a controversy over whether we were or should be a profession (it still continues), and we students had to write an essay, Urban design – profession or non-profession? I followed the well-tried principle of inventing a third alternative when offered two, and claimed the status of a semi-profession. But even if a semi-profession or a full profession, I think the status should be only temporary and porous, until such time as we have made a society literate in the principles of place-making, and capable of implementing them.

● Joe Holyoak

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