

# URBAN DESIGN QUARTERLY

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THE SOUTHWARK SITE  
LONDON DOCKLANDS.

# Editorial

We all knew that, the nature of shopping is changing. This is nothing new, but the signs are that it could be far more dramatic than ever before. The traditional High Street is under serious threat.

Shops have always been located where there was a demand, and sane cities axe renowned for the movement of their commercial centre. However, the centre was always the point of maximum accessibility, and the slightest change can produce startling results. A panic analysis of the assumed growth in car ownership led to the mistaken belief that the car should be given first priority, and therefore that our inherited system of medieval streets was incapable of coping with modern methods of transport. So new urban roads were built, and the centre of maximum accessibility shifted leaving some High Streets stranded.

An over-riding desire to maximise tire security of and profits from property investment, led to the combination of the legal and financial resources of the local authority and the investment company. Therefore, the traditional process of painstakingly acquiring a few pieces of High Street property for the purpose of slotting in a few shops with flats or offices above was ended. The resultant commercial redevelopment schemes created high rents and rates which only the 'multiples' could afford, and pushed the smaller local shops out into the decaying fringe beyond the ubiquitous ring-road or by-pass.

Modern suburban commercial developments, compounded with other inner-city problems, have led to the decline of the central market place. The perception of the traditional High Street has changed from one of delight to that of fear.

Positive discrimination is required to provide favourable locations for specialist shops, in order to provide a social service. People still require a meeting place, a cultural and social centre where the pleasure and fun of shopping in a traditional market place can re-emerge. Some people may feel that this merely creates a mecca for middle-class connoisseurs of hand-made bird cages, whole-food and stripped-pine furniture, but it is nevertheless successful. It answers a definite need amongst the urban population (both residents and visitors) and creates a ripple effect in the upgrading of land and buildings.

There is, however, a word of warning. Although jobs are created, they are increasingly transient, unskilled and, therefore, low-paid. Street theatre, fast-food and craft shops are a weak foundation for urban revival. Considerable profits can be made, but these are generally by the property developers, the hotel owners and the fast-food franchises. Most of this surplus cash escapes the local urban economy. More importantly, not all cities, or parts of cities, have the prerequisites for tourism, luxury shopping and desirable residences. Everywhere cannot be gentrified.

Mike Galloway

If you have any views on this or any other issue please write to the Editor.

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# Urban Design Awayday

Report of an environmental education day-workshop in Bristol in July 1985.

"Among the consultants' recommendations for the area East of the river in the centre of Bristol were the following: offices, shops, open space, a restaurant at water level, a heliport and a site for the Olympic Games."

No, this is not a 'real' report but just one outcome of a day spent by sixth formers from the Avon area in the centre of Bristol tackling planning, architectural and urban design problems. Environmental education work will not be entirely new to many in the Urban Design Group but the format for this day is one which others may wish to follow, not only because it generates exciting ideas, but also because it stimulates the world of education, enthuses the environmental professionals involved and can (though we chose not to on this occasion) attract good coverage by the media.

The notion of an Awayday was initiated by Anne Armstrong when part of her role in the Haimersmith Planning Department included environmental education. The principle is simple; instead of professionals always going out to the schools, why not bring the children into where the professionals work - their offices, sites or study areas? The first such event in Avon was, as in Hammeranith, a Plan Awayday, rooted in the county Planning Department but also included some architects and some design issues. Over 250 children attended, in holiday time. 1983 saw another Plan Awayday and, because 1984 was Festival of Architecture Year, we chose to alter the format to a Design Awayday. This attracted, in term time and mostly accompanied by their teachers, over 150 children of all ages. We offered them a wide variety of design exercises from buildings to open space, from realistic to pure fantasy, each group working with at least one architect. Over 30 architects gave up a day, and though some swore they could only manage the morning, all stayed for the whole day!

For several reasons - notably the uncertainty about our ability to convey adequately to teachers the nature of urban design, the difficulty of getting our friendly professionals out four years running and the likelihood of industrial action - we chose to run a smaller and more focussed Urban Design Awayday this year. Its focus was easy - it had to cover the same geographical area that we were using as a base for a seminar the day after with local development professions, (see next article). We invited only sixth formers because they can come without staff and our own 'trainee' teachers (the architects) would find it easier to work with older students on a potentially awkward topic. Around 30 arrived at Quakers Friars in the centre of Bristol, a venue kindly loaned to us for two days for both seminars by the City Council. Five architects and one planner also arrived to help.

We had identified five projects for the students to work on, demonstrating varying aspects of urban design. One group undertook an environmental appraisal using freehand annotated maps and some sketches. Another group generated, after a quick survey, many types of urban design ideas for the area as a whole. Two groups were designing specific buildings - partly to see to their schemes would compare to those generated by the other groups, (a reflection of real life in that some schemes must go ahead even though the master plan is incomplete). One building was a hotel on an awkward site by a bend in the river while the other was for a building next door to a major historic building. For the latter, a very difficult 'infill' problem, the group could select their own uses. The fifth group were asked to

consider possible ways of interpreting the environment of the area to all sorts of visitors, but especially to consider how it could be presented in a way which would be more interesting to people of their own age.

All groups started by visiting the area or their site and, while some designers chose to spend most of the day 'on the drawing board', the interpretation group were not seen again until the middle of the afternoon. For the building design groups we helped them on their way with 'starter kits' devised specifically for use with non-designers. These are now available in a teaching pack and use one key idea - that one starts in three dimensions rather than leaving it for later because it is too difficult for lay people to handle. (Such methods have been used successfully with planners, councillors, highway engineers and community groups, as well as children.)

For us, the most important outcome was not just their ability to handle some difficult concepts but also their willingness to deal at a very creative level between hard-nosed (boring?) reality and idealism, (which could have been no more than fantasy). The building designs were good, that for the hotel being a superb scheme which coped with the corner site by facing along two axes at the same time. Some of the urban design ideas have been quoted at the start of this article and, while not being strictly relevant to 'their own age', the interpretation group came up with a lovely idea for special beer mats given to local pubs with relevant local information on them! Certainly the six helpers enjoyed the day and we know now that the package of prepared materials - plans, maps, reports, briefs, models, templates, tracing, pens and so forth works well to help them transcend some of the more obvious technical problems such as scale and generally cope with urban design issues - enjoyably too.

Part of our aim therefore in writing this article is to enthuse others to attempt similar events elsewhere and, though we do not exactly have written instructions, would encourage people to make contact for advice and information, (as well as for details of the pack). Please feel free to ring me on 0272 741117 or Nick Jones at the Bristol Urban Studies Centre, 0272 277454. Good Luck.

Jeff Bishop

## News

ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE : COUNCIL ELECTIONS 1986-1987

We are pleased to report that three UDG members were successful in the ballot at the end of last year for the 14 vacancies on the RTPI Council.

They are John Anderson, John Collins and Francis Tibbalds. All three are former Council members and will continue to serve for the years 1986 and 1987.

# Raising the Standard

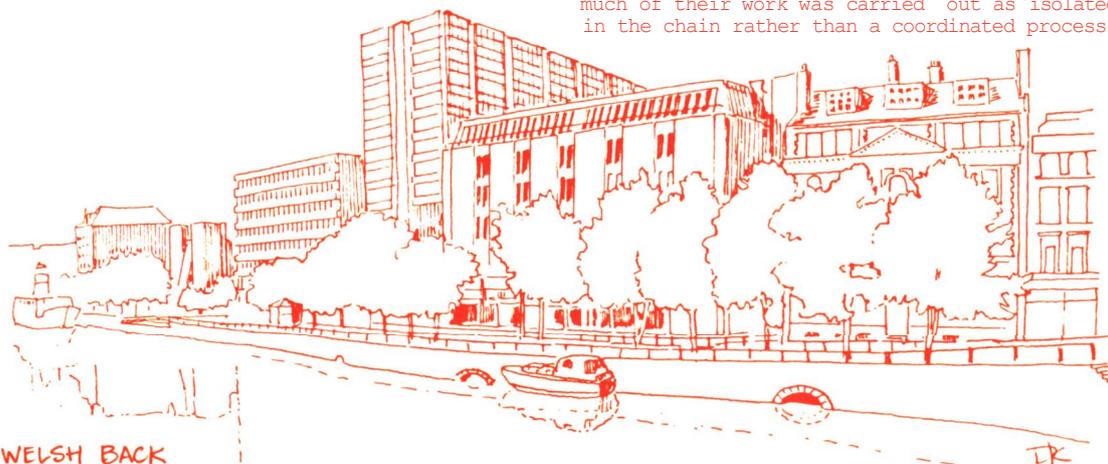
Report of a Day Seminar in Bristol in July 1985.

In July 1985 a stimulating one day seminar was held for a group of invited participants. The idea was to gather together a wide range of people who are involved in development work, whose decisions both create a project in the first place and also largely determine standard and quality, often well before a professional designer is involved. In addition to discussing each other's perception of design we hoped that an insight would be gained into each discipline's contribution to the development process.

The size of the group was deliberately kept small to encourage discussion and the 18 participants included a Developer, Solicitor, Estate Agent, Contractor, Traffic Consultant, Engineer, Quantity Surveyor, Landscape Architect, Architect, Urban Designer, Marketing Manager, Artist, and a Member of the Bristol Civic Society. Unfortunately the circle was incomplete due to the last minute withdrawal of both the City Planner and the Chairman of the Planning Committee (with the pressure of other business).

The venue for the day was Quakers Friars, a restored mediaeval building isolated in the middle of Broadmead Shopping Centre, which is a typical post war comprehensive redevelopment scheme. The location and surroundings provided an appropriate introductory reference point to the topic for the day - Quakers Friars stands on an island of grass and paving in the middle of a sea of car parking, completely surrounded by service yards and the backs of shops, with all the attendant clutter of refuse bins, cardboard boxes and delivery vehicles. It was remarked how surprising it was that the building had survived the total redevelopment of the area, and that this seemed an accurate reflection of 1950 attitudes to Conservation and Urban Design.

To generate discussion we used part of Bristol's historic Floating Harbour, the regeneration of which is being actively promoted for tourism by the English Tourist Board under the auspices of the Bristol Marketing Board. The specific area chosen was that bounded by Welsh Back and Redcliff Street.



WELSH BACK

Along the west side of this part of the harbour runs Welsh Back, behind which lies one of the few remnants of Old Bristol - the cobbled King Street containing a variety of interesting buildings such as the Bristol Old Vic and the half timbered pub called The Llandoger Trow. Welsh Back has been partially pedestrianised, landscaped and planted. Its sunny wharveside location and sitting areas make it a popular place at lunch times, evenings and weekends. It contains a mixture of buildings ranging from a Victorian warehouse in the "Bristol Byzantine" style, through derelict wharveside sheds and typical post-1960 offices to some recent and thoughtful infill schemes.

The east bank of the harbour" is lined with old Victorian warehouses in varying degrees of decay, empty sites and some recent office infill projects in the currently fashionable brick and mansard roof style with the requisite elevational modelling.



QUAKERS FRIARS

On the previous day I had assisted with Jeffrey Bishop's seminar at the same venue, (see previous article) at which approximately 20 'A' level schoolchildren examined the same area and produced their own development proposal, plus the designs for two specific sites. Their work was used to introduce the area to the professionals and to show what might be done if imagination and enthusiasm were the only constraints.

The participants were split into two groups and spent the morning walking around the area, vigorously debating the merits or otherwise of what was there, or used to be there and what should be there in the future. Each delegate was able to put forward his own particular discipline's approach to development, and it was apparent to all at an early stage that much of their work was carried out as isolated links in the chain rather than a coordinated process.

It was soon acknowledged that all the primary development decisions which determine the composition of a project are usually made before an architect is appointed, and further, that such decisions, whether made for legal or financial reasons, directly affect the final design. As one delegate remarked, the Architect's role appeared to be that of trying to square the circle by putting an elevation around a volume decided by others.

It became apparent within the group that those lacking any rudimentary training in design had an undeveloped sense of perception and little verbal ability to comment on their surroundings except in

the most elementary terms, since this was utterly outside the range of their experience.

There was general discussion on planning and how it affects design. Because of the apparent inconsistency of the current planning process, once a particular elevational "style" was seen to be acceptable to the Planners a rash of imitations followed to avoid any costly delays through being innovative or different. In Bristol the style of the manent is modelled red brickwork with large fake 'mansard' roofs, which is not a local building form and does not even look like the real thing. The general comment was that "they don't look nice".

Looking at the buildings on or adjacent to Welsh Rack the consensus was that those predating 1939, although built decades or centuries apart, achieved a degree of harmony, described by a delegate as "weathered together", but the same could not be said of the post 1945 buildings. The acceptable buildings were identified as those with a similar range of materials, colours, forms, and general height plus "feeling nice". Those that revealed more details or patterns the closer one approached were also singled out for approval.



Irregular rooflines and interesting silhouettes "looked nice", as did chimneys by helping to break up a flat roofline. There was general agreement that variety in what you walked on was also desirable, the different colours and textures adding visual interest and delineating areas where pedestrians had priority. The riverside walk along Welsh Back, with its setts, bollards, seating and trees, was carcented on as "looking nice and not doing any harm to the rentals"1

Conversely, post 1945 buildings of non-ageing or weathering materials or, worse, combining these with "imitation" materials that streaked and weathered badly, were not admired. The lack of detail refinement close to was disappointing. A modern building might look well viewed in isolation, but when viewed in its context with its neighbours often did not look right.

In conclusion, many ideas were generated as to what combination of activities and amenities would further enhance the area, but there was no consensus on what they should be, how they would be founded or what sort of design would be suitable. The two points of general agreement were that the area seemed "right" for further development and that the whole issue was very carpi ex!



At the end of a stimulating day a delegate summed up the mood of the group when he said "how nice it was to talk about what we think about buildings without being talked down to by Architects". I felt that they had become aware that the spaces between the buildings were as important as the buildings themselves and that one aspect cannot be looked at without recognition of the other. Many now realised how their professional contributions had a cumulative affect on the appearance of their city which in turn affected them directly as individual citizens. Most of the Group expressed the wish of being involved further and we are currently wrking en a widening of the network without reverting to Architect/Planners "talking down" and with the same participatory style.

David King

## Diary

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Wednesday 19 February<br>6.15 pm | WHITE COLLAR FACTORIES,<br>a conference preview by<br>Terry Farrell and others.   |
| Wednesday 12 March               | THE FALING CENTRF -<br>COMMUNITY UTOPIA?<br>a talk by Louis Fellinan  |
| Wednesday 16 April               | URBAN DESIGN IN CONTEXT,<br>a ta talk by Graham King.   |
| 3-11 May 1986                    | WALLER TOWNS OF BAVARIA,<br>a study tour by the UDG<br>Eastern Region (Contact<br>Alan Stones 0245-352232<br>ext. 299, by 28 February). |
| Wednesday 21 May<br>6.15 pm      | ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING<br>to be followed by a talk<br>by a guest speaker.   |
| Thursday 26 June                 | ONE DAY CONFERENCE:<br>WHITE COLLAR FACTORIES.  |

All events will be held at the Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Road, London. Nearest tube station is Baker Street.

Additional diary note:

June 18 One Day Conference "Who Plans London Now" - The UDG is joining forces with RIBA London Region, the RTPi London Branch and the SE chapter of the Landscape Institute in promoting this major conference at the RIBA on prospects for the environment after the abolition of the GLC.

# London Docklands Update

In May 1985, four years after Edward Hollamby spoke to the Urban Design Group of the premise of Docklands, it seemed timely for Christopher Benson, the Chairman of the L.D.D.C. and Reg Ward, the Chief Executive, to return to talk of the realization to date of that premise.

Benson started his general outline of current activity by explaining that in his view this experience represented a model for the future of inner urban areas that went far beyond the boundaries of Docklands. The L.D.D.C. area, (some 8 square miles or 5,000 acres or one half the size of Manhattan island) had seen the completion of 7,000 new private houses with 2,000 starts having been made this year. It is the biggest private housing programme in the country. While this fact has led to some criticism it must be remembered that at the time of designation there were only four private houses under construction in the whole of Docklands. 4.8 million sq. ft. of other building has taken place and a sports arena for 18,000 people is being constructed together with 2 Asda shopping centres at Beck and the Isle of Dogs with a quarter of a million sq. ft. of shopping being implemented south of the river.

At the time of designation there were negative land values in the area and the quality of environment, in particular the magnificent stretches of water that were available, were being steadily eroded by a programme of dock filling and demolition of warehouses. The L.D.D.C. is now digging up waterways to try and restore some of this old quality at a cost of some £8 million.

The dearth of communication, in particular public transport, is still a problem. The extension of the Jubilee line at a cost of £440 million was clearly out of the question and the first moves toward a solution were the relatively modest provision of a bus service around the Isle of Dogs with as a second stage the Docklands light railway approved in 1982 and due to start operation in 1986. This will link the Tower of London to Island Gardens opposite Greenwich and its 9 stations will offer opportunities for selling space to developers. Another facet of communications is the Stolport (given planning consent soon after the UDG meeting) between Royal Albert Dock and King George V Dock. This will provide both commuter flights to Europe by June 1987 and a range of new jobs associated with this activity.

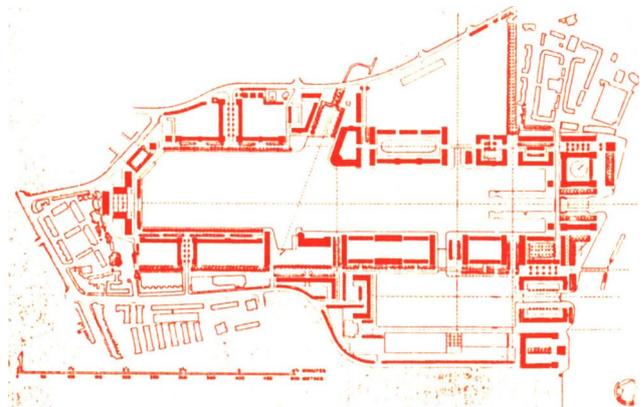


Attempts to use the river - an obvious East to West communication link - have so far run into difficulties. The latest investigations utilize an "airman", a double hulled hovercraft, which can travel from Westminster to Greenwich in 17 minutes.

Benson closed his contribution by admitting that on the debit side the problem of community relations and local animosity remain, in spite of a growing acceptance of the L.D.D.C. among some groups. He reaffirmed, however, his conviction that his Corporation's policies were correct and had to be demonstrated as such to the remaining opponents.

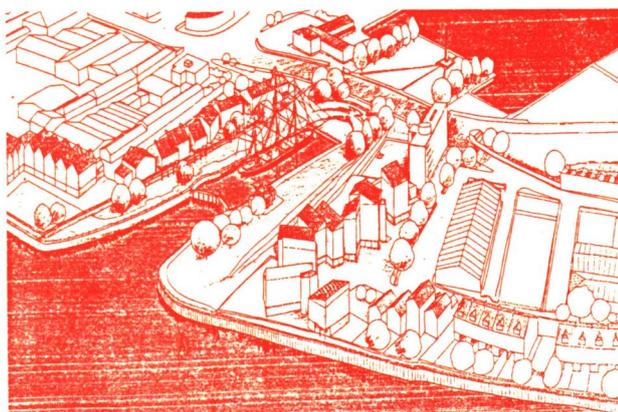
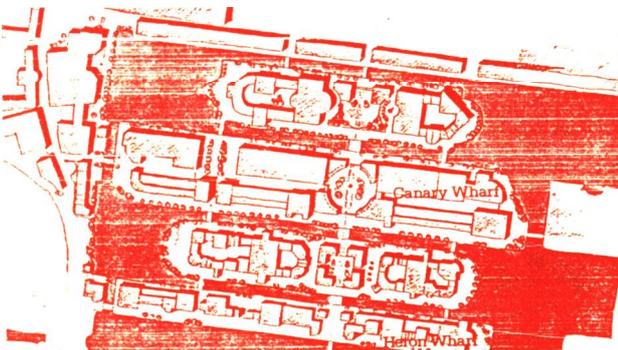
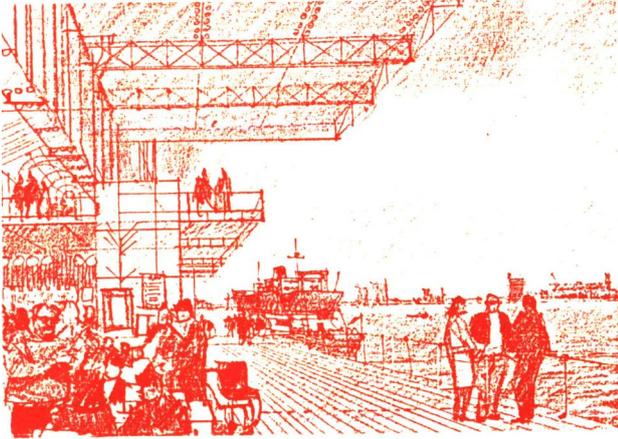


Reg Ward started by emphasising that his strategy had always been one of gradually moving investment east from the relatively privileged areas adjoining the city into the deep and inaccessible heart of Docklands by introducing uses new to the east-end. This was against a market view of the area as "London's Back Yard" and a local authority reluctance to shift their view of the future of the area from one of a return to a world of shipping and manufacturing which no longer exists.



In 1980, in spite of its proximity to the city, in urban design terms the Docklands were regarded as a liability - not an opportunity. It clearly would not be enough to draw up a reconstruction plan which utilized the particular qualities of water, land and sky, unique to the district but which without any demand would remain unimplemented. It was necessary to adopt a "hard sell" which exploited every marketing opportunity available. An example of this was the Enterprise Zone in the Isle of Dogs. Instead of the usual concept of Enterprise Zones as allowing existing industry to recuperate and attract other similar activities, in Docklands it was directed to office and commercial development, where the rates saving was worthwhile and which enabled the area to be seen as a location for this particular type of activity.

The Isle of Dogs had been chosen as a starting point because of its easily acquired land and there were sufficient areas of water left to create a marketable image. After the first four years the development of the western half of Docklands based around the Isle of Dogs, can be counted as a success.



The next stage will be the implementation of proposals for the Royal Docks whose development horizon has now been put forward by about 10 years from the original date of 1995 because of successes in the western Docklands. In spite of the success of the Isle of Dogs it has so far not proved possible to attract either any institutional investment or any major developers. Development has taken place through the agency of owner occupiers or contractor developers. It is hoped that the current interest being shown by institutions in the Royal Docks will change this. It was against this context that Ward defended the L.D.D.C. against criticisms of a lack of a clear urban design concept by asserting his opinion that a traditional prescriptive plan would frighten any private investment and that such a concept would be unnecessarily rigid and incapable of responding to changing demand, bearing in mind that the Docks represent in London the only potential location for a range of major land uses, such as Exhibition Centres, Sport Complexes and Conference facilities.



Albert Basin — South side

Thus far, the L.D.D.C. has been successful in attracting private finance and this is demonstrated by the fact that £120 million of public money has so far attracted £700 million of private investment. This point emerged in the discussion as being a major difference with the experience of the Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal Project where public money had been expanded without any regard to the private investment that was being generated.

Behind this success lies a view of urban design as "environmental public relations" requiring skills which bridge between professions and which cross the divide between the public and private sectors.

IWR SAMUELS

## News

### UDG CHAIRMAN IN LINE FOR RTPI PRESIDENCY

At the time of going to press, Francis Tibbalds, founding Chairman of the Urban Design Group, has been elected unopposed as RTPI Junior Vice-President for 1986. In accordance with established procedures, the Junior Vice-President becomes Senior Vice-President, then President, in the succeeding two years. While feeling suitably daunted by the responsibilities of the next three years, Francis is obviously delighted at the tremendous opportunity this brings to take the "urban design banner" and the cause of better inter-professional collaboration right to the heart of one of the key professional institutions. He intends to do his best to make the most of it and to promote interdependence and better physical design as Presidential themes for 1988. He has particularly asked that UDG members who are also RTPI members be thanked most warmly for their support and encouragement in the recent Council Election.

# New Roads for London?

IS THERE A CASE FOR NEW ROADS IN LONDON?  
Panel discussion held at PCL on 30 April

For its April meeting, the Group tried a different approach for the discussion of an important environmental issue to be faced in London. A panel of speakers, 4 in all, were invited to speak to the topic from differing viewpoints, ably chaired by Terence Bendixson, Chair of the Pedestrian Association and journalist, who applied strict timelimits.

## THE GLC VIEW

The first to speak was Geoff Holland, recently appointed Chief Transport Planner at the GLC but also an architect/planner and Urban Designer. He answered the question with a yes, but a very qualified yes. The GLC had recently approved a 16 point policy statement on road building with a £68 million budget. He felt that decisions taken by government over the next few years will set the pattern for London's future for many years to come. And massive expenditure can be expected.

In outer London there was obviously a need for road construction, which could also be more easily accommodated in less densely developed areas. The GLC had several such projects - the Hayes Bypass, Rochester Way Relief Road - which were distinguished by public acceptability. But the benefits were localised and such investments did not affect the majority of Londoners. He felt there was no case for new roads in Inner London where traffic management, environmental improvements, cycling and pedestrian measures have higher priority. Indeed, the GLC would argue that there was a good case for reducing the capacity of some roads, particularly the radial routes. Geoff felt that high capacity roads cannot be well integrated in inner-city areas, London has the evidence to prove it!

The GLC would argue that the use of private cars is not a right and that congestion is not due to insufficient capacity on existing roads but to people making a personal choice against public transport, and to massive illegal parking. Current government policy advocates choice but in effect is producing an iniquitous situation where choice may be restricted to using a car or not, with no alternatives. The majority of inner London dwellers will be the ones to suffer.

He also had a lot to say about road users. 3 out of every 4 car commuters to central London use company cars, subsidised to the equivalent of £160m p.a. by the taxpayer. With those resources, London could have the worlds most modern public transport services. The emphasis needs to be placed on the better management of space and facilities especially public transport. The drop in fares in 1980/81 resulted in a 13-17% drop in commuter traffic. The three maxims of the GLC were Efficiency, Equity, Economy. But Government policy revolves around the last with proper coordination destroyed by deregulation (and choice with it) while evidence of policy change must be demonstrated by new road building. The ray of hope he saw in the light of more "Trunking" is that, since the last round of road building, resources are more limited, the time from conception to construction is much more extended and the quality of opposition is much better.

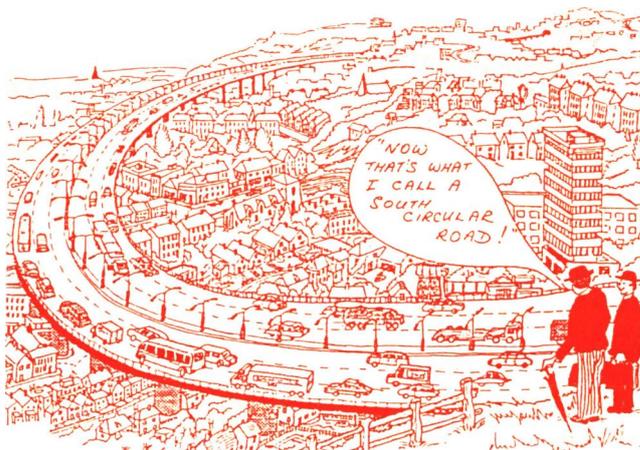
## THE BOROUGH VIEW

David Pike is Assistant Director of Planning and Communications at Camden, responsible for Landuse and Transportation Planning. He was most concerned about the impact of new roads on everyday lives. He defined three criteria against which need must be measured:

- the impact on job prospects
- the impact on accessibility to the activities of everyday life
- the impact of road's physical presence on community life and the risk of severance.

"And we should ask what other forms of investment meet these criteria."

But current government policy sets the context for the debate and it is almost certain that the emphasis will be switched from 'capacity reduction schemes to major road schemes and an unwillingness to tackle heavy lorries and declining investment in public transport. This must be seen in the context of the public to be served, those who have a car and those who do not. In outer London 65% of households have a car, in inner London only 41% and the haves can be characterised as affluent/male/suburban while the have nots are poor/women/city dwellers, a perfect recipe for inequality. How can transport policy help close the gap?



On jobs we must compare investment in new roads with other investment opportunities for public funds such as houses; and will new roads increase the accessibility of jobs to the unemployed? On accessibility, do new roads make the broadest range of facilities available to all groups in society and if investment is switched to favour those who have the choice of using a car or not, hcv/ will those vsho do not have the choice suffer? On Severance, hcv/ will new road schemes affect those activities which are performed by communities in groups; and how can large volumes of traffic move through an area on new roads or through traffic management without disrupting those aspects which create community cohesion. There must be much more than a simple problem of congestion to justify new road building.

## THE CONSULTANTS VIEW

As a representative of one set of consultants involved in the Department of Transport's Corridor Studies (Colin Buchanan and Partners) Malcolm Buchanan was concerned about the consequences for the physical environment of London of new road building. He saw too the main bases on which new roads might be justified:

- economic : savings in time
- environmental : removing traffic from sensitive areas

New road schemes should preferably satisfy both of these. He felt, on this basis, that there were many opportunities in London for new roads and that the question would be better phrased as "for what type of roads is there a case and where?"

The environmental problems created by new roads are well known:

- traffic noise
- visual intrusion
- air pollution
- severance of communities
- accidents
- nuisance of road widening or construction works



They are closely related to the volume and speed of traffic the greater of either (or both), the greater the problem. Minimising the impact depends on the design of the network, the design standards adopted for the roads, the type of road construction employed and the degree to which the road can be integrated with other appropriate land-uses. The optimum traffic engineer's solution would be to fully segregate vehicles and pedestrians but this is rather an oversimplistic view of how to tackle the problem. And anyway the maximum volumes of traffic are often carried at speeds that are relatively low - 30-40 miles per hour. Designing for roads of this nature is very different to creating urban motorways.

In accommodation new roads in London the scale of the problem is very difficult to comprehend and to cope with and there are severe problems of imposing an optimum system on existing street patterns. He agreed that a proper transport plan must involve central area restraint. But it must also deal with existing bottlenecks. There must be scope for compromise on design standards. He appeared to feel, quite rightly, that free traffic flow was but one objective of city life.

#### THE ROAD LOBBY VIEW

Jeremy Hawksley is the Secretary of 'Movement for London', an influential pressure group lobbying for better road transport facilities in the Capital. He based his case for more roads on the 'ever increasing number of cars owned by Londoners and the resulting lower average traffic speeds, especially in the peak periods'. He produced some interesting data to back his view.

- 2,100,000 cars registered in Greater London (Dec.1984) an increase of 23% since 1971
- an increase in concentration from 1971-1981 of 18% to 130 vehicles per mile
- declining average speeds from 14.0 mph to 13.6 mph in 1981 at peak times.

If these trends continue while we have optimised the use of space through traffic management we have only 2 choices: restraint through supplementary licenses or electronic road pricing (ERP), or we create more road space. Subsidy to public transport can influence modal choice but it is no long term solution.

Negative restraint is not attractive to motorists and the implementation is very complex. The GLC's 'Area Control' package was abandoned by sympathetic Councillors while ERP merely increases costs and may affect business competitiveness.

The audience was pleased to hear (audible sigh!) that Movement for London does not want an Urban Motorway programme; costs and environmental impact make them politically unpalatable. Indeed the Minister has already ruled out this option. But why not embark on a programme of new roads of limited capacity which take through traffic out of shopping streets and housing areas? Such road should only accommodate existing flows and not attract cross-town trips - available primarily to Londoners. Speeds may not be increased greatly but journey times will become more dependable.

Jeremy then went on to draw up some ground rules for his new roads:

- they should only be single carriageway but with grade separated junctions
- minimal property demolition
- minimal severance
- visual, noise and vibration effects to be taken account of at design stage
- landscape designers to be involved from the outset.

The job is not easy but he felt that the GLC's claim that more roads will only destroy the city is overstated. If that were true, they would not be building their current schemes. New roads need sympathetic design and would present an interesting challenge to urban designers.

He offered some guidance on how such roads can be best accommodated:

- located alongside existing barriers to limit severance eg. railways, canals, rivers, parks
- tunnels - single carriageway roads may present different economic equations
- using road structures to reflect local character - murals, planting etc.
- using cuttings to reduce noise nuisance and screening to limit visual intrusion. Planting, walls and earth banks should be considered.

And so ended four widely varying presentations which despite their disagreements had some similar aims, particularly more concern for environmental issues. Clearly the question "Is there a case for New Roads in London?" does not have a simple answer yes or no - "perhaps" would be nearer, "in certain circumstances" nearer still; that view unified all the speakers from both sides of the argument. It was all a matter of degree.

It was a novel form of debate from the group and one which bombarded the audience with both facts and polemic. But despite undoubted shell shock, contributions from the floor were many and varied, weighted (not unexpectedly for such a group) rather against the road lobby. One contributor surmised up the apparent consensus among us by suggesting that, in deciding transportation policy, our guiding aim should not be the solution of the car problem or the lorry problem or the parking problem or the decline of public transport problem but how to we seek to speed up accessibility, by any mode to any activity. Perhaps if transport policy were formulated on this guiding principle then the often futile 'car Versus public transport' split could be avoided and better use made of limited resources - not just financial, but social and environmental in equal measure.

Lawrence Revill

# Book Review

'RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTS : A MANUAL FOR DESIGNERS'

by Ian Bentley, Alan Alcock, Paul Murrain, Sue McGlyn and Graham Smith; Architectural Press, 1985; 152pp.; £14.95. ISBN. 0-85139-967-3

On a simplistic level it would be easy to view this as a 'recipe book', a 'what to do' guide which can provide all the answers if you follow the steps. That is how the book appears to be laid out both in its format and in the logical progression of its argument. But a deeper interpretation, one which I am sure would be closer to the intentions of the authors, would be to see this book firstly as a statement of values, a description of those qualities of a city form which the authors find essential to the quality of city life; and then as an aide-memoire on the drawing board, not of things to do but things to bear in mind and use creatively.

It is rare for any designer to attempt to set out his or her values and then be prepared to debate them - to set them up like Aunt Sallys for all to shy at. But it is in this that the strength of the book lies. It does not veer towards simple polemic but presents a rationally argued, practical statement of values and objectives to condition design decisions. So what do the authors have to say about the qualities which they value?

They start, not surprisingly, with what is wrong with modern design. "Designers," they say, "never made a concerted effort to work out the form implications of their social and political ideals....Form they felt ought to be the by-product of progressive social and political attitudes. But in adopting this stance, paradoxically enough, designers failed to realise that the manmade environment is a political system in its own right: try walking through a wall and you'll notice that it is the physical fabric, as well as the way it is managed, that sets constraints on what you can and cannot do."

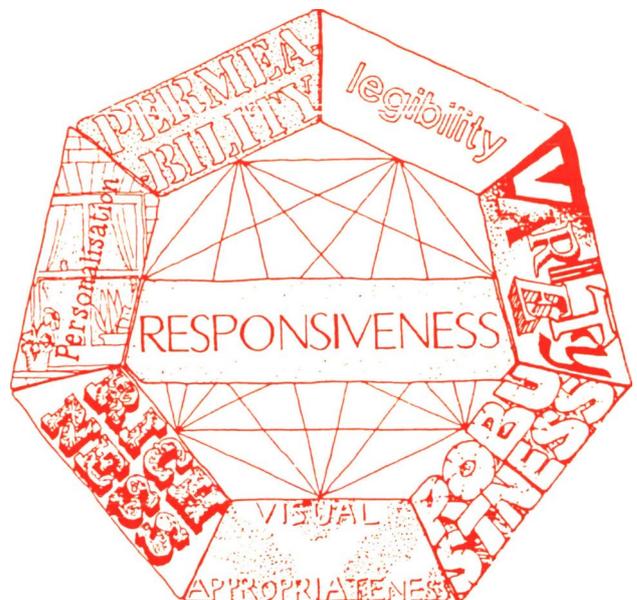
And what do they propose to do about this? "Once we understand this, it becomes obvious that even from the political point of view it is the things that designers do in the built environment that matter". They believe that, "the built environment should provide its users with an essentially democratic setting, enriching their opportunities by maximising the degree of choice available to them." This relies on the seven qualities described in the report of their talk at the Group's October meeting.

The book itself is laid out in seven chapters, each dealing with one of the qualities, ie. Permeability, Richness, followed by an eighth called "Putting it All Together" which describes the use of the methodology in formulating development proposals for a large site in central Reading. Each chapter follows a similar format, firstly an introduction to the particular quality and how to design for it; read together these give a comprehensive view of the whole approach. These are followed by an extensive series of design sheets which cover the practical implications of achieving each quality. The whole book is copiously illustrated with sketches, diagrams and charts (there are few photographs and what there are are of poor quality) such that each page contains a plethora of information which at first sight overwhelms the reader.

In attempting to be comprehensive the authors have created a degree of difficulty in extracting particular information; but as the book is presented as a logical progression where each step is dependent on those before, perhaps this is intentional and it may not be such a problem. The breadth of the information clearly reflects the variety of backgrounds of the authors - architects, a planner, a landscape architect, an artist.

The authors have tried hard to avoid jargonising their subject, attempting to demystify their approach to Urban Design. But, as the book is obviously aimed at a professional audience some of the phraseology tends to talk down to the reader, assuming less knowledge or awareness than he is likely to have. For example on the subject of conducting street corner interviews, "But remember that the police may be suspicious of people conducting public interviews: if you intend to use the street corner approach it may save embarrassment if you tell the local police station what you are doing in advance. Policemen are often mines of useful information anyway." said PC Plod to Noddy. To be fair the major part of the text is clearly written with a wealth of useful general information to augment the illustrations.

As to whether I was convinced by their approach I have to declare an interest as a former student of the Joint Centre for Urban Design where the authors teach. Though it was less developed as a theory back in 1980, the concepts continue to have a significant influence on my work and represent those qualities which I consider valuable. Some elements jar a little; for example the section on Personalisation may prove hard to swallow for architects and planners who dread the arrival of the Bradstone and aluminium window brigade in their areas, admirably argued though it is. Some of the text does appear to be overly prescriptive.



Without wishing to unnecessarily overestimate the value of this book I feel that it stands up well in comparison with the more established texts from Gordon Cullen, Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs and the like, primarily because it is the first substantial British contribution to Urban Design thought for many years. The comprehensive bibliography amply demonstrates the extent to which the subject is dominated by research from across the Atlantic. The proof of the pudding will as usual be in the eating but when and if projects are conceived according to these principles, they are likely to prove to be more sensitive to people's needs than much of what gets built today.

In summary the theory flies in the face of much accepted custom and practice in the environmental professions and the authors face an uphill struggle to get their values more widely accepted. But we must give 'Responsive Environments' a fair hearing before we judge it and it should be read without preconceived ideas. Much of what is said is commonsense; it's just that most of us have become so blinkered by the preconceptions of our education, we may find it difficult to reexamine the fact.

Lawrence Revill

# Planning - on both sides of the fence

A report of a meeting of the West of England Branch on 26 November 1985.

The West of England Branch of the Urban Design Group held a meeting on the 26 November to talk about Planning as viewed from both the Public and Private sector. The aim of the meeting was to attract a wide audience of practising professionals from both sectors with a vested interest in Planning decisions. The interests of the 36 participants attending ranged from Marketing, Public Relations, Investment, Development and Retail Surveying, through to Structural and Civil Engineering, Landscape Architecture, Traffic Engineering, Planning, Architecture and Urban Design. The political view was represented by an ex-Liberal councillor and the public sector viewpoint by the City Planning Officers of Bath and Bristol.

The aim was to encourage interaction not only between the audience and the speaker, but also amongst members of the audience. Therefore the seats were informally grouped and the format of the evening was that, following the talk, the delegates were split into small discussion groups which then came back together to debate the points raised by each group.

It was not intended that topics be discussed in great detail but that general principles be discussed to identify basic issues which were of concern to those present. These could then form the basis of future meetings to examine specific issues.

The speaker for the evening was Terence O'Rourke, formerly Chief Planning Officer of Wimborne and now a Planning Consultant. He commenced by outlining his career in County and Local Authorities. He stated he was a great supporter of the Local Authority Planning System which, in his view, at its inception had been the finest in the world. Working within the system he had often heard that the quality of various planning authorities varied, but his experience since becoming a Consultant had "shown without doubt that the worst were 'the pits' - most infuriating to deal with." Since becoming a Planning Consultant he had collected his own personal "horror stories" about particular Authorities; and that there was no doubt that there were sane Authorities within whose area many companies would not consider building.

His view of the role of a Planning Officer was that of a person who gave independent and unbiased professional advice to those who needed it. He had noted with concern the increasing tendency of elected members to be constantly lobbied by their own Planners to ensure that their point of view was accepted. His view is that it is the elected representative's role to make political decisions on the advice given and that Planning Officers should stay out of the political arena.

There was an increasing personal pressure on Chief Officers. To be effective they must have their own set of professional standards and principles as a base line, but these were increasingly difficult to sustain over many years of continuous pressure. They were increasingly suffering from "shell shock" brought on by too many public meetings that often degenerated into shouting matches between interest groups. Many simply gave up and took the line of least resistance, swimming with the tide of whatever was currently fashionable. From the speaker's experience this did not improve the quality of planning. Positive results came from Authorities with a strong and clearly stated Planning Policy.

In his view the Planning system had got its priorities wrong. It was his experience that banal, dull, "don't rock the boat" schemes slip like grease through the planning system un-opposed while good, Architect designed schemes, which were clearly

presented and thus capable of criticism, are criticised down to the smallest detail and thus take much longer to get approval. Planning Officers' and Committee time would be much better spent on raising the design level of inferior schemes where a competent level has already been achieved.

He has observed that if a developer uses an architect with a good professional team the scheme takes twice as long to get approval. Therefore the next time the developer will go back to using his old insipid designs to avoid any planning delays.

This is not what Planning is about. The net effect is to encourage abysmal design at the expense of the good. The system should be geared to encouraging quality, by applying to Architect designed schemes of quality the "carrot" of higher densities and quicker Planning decisions, and the "stick" of lower densities and slow decisions to bad schemes.

Every month that a good scheme is delayed reduces its final quality. On a particular scheme done by a very competent Architect, planning wrangles led to a 6 month delay before the architect finally won the day. This cost an additional £100,000 in land interest charges, so to make up for this the quality of materials and finishes had to be reduced to help recover the extra costs. So the end result of planning involvement on this scheme was to worsen the end product. Many Planning departments seem unable to grasp the realities of commercial life and the relationship between money, time and the market. The process of Planning and Building should be a partnership, not a tactical battle where both "sides" see each other as "the enemy".

In Terry O'Rourke's view the best planning system has now become far too bureaucratic and negative, "the automatic reaction of many planning authorities now, when a new scheme is presented to them, is "No! unless...." The results of this can be seen on the ground, and it is just not good enough.

The United Kingdom system of Planning has been exported successfully all over the world, and modified to suit each country and culture. Meanwhile the system back in the United Kingdom has not modified, but has solidified into an inflexible system that is increasingly political.

The speaker then concluded with two final comments:

One, that if it were possible for a totally new planning system to be introduced it should be based on the consensus of the majority and focus far more on Urban Design and far less on detail design and, Two, as a final horror story, he has heard of a local Authority which is said to have recently passed a decision to limit planning approvals to 75 a year, irrespective of size of application. He is pursuing documentary evidence of this!

Following the talk the participants were formed into 5 groups and for 20 minutes the issues raised by the speaker were vigorously debated. Each group was asked to come up with five key words or sentences, which were written on a blackboard. By this time there was no reticence in people expressing their views, and each sentence brought comments from all parts of the room, with requests for clarification, definition of terms, explanation or frank disagreement.

The meeting officially closed after two hours but the majority adjourned to the bar where they continued the topic for two more hours. Those present commented that there were many issues raised which would warrant further specific discussion and they hoped that this would be the basis of seminars in the near future.

David King

# Walled Towns of Bavaria ♦

A study tour organised by the Urban Design Group Eastern Region, 3-11 May, 1986.

Franconia and Swabia were largely bypassed by the main course of history, and retain some of the best examples in Europe of the complete mediaeval town, including intact fortifications. This is an opportunity to visit a number of them, including those on the northern section of the famous 'Romantic Road'. We shall also meet local experts involved in urban conservation and planning.

Travel will be by rail to Heidelberg and thence by minibus or hired cars. The cost of the tour will be £220 for eight nights' stay and travel from London.

Details from: Alan Stones, Fullerthorne, Church Street, Kelvedon, Essex C05 9AH. Telephone: 0245 352232 ext.299. Bookings must be received by Friday, 28 February.

