

139 **URBAN  
DESIGN**

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**TALL BUILDINGS**



**URBAN  
DESIGN  
GROUP**

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

This is the last View from the Chair that I will write for *Urban Design* and it gives me an opportunity to reflect on the last two years of my tenure. The time has flown by!

At last March's National Urban Design Awards I pondered with Graham Smith, a former lecturer at Oxford Brookes University, the use of the word 'community' for new developments. This term is thrown around on a number of planning application documents and marketing material. We were debating whether it could be said that these developments are creating new communities. In literal sense yes, these new developments do contain 'a group of people living in the same place'. The term, however, means

more than this, with people being seen collectively because of their 'social values and responsibilities'. As urban designers we are members of a community. We share similar values and take on the duty of improving the quality of life for people who live and work in cities, towns and villages.

I would like to use this last article to thank people within the Urban Design Group community for continuing to strive to raise the standards in urban design practice. Lack of space precludes me from mentioning everyone but the list includes the following members of the community:

- Robert Huxford and Kathleen Lucey for the running and coordination of the Urban Design Group and Colin Pullan for continuing to be Treasurer.
- Sebastian Loew and Louise Thomas for editing *Urban Design*, with the support of the Editorial Board.
- Laura Alvarez and Andrew Dakin for coordinating the last two national conferences in

Nottingham and Bristol respectively.

- Noha Nasser and the awards panel for continuing to grow the Urban Design Awards.
- Ben van Bruggen and Amanda Reynolds for their ongoing stewardship of the Recognised Practitioner scheme.
- Barry Sellers for providing oral evidence on the Urban Design Group's behalf at the House of Lords' Built Environment Select Committee.
- The various regional conveners of events, particularly Paul Reynolds and Philip Cave in London; Peter Frankum in Southampton; Mark Foster and Hannah Harkis in Manchester; Laura Alvarez in the East Midlands; and, Andrew Dakin in the South West.
- Not forgetting Alan Stone and Sebastian Loew's ever popular study tours.
- And Graham Smith for continuing to question things! ●

Katy Neaves

## NEW VILLAGEISM

In the 1950s there was a great deal of interest in recreating the village environment in new social housing, in the belief that it might help create a sense of community. Today the 'village brand' is used as a major selling point by developers and politicians alike. Most recently a council has described a proposed 12,000 home settlement as a village. But what actually is a village? Hoping to find out more I attended the 2016 annual spring conference of the Medieval Settlement Research Group at Lincoln University. Hosted by Time Team's Professor Carenza Lewis, the conference ranged from latest theories through to community archaeology.

Greenfield development, by definition, takes place in fields. In England there are two broad patterns of underlying rural settlements: one, of dispersed homesteads, hamlets and small fields, and the other, of

nucleated villages each attached to two or three large open fields farmed collectively, a pattern found in much of central England. How, why and when did these nucleated villages develop? Dr. Susan Oosthuizen from the University of Cambridge argued that the governance for collective farming was in place by the time of the Roman invasion, as shown by archaeological evidence. She suggested that the expansion tended to happen where there had been a tradition of arable farming going back to the Roman era or before, and posed a theory that medieval expansion occurred when people were invited in by their manorial Lord in order to increase production.

The conference included a trip to the deserted village of Riseholme, created in the 12th century as a planned village, designed using the perch as the unit of measure (5.0m). There is a single straight street running east-west, and a row of rectangular house plots (or tofts) on either side, each 20m wide and 40m deep (or 4 by 8 perches). The regular design of Riseholme coincides with the deliberate planning of

many market towns formed around burghage plots. There is nothing new about plot-based urbanism.

Medieval villages were settlements for people who worked the surrounding fields. They had a system of governance that included collective decision-making, and oversight from Church and manorial Lord. Surplus produce was taxed or traded. The villages were highly organised, and some were formally designed. The vast majority were sustainable in all senses of the word. We impoverish our thinking when we regard villages only in physical terms.

When we develop greenfield sites, we should remember that they are things with a deep history. Some may still have boundaries that go back to the Iron age, and be served by roads and routes that are older still. If we intend to emulate a village, we should think about governance, economics, and social structure as well as physical design. ●

Robert Huxford

## DIARY OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, all LONDON events are held at The Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ at 6.30 pm.

Note that there are many other events run by UDG volunteers throughout the UK. For the latest details and pricing, please check on the UDG website [www.udg.org.uk/events/udg](http://www.udg.org.uk/events/udg)

### WEDNESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

#### Tall Buildings

Overcrowded, unhealthy, lacking in greenspace, and light? Or compact, energy saving, vibrant, and the answer to the challenge of housing a growing population? This event will debate the issues raised in this edition of the journal.

### 6-7 OCTOBER

#### The National Urban Design Conference Learning from London

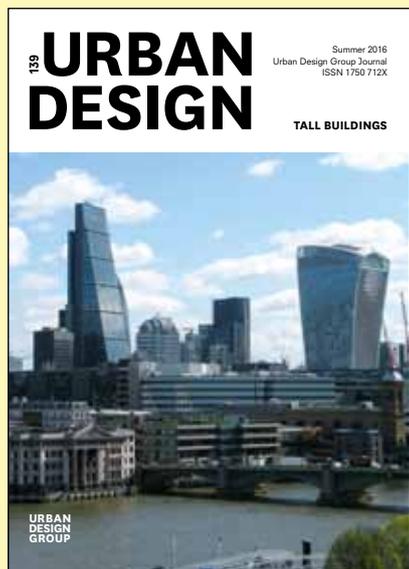
This year's conference will take place at the Victory Services Club in London. It will consider the changes that have taken place in

the city since the last conference was held in London some twenty years ago, how professionals of the built environment, developers and politicians have reacted to these changes and what we can learn for the future.

### WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER

#### Food and Urban Design

A focus for regeneration? A catalyst for stronger communities? A contribution to reduced food miles and environmental impact? A means to improve the health and wellbeing of the population and reduce obesity? Featuring the theme in *Urban Design* 140.



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London Skyline, Photograph by Sebastian  
Loew

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# Not fit for purpose

London has a new Mayor, only the third elected to that post since the creation of the Greater London Authority, and we can only hope that he will be a more effective manager of the capital than his two predecessors. Both of these were flamboyant characters keen to enhance their own images, and one of the ways they thought to do this was by encouraging tall buildings, the subject covered in this issue. There have been many rationalisations for allowing the dramatic change to the city's skyline that is taking place, some of which are discussed in the following pages, but the large egos of the mayors undoubtedly played a part. Unfortunately, the negative impact of these tall structures on the environment, on the public realm, on the infrastructure and services, has had very little coverage. And nobody seems to remember the vicious criticisms voiced against 1960s tall buildings (then called tower blocks) often by exactly the same people promoting them today.

The articles on the topic of tall buildings collected by Michael Short cover a range of aspects with an emphasis on London approached from different angles by various contributors. Other cities are used as comparisons, showing that within certain parameters, tall buildings can make a positive contribution and also that the problem does not only affect large capital cities but also medium size towns.

The housing crisis is undoubtedly the main issue that the new Mayor has to tackle. His means to do this are limited and he will therefore have to work hard and negotiate with the many other stakeholders, the boroughs, central government, the private sector, and avoid being carried away by flashy schemes that do not benefit Londoners. A similar situation applies to other parts of the country where, in addition, there are problems with the transport system, and a lack of investment in infrastructure.

Several events, also reported in this issue, have taken place recently where these subjects have been discussed, together with the Government's approach to planning and urban design. Even representatives of the developing industry admit that the system is broken and needs fundamental change, but not in the direction pursued by the present administration: Nick Rogers on p.10 gives a very lucid exposé of the situation. The recently published report of the House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment (see p.3) would be an excellent start of the debate. It will have to be considered by the House of Commons and all professionals concerned should lobby their representatives to support its proposals.

The Urban Design Group is the ideal forum to discuss the current problems and expose them to a wider audience. It needs more young professionals willing to get involved in its activities and spread the word. ●

Sebastian Loew, architect and planner, writer and consultant

## HOW TO JOIN

To join the Urban Design Group, visit [www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk) and see the benefits of taking out an annual membership.

**Individual (UK and international)** £50  
**UK student / concession** £30  
**Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design** £80  
**Small practice** (<5 professional staff) £250  
**Large practice** (>5 professional staff) £450  
**Education** £250  
**Local Authority** £100  
**UK Library** £80  
**International Library** £100



## Building Better Places

NLA, The Building Centre, London, 24 February 2016

Matthew Carmona is the Specialist Advisor to the House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment, whose report was published a few days before this meeting and at which he presented its scope and main findings. The report (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/100.pdf>) addresses a wide range of questions: policy making, integration and coordination, the role of government in dealing with the

housing crisis, sustainability, skills availability, community involvement, finance, etc. The Committee's work was based on evidence and comments received, and went beyond short-term issues.

The current approach to the built environment is crisis-led and lacks ambition; currently the crisis is housing but at other times it may be infrastructure, flooding or high streets. We fiddle with regulations instead of adopting a pro-active approach. The government cannot control everything but the private sector cannot do everything either. Among the report's conclusions were:

- We need to do better and aim higher
- Quality of place should be at the heart of all policies: speed should not be achieved at the expense of quality, sustainability or resilience
- National government should set the

national ambition

- Local government should be empowered to deliver with partners.

The report recommends inter alia the appointment of a Chief Built Environment Advisor supported by a Unit; the production of a national architecture and place policy; reinforcing design review; establishing a zero carbon trajectory; reviewing the borrowing restrictions of local government; facilitating SME builders; making planning proactive. The question posed at the end of Matthew's presentation was 'How can we ensure that the committee's recommendations are turned into practical realities?' The Government has to respond to the report and there will be a debate in Parliament; therefore all built environment professionals should read it and press for its recommendations to be followed.

The ensuing debate chaired by NLA director Peter Murray involved Peter Bishop, Esther Kurland and Max Farrell, all of whom endorsed the report, emphasising different aspects that they thought were of particular relevance. The current rather anarchic development of design review was mentioned as were the achievements of CABE, though the establishment of a 'son of CABE' was favoured by only part of the audience. ●

Sebastian Loew



## Latin America

The Gallery, London, 15 March 2016

Latin America was a recent *Urban Design* topic for the first time, after other geo-regions like North America, India, China and Europe. Sebastian Loew, who edited the topic gave an overview of the 12 articles, all from Spanish Latin America apart from one on sustainable regeneration of a *favela* in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He summarised various design concerns: centrality, (im-)material heritage preservation, community involvement, public space as social asset, governance subjected to political sways preventing continuity, holistic vs. acupuncture approaches, urban

redevelopment with environmental concerns. Besides the *favela* study, all but one were mega-projects on paper without much link to implementation.

Put into the context of *Planetary Gentrification*, these projects illustrate a process of gentrification and displacement driven by the state and the development industry, which goes well beyond the role of design in the process of urban change. In her critique, Catalina Ortiz (above) from the Development Planning Unit at UCL, advocated the need of expanding the notion of urban design as coined in the western world to suit Latin American urbanism. This, in her view, consisted of *mestizo* urbanism rooted in pre-Hispanic times and its superposition of the rigid grid structure as a tool of control on the one hand, and on the other hand, sites

of socio-spatial innovation such as rapid bus transit, cable cars, favelas or disaster recovery protocols. Specific challenges would require urban design to reclaim political relevance in what she considered the most unequal, multicultural, fragmented, macro-cephalic urban system in the world. She illustrated her selection of urban design challenges in Latin America to show that they were beyond traditional urban design capacity. Alternative urban design may have to become a negotiated co-production of space based on fresh knowledge of the citizens, the environment and the role of location, as well as on more multidisciplinary socio-spatial action research.

Laura Alvarez who had written the very useful explanatory article on the *Laws of the Indies* chose to talk about La Plata, a Latin-American garden city, 80 km south of Buenos Aires, Argentina which satisfied all the original garden city criteria except transportation. The discussion confirmed that the internalised idea that the west has still lessons to teach and could provide professional help to the south still prevails. Perhaps unpacking these ideas would warrant a UDG debate to overcome both the western-centric superiority and go-it-alone isolation of the south. ●

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



## Delivering Housing for London

### PART 1, BDP OFFICES, LONDON, 16 MARCH 2016

Addressing London's housing needs was a key topic in the recent Mayoral election, with all of the major candidates promising to build 50,000 homes a year. London contains a number of large Opportunity Areas, and there is an expectation that these areas will be unlocked through transport improvements to accommodate significant volumes of medium-density housing. The Urban Design Group and the Transport Planning Society therefore jointly organised two events to explore this topic.

The first evening, hosted by BDP, was kicked off by Martin Tedder from Transport for London who set the scene with the current population projections for London, recent housing delivery rates and the projected cumulative effects of the housing gap reaching over half a million units by 2035. Public transport is key to delivering housing with 85 per cent of units built since 2000 within 1km of a station. Martin presented a multi-pronged approach to TfL's role in unlocking housing, including working to develop public sector landholdings, working to improve access to support growth in the designated Opportunity Areas and Housing Zones, enabling densification along existing infrastructure through the 'metro-isation' of existing rail services, and delivering major new infrastructure such as Crossrail 2.

There is a clear link between public transport connectivity and density in major cities, and Paul Buchanan of Volterra made a compelling case for reform of the transport scheme appraisal process. Citing the example of the Jubilee Line extension to Canary Wharf, which had a poor business case under conventional Department for Transport appraisal rules, he argued that transport investment decisions could be very different if land use impacts were appropriately considered. Economists would describe housing delivery in London as an imperfect market with little incentive for landowners to develop sites more quickly. The economic impacts of the housing gap do affect

London's businesses in all sectors through higher wages compared to competitor cities, prompting wide-ranging support for measures to resolve the crisis.

George Weeks, Urban Designer with TfL, then took the audience on a fascinating tour of two developments in Ijburg, Amsterdam and Hammarby-Sjöstad, Stockholm. These are both major mixed-use developments on brownfield or reclaimed land, and have many similarities to the large sites London is seeking to unlock in its outlying Opportunity Areas. Two common factors at both sites included the up-front delivery of high-quality public transport through the spine of the sites, providing connectivity to the city and an environment suited to less car-dependent lifestyles. The second factor was the role of place-making, for example, through partially plot-based development creating varied neighbourhoods and the inclusion of leisure facilities (in Stockholm in the form of a ski slope!). These factors are linked to a delivery model with clear city leadership, a spatial development framework, the exercise of ownership powers, advance infrastructure provision, securing design quality and a framework for ongoing stewardship.

Many thanks are due to BDP and Urban Flow for their sponsorship of this event. ●

Martin Wedderburn, independent transport consultant

### PART 2, THE GALLERY, LONDON, 14 APRIL 2016

The second evening was held at the Gallery and chaired by Colin Pullan who illustrated the central issue by mentioning a few figures: the projected growth of London's population to 2030 would require building over an area as big as Birmingham and Coventry together. Martin Wedderburn started the evening by summarising the first meeting for those that hadn't been there.

Dr Riette Oosthuizen, planning partner at HTA Design, then presented her work on *Supurbia* (described also in UD 138), a strategy aimed at utilising existing available land more efficiently. Three requirements for success are: area based initiatives, involving the residents, and using Local Development Orders in combination with Plot Passports (a kind of permitted development) none of which would require new

planning legislation. Housing could be built on large gardens of suburban semi-detached houses or bungalows located at a maximum distance of 800m to a public transport stop. Riette illustrated this with sketches of various possible arrangements. To allay residents' resistance to densification, the strategy shows that home-owners would benefit financially, and that collaboration between neighbours would make it even more beneficial. The next step of *Supurbia* is the intensification of existing shopping centres.

Tim Pharaoh was the next speaker. His theme was 'development beyond London's sphere of economic influences'. The case study he presented was that of Colchester Metro Town on which he worked to present an alternative to the standard model of development regularly applied in Essex, commissioned by the Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex (CAUSE). The projected growth for Colchester/Tendering requires 20,000 new homes in 15 years and it must be based on high quality transit network which is not been provided or planned for at the moment. On the other hand the existing electrified Clacton to Colchester railway line is a high quality but totally underused investment that could be the basis of the area's sustainable development: between 6,000-9,000 new homes could be built around each of the five existing stops. This would increase the use of the Metro line, not just for commuting but also for shopping, education and leisure. Additional actions are needed to improve accessibility to the east and to address the mediocre quality of Colchester city centre.

The last speaker was Ben Rogers of the Centre for London who described the possible political obstacles to resolve the housing problems. These are partly due to the way that development is tackled in Britain and who benefits from it. At present the cuts in local authority funding have greatly affected the Boroughs' planning departments and the Mayor has limited powers or finance to resolve the housing crisis. However more could be done with land owned by TfL and the railway network.

A lively discussions followed. ●

Sebastian Loew



## The Place Alliance Big Midlands Meet

Birmingham, 15 March 2016

The Place Alliance Big Midlands Meet, hosted by JMP Consultants Ltd in Birmingham, was an excellent platform to discuss the future of regional planning and urban design. Conversations began with the pressing issue of housing demand and where homes could be best located to promote growth. David Rudlin stated, ‘...growth should be accommodated in a way that reinforces all regional cities by making much better use of urban capacity, only building in locations that can be connected efficiently to town and city centres by public transport. Birmingham

should pursue a growth agenda if it isn’t to be overtaken by the other provincial cities.’

The imminent introduction of the HS2 as a high impact catalyst to structural transformation was discussed at some length. Issues of design and quality of place and landscape were portrayed as being of great concern in central England. Kathryn Moore said ‘landscape is still undervalued and underrated’ explaining that innovation and creativity are needed to combine traditional grounded knowledge with emerging ways to explore places through phenomenology. Phil Jones pointed out that most comments emerging from regional review panels relate to poor road design and that if we do not get basic principles right we will not increase quality of place.

The presentations continued by zooming into the small scale, looking at how development can impact on personal wellbeing and

on the population as a whole. This is particularly important in a world where societal changes driven by globalisation and communication advances are having a negative impact on the physical and mental health of the population. Noha Nasser said: ‘As place makers we are responsible for ensuring our public realm works to bring people together. Think about uses and activities that spark conversations and can be enjoyed by everyone.’

Recurrent themes across all presentations were the need to create places with a sense of identity, and the importance of considering, respecting and embracing public perceptions, both regarding existing places and new developments. The event discussions will result in a ten point action plan for the region, covering all scales of design and planning. A team will be established to create a place-based action plan rooted in ethical practice.

A huge thanks is due to Emily Walsh, Chair of the RTP1 West Midlands urban design forum and Associate Director at JMP for making this event possible, who said:

‘Our Big Midlands Meet was a great success, with over 100 people attending from a wide range of organisations. The presentations and discussions on the day have pointed to a number key things we need to do to deliver great places in the Midlands.’ ●

Laura Alvarez, alkiki Co-founding Director  
UDG East Midlands Convenor



## The Big Meet 5

UCL, London, 29 April 2016

Place Alliance which describes itself as a ‘movement’, was borne out of the Farrell Review’s recommendation that place quality should concern us rather than urban design, arguably a semantic rather than a fundamental difference. The Big Meet 5 hosted by UCL’s Bartlett School of Planning aimed to reflect on design review and assembled a number of professionals involved in this growing industry. Matthew Carmona started the proceedings with a fascinating account of the history of design review, starting in 1802

and ending today with a free market and a variety of models. Former director of CABE, Richard Simmons then described these, how they evolved after the demise of CABE, what they have in common and what the differences are. Victor Callister, Deputy Director at the Design Council argued that as investment in the property market is so huge, it has a major influence on planning. Therefore design review, to be accepted, needs to be cost effective and show what impact it really has on quality, which can only be done with evidence based research – not available at present.

Turning to practical matters, David Tittle, formerly of MADE and now design manager at Design South East pointed out that place review is what is being done by panels and

suggested that the best approach was to review existing places in advance of planned proposals coming to a panel for review. He also emphasised the importance of timing, as schemes are often reviewed too late in the process and therefore the applicants are reluctant to change their designs. Andrew Forth from the RIBA showing some examples of successful design review, added that it works best when people understand what its purpose is. After a detour through Northern Ireland presented by Mary Laheen, Nigel Longstaff, Group Urban design Director at Barratt Development, the sponsor of the event, gave a heartfelt defense of his company’s work. This is perceived very negatively (the cul de sac, the endless nowhere houses, etc) but with examples, he showed that the reality was much better and affirmed that the company is committed to improve design quality and place making. He also listed the obstacles to achieve this such as antiquated design standards, highway authorities, and bins! For him design review worked in some cases and not in others.

The morning ended with a debate that focussed mainly on how panels engaged with communities and how design review could be evaluated. ●

Sebastian Loew



1

## Milan and Turin UDG Study Tour

21 – 25 April 2016

In April Sebastian Loew led the latest of the Urban Design Group's legendary study tours of European cities. Twenty-five Group members and friends spent four days exploring Milan and Turin.

Milan, capital of Lombardy, is Italy's second city with a population of 1.3 million within a wider metropolitan area of 3.5 million. The city sits in the midst of a fertile agricultural plain at the foot of the Alps and has had a long and often turbulent history, having been invaded many times and coming under Roman, Spanish, Austrian and French occupation, not to mention numerous Republican regimes. The city's cultural significance is enormous, from its time as an early Christian centre (Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 gave the first formal Roman recognition to Christianity), much later as the adopted home of Leonardo da Vinci, and in the 20th century as a major operatic capital in the form of La Scala theatre.

Milan's history can be read in its streets. The medieval core is contained within the traces of the former Spanish walls, with arterial roads (several of Roman origin) leading from the outskirts, and grids of 18th and 19th century streets in between. There is a striking contrast where these grids meet the more organic heart of the city, with its great Duomo (the largest Gothic building in Italy) and the huge Gallerie – glazed arcades – of the 1860s. The city streets are mostly spacious, reflecting 19th century improvements as well as post-war reconstruction. Milan was bombed 15 times in the Second World War and half of the city centre had to be rebuilt.

The image of contemporary Milan is forward-looking, indelibly associated with

modernity, fashion and design. The skyline is dotted with Italy's earliest skyscrapers including the graceful Giò Ponti's Grattacielo Pirelli, built in 1958 and a counterfoil to the imperial hubris of Mussolini's Stazione Centrale,

The three-yearly Milano Triennale design forum is an important cultural event for residents and visitors alike. The city centre is still a popular place to live, if increasingly costly; an efficient and cheap public transport system keeps it going.

On our first day we were welcomed at the prestigious Politécnico di Milano – one of Italy's main school of architecture and planning – by Professor Corinna Morandi, who summarised Milan's urban history and recent development initiatives. It was a good time to visit Milan, Morandi said, with the spirit of last year's international Exposition still in the air, even if the displays had been dismantled and there was deplorably little evidence of any legacy planning. As the theme of the Expo had been *Feeding the planet, energy for life*, some were questioning its sustainability credentials.

The northern side of the city formerly housed the industrial districts, dominated by legendary names from the automotive industry, Pirelli and Alfa Romeo. The southern side of the city was more strongly associated with waterways and the agricultural hinterland, but were still important economically.

The industrial sites are now being recast with fashion, retail and leisure uses to the fore, as well as housing. The *grandi progetti* were alive and well in Milan: many masterplans were nearing completion and we would visit several of these, mainly to the north and west of the city centre.

Bicocca with a masterplan by Vittorio Gregotti, was once the centre of Pirelli and is now a large campus for the Università degli Studi di Milano, one of Milan's seven universities; its grid follows the former industrial plan design pattern. The former Ansaldo plant where electric train engines were

- 1 Milan: the Portello park by C Jencks and A Kipar, Photograph by Victor Morais
- 2 Milan: the Darsena at night, Photograph by Victor Morais
- 3 Milan: CityLife residential building by Zaha Hadid
- 4 Milan: UniCredit building by C Pelli
- 5 Turin: Piazza San Carlo
- 6 Milan: Bosco Verticale by S Boeri

made, has now been re-purposed as a giant sculpture gallery, displaying Anselm Kiefer's vertiginous Seven Celestial Places (2004).

The Porta Nuova district is close to the city centre and until recently the industrial yards stood abandoned, with ownerships fragmented between the public and private sectors. It has now been cleared away and rebuilt as an up-market shopping and housing area, masterplanned by Cesar Pelli, with a fine new elevated piazza and Pelli's shiny curved building for UniCredit, complete with pinnacle as its principal landmark.

The nearby Bosco Verticale, a pair of residential towers by Stefano Boeri with more than 900 trees on their balconies, provided an eye-catching alternative to their glass and steel neighbours.

Friday evening provided an opportunity for the party to explore the southern side of the city with a stroll around the Darsena district where the old canals known as the Navigli, have been regenerated and are now a leisure area teeming with life.

Suitably fortified, our Saturday's explorations began with a visit to QT8 (named after the Ottava Triennale di Milano, held in 1947) a model housing estate of slab blocks led by architect Piero Bottoni, started in 1948 and completed in the late 1950s. Railings and gates now separate the apartments from the street, but the landscape is mature and the development seems to be wearing well. Comparisons were made with the LCC's Roehampton Estate, its close contemporary.

A short walk took us to Portello – formerly the Alfa Romeo car plant, which vacated the site in 1974, and has now been redeveloped to a plan by Valle Studio. The most impressive urban move was Parco Portello, where designers Charles Jencks and Andreas Kipar have used the DNA double helix motif to create a curvaceous, dreamlike landscape on the theme of time. From there, the main link to the rest of the scheme, the Passarella or footbridge (Arup) across the Circonvallazione one ring road, was bafflingly hard to reach, forcing our group to make a big detour.



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Much less appealing was Piazza Gino Valle, now the largest square in Milan and named in honour of its late masterplanner. The piazza was deserted and soulless on our visit; Fabio Novembre's Palazzo Casa Milan with its glassy facade and dancing rooftop figures failed to lift the spirits.

Adjacent and planned in parallel is CityLife, the new business and residential district on the site of the old Fiera di Milano exhibition area, developed initially by the Generali insurance giant. It is now in the hands of Allianz, whose MicoMilan Convention Centre Park forms the centrepiece.

Flamboyant residential blocks by Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid and Arata Isozaki are newly completed and look out onto the park designed by Gustafson Porter, Melk, One Works and Ove Arup. Three mixed use towers (named Straight, Twisted and Curved, by Arata Isozaki, Hadid and Libeskind respectively) are in varying stages of construction. Some of these were undoubtedly exciting, but it was hard to escape the feeling that the developments were designed in wilful isolation, with more emphasis on architectural shape-making than on creating a vibrant urban quarter. A metro station on a new line serves the new district.

## TURIN

Sunday took us by train westwards from Milan to Turin, passing between small towns, pasture and rice fields. We arrived at Torino Porta Susa, the sleek and sunlit new station

completed in 2013 by Paris-based Silvio D'Ascial Architecture.

Turin, smaller and more compact than Milan, allegedly receives fewer tourists than any other comparable Italian city. Unjustly so, we thought, as we strolled through its delightful arcaded streets. The *passeggiata* was alive and well in the city and our visit coincided with a long weekend and the Turin Jazz Festival, with performers and their attendant crowds enlivening the streets and squares.

The city was extensively rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries on the Roman grid, although most of the buildings in the centre date from the mid to late 19th century. The Via Roma and Via Garibaldi are elegant and formal colonnaded streets contained within the loop of the river Po and with glimpses of the snow-capped mountains to the north of the city.

Since 1899 Turin has indelibly been associated with Fiat and the Agnelli family: in 1923 the old Lingotto plant located in the southern part of the city, was once the largest car factory in the world. The main building is 500m long with a volume of one million cubic metres. It was built over five floors with a ramp leading to the rooftop test track, pioneering modular use of reinforced concrete. Fiat vacated the factory in 1983 and shortly afterwards Renzo Piano was appointed for what was to become a 20-year project for the re-use, and re-imagining, of the whole extraordinary complex. Interiors were mostly scooped out to accommodate a

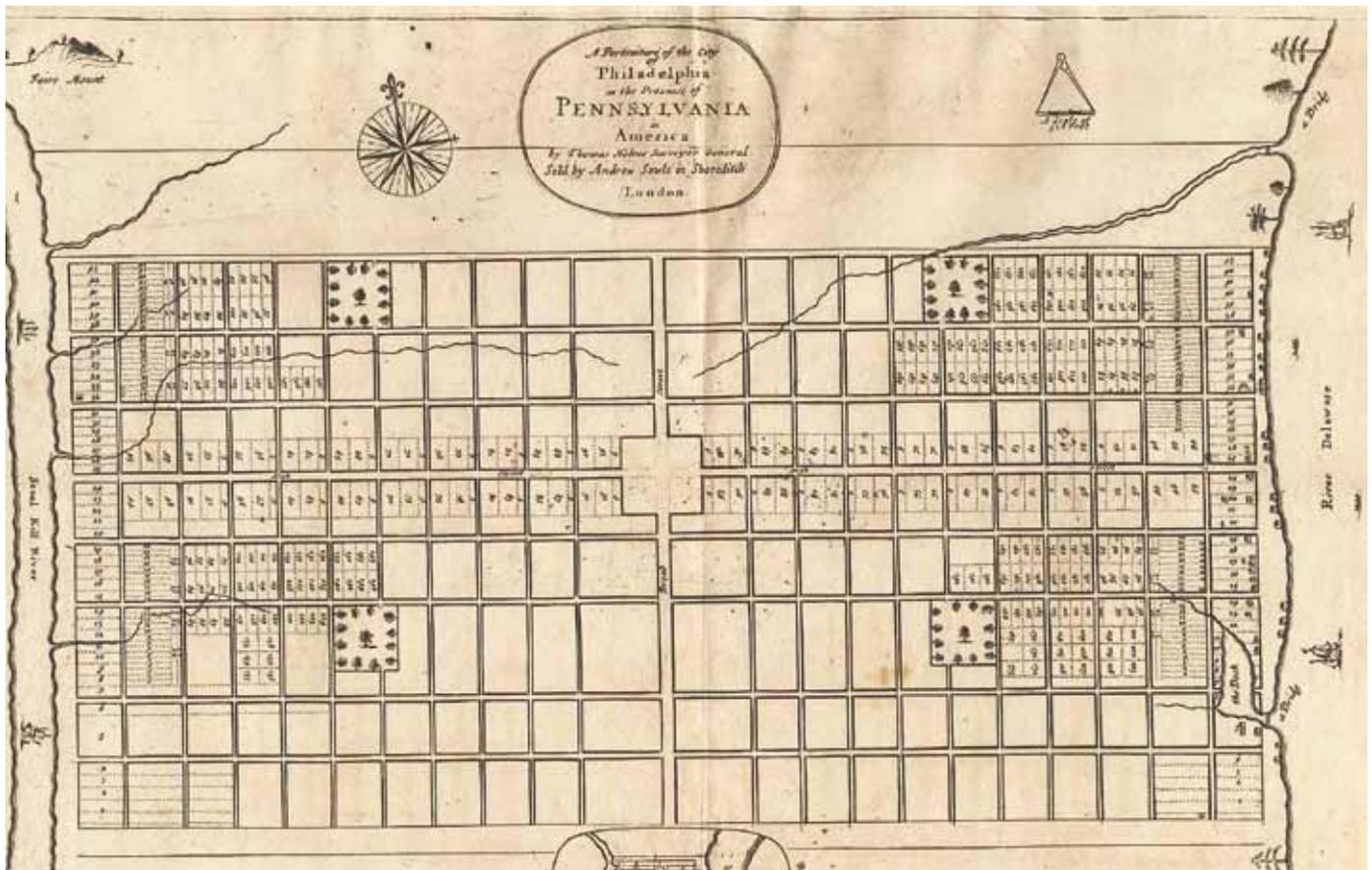
wide range of uses: shops, conference centres, hotels and offices co-exist, but happily the spiral ramp also survives.

Cantilevered above the main building is Piano's metal box that contains the Agnelli art collection, small but exquisite with paintings from Canaletto to Picasso and Matisse. A temporary exhibition of Gae Aulenti showed the range of this most individualistic architect. The test track survives, allowing exhibition visitors to stroll across the tarmac and enjoy an Alpine panorama beyond the city rooftops.

A lively addition to Lingotto's retail mix is Eataly, an upmarket foodie emporium on a huge scale; a cross between Harrods Food Hall and Borough Market, stuffed with the rafters with bars, restaurants and delicatessen dispensing all things edible and drinkable. It is a winning formula.

An unplanned Monday morning allowed members of the group to explore Milano's city centre monuments and to visit the exquisite Prada Foundation designed by Rem Koolhaas, located in another former industrial building. ●

Geoff Noble, urban design and heritage consultant



## My Favourite Plan – Mike Galloway

Philadelphia Plan, 1683 by William Penn and Thomas Holme

### Why it is important

This masterplan for the layout of Philadelphia, the first planned city in the USA, marked the rebirth of the gridiron street pattern in modern times. It led directly to all of the subsequent rectangular street layouts of the western world. New York, Barcelona and Edinburgh New Town are all descendants of this rediscovery of the power of the grid.



I have always been fascinated by grid layouts and have tinkered with the concept throughout my career, either in a purist sense as in Glasgow City Centre, or in a more responsive approach at Crown Street in the Gorbals.

Penn's two main thoroughfares of Broad Street and High Street intersect at Centre Square, thus dividing the city into four quadrants; each of these has its own square and it is the subsequent fate of each of these squares that underpins the second reason why this masterplan is so important.

In her life-changing book (for me anyway) *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs describes the processes by which four identically designed and positioned squares could end up being so different after 300 years of urbanisation. Some are intact and successful while others lie ruined and shunned as a result of modernist planning, comprehensive redevelopment and the worship of the motor car.

This story impacted heavily on me in my student days and led me to being totally convinced by Jacobs' four key principles of mixed use, permeability, diversity and density. While these are now widely accepted, they were ground-breaking at the time when she fought against the demolition of inner city neighbourhoods in the USA and Canada.

I got to meet Jane Jacobs in Toronto a few years before she died; a diminutive lady (who would have been 100 years this year) with bright eyes and a fierce passion. I wonder how she would have gotten on with William Penn; probably not very well, I think,

as he was far too much the orthodox urbanist for her liking.

### What to learn from it

Grid layouts are powerful urban forms which are pretty resilient and quite democratic in the way they can structure city life. Grids are fairly ubiquitous throughout many societies and can take various forms and scales, but they can also, if not managed carefully, be easily dominated and ruined by dense traffic.

The key lesson, however, is that a grid is just a framework upon which a deliberately more messy approach to human activity needs to be draped. A huffer-mugger mix of uses within a diverse range of buildings at a reasonable density is the real secret to a successful plan. ●

### Current position

Executive Director of City Development, Dundee City Council.

### Education

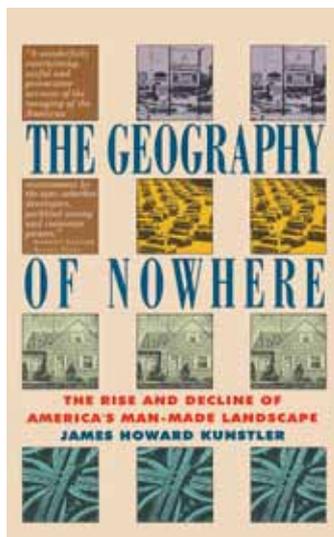
BSc in Town Planning (Dundee) 1979. MA in Urban Design (Oxford Polytechnic) 1982.

### Specialisms

Regeneration, urban design, master planning and project implementation.

### Ambition

To complete our own new rectilinear grid masterplan for Dundee Waterfront; the new streets and spaces are built and the first buildings are under construction.



## The Urban Design Library #18

*The Geography of Nowhere, The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape*, James Howard Kunstler, Touchstone, 1994

The main story James Howard Kunstler wants to tell in this book is how the beautiful and wild landscape of the North American continent was gradually but relentlessly ruined by its inhabitants; today, 'most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy and spiritually degrading', he laments and the main reason for this destruction is American individualism which leads to the neglect of the public realm. Developers and the private car are the instruments that helped the process.

In the early 90s, Americans were still enamoured of suburbia (most of them still are), global warming was just starting to be debated, the world economy was changing and not to the benefit of the West. Kunstler's book was a wake up call to his compatriots. There are parallels with the much earlier Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life* and the subtitle of this book is obviously a nod to its predecessor. Neither of the authors were architects or planners, but they were good observers critical of what was happening in their environment. Jacobs focussed mostly, though not only, on the neighbourhood. Kunstler takes a much wider view but covers some of the same ground (though surprisingly never quotes her) and both had a common enemy in Robert Moses, the so-called 'master builder' of New York whose 'only ideology was to get highways, bridges and tunnels built' and who 'showed a strange enmity for railroad trains and mass transit'.

These comments are at the core of Kunstler's arguments: whilst rail connected neighbourhoods, towns and cities across the country, allowing for dense hubs to develop around the stations, the car and the

highway encouraged undifferentiated suburban sprawl and isolated people from each other. Town centres disappeared and were replaced by malls, streets were no longer fronted by buildings, housing developments became dormitories to which people had no particular allegiance. A recurrent theme is that the neglect of the public realm reflects a particularly American attitude that considers land as a commodity and not a community good, and has negative consequences for society.

Kunstler makes connections between the zoning laws and the impossibility of creating a lively town: in most places, residential above shops is not allowed, or large set backs are compulsory, thus destroying any connection between street and building. In most commercial areas this means car parking on the street front instead of front doors. Furthermore restrictive zoning laws have led to segregation and the destruction of communities. He also points at the contrast between the poor quality of architecture and the nostalgic image that people have of buildings; or between the enjoyment of places like Disneyworld, with its car free environment, and the *noplace* where people live, 'the place where the dream house stood – a subdivision of many other identical dream houses – was neither the country nor the city ...it combined the worst social elements of the city and country and none of the best elements'.

Kunstler reserves much of his anger for the relentless building of highways, and the simultaneous destruction of public transport, which encouraged sprawl and led to the rise of the shopping mall. These in turn destroyed the urban high street and the local economy, as profits were 'funnelled to corporate headquarters far away' instead of staying in the community. 'The chains gave back nothing to the locality except a handful of low-wage service jobs'. Sounds familiar?

The UK is not the USA but in re-reading this book, first discovered whilst travelling in America in 2000, the similarities are striking. The patterns are the same: the decline of town centres, the car-dominated environment, the spread of chains, the erosion of the countryside and the ubiquitous housing developments which are not places. For too long we have let engineers design towns around the needs of the automobile and neglected the public realm. As in the US, we have let the business lobbies influence government and deregulate planning. As a result the profession that used to be visionary, has been deskilled and reduced to a bureaucratic role: 'planners are now chiefly preoccupied with administrative procedure: issuing permits, filling out forms, and shuffling papers'.

Some of the liveliest parts of the book deal with specific places and how they have evolved; chapter eight, How to mess up a town, describes the decline of Saratoga Springs in upstate New York, whilst chapter ten, the Loss of community, deals with

a smaller place called Schuylerville. Later Kunstler contrasts the fate of Detroit following the decline of the motor industry, with the success of Portland, Oregon, where the administration forcefully protected the city's environment and its economy. Los Angeles is a third example, where the car is as indispensable as oxygen, and the public realm non-existent. Capitals of unreality shows how within an environment that has become uniform and banal, society needs fantasy worlds and these are provided by Disneyworld, Atlantic City or Woodstock, catering for different income groups and different kinds of dreams.

Finally, there is a glimmer of hope. New Urbanism was still in its infancy but Duany and Plater-Zyberk had designed Seaside, Florida, and Peter Calthorpe had started building Laguna West in California. Kunstler is a great fan. Christopher Alexander's *Pattern Language* is also praised as are a couple of less known initiatives. Kunstler is rightly convinced that the age of the petrol fuelled automobile is nearing its end and that Americans will be forced to rethink fundamentally the way they live and interact with their environment. The situation there is undoubtedly more dramatic than it is here, but the issues are the same and we are moving in the wrong direction. Deregulation of the planning system, allowing the market to take most decisions regardless of the consequences will be self-destructive. 'Sooner or later, absolute necessity will compel us to give up our present habits, but by then the cost of rebuilding may be more than we can bear'.

Not everything in the book is relevant or even good. There are chapters on the evolution of architectural design in America, which are entertaining but somewhat superficial, and his condemnation of modernism is arguably overstated. Post-modernism which was at its peak when Kunstler was writing, fares no better. Some parts of the book are more like rants. But the greatest failure is the lack of images, which is incomprehensible even though Jacobs' masterpiece has the same problem. If ever this book was reprinted, I hope the publishers will illustrate it.

I haven't covered all the book's aspects and I would probably advise readers to skip parts of it and find the juicy bits. But these are very well worth reading and reflecting upon and could be as mind expanding and influential as Jane Jacobs' classic. ●

Sebastian Loew

### READ-ON

Duany, Andrés, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck (2000). *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York: North Point Press.

Calthorpe, Peter: *Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change*, Island Press, 2010

Hayden, Dolores, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life*, WW Norton, 2002

# A House Builder's Perspective

Nick Rogers' keynote speech for the National Urban Design Awards ceremony



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Many design problems disturb my sleep: how do we meet increasing energy performance cost-effectively and safely? Or how can we modify our home designs to meet the national space standards? Or perhaps, how can we consistently design and deliver good ordinary competent places for our customers to live in?

Of the varied design areas I have to deal with and improve, place-making is the hardest to pin down. The actions we are working on to improve current practice include: writing design guidance, running internal design reviews and training workshops, and developing a design academy. But these, though important, are short-term tactical responses. There are longer-term issues, tied to a potentially changing context of the whole industry, and the foremost of these is our response to housing undersupply: how is that supply shortfall addressed while improving quality and in the context of a cyclical economy?

Housing undersupply has to be the biggest problem that our industry has faced, and if we respond to it in the wrong way, either through our own efforts, or through a response to policy and context changes, we risk repeating mistakes of the past, or worse.

## SIZE OF THE PROBLEM

Britain built just under 200,000 homes in 2015, which is less than the expected rate of new household formation. To deal with undersupply we need to provide, depending on whose figures are used, between 250,000 and 300,000 homes per year. Each year we fail to meet the number, we fall further behind. The last time the UK exceeded 250,000 new homes was 1979, when the tenure split was 144,120 by private developers, 21,390 by housing associations and 86,320 by local authorities. The last time output exceeded 300,000 was 1973 with a breakdown by tenure of 191,080, 12,130 and 101,430 respectively.

This is not a problem that is going to be solved easily; there are significant barriers to such a drastic increase in delivery:

- The construction subcontract base shrank hugely in the recession. Many skilled tradesmen will not come back to the industry and those who may replace them need to be trained.
- The wider construction supply chain adjusted to a lower output and will take time to grow output again. We have already seen that the reopening of brickworks has lagged behind demand by a year to eighteen months.
- The development industry also reduced in size during the downturn: in 2009 Taylor Wimpey produced 68 per cent of the homes that

the newly merged company had completed in 2007, and reduced the number of regional offices from 36 to 24. Design consultants didn't escape the downturn either and now at current output, most designers are stretched. Can either easily increase capacity by 25 or 50 per cent?

- Planning departments throughout the country are struggling with local authority cuts and consequent resource and skill shortages, whilst trying to cope with continual government tinkering with the planning system.

All of this points to an industry that is a long way from being able to deliver the step change in housing output required, and without greater changes we will not come anywhere near the production levels required. I believe that the UK's current model of housing development will not be able to scale up.

## UNFIT FOR PURPOSE

The model for housing supply was not purposely developed, it evolved in response to our forms of land ownership, our planning policies, evolving government policy on how housing should be provided and our patterns of and attitudes to home ownership. I would argue that it is not fit for purpose; it cannot deliver. But what do I mean by the current model?

- Most development land identified by local plans is in response to promotion by developers and landowners.
- Most larger developments are made up of land assembled by developers.
- Infrastructure is funded through developers; funding through s106 and CIL is an inefficient way of ploughing the uplift in land value from development back into infrastructure.
- Both the risk and profit stay with the developers who need a commercial incentive to develop.

Is this a model where a private sector-led response to undersupply could emerge? Developers are businesses owned by shareholders and however well-intentioned, they still have to return a profit, and a competitive one to attract investment and finance. Managing their risk, their behaviour becomes process-driven and conservative. The current structural reliance on the private sector to promote, assemble and develop land restricts the scope for upscaling delivery; houses will only be built where land is available, development viable, and homes marketable, and so not necessarily all of the homes that are needed, or where they are needed.

So why doesn't the solution come from the house builders and their land bank? Contrary to the beliefs of some, house builders are not sitting on land that could be developed but isn't. The economics of that don't stack up; developers are working furiously to feed enough land into their programmes to keep current volumes going. Implementable consents are valuable and as soon as we can get them we start on site. Prices are set by the local market (new build is only 1 per cent of the housing stock and 10 per cent of annual house sales), and sales rates are set by local demand. While I'm not exonerating house builders from collective responsibility, it is obvious that they cannot be the only answer. Going back to the figures, the private sector has only once exceeded 200,000 homes since 1968, and that was in 1988 just before a housing crisis; the next peak at 198,000 was in 2007; is private housing approaching 200,000 homes something we should fear? Is there a structural limit to the capacity of the private house building sector?

1 Nick Rogers  
2,3,4 Dartford,  
The Bridge housing  
development.  
Photographs by Taylor  
Wimpey.

## UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Housing supply has always been a political hot potato. In the current state of housing we can see the effects, good and bad, of previous policies throughout the post war period. PPG3 gives us a little lesson in unintended consequences: the intentions were to improve design quality, sustainability and increase delivery through density and the use of brownfield land. What happened was somewhat different: densities increased through the use of 3-storey houses and small apartments whose values plummeted post-crash. Place quality decreased as the result of inappropriate design responses to density and parking. Land values soared due to unmet demand, cheap finance and increased density. In the ten years following the introduction of PPG3, housing output fell.

More recent government initiatives have similarly failed to create the needed increase in supply: localism and neighbourhood planning have unblocked the planning process in a positive way, but are unlikely to generate significant additionality. The Help to Buy scheme eased the market post-recession, but the industry needs weaning off this stimulant. Private Rented Sector Housing Guarantee Scheme (PRS) is a positive proposal for additionality, but not much activity has been seen so far, and we're still trying to work out what Starter Homes are. On the horizon are vague threats of incentives or sanctions if home builders don't accelerate supply.

## A NEW APPROACH

These initiatives may deliver increased numbers, if nowhere near the requirements. At best government intervention is only a tweak to this model, at worst there is a danger of market distortion and unintended consequences. More radical thought and more than tweaking the current model are needed, such as to:

- Bring much more land into play: who identifies and promotes land? How is infrastructure planned and funded? What is the role of local authorities or development corporations? Is this a shift away from the major role played by private developers for identifying and promoting land?
- Look at innovative ways of developing that land quicker without distorting the wider market, delivering many more homes at a greater rate without destroying value in people's homes.
- Devise design solutions to meet a new model where there is a more diverse mix of development type and the potential for enhanced richness.

## DESIGN ROLE

The design response to a new model is at once the most exciting and most concerning. Proactive planning and greater diversity are exciting concepts. How thrilling to be designing with infrastructure in place and being able to include not only market housing and various tenures of affordable, but also PRS, self and custom build, and even co-housing! But how do we ensure that in jumping to meet a new context we won't fall into a similar trap that has awaited previous changes? How do we ensure we don't create the next 1960s estate or the next PPG3 development of three storey houses, two-bed flats and dark parking courts? The idealism of designers, together with a blind faith in their abilities, has led us into some of these traps. We need more regard for the lessons of the past as well as an ability to imagine a new future. Just as a new economic and political model is needed to resolve our housing problems, so a new urban form may be needed, but the essentials of what people need from where they live have not changed for the last 100,000 years or so.



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The one thing we can be sure of is that sooner or later we will have to face a changed context. Hopefully that will be a positive change, perhaps one where development land is identified, assembled and promoted by local authorities or development corporations; where there are powers to forward-fund infrastructure in a coherent and co-ordinated way; and where there is still risk and profit to developers on their development parcels, but perhaps a more diverse range of developers. While few of us can influence many elements of the contextual model, we can be alive to the design implications of change. As an optimist I look forward to meeting this challenge; things can only get more interesting (and better?). In the meantime I will throw down three challenges:

- **Understand!** Never stop trying to increase your understanding. Whether it is the economic context, the political strategy of the government of the day, or just the business drivers of your clients. And of course what makes great places.
- **Think!** Think deeply and re-invigorate your research, your analysis and your thought leadership.
- **Influence!** Influence everyone you can think of, local and national policy makers, land owners, developers ... We need to be evangelical about what makes things better, but in way that engages rather than raising barriers. ●

Nick Rogers, Design Director, Taylor Wimpey UK



London, New Covent Garden Market: three proposed towers in the Vauxhall cluster, image courtesy Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Inc

# Tall Buildings

We are currently witnessing another tall building boom, as the economies of the world's great cities improve, as land becomes scarcer in their central locations and as capital seeks safer locations for investment. This issue seeks to reflect on the variety of approaches to tall buildings that cities have taken in recent years, from urban design and planning perspectives. We can see that the current phase of building tall has a number of characteristics: firstly, the form of tall buildings reflects the particular drivers for development of a specific time and place; secondly, the examples that follow show how the uniqueness of place (country-city-neighbourhood-site) and the dynamics of local planning regimes affect the form of the city through the decisions taken on tall building proposals; thirdly, the particularity of place combined with the characteristics of the local regulatory regime result in complex decision-making processes that require the benefits of tall building proposals to be weighed against impacts and the desire to regenerate and re-image; and finally, the examples outlined show, however, that there is potential to actively manage tall building proposals in a way that positively contributes to a sense of place and evolution of the city.

The selection of examples starts with a series of articles looking at London. London is at the centre of current debates about tall buildings and their impact, positive or negative. Tall building champions are promoting specific proposals across the metropolitan area, in a weak regulatory environment. Facing a competitive threat from other financial centres, the Mayor's desire for London to retain and strengthen its pre-eminent economic position has meant the prioritisation of financial and business concerns in spatial development planning strategies. This approach is being challenged by some of London's constituent municipalities concerned that the consequence of poorly regulated tall buildings will be over-development and the destruction of the character of their areas.

Ziona Strelitz reflects upon lessons learned from the last tall building boom in the 2000s and whether we have seen any good examples of tall buildings from this period. Tim Catchpole augments that reflection with his own review of tall buildings in the pipeline in the city. David Mathewson reflects on the tall building boom currently taking place and strategic attempts at managing the consequent change. This is followed by Günter Gassner's article which explores the city's visual appearance and how aesthetic arguments are used in political negotiations about particular tall building proposals. Chris Williamson examines the intersection of tall buildings and transport infrastructure, drawing from a range of examples including Crossrail's Woolwich Arsenal station.

The second part of the selection starts with my own article looking at Dublin and the impact of its gradually improving economy on the form of the city. Using Boland's Mills, a hugely significant site of cultural value to the Easter Rising 1916, the article reflects upon issues of character in debates about new tall buildings in the city. Charlotte Nyholm explores the pressure to densify Finland's second largest city, Espoo. She reflects upon the city's densification strategy, the political will required for its implementation and the need to create high quality built environments. Philip Oldfield then examines Singapore's engagement with the tall building typology and how it might provide socially sustainable, and even aspirational, housing for a wide socio-demographic.

Together the articles seek to explore the multi-dimensional nature of tall building proposals and the challenges that they present to urban designers. Their reflections are invaluable as we wrestle with the complexities of their design, impact and place in our cities. ●

Dr Michael Short, Senior Teaching Fellow in Planning, Programme Director MRes Inter-disciplinary Urban Design, The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London



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## From Guidance to Action

Ziona Strelitz wonders whether design guidance on tall buildings has delivered what was expected

In 2005 the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) published the British Council for Offices report *Tall buildings: a strategic design guide*, covering considerations of urban and policy context, architecture, engineering and occupants' experience. Reprinted in 2007, the guide had considerable reach. As its editor, I was asked at the conference on 'London's Growing Up' to comment on the realisation of London's tall buildings in the decade since.

The tall buildings guide followed research on various facets of the topic. As a swansong in 1999, prior to being rolled into the Greater London Authority, the London Planning Advisory Committee published *Strategic Planning Advice on High Buildings and Strategic Views in London*, for which I had led the consultative research with Londoners. Focusing on three different urban conditions where tall buildings had notable presence – Hyde Park, the base of Archway Tower, and a refurbished housing block in Bow, we interviewed people for their opinions on tall buildings, both in the study localities and elsewhere in London. The findings showed little public disaffection, and considerable interest and positive sentiment.

In 2002, I undertook research on commercial occupiers' positions on tall office buildings in London. With the destruction of the Twin Towers the previous year, it was in the context of whether New York's 9/11 calamity would deter occupiers like Barclays and Clifford Chance from pending moves to tall buildings. In the event, any perceived anxiety dampened over the course of our research, with no notable exodus of staff reported.

Whereas the background to the study was the argument that tall buildings were imperative to London's sustained status as a competitive global city, the report concluded that with London's many strengths, organisations come to and operate in London for many reasons other than its building stock. Rather than trying to name which businesses had left or not come to London because a tall building was not available, it posed the relevant question as what London's tall office stock was providing across a segmented tenant market. The report identified tall buildings as accommodating 'major global players aiming to stamp their brand', 'small firms who need high profile and can afford high premiums', and smaller organisations or government

departments benefitting from second-hand tall space that is 'good for what it costs'. It contended that 'big space' which can accommodate large organisations, like the then new tall buildings at Canary Wharf, was likely to remain important, especially in view of trends in business consolidation and corporate mergers.

### FAVOURING BIG

These prior studies contributed to the *Strategic Design Guide's* positive stance, which then waved a flag for the numerous benefits that tall buildings can confer. Symbolic value headed the list, with tall buildings perceived as signifying economic prosperity and a progressive business environment. At the same time the guide recognised the value that people place on London's heritage and the desire to balance old and new, which the then recent proposition for clusters of high quality tall buildings situated at transport nodes was seen to provide. Critically, high quality became embedded in this proposition. Indeed, much of the content the guide addresses building and urban quality.

As if it were a marketing manifesto, the guide profiles numerous other benefits that organisations occupying tall office buildings can attain. These include identity and address, external aspect and daylight, the amenities and lifestyle facilities that the size of tall buildings can support, and even security, with the more compact footprints and concentrated vertical circulation cores requiring fewer points for access control and surveillance.

1 Panorama of the City of London



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Leaping further to argue that an occupier wanting all the foregoing would not wish to compromise on user comfort, the guide proceeds to address multiple aspects of building performance, with positive strategies for the distinct challenges that tall buildings pose.

Independently of any requirements for the then prominent driver for trading floors, the guide makes a strong pitch for big, describing large buildings' scope to facilitate co-location and communication, exchanging ideas, sharing market knowledge and referrals, cross-selling services and reinforcing organisational culture. However, the advantages it ascribes to tall buildings go wider than direct benefits to occupiers. It further argues that tall buildings promote productivity when they form part of local economic clusters (though low dense development can also achieve this), and, assuming they are well-designed, the guide proposes tall buildings as good for urban design, through their provision of extensive space with smaller floor plates than in ground scrapers, and therefore allowing more physical and visual permeability than large low buildings permit.

**LONDON'S SKYLINE: COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOTS**

Looking back to the data of the earlier studies, the current proliferation of tall buildings is salutary. In addition to those already built, the most recent report by the NLA and GL Hearn identifies 436 tall buildings in the pipeline across London: 89 under construction, 233 approved schemes but not yet on site, and 114 proposed, including 39 in pre-application. At the time of the 1998 LPAC report, apart from the early phase of Canary Wharf around 1 Canada Square, the field mainly comprised the NatWest, BT, Euston and Millbank Towers, Centrepoint, British Gas on Vauxhall Bridge Road and Marble Arch, the Hilton Hotel in Park Lane, and pepper-potted residential blocks, mostly accommodating social housing and most in east London. By the 2002 report on Tall Office Buildings in London, Canary Wharf was developing apace, to the extent that the City of London was shifting away from its disfavour of tall buildings to positive facilitation.

By 2005, when the *Strategic Design Guide* was published, London was emerging as a crucible of tall building activity. The

2 Leadenhall Building and 30 St Mary Axe. British Land and Oxford Properties Architect: Rogers Stirk Harbour. Photo: Richard Bryant  
3 CGI of the once proposed but not built Minerva Tower

advent of digital design technology was key, enabling architects and engineers to optimise floor area whilst shaping building form to comply with the planning constraints of London's strategic views and view corridors. Capturing what was built versus proposed amongst this new generation of tall buildings, the guide shows photographs of the Gherkin completed the previous year, whereas other buildings are shown with illustrations, mostly computer generated images. These include: 122 Leadenhall Street (aka The Cheesegrater) consented in 2004, London Bridge Tower (aka The Shard) consented in 2003, Heron Tower (since called The Salesforce Tower) consented in 2004, Minerva Tower and New London Bridge House south of the Shard, both consented in 2004. Neither of the latter was built; the 15-floor St Botolph Building completed in 2010 now sits on the site for Minerva.

**INNOVATION**

Whilst the Gherkin became an instant poster for post-millennium London, the new generation of proposals also generated considerable interest. The design technologies used to conceive and develop them challenged familiar expectations of orthogonal form, promoting excitement in their projection of new possibilities. And more than form was involved: the *Strategic Design Guide* speaks of 'conceptual quality', a framework that 'informs the organisation, external expression, integration of structure, envelope and services, and the



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character of spaces within the building'. At the time, London's government was providing strong leadership on sustainable design, and the tall building proposals harnessed a range of strategies from the evolving repertoire of progressive environmental practice. A seminal image, though shown at small scale in the guide, is a hand-drawn sketch of Heron Tower's orientation and configuration, relative to the sun path. However, as too often across all building types, less attention is given to disseminating realised environmental effects than predictions at the design stage. With the contemporary policy currents, government's waning carbon agenda and emerging interest in 'healthy towns', the comparative efficiencies of centrally located tall buildings versus distributed, low-density development requires urgent modelling and testing. The importance relates to optimal ways to address the on-going shortage of residential accommodation.

#### VARIETY AND UNIQUENESS

The plasticity of form arising from London's planning constraints and digital design tools has generated great variety. The guide's comparison of floor plate and core configurations across nine tall buildings in London shows dramatic differences between their plans. One would expect such difference between London's mediaeval footprints and the large rational plots of Canary Wharf, but their elevations suggest that there is also a cultural preference for variation. I made the point in an earlier publication on construction economics, adding the subtitle *Helping the UK Afford the Buildings it Likes* to the author's (Gray C.) title of *Value for Money*. The *Strategic Design Guide* develops this view, referencing variety in the external expression of commercial buildings in the UK as relating to preference and intention, as well as site context.

Notwithstanding Canary Wharf's more uniform North American model, and the added cost of more articulated design and construction, the guide's proposition that variety can add landmark value is supported by the cult of personality now associated with London's tall buildings. Society's preoccupation with 'celeb' people is mirrored in our attitude to these tall buildings – those we love, and those we love to hate. This is underscored and reinforced by their widely adopted nicknames. Typing The Gherkin into Google redirects to Wikipedia and the entry's opening assertion: '30 St Mary Axe (widely known informally as The Gherkin and previously as the Swiss Re Building)'. A similar sequence

follows searches under The Cheesegrater, The Shard, The Walkie-Talkie and The Scalpel. Notably, Wikipedia only references The Helter Skelter in connection to 22 Bishopsgate's original proposals; with its transformative redesign, the name is no longer relevant. Names evidently follow form.

Given the current intensity of tall building development, the issue is whether we wish to engage with such varied and insistent mix. In China, architectural variation of tall buildings has typically involved decorative topping and external detail on vertically extruded plans. With the advent of buildings that are more fundamentally varied, the Chinese government has just declared against virtuoso (gratuitous?) form, with 'bizarre', 'odd-shaped buildings' to be forbidden on grounds of economy, functionality and aesthetics, and environmental policy that favours less-resource-intensive, less wasteful construction.

#### MIXED USE AND PUBLIC ACCESS

My optimism in the *Strategic Design Guide* arose in part from the new generation of tall buildings' promise of public access. Mixed use does not necessarily mean public access, but in office buildings, it provides a means to achieve it. Until the Millennium, public access in tall buildings had been patchy. The high-level public viewing galleries and rotating restaurant at BT Tower, which had been opened in 1966, were closed in 1980 after bomb damage in 1971 and the subsequent expiry of the operator's lease. Following the 1990 refurbishment of the Oxo Tower building incorporating a restaurant on the top floor, the developer, Coin Street Community Builders, established a lease provision ensuring public access to the terraces. A different precedent, for a through route at the base of the original Citigroup Centre at Canary Wharf, was stymied by security concerns, frustrating public experience of the wonderful Bridget Riley installation that rises up one elevation of the building's eighteen storey atrium.

The tall buildings described in the *Strategic Design Guide* heralded new opportunities for the public to participate in them. The plaza around The Gherkin delivers on this: sculpture is exhibited in the front facing St Mary Axe, there is extensive open air seating behind, and food can be bought from or eaten in relatively inexpensive establishments on the ground floor. The Heron Tower has restaurants at both its base and on the three highest floors, with the informal venue on the top floor affording a panoramic escalator ride and views from the fortieth floor to patrons who may just buy a drink or cup of coffee.

Exceptionally, The Cheesegrater has full, free public access to the six-storey

4 Leadenhall Building: open access to 6-storey high public Galleria. The screens behind the grassed area will be removed, opening full access between Galleria and square. British Land and Oxford Properties Architect: Rogers Stirk Harbour Photo: Richard Bryant

high volume that covers its entire footprint. People can walk through this vast space from Leadenhall Street to Undershaft, sit in it, attend an event, and enjoy the view through its open frontage to the Lloyds of London building, directly opposite. The galleria's other open side addresses St Helen's Square, offering a sheltered experience of outdoors whilst under cover from sun or rain. In all of these uses, being in the space is to share in experiencing the building's concept and quality. At a high level, The Walkie-Talkie provides 'revenue-free access' to its sky-garden, if booked in advance and following a security check in a discrete area provided for this purpose at ground level, and The View from The Shard can be purchased for about £25. Doubtless these provisions extend spatial scope within the city, but whether they all represent an appropriate *quid pro quo* for their height is a matter of individual judgement.

My own appraisal is mixed: I have worked on the strategy for uses at the base of the Cheese Grater and consider the scope impressive. However, given the public's lack of choice about seeing tall buildings in distant, middle and local views, their opportunity for involvement in tall buildings is not always so integral. This applies to the Walkie-Talkie and the Shard, both with significant mass, the former at high level, the latter as it hits the ground, though the experience of the building from London Bridge Station feels disconnected from its now ubiquitous poster image, and access to its non-office uses is privileged. Looking back, my expectation for more fluid scope to participate in tall buildings' use relates in part to seeing what I hoped for in images contained in the *Strategic Design Guide*. The sections showing the Heron Tower's innovative internal volumes up the height of the building, and the Shard's vertical stack of accommodation for public / retail, offices, and hotel / apartments were exciting and alluring. And where design provides for functional variety, my career-long interest in mixed use and shared facilities disposes me to expect access by the varied user constituencies and cross-participation in use.

The trend of tall buildings that incorporate functional and spatial variety is a welcome evolution. In residential buildings especially, it offers more to its users, whether they are owners or affluent students. And externally visible provision for varied use can lend interest to the urban setting. Nevertheless, conspicuous, elevated features – like a 'skypool' that bridges two residential buildings – whilst doubtless imbuing wonder, extend the increasingly privatised public realm into the vertical dimension. Such privileged synergy falls short of tall buildings' potential to offer the public more specific additional urban experiences that their scale can afford.

#### WHAT ABOUT BIG?

How does the *Strategic Design Guide's* promotion of 'big' space stand up with hindsight? Buildings outlast economic cycles, and tall office buildings are now extensively multi-let, including buildings that were developed for a single occupier organisation. It is also assumed that those tall office buildings currently under development will be similarly occupied.

Tall buildings are more costly to construct than lower structures, though with height it is more cost-efficient to construct buildings with larger floor plates than smaller ones. Whilst this will have driven the design of some tall buildings, buildings that are necessarily slender because their footprint and planning constraints necessitate this, can attain premium landmark values, even though they are costlier to construct. Their value to an occupier will derive from their location, quality and prestige, rather than from big space. Meanwhile, the influence of technology on work modes is increasing the extent to which people now work in spatially distributed ways. This has implications for less corporate workspace and more third places, lessening requirements for big space. In addition, ZZA's research on workplace transformation identifies a worker preference for smaller workplaces.



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### Given their omnipresence, tall buildings should not take more from the urban context than they give

#### OVERSOLD

Looking back to 2004-5, I have mixed reactions. There are realised tall buildings that I admire and lift my spirits. There is at least one, Minerva Tower, that I wish had been built. But there are others that strike a sense of disappointment; I feel this when I view the City from the South Bank, and when I look up City Road. Recent recognition of the bevy of new tall buildings and those in the wings, has rightly prompted a widespread *cri de coeur* for quality. Though a mechanism to ensure this eludes me, appointing a signature architect is surely not an adequate answer in itself. Having presented a paper on Tall Building Ecology at a Chinese Ministry of Construction conference on Intelligent and Green buildings in 2006, I find it gratifying and humbling that with Xi Jinping's call for buildings that are 'economic, green and beautiful', leadership on this is now coming from China. I would add the criterion that, especially given their omnipresence, tall buildings should not take more from the urban context than they give. And this is surely more than just a marker for wayfinding and an impression of economic thrust. ●

Ziona Strelitz, Design Researcher, Strategist, and Founder Director of ZZA Responsive Environments.

5 Leadenhall Building: sheltered rest space at the base for use by the public and people based in the building. British Land and Oxford Properties Architect: Rogers Stirk Harbour  
Photo: Richard Bryant

# London's Latest Tall Stories

Tim Catchpole laments damage to London's skyline in the rush to build higher and higher



**W**hen I edited the previous issue on Tall Buildings (UD 90, Spring 2004), the Shard had just been approved and there was much speculation as to what and where would be the next iconic building in its wake. No one could have predicted a 72-storey Paddington Pole, the main Canary Wharf tower being 50 storeys. The planning application last year took London by storm.

The applicant was determined to ride roughshod over Westminster City Council's restrictive policy on tall buildings and was hoping that the Pole would have a wide appeal: after all, it was not within a heritage area (actually it was next to a Grade I listed railway station), nor within a protected view corridor. The application was accompanied by a voluminous Environmental Statement which included many photomontages with captions asserting that the visual impact almost everywhere was 'positive' whilst I would have described it as 'negative'. The architect is once again Renzo Piano, creator of the Shard.

The Skyline Campaign, which had been founded the previous year (2014) went into full swing by organising a petition against the Pole. With support from the London Forum the petition attracted over 2,000 signatures and the effect was dramatic. The application was withdrawn at the beginning of this year and there were sighs of relief all round, but then...

## THE LONDON PIPELINE

In March this year came the second annual update of the *London Tall Buildings Survey* produced by New London Architecture and GL Hearn. The original *Survey* in 2014 had identified a pipeline of over 200 tall buildings of 20+ storeys under construction,

with planning approval or awaiting planning approval, and had prompted the Skyline Campaign to launch itself because 'a fundamental transformation was taking place with a shocking lack of public awareness, consultation or debate'. The second annual update, however, announced that there were now a total of 436 tall buildings of 20+ storeys in the pipeline. This included 25 buildings of 50+ storeys. At present there are only two existing buildings of such height in London, namely the main Canary Wharf tower and the Shard.

Storey heights can be misleading as they differ significantly between commercial and residential, for which reason the metric measurement is often preferred. The common view is that anything above 100m is super-tall (the cross of St Paul's Cathedral is 111m). There are currently 104 buildings of 100m+ in the pipeline compared with 54 already in existence. That says a lot.

## LOCATIONS

So where are these pipeline buildings located? The annual update report was not site-specific and the GLA database not too helpful. I have therefore accessed borough databases and plotted the pipeline buildings onto an old map prepared for an LPAC Study in 1987-89 showing all existing and committed tall buildings together with heritage areas and important view corridors, and duly updated it. The plotting has revealed a number of clusters, some already established, others emerging.

## THE CITY

In Central London, the City continues to be the main focus for tall buildings. Seven pipeline buildings of 100m+ will be added to the existing total of 13 of such height. Alas, the one building of distinction, namely the Gherkin, will gradually disappear from view as some of the pipeline buildings begin to emerge. The pipeline includes two buildings awaiting approval which are almost as tall as the Shard, namely No. 22 Bishopsgate (formerly known as the Pinnacle) and a replacement for the former P&O Building (currently known as No. 1 Undershaft). One key issue

1 City of London: new and pipeline buildings (in white) will hide the Gherkin, the only building of distinction. David Meggitt, New London Model, NLA Galleries at The Building Centre.

here is whether the London Underground has sufficient capacity to cope with the overall cumulative increase in floorspace.

**THE SOUTH BANK AND VAUXHALL/NINE ELMS**

Among the emerging clusters in Central London those on the South Bank are causing controversy by being so close to the river. In the early 1980s the GLC refused planning permission for the Green Giant at Vauxhall because of its impact on the river scene but more recently the 49-storey tower on St George’s Wharf in almost the same location was approved and is now built (albeit not without being hit by a helicopter before final completion). This building is currently the only existing 100m+ tower in the area but there are 13 towers of 100m+ in the pipeline, some taller than St George’s, and this does not include the new US Embassy which is rising to a modest 97m. Again, a key issue here is whether Vauxhall Station has sufficient capacity to cope with the overall cumulative increase in floorspace.

The emerging clusters at Vauxhall and elsewhere along the South Bank, including alongside the Shell Centre, at the Blackfriars Bridgefoot and at London Bridge Station, have caused consternation at Historic England who are determined to designate the whole river, including its frontages from Putney Bridge to Tower Bridge, as one large Conservation Area in order to prevent further proliferation of tall buildings. Alas, the horse has bolted.

**ISLE OF DOGS**

There are now 14 tall buildings of 100m+ on the Isle of Dogs with the three Canary Wharf towers providing a crowning focus (as conceived by Sir Roy Strong who was inspired by the towers of Lincoln Cathedral). However, there are another 40 in the pipeline including a number on the fringe, which would be roughly the same height as the Canary Wharf towers. But whilst the Canary Wharf towers rise above the main transportation hub in the area (Canary Wharf) located at the epicentre of the Isle of Dogs, towers on the fringe and at some distance from this transportation hub, should in theory be lower. So what has happened? The horse has bolted here too. Again, a key issue is whether Canary Wharf Station has sufficient capacity to cope with the overall cumulative increase in floorspace.

**OTHER AREAS**

A new cluster is emerging on the Greenwich Peninsula next to the Millennium Dome. Elsewhere the pipeline includes tall buildings which will consolidate existing clusters, notably at Croydon, or help to demarcate emerging clusters such as at Stratford. It is noticeable that many of the approved buildings are significantly taller than those that already exist.

**THE RESIDENTIAL ELEMENT**

Many of the tall buildings in the pipeline are residential. In the 1970s residential high-rise went out of vogue but the tables appear to have turned once again. Some claim that tall apartment blocks are seen as desirable and sustainable: they can help to meet London’s urgent housing targets and within the current building envelope of the capital, i.e. without encroachment onto open land or the Green Belt. Apartments on upper floors with good views of London, particularly up and down river, can command top prices while those on the lower floors without views are generally the much-needed affordable element. However, there has been widespread criticism that these tall apartment blocks are neither providing homes for Londoners nor are they encouraging the creation of cohesive communities. Indeed, many such apartments are being bought by foreign investors who leave them empty.

**THE ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY**

The design of the tall buildings in the pipeline has also been widely criticised. According to the Skyline Campaign ‘too many of these towers are of mediocre architectural quality and badly sited’. In GLC days the criteria for assessing tall



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buildings included ‘they shall not mar the skyline’ and ‘they shall be of outstanding architectural quality’. The Mayor’s Plan for London recycles the former in tall buildings ‘not having an unacceptably harmful impact’ (policy 7.7) but does not reiterate or recycle the second statement. The London Forum is pushing for tall buildings to ‘make a positive contribution to the London skyline’.

I will hereby express my own opinion as I have done for 30 years. We in London, are very privileged to have a tall, iconic building in the centre of our city – we have had it since 1710. Taller buildings emerging in the centre of our city must show respect. So-called ‘iconic’ buildings such as walkie-talkies and cheese-graters are not respectful and would be more appropriately located further downriver, if not in Dubai. But it’s too late now.

**THREADS**

There are a few threads emerging from this brief review of the pipeline. Outside the heritage areas and protected view corridors, are there height limitations or is the sky the limit? What exactly is meant by positive and negative impacts, and who has the final word on this matter? How much attention is being given to the overall cumulative impact of floorspace on the capacity of the London transport infrastructure? Should there be control over overseas investors buying apartments? How can a larger number of affordable apartments be encouraged? What actually is the target population of London and how is this being arrived at? ●

Tim Catchpole, author of *London’s Skylines and High Buildings* for LPAC, the DoE and English Heritage (1989), and other articles and papers on tall buildings

2 Isle of Dogs: pipeline buildings (in white) will rise to the same height as the original three Canary Wharf towers, which will lose their Lincoln Cathedral effect. David Meggitt, New London Model, NLA Galleries at The Building Centre.

# Whither London's Skyline?

David Mathewson wonders whether it is heading towards disaster or urban renaissance



**O**ver several years, there has been a great deal of public discussion around the current state of London's skyline and the number of new tall buildings under construction and planned across the city. A recent survey by New London Architecture and GL Hearn found that 436 tall buildings were in some stage of the planning process, with 223 having been granted planning permission, an increase of 119 over the last year. The inevitable change to the cityscape that this will bring about is disconcerting. It is therefore important that planning authorities have a strategy to deal with these rapid transformations to the city.

## A LACK OF GLA-WIDE STRATEGY

While it is true that some boroughs have their own policies in place, there is no city-wide or GLA policy to manage the overall appearance and composition of the city's skyline, apart from the London View Management Framework (LVMF) and the London Plan. The LVMF governs protected views and vistas, indirectly influencing the development of tall buildings, while the London Plan sets out priority areas for new development, though not specifically towers or maximum heights. London is developing a polycentric model of tall building clusters across the 32 boroughs and the City, largely based on Transit-Orientated-Development models (TOD), where tall building clusters are located on or in the vicinity of public transport nodes. This situation is leading to a number of such clusters scattered across inner London from Vauxhall-Nine Elms in the southwest to Stratford in the east. New clusters are emerging at Elephant and Castle, Blackfriars Station, Bankside and Waterloo, with more high density tall development planned for areas in the northwest of London at Paddington Basin and Old Oak Common, both major transport interchanges. Old Oak Common is set to be London's

newest area for significant development alongside upgraded tube and rail facilities including a new station for both High Speed 2 and Crossrail.

Height clusters are a relatively recent phenomenon in London, traditionally a low-rise city. Intermittent post-war development of tall buildings in central London initially occurred during the 1960s and 70s, including the capital's first iconic tall buildings: the Millbank tower in 1963, Centre Point in 1965, the Barbican Estate towers in the 1970s and the National Westminster tower in 1980. However, major height clusters only began to develop after the 1990s at Canary Wharf and the City. At first these towers were sporadic, due in part to the negative association of tall buildings with unsuccessful social housing tower blocks of the 1960s and 70s, many of which were later demolished. More tall buildings were built following deregulation of the financial markets in the 1980s which led to a demand for new office space, in particular large stock trading floor plates, then new to the UK. This partly drove the development of Canary Wharf, where a number of North American style office towers sprang up on cheap land. The trend took off in the City in the 2000s with the construction of 30 St. Mary Axe in 2003, quickly followed by a succession of other tall buildings, including the Heron Tower, the Shard at London Bridge, 122 Leadenhall Street and 20 Fenchurch Street in 2014.

A number of other tall building proposals are now under construction, including the Bishopsgate Tower, recently redesigned by PLP to a revised height of 278m, and a new 295m-tall design by Eric Parry for 1 Undershaft nearby. Other proposals include 1 Blackfriars, Manhattan Loft Gardens in Stratford, One Nine Elms in Vauxhall and three towers at New Covent Garden Market. While this ad-hoc principle of clustering towers in or around public transit nodes, may be logical for the market, it does not engender a cohesive and aesthetic urban cityscape or an impressive skyline emblematic of other world cities such as New York or Hong Kong, both of which are known for their distinct, unified silhouettes. London is in danger of becoming more like Shanghai or São Paulo, where hundreds of towers

1 Model of the proposed Vauxhall cluster

have been dispersed across the cityscape, resulting in a virtual jungle of verticality, lacking order or hierarchy. If continued, London could end up losing any sense of coordinated tall building development and resemble a forest of towers.

**A RAISON D’ÊTRE FOR TALL BUILDING CLUSTERS?**

Virtually all new tower clusters have been justified on the basis of TOD. At London Bridge, the Shard rises 310m over a major public transport hub. At Stratford, the Olympic Park became the chosen location for significant new housing and associated commercial development around a major transport hub. In developing tall buildings along London’s South Bank, public transport adjacencies have also been cited at Waterloo and Blackfriars stations. At Vauxhall Nine Elms, the strategy utilised public transport as the ultimate *raison d’être*: it was not only the underpinning for perhaps the largest new tall building cluster in London, but also necessary to the success of the nearby Battersea Power Station redevelopment. In this case the Northern Line will be extended through a development levy raised on high density residential schemes under construction in the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area. A number of new towers at heights up to 206m have already been granted planning permission.

South Bank, Vauxhall and Stratford are not the only areas slated for significant change. Paddington Basin was recently the subject of a new proposal by Renzo Piano for a tower 254m high, and already at least one other scheme by Squire & Partners for a development with a tower of 38 storeys, has come forward citing the Piano scheme as a precedent. Old Oak Common has also been the subject of much development speculation, including high density developments on the former Cargiant site.

Closer to Central London, schemes at Bishopsgate Goods Yard and properties adjacent to the Broadgate Estate are transforming the area currently predominantly low-rise into one characterised by towers. The former Goods Yard will be redeveloped into a number of tall buildings, forever altering the historic character of the area while Principal Place, a project designed by Foster & Partners on Broadgate will rise to 161m, and an adjacent development by Perkins & Will to around 130 m. The pressure on Shoreditch continues to grow while a number of high density schemes have already impacted on the area, a process that began with the redevelopment of Old Spitalfields Market completed in 2005.

**REGULATION IN LONDON**

Overall development in London is governed by the London Plan, which designates zones for the development of tall buildings by designating Opportunity Areas, Areas of Intensification, the Central Activity Zone, major public transport nodes and town centres. These priority areas represent potential for urban intensification and increasing density, utilising infill development on vacant and redundant brownfield sites. According to New London Architecture (NLA), these sites have the potential to deliver nearly 250,000 homes and 300,000 jobs, and tall buildings feature prominently in relevant proposals.

The London Plan does not determine building height; however, the location of tall buildings is influenced by the LVMF which protects views and vistas from specific points across London. Examples include views of the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral, the silhouette of the Palace of Westminster along the Thames and views from key locations such as Primrose Hill or Greenwich Park. The LVMF delineates three dimensional view corridors and associated consultation areas for large scale developments in and around such protected views, requiring any application to document how the proposal will not impinge or significantly impact on them. This includes potential impact on World Heritage Sites such as the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey.



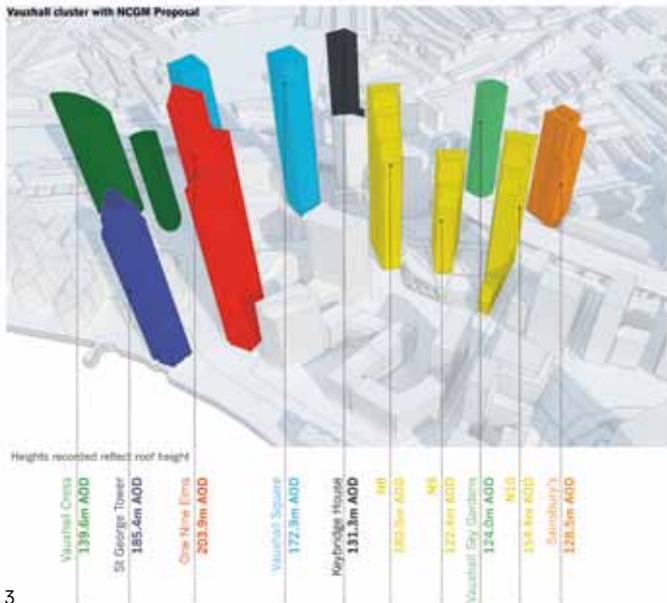
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Therefore, while the GLA identifies priority areas for height and density, intensification and large scale development, protecting some views and vistas across Central London, it does so with only a modicum of constraint. Any developer in theory could plan and develop a tall building outside protected areas, providing that it falls into a priority development zone. In addition, regulatory bodies such as Historic England, the Civil Aviation Authority or CABE, as well as the wishes of local boroughs and the GLA itself, have been ignored in the past when a case was made for a particular tall building development to be approved. An example was the 143m-tall Doon Street Tower proposal where all four bodies refused or recommended planning refusal but were overruled by the then Secretary of State, despite concerns about the building’s impact on heritage buildings and the local townscape.

**VAUXHALL NINE ELMS**

Potentially the largest new cluster of tall buildings is emerging at the eastern end of the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area (VNEB), a regeneration area designated by the GLA in 2012, to link the redevelopment at Battersea Power Station with Vauxhall transport interchange. The 13 towers planned will fundamentally change the existing urban environment of Wandsworth and Lambeth, both of which are predominantly low-rise in character. Already evolving into an area of higher buildings in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of large developments were built between Vauxhall Station and the riverbank. These include Terry Farrell’s gargantuan MI6 Headquarters (1994), and St. George Wharf, a large-scale residential, office and leisure complex along the waterfront completed in the early 2000s, containing over 1,100 apartments and the 186m tall St George Wharf Tower.

2 Diagram showing the Vauxhall cluster and Millbank Tower datum formed by the LVMF view with building heights.



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After the latter was completed, a number of tall building schemes began to emerge in the vicinity. Lambeth Council became concerned about the number of tall buildings, and it was only after the approval of the master plan for New Covent Garden Market that the cluster's volumetric composition was finally agreed. SOM's plan, while challenging the heights of the previous Foster & Partners plan, helped to reinforce the developing cluster and unify it into a cohesive assemblage of towers. At this time, KPF was finalising its plans for One Nine Elms, at 206m the tallest of the tower grouping which helped to define the cluster, acting as the apex of the collection of tall buildings.

Key to the agreement between Wandsworth, SOM, KPF, the developers and other design teams, was the notion that the tower cluster could only be sited to the east of a key LVMF protected corridor from Westminster Bridge looking towards the Palace of Westminster. English Heritage, Westminster City Council and the GLA were concerned that planned towers at Vauxhall Nine Elms would impinge on the silhouette of the Palace. A compromise was agreed using the 118m Millbank Tower as a precedent: buildings to the west of the Millbank Tower could rise to a maximum of 70m, thus remaining invisible behind the Palace, while buildings to the east of the Millbank Tower could rise to heights of 150m (later increased to 206m). The Millbank tower thus acted as a kind of marker for a datum line generated by an LVMF view corridor.

### OTHER CITIES WITH TALL BUILDINGS

A number of cities have tackled tall building development well. These include larger world cities like New York and Hong Kong, where the scarcity of land pushed development upwards. New York and Chicago acted as urban laboratories where the skyscraper typology was developed and where planning departments experimented with height regulations, such as New York's famous setback rules to allow daylight to reach lower storeys. The result, developed over time, is an elegant and unified skyline.

Smaller cities with dense urban cores also manage their height well: Vancouver and Frankfurt use prescriptive three-dimensional height frameworks to locate tall buildings and limit cluster expansion outside inner city areas, while utilising TOD proximities as an essential rationale for clustering. Vancouver even has its own view protection framework, similar to London's LVMF, capitalising on views to the surrounding mountains and sea. These models have resulted in stunning urban skylines while protecting existing assets, be that the natural environment or medieval quarters.

Yet none of these exemplars has developed a polycentric model of tall building development. The city that stands out in

this context is Tokyo, the world's largest urban conurbation. Tokyo shares many characteristics with London, including proximity to water, a number of large open parks in the inner city and most importantly, a polycentric form of tall building development. There could be much for London to learn from Tokyo, especially in terms of densifying its inner core and utilising tall buildings in general. However, Tokyo does not have a distinctive skyline and is so large that tall buildings can become lost in a sea of building heights over a huge area of urban landscape.

### WHAT CAN AND SHOULD LONDON DO?

London is undergoing rapid spatial change: its skyline is experiencing an accelerated growth of tall buildings, forever altering the urban landscape. The economic and financial pressures driving the development of tall buildings are unlikely to change in the near future. Therefore, adopting a comprehensive framework for the location and composition of towers across Greater London will be paramount, since historically and culturally the city has not regulated its built environment prescriptively, operating under a discretionary planning system where at least in theory, anything is negotiable. This must change to allow the city to continue to grow and thrive as an economic powerhouse while developing a mature, cohesive and unified urban skyline. How can London achieve this? Given its historical market context, it should look to other cities that have managed tall building development well, while forging a unique path encompassing change.

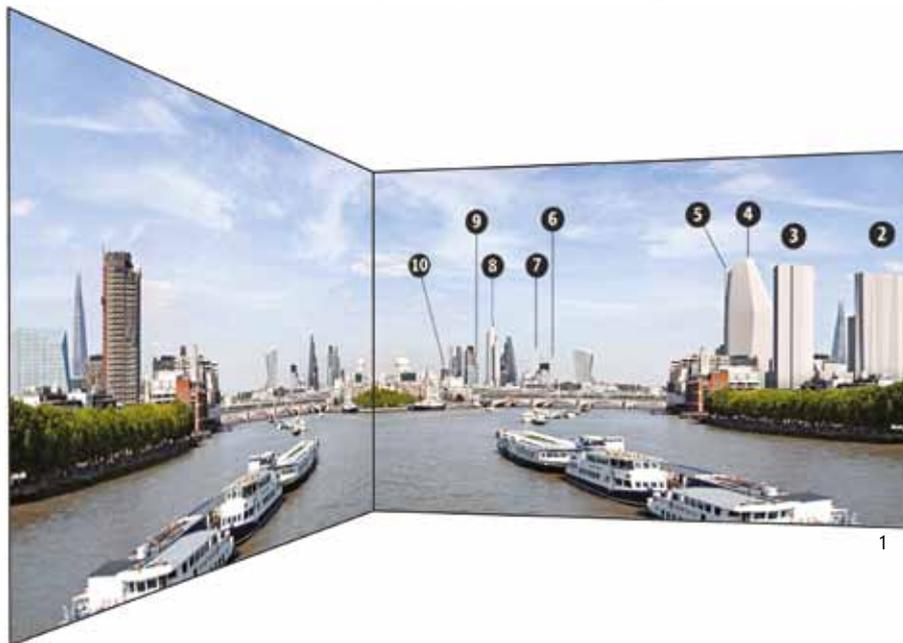
In the manner that New York has its rivers, Hong Kong its harbour and Chicago Lake Michigan, London has one of the most spectacular rivers in Europe with stunning vistas along its length from east to west. London already has a comprehensive view framework to protect these vistas. Perhaps the city should be thinking of using this not solely for the protection of heritage monuments and historic views, but as a mechanism to order the urban skyline and locate tall building clusters aesthetically, since they are already well founded on the logic of TOD proximity and priority areas. This way London can capitalise on its unique juxtaposition of built heritage and contemporary, experimental architecture, propelling its urban laboratory to new heights while ensuring that tall building development does not run amok. ●

David Mathewson, Lecturer in International Planning and Urban Design, University of Westminster, and undertaking a PhD in spatial development patterns in emerging cities

3 Massing diagram of the Vauxhall cluster. All images courtesy of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Inc

# Seeing Capitalism in the View

Günter Gassner shows how aesthetic arguments are used to justify tall buildings in the City of London



construction of skyscrapers utilising a conceptual framework that was originally developed to limit this building type in the city. Visual arguments, then, are transformative in a peculiar way. The argument that developers put forward is not that the visual dominance of historic landmark buildings should be challenged, that they have lost their civic significance and their aesthetic and cultural relevance in the contemporary city. The argument is rather that their visual dominance can be strengthened, that commercial skyscrapers can visually enhance a building like St Paul's Cathedral. Architectural theorists who dismiss visual assessments according to which a tower 'defers to the cathedral' as nothing more than an easy way to get planning permission, are aware that the two roles of aesthetics are not mutually exclusive in political negotiations involving London's skylines. However, how exactly can a visually transformative argument support a conservative reading of the city? And in what ways is it a neoliberal logic that is inseparable from economic globalisation and a global city image that aims to attract global investors and revenue-generating tourists?

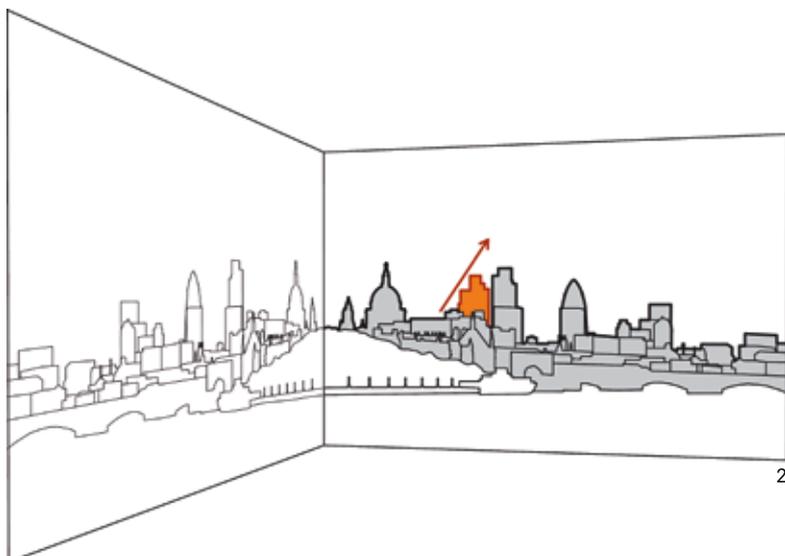
Consider two commercial skyscrapers in the City of London: the Heron Tower, a 230m tall office building that was opened in 2012 and is located on Bishopsgate, and the Pinnacle, an office building that was planned to be the tallest and most iconic tower in the City and whose construction stopped after the developers failed to sign a major pre-let agreement. Visual assessments of these two towers revolved around the relationship between the Eastern high-rise cluster in the City that both buildings are part of, and St Paul's Cathedral. As seen from Waterloo Bridge, the Heron Tower has a stepped profile. It steps up and away from St Paul's, 'respecting' the cathedral. An architect emphasised that this profile allowed the designers 'to define a line that was sensitive to views from Waterloo Bridge', a line that 'rose from the edge near the cathedral up towards the centre of the cluster'. Urban historians welcomed this aesthetic strategy. A representative of Historic England suggested that the stepped profile 'was a positive aspect of the design in terms of its relation to St

**W**ith the aim of attracting global investment, the city's visual appearance has become a major concern in urban politics. Evaluations about what the city looked like in the past, what it looks like now and what it might look like in the future have also an important role in the professional production of London's built environment. That, however, is also a result of the city's planning system. London does not have a legally binding citywide land use plan in which floor-area ratios and building heights are prescribed. These characteristics of a development are subject to negotiations between applicants – increasingly private developers – and local planning authorities and their advisors such as Historic England. Aesthetic arguments are used to set bounds to those quantifiable characteristics. At the same time, they are used to support developments that arguably overstep the scale and height of the existing built environment. In other words, aesthetics has a double-role in political negotiations: on the one hand, it is the space for a conservative reading of the city that wishes to hold onto the existing visual order; on the other hand, it is the space for a transformative reading of the city that is structured around capitalist imperatives of capital accumulation, continuously on the lookout for new investment opportunities.

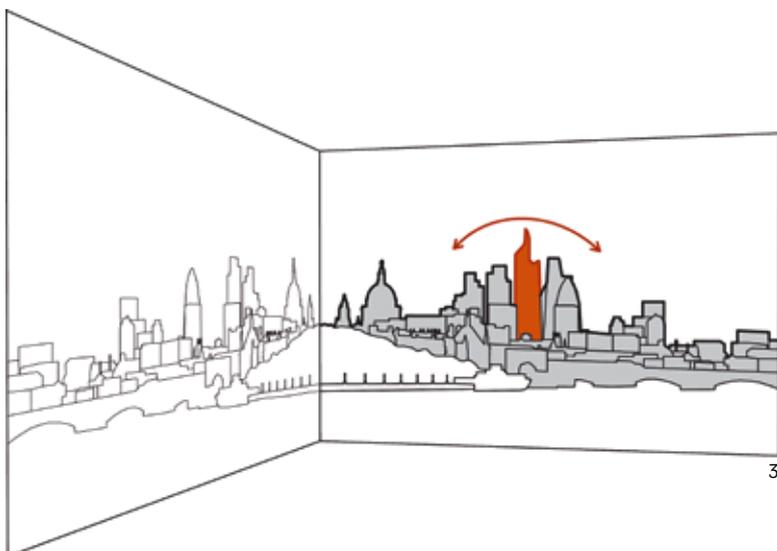
## DOUBLESPEAK

London's current tall building boom must be understood in relation to this double-role of aesthetics. With regard to commercial skyscrapers, historians put forward conservative visual arguments when they are concerned with the continuing visual dominance of historic buildings such as St Paul's Cathedral in selected panoramas, river prospects and townscape views. While London does not have a citywide land use plan, the city is cut through with viewing corridors towards these landmark buildings, which apparently have civic significance and make aesthetic and cultural contributions to views. At the same time, developers' design teams have found ways to argue for the

- 1 Distant view from Waterloo Bridge towards the City and prediction for 2025 including proposed tall buildings:  
 2) 20 Blackfriars;  
 3) Kings Reach;  
 4) One Blackfriars;  
 5) Ludgate & Sampson House;  
 6) 40 Leadenhall;  
 7) 52 Lime Street;  
 8) Pinnacle;  
 9) 100 Bishopsgate;  
 10) One Crown Place



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Paul's. You know, without that it would have been a non-starter'. It was offered as a visual quality that allows the skyscraper to improve the readability of St Paul's by creating a sensitive, smooth edge of the high-rise cluster. In that respect, the Heron Tower is to be preferred to a lower building, which is not capable of contributing positively to the cluster.

The Pinnacle was also assessed in terms of its contribution to the high-rise cluster and the resulting positive impact on the reading of the cathedral. The building, so the argument went, filled an existing sky gap within the cluster as seen from Waterloo Bridge. An architect suggested that the City Planning Officer felt that it was important that 'he could argue publicly that the cluster would be formed as one group'; when there is 'too much' distance between buildings then 'what you want to do is fill in the missing tooth, because isolated buildings compete with St Paul's'. The skyscraper, the argument continued, also gives the cluster a strong, iconic centre point. According to a townscape consultant, the skyscraper 'will taper upwards, and with the curving spiral a form will be created that will work effectively with the stepped top of Tower 42 and the sensual curves of 30 St Mary Axe. The spiral will also reinforce the idea of a visual centre of the cluster, which can hold visually, as an inward force – centripetally – the array of different shaped tall buildings around it'. The striking visual appearance of the Pinnacle was offered as a characteristic that helps turning the cluster into an 'effective backdrop' for St Paul's. As a result, attention will not be drawn away from but to the cathedral.

In short, the key arguments that were put forward for the Heron Tower and the Pinnacle were based on the idea that a

2 Existing cityscape of the City seen from Waterloo Bridge before the construction of the Heron Tower and the tower's stepped profile

3 The same before the construction of the Pinnacle and the tower's iconic visual appearance

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## It is the commodification of St Paul's, its monumentalisation that evokes the interpretation of commercial skyscrapers as structures that do not compete with historic landmark buildings

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strengthened high-rise cluster is visually less obtrusive than the existing towers in the City; more, that a coherent cluster can visually enhance the reading of St Paul's. In other words, a quantitative increase in commercial skyscrapers results in an improved readability of a historic landmark building. An architect suspected that 'the idea of a cluster is one that the Corporation of London has supported because they can say, well, there is a benefit to certain tall buildings in certain locations; it's actually enhancement rather than it being talked about impact in a negative way'.

### MARKET-POLITICAL LOGIC

These arguments can be interpreted as part of a professional framework that has little to do with how the city is visually experienced on the ground. They might be regarded as nothing more than strategies that exemplify how market forces shape the built environment under the pretext of monument conservation. There is no doubt that the visibility of historic landmark buildings is a crucial part of London's global city image. St Paul's must not merely be understood as a religious building of civic significance but equally as a commodity due to its instrumental role as an easily marketable image of the city. It is the commodification of St Paul's, its monumentalisation that evokes the interpretation of commercial skyscrapers as structures that do not compete with historic landmark buildings. A market-political logic is deeply ingrained in the visual protection framework. Historians are, and always have been, concerned with 'Seeing the History in the View' as a recent publication by Historic England with the same name indicates. However, this concern was always intertwined with seeing capitalism, previously industrial capitalism and now financial capitalism. This is why it is so important to understand the aesthetic conceptualisations that design-related professionals and historians developed over the years. Yes, aesthetic arguments according to which skyscrapers defer to St Paul's are an easier way to get planning permission. They are also the result of a long process in which architects and historians tried to make sense of commercial structures

in the City. The rich history of the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC), which was a group of mostly architects and historians who advised the government on architecture, urban design and public space in England from 1924 to 1999, is useful for unpacking this process.

The distinction between monuments on the one hand and tall commercial structures on the other was established in the inter-war period. In 1934, the RFAC distinguished between ‘buildings of national and historic interest, amongst which are monuments of the greatest importance and fame’ and ‘high buildings’. The latter included all kinds of industrial structures such as tall office buildings, factory chimneys and power stations, because they were regarded as having the same problem: their ‘colossal size suggest a monumentality traditionally reserved for buildings of religious and other civic purposes’. The RFAC was quite clear: these high buildings should not be monumentalised, precisely because of their lack of civic significance. In addition, the current conceptualisation of an urban view as a bounded composition in which the visual relationship between these different building types are inscribed, is equally old. An urban view was defined as a ‘whole or unified composition of architectural beauty’. Hence, a proposed high building has always been seen as a threat because it has the power to destroy an existing urban view that is balanced and harmonious.

**EVALUATING THE SKYLINE**

In that respect, little has changed since the 1930s. However, the current argument that commercial structures can visually enhance monuments is the result of discontinuities in an otherwise continuous history. Without assigning civic significance to a commercial structure, a truly positive interpretation of it is only possible when form and content are divorced. In 1957, the RFAC introduced the idea that a high building may have positive aesthetic advantages, given that it is well designed. Crucially, design quality, here, did not refer to a building’s accommodation of uses or to the allowance of multiple, unpredictable uses for that matter. It referred almost entirely to its outline as seen against the sky. A building’s ‘general silhouette’, we read, ‘must be carefully considered’; the ‘treatment of the tops of the buildings is of great importance’ and, indeed, the ‘architectural success or failure of a scheme will be judged largely by the final silhouette’. Once a building’s form was divorced from its use, structures to which different values were attached to could be easily assessed in relation to each other. Concerns with the ‘relation between the building in silhouette and the skyline as a whole’ gave way to the idea that clustering high buildings can have aesthetic advantages. In the early 1960s, the RFAC lamented that towers were ‘dotted about all over London’ and suggested that a ‘better result would be achieved if high buildings were to be kept in groups or clusters’. This then was the beginning of the currently practised idea that a commercial structure’s impact on a monument is measured in terms of its contribution to a high-rise cluster first, and that clustering high buildings, in turn, can contribute positively to the visual dominance of a monument. Of course, this is only the case when the cluster is shaped accordingly. The idea that a cluster should be defined by a centre point that is the tallest building in the group from which buildings gradually fall away in height was first stated in the 1970s: in negotiations about the Nat-West Tower, which is now known as Tower 42.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

The result, I suggest, is a naturalisation of tall buildings: they appear like an integral and naturally grown part of the historic, mid-height built environment. Sharp lines of demarcation are avoided, in order to create a non-conflictual image in which historic landmark buildings and commercial skyscrapers are harmonised.

Visual arguments according to which commercial skyscrapers defer to historic landmark buildings are not the latest stroke of urban developers and their design teams. They are the



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4 The tapered profile of the Leadenhall building (Cheesegrater) supposedly defers to St Paul’s.  
 5 The post-industrial skyline of London as compared to the 19th century industrial skyline  
 All images by G. Gassner

result of a long process of professionals’ attempts to both control and justify the ways in which capitalist imperatives shape the built environment. That St Paul’s is hardly ever described as a religious building but almost exclusively as a historic landmark building in current political negotiations around London’s skylines, illustrates the way in which a highly exclusive historical narrative is being co-opted by the market. The city’s past is reduced to the enshrinement of a few monuments. Perhaps the key characteristic of this historical narrative is a conceptualisation of history and capitalism as mutually exclusive categories as if capitalism would have no history in the city. ●

Dr Günter Gassner, architect and lecturer at the LSE, and interested in the relationship between aesthetics and politics

# The Impact of Transport Oriented Development

Chris Williamson suggests that transport can be the catalyst for taller buildings



to Crossrail stations in east and west London. Originally, no Crossrail station was planned to serve Woolwich, but the local authority and Berkeley Homes as owners of the large Woolwich Arsenal development site, successfully petitioned for a station and contributed towards the cost. Now that the box is built and the fit-out underway, around 400 extra homes, some in tall buildings, are viable because of the improved public transport infrastructure.

## THE SINGAPORE EXAMPLE

The regenerational effects of public transport are by no means limited to London. Similar growth can be seen in Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. Major international cities are exploring the virtues of good public transport harnessing the power of urban growth and regeneration. Singapore was the first city to introduce congestion charging in 1975, and has been pioneering the concept of urban growth through public transport. It is now planning a high speed link between the small entrepreneurial island and access to labour in Malaysia.

Westonwilliamson's proposal for an 80-storey tower above the high speed station in Singapore contains a hotel and retail at the base and offices and residential at the top. A research project with Thyssen Lifts developing innovative lift technology, is to allow personal transportation from platform level to various designated locations in surrounding towers. This technology will transform the way people move around tall buildings with the same impact as driverless cars will have on the physical environment of cities. This collaboration with Thyssen is especially interesting in relation to existing cities. There are exacting constraints in dense cities which lifts cannot normally avoid. Piling, services, waste and water, basements and other underground routes are numerous, and trying to find that vertical sweet spot from an office or residential tower to the platform is often impossible. This new technology will change all that, and the passengers will be able to call a lift in the same way as calling a driverless car or automated vehicle, and programme it to go exactly to the right floor in the right tower travelling both vertically and horizontally.

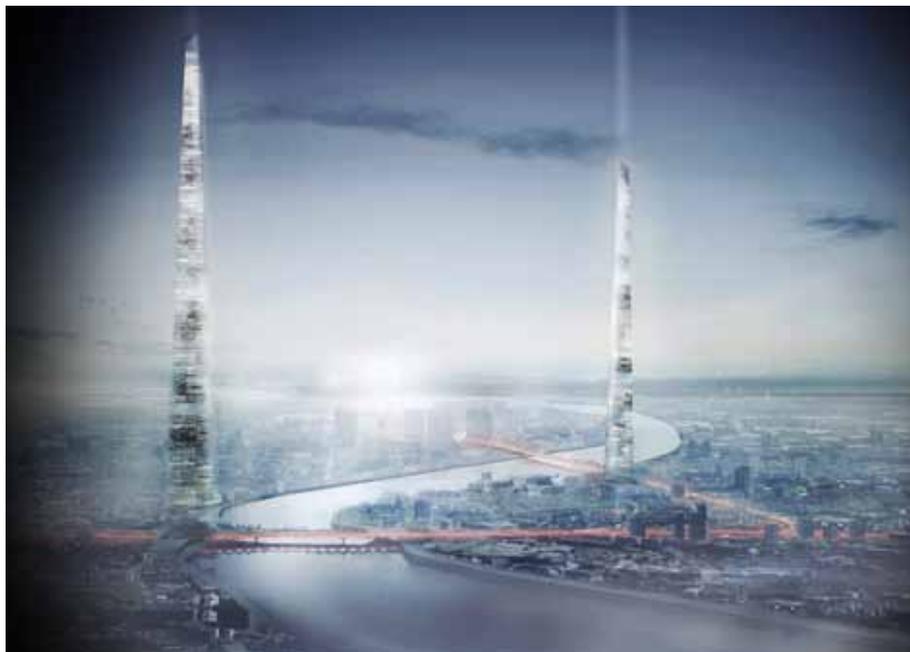
**S**ince 1991 there have been major changes in the way that urban transport works are considered, planned and funded. These changes have affected the relationship between transport provision and the urban environment and with tall buildings, as part of densification.

When the Jubilee Line was built in the 1990s it was funded through central government. Although the Canary Wharf developers were due to contribute to the capital cost, little of this materialised. When the line was completed, development sites which had laid empty for decades became attractive because of greater accessibility, and schemes like More London were built in Southwark. The Jubilee Line had a transformational effect on the way public transport was perceived and since the success of this line, government's attitude to public transport as a regenerational spur has been encouraging.

One third of Crossrail for example, is funded from private finance, and the impact of this project on urban regeneration can already be seen as housing and residential sites are developed. Pick up any newspaper in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong and you will find adverts for apartments adjacent

1 Singapore High Speed interchange

**New technologies will transform the way people move around cities and at the same time change their look**



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**GREEN CITY PROPOSALS**

In addition to the research work with Thyssen, we are conducting a research project to design and promote a new Green City based around high speed rail. New technologies will transform the way people move around cities and at the same time change their look. No longer will the vision of the future be that of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, but a high rise version of a true garden city.

Previous new towns such as Milton Keynes, Chandigarh and new settlements in China, were based around the motorcar. New high-speed rail connections are now proposed around the world. We have taken this opportunity to reimagine how a new settlement of 350,000 people could be designed around a new high-speed transport hub. It could be Crewe, southern Malaysia or northern California. The design would be site specific whilst adopting the design principles suggested here.

The designs for the Green City show how the buildings are an essential component of a walkable, viable, dense city to allow greater expanses of open space and promote civic pride. The Green City was investigated primarily because of the limited ambition surrounding the development of Ebbsfleet where 15,000 homes are proposed around the high-speed station. We believe this should be 250,000, on the scale of Milton Keynes though developed around public, not private transport and with tall buildings instead of sprawl. At the time, Milton Keynes typified state of the art thinking but 30 years later it is difficult to adapt it to a changing society. The Green City is based around public transport and will continue to evolve. The model would also be suitable for a station south of Birmingham, allowing people to live in a well-designed space and work in London, Manchester or Birmingham, within an hour's travel. A further version of the model being developed is located in the proposed Mumbai to Delhi high-speed line. HS2 in the UK and high-speed in general can transform how people live in cities and allow tall buildings to be more evenly distributed. It could also help spread the wealth, equalise house prices and contribute to remedy climate change.

**FURTHER POSSIBILITIES**

In addition to rail transportation activity as a catalyst for tall buildings, proposals have been drawn up for a series of residential towers adjacent to proposed road and pedestrian bridges in East London. The advantage of developing along the river is that overshadowing is not an issue. The economic model suggests that the development of homes adjacent to a bridge can contribute 30 per cent of the cost of the bridge.



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A website for transport orientated development ([tod.org](http://tod.org)) is populated with designs for proposals both large and small. It is important to stress both ends of the scale and both are equally valued. Infrastructure projects such as the Northern Line extension to Battersea show what is possible to help to bring new life to brownfield sites, often generating tall buildings because of the demands of city living.

The relationship between public transport and commercial development has come a long way since the Jubilee Line project in the 1990s. This was conceived purely as a transport scheme to ensure fast, safe and efficient movement of people around the city. There was little thought given to how the traveling public moved through the urban realm once they had passed through the ticket gate line. Only when the local authorities became involved throughout the planning process were pavement widths and desire lines considered.

Now that Crossrail 2 is at the planning stage, this attitude has changed completely. The Crossrail 2 design team is working alongside the GLA's urbanism

2 Living Bridges East London  
3 Green City Concept model



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unit to assess where stations and their entrances should be best positioned to fit into the city and promote urban growth. Crossrail 2 will be much more a city-shaping project than a transport project and tall buildings will inevitably form part of that city shape. Transport for London (TfL) have been tasked with disposing of sites and air rights opportunities adjacent and above their stations.

However, these sites are often more difficult than other non-transport related sites. In 1998 the Jubilee Line project

4 Woolwich Crossrail station, all images WestonWilliamson

built the stairs and the lift-well for a commercial development at the Borough High Street ticket hall, but the oversight offices planned were not found to be commercially viable and remained undeveloped until 2013. Similar experiences at Southwark and Bermondsey Stations are now part of TfL's plans to activate their portfolio. Deloitte has been instructed to identify TfL sites and properties which might be developed, some involving tall buildings.

There is a clear economic case for developing tall buildings adjacent to high quality public transport links. This is apparent at home and abroad. The scale of ambition for HS2 and Crossrail 2 has to rise. There is little point in building world-class infrastructure to serve suburban developments. ●

Chris Williamson, architect, planner and urban designer, founding partner of Weston Williamson and Partners.

## Dublin's New Tall Buildings

Michael Short considers the impact of new developments on the city's character



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Ireland's capital is starting, once again, to see a strengthening of its economy and its re-emergence as a European gateway to the global economy. Just like the economic boom during the 'Celtic Tiger' years Dublin is experiencing huge pressure to build, particularly in the re-use of brownfield land, the promotion of particular tall building proposals in key locations, and debates about the protection of specific built heritage elements which are at risk from demolition and redevelopment. Schemes which had spluttered to a halt during the recession have recommenced on site. In this article, I will reflect on the redevelopment of the Boland's Mills site in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock, a place of huge significance to the Easter Rising 1916 and its celebration this centenary year. A redevelopment currently underway will see the removal of mid-20th century fabric deemed of little value, the restoration of the original mills and the erection of three towers of 13, 14 and 15 storeys respectively. There has been concern about the impact of the tall buildings

on the built heritage of the mills, and what that may say about the approach to development in the city.

It has been argued that Dublin is a city of quite exceptional character and beauty that can be characterised mainly by its 18th and 19th century attributes, at least in the central area; these include tightly-woven streets, using consistent materials, scale and form, mostly from the Georgian period, but with elements from the Victorian period. The predominant part of the fabric of the city from this period has survived mainly as a result of neglect and lack of economic activity during most of the 20th century. The city can be characterised as medium-rise, with buildings

1 Dublin's Docklands: planned medium-rise townscape. Copyright: Markus Gann (dreamstime.com)

that mainly range between four and eight storeys: compared to other cities in Ireland and Britain, this is relatively tall. The city is built along the River Liffey which forms the main backbone of the modern city, fanning out to the north, west and east. The city gently rises from the central area to the west, providing wide panoramas from the west. The skyline, particularly from the west, can be characterised by its generally medium-rise nature, although a number of key historic and more recent buildings punctuate it at regular intervals. To the east of the central area lies the Docklands area which is experiencing a large amount of development, mainly office and residential, spurred on by a framework, implemented by Dublin Docklands Development Authority and Dublin City Council.

### DOCKLANDS DEVELOPMENT

The planning of the Docklands area was the city's first attempt at comprehensive planning on a significant scale for economic growth and as such, had the political backing for implementation from the state, businesses and local population. Whilst the framework suggested development at between four and eight storeys (reflecting the character of the wider city centre), a number of taller buildings are again coming forward in this area as economic confidence improves. The North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in the Docklands contains the historically significant and protected Boland's Mill. Linked to Éamon De Valera's 3rd Battalion of Irish Volunteers' use of the Mill complex during the 1916 Rising (strategically located on the main rail and road connections from Dún Laoghaire), the buildings have huge significance to the quest for Irish independence from Britain. In recent years, the SDZ has required a conservation-led scheme for its redevelopment.

The approved development provides for 42 new apartments, 29,000m<sup>2</sup> of office space, 1,400m<sup>2</sup> retail and restaurant space, and 550m<sup>2</sup> cultural space. It will provide for 'significant economic activity in the area, facilitate the redevelopment of a disused brownfield site, provide a community/cultural space and associated public space which will provide a valuable asset for both established and new communities; it will deliver a highly permeable, attractive and animated public realm and open up the adjoining water body to a wider public and secure the restoration and hence the future of a number of heritage structures'. The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) is funding the redevelopment of the site to the tune of €170 million in demolition and enabling works. Established in 2009 as an initiative taken by the Irish state to address the serious crisis in banking, in this instance NAMA reflects strong central government interest in the redevelopment of this important site.

### CONCERNS

The scheme approved in July 2015 has sought to address the protection of this important heritage asset through the demolition of the concrete mill from the mid-20th century and the articulation of a conservation narrative with a series of very modern towers which are, in many senses, out of keeping with the rhythm of this part of the Docklands. Whilst the assessment of the application by the City Council viewed the removal of existing fabric as beneficial to the protected structures, the planner's report recommending approval of the scheme makes little comment on the relationship between the new and the old beyond the importance of new 'landmark buildings' being built in this location. This is the last of the redevelopment sites on the inner waterfront of the Grand Canal Dock and the quality of new architecture is obviously very important. Having said that, it also appears odd that the protected Boland's Mill, a set of landmark buildings both physically and culturally given the link to the Rising, might be drowned out by towers which have little relationship to the existing either in terms of materials, massing or height. There are undoubted public realm benefits to the scheme but it remains surprising that the assessment of the proposed relationship is under-articulated at best. That the



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report suggests that the three towers are landmark buildings is also of concern.

The examination of this approved development proposal indicates that a correct decision was made, in the sense of utilising key sites for high-density development and investing in schemes which might recoup some moneys for the state. However, the built heritage debates in the assessment of the scheme were unsophisticated, and did not reflect the importance of the designations in architectural or cultural terms in the Docklands area. There are undoubted benefits to this redevelopment, yet it would also appear that this should be the starting point for a more robust inclusive debate about the need for Dublin to utilise creative solutions about the type and form of development that should take place, particularly in relation to its unique character. In a time when there is still no new central government since elections earlier this year, strong direction from the planning department of the City Council about the scope and form of new development across the city is even more important than usual. ●

2 The protected structures of Boland's Mills with demolition of the concrete building underway, April 2016  
3 Alto Vetro tower, new development emerging in Grand Canal Dock, Dublin

Dr Michael Short, Senior Teaching Fellow in Planning, Programme Director MRes Interdisciplinary Urban Design, The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

# An Imagined Urban Environment

Charlotte Nyholm wonders whether the city of Espoo, Finland will manage to protect its character



**P**ressure to densify urban areas and global competition for investment have long since altered the built environments of megacities such as London and Shanghai. Finland and its second largest city, Espoo, provide an interesting context to study the effects of the same phenomenon on small and medium sized cities that have only recently entered into the balancing act between preserving their identity and building iconic landmarks. Much like their Nordic counterparts, Finnish cities have historically been characterised by a low cityscape, accented only by the occasional church spire. As rising land values make tall buildings a more attractive prospect for developers, the need for a planning framework to guide this growth becomes apparent.

In Espoo, such a framework was drawn up in 2012, focusing on finding suitable locations for tall buildings, and presenting guidelines for designing buildings that enhance the skyline while also enriching the street level experience. The implementation of the principles for tall buildings has, however, not been consistent in Espoo due to a lack of political will and the city's desire to position itself as investor-friendly. Establishing this image has been an important part of the city's attempt to distinguish itself in the competition with its neighbour and the country's capital, Helsinki. Because similar pressures are faced by local politicians in many small and medium-sized European cities, it is important to note the detrimental effect that a lack of consistency can have on liveability, attractiveness and the built environment.

## RAPID BUT FRAGMENTED URBANISATION

In the 1950s and 60s, cities in southern and western Finland grew rapidly, partly due to the need to rehouse 423,000 refugees from Karelia after ceding territories to the Soviet Union. Limited land use governing legislation, coupled with plenty of available land and a small population, led to a dispersed urban fabric sometimes referred to as 'suburbs in the forest', or apartment blocks interspersed with nature far outside the city centres.

Some of the growth in Helsinki spilled over into the adjacent, previously rural, communities of Espoo and Vantaa, which were made into cities. Today, the three cities make up the Capital Region with a population of about 1.4 million.

The city of Espoo is fairly young, and lacks a strong urban tradition. Since the construction of its first suburbs, Espoo has grown rapidly, with its population multiplying tenfold from 25,000 in 1950 to 265,000 in 2014. The population density is still remarkably low, however, at only 850 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, which is less than one third of Helsinki's. The urban structure is multi-nodal, with five so-called centres representing the most urban environments. Vast stretches of detached housing and scattered residential high-rise neighbourhoods are interspersed with forests and a large road network. Public transportation is based on commuter trains and a bus network, though private cars still account for 70 per cent of all trips made by motorised vehicle (compared to 46 per cent in Helsinki).

While attitudes towards tall buildings have always varied between the three main cities of the Capital Region, until recently proposals for tall building have rarely been approved. In 1931 the construction of the 70m tall Hotel Torni in the centre of Helsinki was debated in

1 Espoo cityscape as seen from the Haukilahti water tower with two office towers in Keilaniemi visible on the horizon. Photograph by Ilkka Törmä



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court, and once erected it remained the tallest secular building in the city for over 50 years. Only a few more tall buildings have emerged in the region since then, and they are located some 10–15km away from the city centre. The skyline will, however, change drastically in the near future, as Helsinki plans for several clusters of tall buildings to be constructed as part of the development of brownfield sites located a stone's throw away from the centre. The plans have been hotly debated, and a citizen's complaint, possible within the legal framework for city planning, has led to a two-year delay in the construction of one of these clusters. Meanwhile, the city of Espoo had until a few years ago taken a more developer-driven approach to tall buildings, which has meant that each case was reviewed independently by the city council, and planning officials had very few tools to rely on in the process. This approach was in keeping with the city's strategy to profile itself as a flexible partner and attract investment, but meant that there was no strategic vision for the role of tall buildings on a citywide scale.

In 2008, the Espoo and Helsinki city councils voted in favour of extending the Helsinki subway line west to Espoo. In order to make the subway more profitable and to help pay for the city's share of the expected €714 million construction costs, significant infill development was planned around the 13 new subway stations. Already before the subway plans were being discussed, developers had expressed interest in constructing more tall buildings in Espoo, and the required densification was well suited to serve these interests. Tall buildings were subsequently presented as the solution for achieving the desired amount of floor area around several of the new stations including the tech-hub of Keilaniemi and the residential suburb of Niittykumpu.

#### PRINCIPLES FOR TALL BUILDINGS IN ESPOO

In order to mitigate the negative impacts of haphazard development and lack of a large-scale vision for all of Espoo, the city planning office, at the request of the city council, commissioned in 2012 Harris-Kjisk Architects and Planners to establish principles for the construction of tall buildings in the city. The task included facilitating a workshop for city officials and local politicians, as well as arranging a seminar with invited Finnish and international speakers. At the end of the process, the *Principles for Tall Buildings in Espoo* were published in early 2013.

The principles consist of three parts. Firstly, areas suited for

2 Commuter train and subway lines with 300 metre radii from the stations and zones for tall buildings. (Espoo City Planning Department and Harris-Kjisk Architects and Planners, 2012)

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**Without a widely approved and coherent framework in place, tall buildings, due to their visibility, pose a greater risk to the cityscape than lower ones**

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tall buildings are identified. Secondly, guidelines for the design of individual buildings are proposed. Lastly, a scorecard is presented, which sets minimum standards for quality and allows developers of tall buildings to score points by outperforming the minimum standards.

Traffic was a major consideration in determining where in Espoo tall buildings could be located without significant adverse effects. A high concentration of inhabitants or employees on a single plot, without sufficient transportation infrastructure, would lead to congestion. For this reason, the decision was made to concentrate tall buildings within a 300m radius of a commuter train or subway station. Similar restrictions had also been applied earlier in Vienna. The areas around the stations were then assessed based on existing buildings, landscape, views, and historical context to determine which cityscapes could support tall buildings without losing their distinctive character. The suitable areas were then divided into two categories: those suited for tall buildings (40–80m tall) and those identified as target zones for very tall building development (over 80m tall).

High quality architectural design is particularly important in the case of tall buildings, due to their visibility in the landscape. Since good design is to some extent context specific, the second part of the *Principles for Tall Buildings in Espoo – The Guidelines for the Design of Individual Buildings* – focuses on highlighting important concerns and considerations, and presenting best and worst case examples to illustrate the ideas. The silhouette of a tall building, and particularly the articulation of the



3 crown, significantly impact the skyline and should primarily be designed for this large scale context. When successful, these landmarks can contribute to the identity of the city and facilitate orientation. However, attention must also be paid to the street level experience in order to establish a relationship between the building and its immediate surroundings. The guidelines highlight the importance of establishing an active street level façade, minimising the visual impact of parking facilities, and maintaining a scale at street level that relates to pedestrians. Certain assessment tools for city officials are also introduced, such as wind and daylight studies required in connection with building permit applications.

The final section of the Principles combines aspects of street level design, architectural quality and environmental sustainability into a scorecard. Points are given for outperforming minimum standards and a set score is required in order to obtain a building permit. Buildings exceeding 80m in height need to score higher than lower ones, as increased height means a more prominent role in the landscape, and a bigger impact on the environment due to a larger volume of building materials, greater energy consumption, and more end users.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Despite an interactive drafting process involving not only the consulting architecture office, but also city officials from several departments, political desire to be perceived as an investor-friendly city seems to have hindered the full implementation of the *Principles for Tall Buildings in Espoo*. After their completion, the principles were only made into recommendations by the city planning and the building councils, instead of being made legally binding. Representatives of the Green Party wanted the principles to also be taken to the city council for processing

and approval, in order to give the document more weight in the decision-making process. However, due to lack of support from other parties, this did not happen. While most of the currently planned tall buildings in the city do conform to the principles in terms of location, some exceptions have also been approved of, for example in Westend, which is 800m away from one of the future subway stations. The technology hub of Keilaniemi, which formerly housed the Nokia headquarters, is one of the designated zones for very tall buildings. Though the proposed four new residential 32-36 storey highrises are located within this zone, rendered images presented at this stage of the design process raise grave concerns regarding the adherence to the design guidelines and attention paid to the pedestrian experience.

#### CONCLUSION

Strong political will is required to strike a balance between attracting investment and producing a high quality built environment. Tall buildings require careful planning in order to add to, rather than detract from, a city's identity and livability. Without a widely approved and coherent framework in place, tall buildings, due to their visibility, pose a greater risk to the cityscape than lower ones.

In the Capital Region, each city has taken a different approach to tall buildings and no study of the cumulative impact of these policies has thus far been made. In Espoo, a sparsely built low-density city, the explicit reasons for building tall, such as the need to densify and increase housing and office volume, could often also be achieved using lower buildings. The persistent pursuit of tall buildings suggests a more implicit driver: branding the city as progressive and globalised. For a city like Espoo, which largely lacks the fundamental building blocks of urbanity, such as a distinguishable centre, lively squares, and walkable streets, building tall landmarks to project a sleek urban image can perhaps be seen as the city's attempt to differentiate itself from Helsinki and its more traditional European cityscape. However, without careful planning and political determination, the branding exercise may only go as far as a skyline on a postcard, missing out on the bustling street-life that characterises truly urban cities and serves as their primary draw. ●

Charlotte Nyholm, architect and urban planner at Harris-Kjisik Architects, and tutor at the Aalto University Department of Architecture

3 Proposed densification around Niittykumpu subway station including 24 and 12 floor towers. (SARC Architects)

4 Four planned residential towers in Keilaniemi and traffic rearrangement proposal including a vast deck covering Ring Road I. (SARC Architects)

# From Void-Deck to Skygarden

Philip Oldfield describes how community fostering is achieved in Singapore's high-rise housing



was on creating the maximum number of units in the minimum time, with little consideration given to public and social spaces. This aggressive policy saw the creation of 54,000 new homes in the first five years, rising to 180,000 every five years by the mid-1980s. However, soon the HDB's focus shifted from mere numbers to improving residents' quality of life and creating successful high-rise communities. This was achieved primarily in two ways: firstly through the active integration of residents within new high-rise developments, and secondly through innovative design strategies and the creation of community spaces at ground, mid and upper-levels within towers.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Singapore is a multi-cultural country, with residents from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Following race riots in the 1960s, the HDB recognised the need to integrate Singapore's diverse population across the new high-rise housing developments, to create mixed communities and avoid ethnic or economic polarisation. Beginning in the 1970s, the HDB allocated new flats in a manner that would give a 'good distribution of races' across new towns. This was strengthened through the 1989 Ethnic Integration Policy, designed to ensure that there would be a balanced and distributed mix of communities in all HDB developments, based on the country's ethnic make-up. Beyond this, multi-storey housing is planned with a variety of different unit sizes and tenures throughout, with smaller rental units and larger for-sale family flats interspersed. The result is a social and cultural diversity across any floor, in any tower. The HDB also supports grassroots organisations such as local community centres with programmes ranging from organising block parties for local residents to security issues.

## COMMUNITY SPACES: FROM VOID DECK TO SKYGARDEN

High-rise communities have not only been fostered through social integration, but also through progressive architecture and urban design. HDB high-rise design has evolved from the 1960s to provide more and better designed community spaces throughout developments. In early

**W**ith urban populations in cities growing faster than ever before, the debate around the most appropriate urban design paradigm for affordable housing rages like never before. For some, an obvious solution is to build up, creating dense high-rise subsidised housing. Yet the idea of vertical social housing conjures up images of urban dystopia in many people's minds: repetitive concrete blocks, interspaced with vacant unplanned green spaces, the epitome of an unappealing lifestyle, especially for families with children. Recent years have seen an almost unanimous rejection of the typology, with David Cameron for example, pledging to demolish the worst examples in the UK, suggesting that brutal high-rise towers 'are a gift to criminals and drug dealers'. Against this backdrop, Singapore bucks the trend. Here is a nation state of 5.5 million people where 80 per cent live in high-rise social housing, most of which is owner-occupied. Moreover the vast majority of occupants, over 90 per cent, are satisfied with doing so. In an age where housing is at the forefront of the political agenda, Singapore provides a case study for how the tall building can provide socially sustainable and even aspirational housing for a wide socio-demographic.

## THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT BOARD

In the decades following the Second World War, Singapore suffered from a severe shortage of sanitary housing. Many families lived in crowded and dilapidated conditions, lacking basic facilities such as access to potable water. In response, the government set up the Housing Development Board (HDB) in 1960 with the aim of providing affordable housing for all. At first the emphasis

1 Skyville@Dawson – interlinked towers with skygardens at height. Photographs by Philip Oldfield



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Singaporean high-rise housing, internal double-loaded corridors were phased out, and replaced with single-loaded external corridors, as it was thought that these would be more conducive to offer social spaces for residents to meet and mingle. Corridors were then widened, the floor level of flats raised to maintain privacy while creating greater space for social interaction at height.

From the 1970s 'void decks' were included in most HDB high-rise projects as the primary community space for the residents. Void decks are the space beneath tower blocks: open, unplanned areas, typically defined by the structural columns and cores from the towers above. They represented the HDB's aspiration for a locally scaled accessible space that could be used by all residents, while providing a sense of community identity. Typically loosely planned, void decks are home to a variety of community activities: Malay weddings, Chinese funerals, games and even acting as polling stations. Over time, the spaces have been filled in with more permanent community facilities: kindergartens, playgrounds and even kidney dialysis centres.

However, as during the 1990s high-rise HDB housing has grown taller and taller, upper floor residents found themselves increasingly isolated from the activities of the ground. The HDB responded by starting to incorporate some of the space and facilities of the void deck at height in tower blocks. This first took the form of green roofs and playgrounds situated on top of carpark podiums. However, as social housing 50-storeys and above started being proposed in the early 2000s, it became necessary to transfer the concept of the void deck – scalable, accessible social space – up the building where it was closer to residents. This took the form of skygardens. These can be considered as social/communal spaces at height within a development, often covered in lush green landscaping, open to the elements, covered or occasionally glazed in. Such is the popularity of the skygarden that it has now taken over from the void deck as the characteristic social space in Singaporean high-rise housing.

#### THE PINNACLE@DUXTON

The Pinnacle@Duxton represents the first large-scale integration of skygardens into a HDB high-rise project. It consists of seven 50-storey high-rise blocks, linked by snaking skygardens at the 26th and 50th storey. The former accommodates social spaces for residents only, while the uppermost floor is publically accessible. Radically, rather than just green spaces the skygardens include a number of functions that historically have been found at ground, in the void deck. These include an 800m running track linking the towers, a gym for the elderly, a children's



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playground and residents' community centre – all at height above the city.

Of particular note is how these new urban spaces are managed. The skygardens are owned and maintained by the local Tanjong Pagar Municipal Area who charge residents a small monthly fee for this service. Security is extremely high: multiple security cameras cover the spaces, while access is limited to card-holding-residents via metal turntables. A series of strict rules are posted in all lobbies and include 'no food or beverages', 'no social events' and 'no games'. Access to the public space on the 50th floor is restricted by opening times, numbers and an entrance fee, questioning the logic of its public status. It is here that skygardens differ significantly to the void-deck; while the latter accommodates funerals, weddings and other activities, the skygardens are much more sterile. Post occupancy evaluation of the Pinnacle@Duxton by the author in conjunction with colleagues from the University of Nottingham found that while residents enjoyed the skygardens and used them for social interaction, they were frustrated by this bureaucracy. A 34-year-old resident noted; 'I feel very secure socialising up here, but I am not allowed to bring visitors in. I have a lot of friends who want to spend their evenings here on the skydeck'. These strict rules and regulations clearly create a barrier to community life and the sense of social identity at height.

Despite these challenges, the Pinnacle is not a one-off; instead, it has spawned a new urban morphology across Singapore, the 'interlinked high-rise housing cluster'. This is exemplified by the recent construction of many similar examples including the Skyville@Dawson and SkyTerrace@Dawson (both HDB projects) and the privately-owned Sky Habitat and

2 The Pinnacle@Duxton Skygardens at upper level  
3 Rooftop playground in HDB high-rise housing



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Reflections at Keppel Bay. Skyville in particular, shows an evolution of the skygarden concept. The towers are broken down into 12 ‘vertical villages’, each with their own skygarden shared by 80 units. This way, smaller communities are fostered within the bigger whole, providing a degree of social identity within a larger development.

**GOVERNANCE AND POLICY**

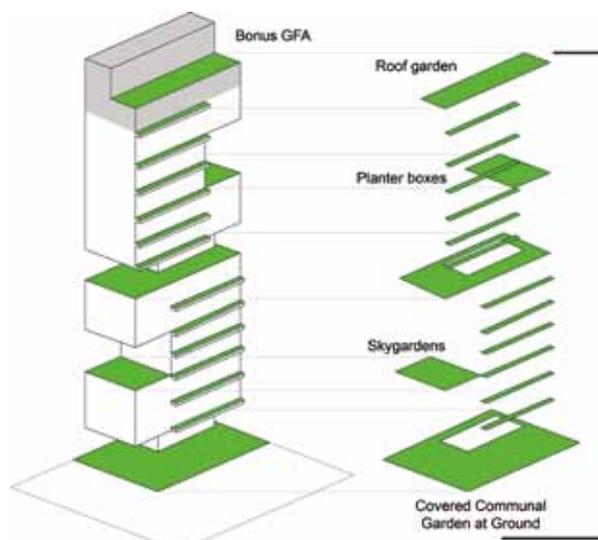
The appearance of inter-linked skyscrapers and lush planted skygardens across Singapore did not just happen by chance. Instead, it is the result of a series of progressive planning policies and incentives set out by the Singaporean government. Singapore’s planning system is governed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and defined by their 2014 Masterplan. This specifies plot ratios, building heights and permissible land-uses for every site across the entire city-state, with the aim of guiding development over the next 10 to 15 years. This highly prescriptive top-down approach is supplemented by planning circulars: documents which provide more detailed guidance including initiatives designed to improve the quality and lifestyle of developments. For example, while the HDB have pushed the concept of skygardens in social high-rise housing, private projects have been encouraged to include similar spaces through the Landscaping for Urban Spaces and High-rises (LUSH) circular. Fuelled by Singapore’s strategic aim to create ‘a city in a garden’, LUSH requires developers to replace any greenery lost from a site within new developments, either at ground level or through skygardens and vertical planting. Developers who include skygardens also benefit from floor area tax exemptions and bonus plot ratios, allowing them to construct more area than local zoning laws allow. This provides a strong financial incentive for the inclusion of such spaces, and has been widely taken up throughout the city.

**LESSONS**

Singapore, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world (even Hong Kong) has embraced the concept of vertical urbanisation first initiated by Le Corbusier, taking the social spaces and activities typically found at ground, and lifting them up into high-rise developments. While questions remain about the over-bureaucratisation of these spaces, skygardens are widely used across both HDB and private high-rise housing developments. It is now uncommon for any new Singaporean tower to not make provision for skygardens and social-communal spaces at height.



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4-5 Skyville@Dawson – interlinked towers split into vertical villages, each with its own skygarden. Source: Woha / Patrick Bingham-Hall  
 6 Singapore’s LUSH Programme showing requirements for replacement greenery and bonus incentives

Such ideas are permeating international high-rise design, with proposals for residential skygardens in many cities, from London to Los Angeles. These developments are clearly positive, moving away from the endless repetition of high-rise social housing of the past. However, the inclusion of skygardens doesn’t guarantee successful high-rise communities, as typified by the failure of the streets-in-the-sky model from mid-20th century Europe and America. It is important to acknowledge that the relative success of the Singaporean model is down to a multitude of factors: the proactive integration of different cultural and economic groups within developments; limited land and a general acceptance of high-rise living; innovative architectural design; high levels of maintenance and progressive incentives and regulations. ●

Philip Oldfield, Senior Lecturer in Architecture at University of New South Wales, Faculty of Built Environment

# National Urban Design Awards 2016

Victory Services Club, London, 9 March 2016



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With over 250 attendees, it was a very full house for the Urban Design Awards evening at the Victory Services Club; there was a real buzz and deservedly so. In its ninth year, the UDG awards have grown and developed, culminating in a stimulating event and an excellent networking occasion.

This year's awards evening was generously sponsored by Marshalls and thanks are due to the sponsor as well as all those that helped in making it a successful evening. Against many odds, the UDG's Director Robert Huxford managed to get all the bits to fit together and on time.

Following last year's model, the first hour allowed participants to mingle and network with a drink in their hands, whilst the Deco ensemble provided agreeable tango music in the background. At the start of the formal part of the evening, with participants having helped themselves to food and sitting comfortably, UDG chair Katie Neaves welcomed the crowd and invited Nick Rogers, Design Director at Taylor Wimpey to give the keynote speech. This challenging talk is reproduced on p.10.

The awards celebrate some of the best urban design work produced over the past year. From a long list of entries, the panel of judges select a short list of candidates for the Practice, Public Sector and Student awards. The first two categories are published in the Autumn and Winter issues of this journal and the UDG membership is invited to vote for their favourites. In the case of the books submitted by the publishers,

these are read and reviewed by a panel of experts coordinated by Louie Sieh; the reviews are also published in the journal but the panel chooses the winner. The Student award is also selected by the awards judging panel.

The Public Sector award was the first to be presented. Following short but informative videos prepared by the shortlisted candidates, the winner was announced as being Stockton Borough Council for bringing back life to Stockton High Street through a well-thought through regeneration scheme.

Next came the Student award for which there had been ten candidates. The winner from the University of Strathclyde had prepared a video which unfortunately suffered from technical problems. However, the video is available on Youtube and readers can see the scheme for *A New Laurieston* overleaf. The winner received the prize of £600, courtesy of the Francis Tibbalds Trust, from one of Francis Tibbalds' sons.

Louie Sieh then gave a reflective commentary on the eight shortlisted books that covered a wide spectrum of urban design concerns, from theoretical to practical. 'In the process of searching for a worthy winner, we look not just at the quality of books, but what reflects the urban design conversation today. So here are a few notable trends this year... there have been lots of books on citizen-led, low-cost, quick impact urban interventions, described variously as: performative urbanism, urban commoning, tactical urbanism. Another trend was the



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disproportionately large number of books that were the showcase of work of urban design schools.'

The winner was *Young – Old: Urban Utopias of an Aging Society* by Deane Simpson.

A pause in the proceedings allowed the attendees to finish dinner with a buffet of very enticing desserts. Networking carried on, a 'guess the city map' quiz provided

- 1 The Deco ensemble entertaining the audience
- 2 The IBI Team, practice joint winner receiving the award from Ben Tibbalds
- 3 Sama Jabr student winner receiving the award from Ben Tibbalds
- 4 Stockton Borough Council, Public Sector winner receiving the award from Adam Tibbalds
- 5 Prof. Ben Hillier receiving the Life Achievement award from Marcus Wilshere

some light entertainment, and behind the hubbub the Deco ensemble continued their tango.

After the interval, David Rudlin of URBED, winners of last year's Practice award gave the second keynote speech of the evening. As usual David managed to be humorous and provocative at the same time. The Practice award was perhaps the most eagerly awaited by the audience, following short but informative videos prepared by the shortlisted candidates that can be seen on Youtube. The quality of the entries was very high this year and as a result there were two joint winners: IBI Group for their Barnsley town centre scheme and Baca Architects for the Eiland Veur Lent scheme in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. These were very different projects, one having to rethink the regeneration of a town centre where the main developer has pulled out, the other designing an area threatened by flooding. Both offered innovative solutions and showed what lessons could be learned from the process. The winners shared the £1,000 Francis Tibbalds Prize.

The final award, for Lifetime Achievement, is decided by the Trustees of the Urban Design Group and this year they chose Professor Bill Hillier. Presenting the award, Marcus Wilshere said: 'Urban design practice worldwide would be different, and diminished, were it not for Bill's fundamental contribution, from his early pioneering work in the 1970s to his continuing refinement of Space Syntax today. In this regard, Bill Hillier is one of the central figures of urban design globally'.

With this the formal part of the evening ended. Participants continued to mingle for a while. One of them, attending for the first time said that he found the evening 'inspirational'. We trust that this reflects the view of many and we hope that more people will be encouraged to submit entries for next year's award and show the wider world how urban design contributes to the quality of life. The Urban Design Group also needs volunteers to help in the whole process from inviting submissions, through judging, to organizing the awards event. Please contact the UDG office if you would like to get involved. ●

6 Johanna Rosvall and Agnes Sandstedt's masterplan proposes a human scale development on the south bank of the river Clyde in Glasgow



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7 Wayne Worsdale's masterplan for Waterside Leicester sought to resolve many of the issues that exist, providing a sustainable mixed-use scheme to reconnect this derelict area to the city



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**PRACTICE AWARD**

**Joint Winners**

- Baca: Eiland Veur Lent, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
- IBI Group: Barnsley Town Centre

**Shortlisted**

- Assael: Lowestoft: Brooke Peninsula and Jeld Wen
- HTA: Aylesbury Estate Regeneration
- Levitt Bernstein: Winstanley & York Road Estates Regeneration

**PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD**

**Winner**

- Stockton Borough Council: Stockton High Street Regeneration

**Shortlisted**

- City of London Corporation: People, Places, Projects
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council: Brierley Hill Town Centre, SPD

**BOOK AWARD**

**Winner**

- *Young - Old: Urban Utopias of an Aging Society* by Deane Simpson

**Runner up**

- *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change*, by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia

**Shortlisted**

- *Heritage Planning: Principles and Process*, by Harold Kalman
- *Touching the City: Thoughts on Urban Scale*, by Timothy Makower

**STUDENT AWARD**

**Winner**

- Sama Jabr, University of Strathclyde, A New Laurieston

**Shortlisted**

- Johanna Rosvall and Agnes Sandstedt, University of Strathclyde, Revitalising Glasgow's Waterfront
- Wayne Worsdale, Leeds Beckett University, Waterside Leicester

# A New Laurieston

Waterfront Regeneration by Sama Jabr

## BACKGROUND

Over the course of Glasgow's history, the role of the River Clyde changed several times from agriculture, to trading, and finally industry; locals have widened and deepened the river with each change to match the demands of different uses. These changes affected the surrounding areas as well, the block typologies, land uses, and most importantly the relationship between the river and both banks: the Clyde became a barrier that had to be crossed, and the number of bridges increased accordingly.

In 20th century, after the World Wars and the Great Depression, ship-building factories were closed, and efforts were made to bring people back to the river. Yet the river Clyde and its banks remain the same as they were in the industrial period. Nowadays, efforts are being made to connect the river back to the city.

For the 2014/2015 academic year, a partnership was formed between the University of Strathclyde and Glasgow City Council. The main objective for students involved was to utilise urban design principles as a means of revitalising river fronts.

## PROCESS

Initial analysis was conducted within different groups covering historical background, policy context, street fronts, blocks, uses, networks and connectivity, and how people experienced and perceived the area. We engaged in interviews and spent time in the

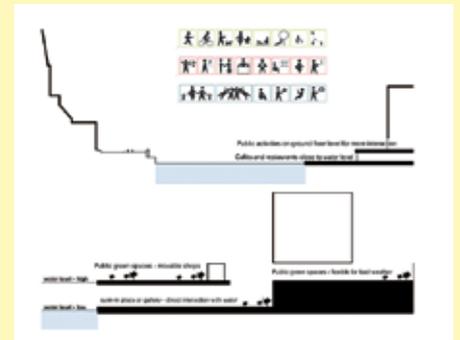
area to study people's movement patterns.

The strong relationship between architectural typologies, perceived safety, cleanliness, and the time people were willing to spend by the river became clear. Generally, people will spend time in high-density neighbourhoods with activities on ground floor level, walkways that are continuously overlooked, and most importantly, activities to attract people and places to sit. Those are qualities that the river Clyde lacked on its southern front and some parts on the northern front. The next stage was developing existing and proposed concept plans to show wider strategic objectives. The existing concept plan revealed areas with discrepancies between population density and the nodes which served them, as well as gaps in public transportation. The proposed concept plan aimed to provide ideas to fix existing situations. This stage informed the development of a foundation masterplan for an area of choice, which for me was Laurieston. Laurieston is blighted by the legacy of modernist urban planning, with an incoherent spatial structure, huge areas of vacant land, and a poorly constructed built form. Furthermore, the area suffers from lack of public amenities, low economic activity and an insufficient functional mix. However it also has key assets including its riverside location and close proximity to the city centre, which can be exploited to assist in its regeneration.

The main goal was to create a node at

Laurieston that has the potential to grow and serve as a district node for Laurieston, Gorbals, and Tradeston. Within this node I aimed to create a pedestrian linear access that is well linked, and encourages small-scaled communities: an old-fashioned town centre, with its shops, transit hubs, and reasonable walking distances between shopping, schools, transportation, business centres and public realm, unifying social and recreational spaces with the functional ones.

The masterplan aims to establish community character through the creation of urban spaces that provide its users with ease of access to living, leisure, culture and work. Due to its location, the site will play two important roles: interconnecting Gorbals, Laurieston, and Tradeston and inviting people back to the river. The design also includes consideration to retaining historical and cultural aspects of the site by implementing a historical grid system that blends

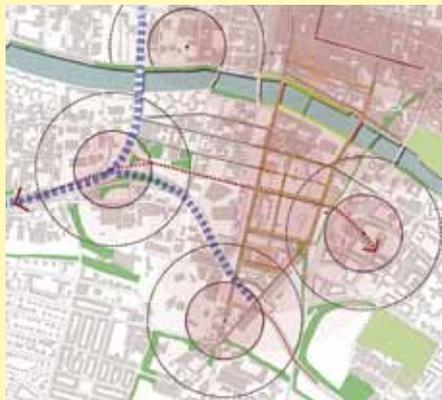


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- 1 Proposed masterplan
- 2 Conceptual waterfront solutions
- 3 Proposed concept plan



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with the current orthogonal urban fabric. Furthermore, the site's current community supporting facilities such as the elderly hospice, the homeless support centre, two theatres, and the library are all preserved and form an integral part of the area. Lastly the introduction of new cultural elements such as the new public square with a new museum dedicated to the Clyde will enrich the urban atmosphere and reconnect the river to the city and people. The design process included six stages: the first was reinstating the historic grid to clearly define blocks and maximise permeability. The second was deciding a route's hierarchy taking into account existing infrastructure. The third was determining densities to create connected functional nodes. Then functional zoning was decided according to market needs and street hierarchy. The fifth stage was creating

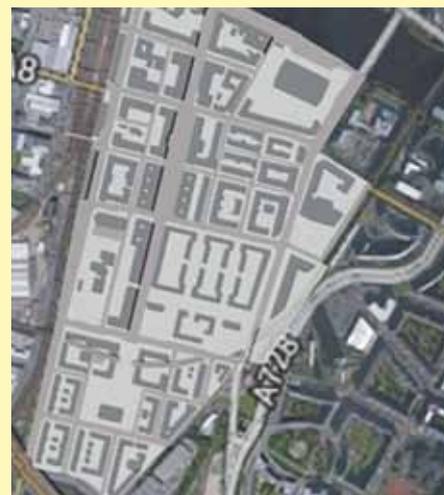
a network of interconnected open spaces to improve users' experience and perception of Glasgow's south and the river fronts. The last stage was determining massing and buildings heights. Heights of developments on main roads and the main pedestrian axis form strong lines to rebuild the important role of these roads. Also heights must be sufficient to reduce the visual and physical noise impact of the railway on all east, west and south sides of Laurieston, acting as a buffer and forming an enclosure to the area.

The result was a masterplan that delivers more than 100 residential units per hectare, a range of housing types and tenures, at least a quarter of land dedicated to public open space, improved access to services, a range of new retail, leisure and commercial properties, a safe, walkable, liveable district to reduce private car use and more importantly, spaces that invite people back to the river. The passion for pedestrian-centric cities is gradually seeping into the consciousness of urban planners. We must understand that our designs can promote or discourage social life, a very important factor to making more resilient cities. There could be a huge improvement in urban living if we focused our efforts on claiming back the streets and creating spaces for people to enjoy their cities. ●

- 4 Block analysis: current situation
- 5 Block analysis: proposed within 25 years
- 6 Waterfront detail
- 7 Pedestrian mixed use street section



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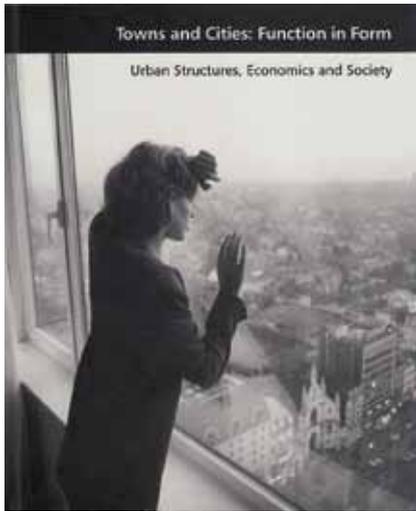
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## Towns and Cities: Function in Form – Urban Structures, Economics and Society

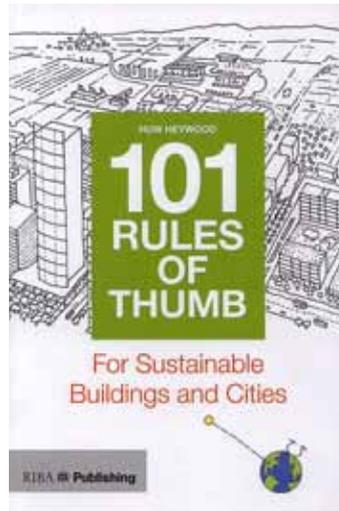
Julian Hart, Ashgate, 2015, £60.00, ISBN 9781472458551

Not many authors have attempted to link economics and urban design; Julian Hart should be commended for doing so. He is neither an academic, nor an urban designer: his observations are based on practice and experience and the text is not laden with innumerable references.

His approach starts from the premise that accessibility to and from markets, combined with the aim of energy saving were the basis for the 'natural town'. The expansion of towns combined with widespread availability of the private car resulted in conflicting aims, that of accessibility with that of privacy. One of the ways that Hart expresses this conflict is by comparing streets that are places, with roads that are linear corridors with no connection with their surroundings. A system of vectors used to explain this dichotomy makes it seem scientific but is not necessarily very helpful.

From the street-road comparison, Hart moves to levels of density and land uses. His analysis is perceptive and presented in a simple and clear form. For instance he shows how in a liberal planning environment and at low density, there is an unavoidable cycle of renewal and decline that make land values unstable, whilst the opposite is true at high densities; this way he explains the decline of market towns. Or he shows the connection between densities and public and private space. The text is peppered with anecdotal or explanatory boxes that clarify particular points and are some of the gems of the book: the 'Barnet chalets' struck this reader as particularly illuminating in its criticism of the habit of designing blocks of flats as if they were houses: 'semi-detached on steroids'.

There is much more of value and a lot to be learned from this book and the analysis



will be useful to students and practitioners. However it is unlikely to lead to a new theory of urban design as the author claims. In spite of the clear effort to link spatial design to economic analysis, there is no indication of how this can lead to a more solid theory. The criticism of existing theories is valid to a point but ignores how practitioners work, as opposed to political and economic influence from interests that diverge totally from the objectives outlined here. The 1960s saw the development of what was called a systems approach to planning which this book has affinities with; unfortunately that approach led to a dead end.

Finally it is a pity that editors didn't employ a better proof-reader: 'verses' are part of a poem, not a Latin word for 'against', maybe a small but infuriating detail. Still a book well worth reading. ●

Sebastian Loew

## 101 Rules of Thumb, For Sustainable Buildings and Cities

Huw Heywood, RIBA Publishing, 2015, £19.95, ISBN 978-1859465745

This small pocket book, its simple structure and its clear drawings are a good reminder for sustainable design. It aims to bring the bigger picture to the foreground on 'how to design low energy use buildings'. It could be argued that many of these 'rules' sum up the principles of nature and behaviour of materials, but most relate to design itself. Nothing in this book is new knowledge but a convenient way of putting knowledge and know-how together into a compendium of use when engaging in sustainable design. A main objective is to reduce waste and contribute to respecting the limits of the planet and its renewable capacity.

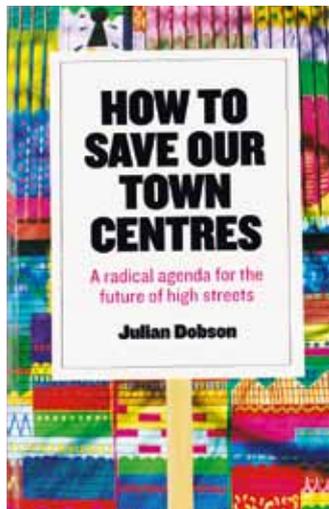
After a set of sustainability principles relevant to designers, the text provides practical advice on how to respect and preserve

natural resources in the building process, and work in harmony with the natural world, instead of against it. It recognises that buildings are also there to serve human wellbeing and comfort and to create healthy environments for human activities. Most rules relate to new build and implicitly green field situations.

The last chapter, called 'strategies for sustainable buildings and cities' which collapses more complex issues into a small set of rather overloaded drawings, is less successful. It is reduced to three double pages, listing the rules on one side and showing how they may interact in the drawings. They deal with 'sustainable retrofit', 'sustainable architecture', and 'sustainable cities' respectively. It is arguable whether these pages are making a useful contribution or may have been better omitted.

A lot is known and has been written about ecological urban design. As soon as buildings are put together they create issues of microclimates not just inside the buildings but also between them, notwithstanding the wider repercussions on other parts of the city, at different times of the year and of the day, and in different climatic conditions. Sustainable design to improve microclimates is confronted with a very complex set of issues it may be possible to optimise individually, but which in combination can have contradictory effects on each other. This implies many trade-offs studied by scholars of eco-cities, as well as building regulators whose aims are to foster more sustainable design. The 'notes, observations and references – a narrative bibliography' at the end of the book are very useful. For each chapter, they complement the rules and drawings with evidence and empirical studies. A list of references of printed and web resources, together with an index complete this part of the book, unfortunately in very small print but of definite worth. ●

Judith Ryser



## How to Save our Town Centres: A Radical Agenda for the Future of the High Streets

Julian Dobson, Policy Press, 2015, £23.99, ISBN 978-1447323938

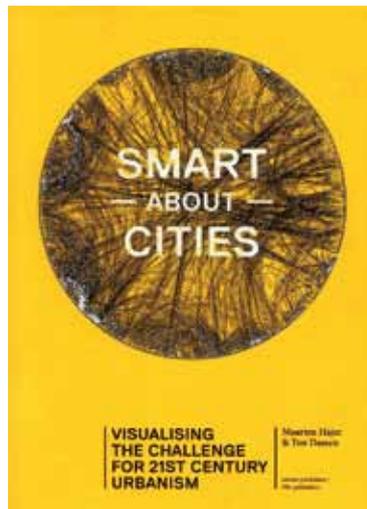
At first glance the absence of plans, graphics or visualisations does not suggest this as a book for urban designers. However, director of think tank Urban Pollinators, Julian Dobson covers a lot of ground and is completely focused on the value of town centres as places, and what works or does not.

The first part of the book examines where town centres are today, their cultural and social importance, the workings of the market, and independent retailing; the second focuses on what town centres could be like and the final chapters deal with key issues such as land ownership, finance and the idea of town centres as 'commons'.

The background is familiar: the malaise of property economics, out-of-town centres the impacts of online shopping, etc., all undermine town centres. The damage brought by Merry Hill for instance, borne out of an early 1980s Enterprise Zone; shopping malls and the unhealthy dominance of the grocery sector; the online giants such as Amazon siphoning off income to tax havens, avoiding property taxes, competing unfairly and making no investment in physical (town) infrastructure. City centre retail-led regeneration is critiqued as well for concentrating and polarising: Liverpool One for instance is 'a One Billion Pound Wealth Distribution Scheme'.

Churches, libraries, health providers, education classes, law firms have been leaving town centres. They and council services, and the use of assets can be vital to the health of town centres. The book promotes the widest possible choice of uses, 'meanwhile' uses, residential, walking and lingering and initiatives to revitalise public space.

More fundamentally, a system of property law based on a 'duty of stewardship' is advocated. The 2011 Right to Reclaim Land



enables groups and individuals to order disposal of public land, but a more radical extension needs to apply to private property too on the principle that neglected land should be made available to the community. Other major ideas proposed are to overhaul current property taxation in favour of a Land Value Tax and a Community Investment Act to channel a proportion of banks' profits into community development.

Planning needs to be agile, frameworks must blend the visionary and spontaneous. Town teams of conservators, guided by a principle of stewardship, should consider the benefits for a place over the long term. The book provides a promising agenda for town centres which works at a number of levels. Can anyone make it happen? ●

Tim Hagyard, Planning Team Manager, East Herts Council

## Smart About Cities: Visualising the Challenge for 21st Century Urbanism

Maarten Hajer and Ton Dassen, 2014, nai010 publishers/PHL publishers, £21.95, ISBN 978-9462081482

This is a manual with graphic representations of ten data sets relevant to 'smart urbanism': demography, air, water, food, biota, mobility, cargo, building materials, waste and energy. Published in the Netherlands, also in English the book rests on Dutch data but put into a global context. An essay by Maarten Hajer discussing seven considerations for a new urban planning and design to be smart about cities completes the book.

Hajer refutes the customary dichotomy between *a priori* values, such as 'big problems require integrated solutions' and bottom up criticisms along the line of 'small is beautiful'. He proposes to look at 'smart cities as a form of discourse' instead. Five hurdles of 'smart city discourse' have to be overcome to avoid building cities in the

'default mode': a managerial view of the city focusing on applying ICT tools based on big data, efficiency, systems approach, etc.; the use of discourse in the cross-over between business, government and knowledge institutes dominated by ICT business but resisted in academic debate; organisational structure based on public-private partnerships with business in charge of public service delivery; a primarily technological approach to innovation moving quickly from problem to solution while omitting local conditions; and lack of historical awareness including effects of protests and deliberation between citizens and decision makers. He discusses key historic eras relevant to urban change: industrialisation and the sanitary reform movements; mass produced cars and centralised fossil fuel based energy systems extending the functionalist city into ever growing suburbs; and the current era having to cope with the unintended environmental consequences of man-made disruption between nature and society.

Hajer proposes an agenda to cope with climate change. He illustrates seven pre-conditions with concrete examples to consider when contributing to globally networked urbanism: decoupling as strategic orientation; coming up with a persuasive story line about the urban future; the use of urban metabolisms as framework for strategic decision making; focusing on the default in infrastructure; designing the smart city outside the box; and engaging in new open collaborative politics. Only by decoupling wealth from resource use would it be possible to stay in a 'safe operating space' within planetary boundaries which would have to be socially just. He distinguishes between 'need to have' and 'nice to have' as the story line to achieve a liveable urban future embedded in ecological sustainability and regional bio-economics. He attributes weight to understanding the urban metabolism as a means for urban designers to become normative in envisioning futures that reflect the need for a sustainable, productive and inclusive urban world. ●

Judith Ryser

# Practice Index

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Jointly run with Heriot Watt University, this M.Sc in Urban Strategies and Design focuses on urban design practice and theory from a cultural, and socio-economic, case-study perspective. Engaging students in 'live' urban projects, as part of the programme's 'action research' pedagogy, it also offers research expertise in African and Latin American urban design and planning processes.

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Master of Architecture in: Urban Design and Creative Urban Practices; Urban Building; Computer Aided Architectural Design; and, Energy & Environmental Studies. The MArch programme is research and project driven with a multi-disciplinary input that begins with a series of core lectures and seminars that is balanced by literature enquiry to enable students to develop a multi-disciplinary perspective as a grounding for shared discourse.

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Master of Arts in Urban Design consists of 1 year full time or 2 years part time or individual programme of study. Shorter programmes lead to Post Graduate Diploma/Certificate. Project based course focusing on the creation of sustainable environments through interdisciplinary design.

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W [www.ncl.ac.uk/apl/study/postgraduate/taught/urbandesign/index.htm](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/apl/study/postgraduate/taught/urbandesign/index.htm)

The MA in Urban Design brings together cross-disciplinary expertise striking a balance between methods and approaches in environmental design and the social sciences in the creation of the built environment. To view the course blog: [www.nclurbandesign.org](http://www.nclurbandesign.org)

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W [www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/pss/course\\_finder/108169-1/6/pgcert\\_planning\\_urban\\_design\\_and\\_sustainable\\_development.aspx](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/pss/course_finder/108169-1/6/pgcert_planning_urban_design_and_sustainable_development.aspx)

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W [www.uclan.ac.uk/courses/msc\\_urban\\_design.php](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/courses/msc_urban_design.php)

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C Giulia Carabelli

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C Filipa Wunderlich

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W [www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning/programmes](http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning/programmes)

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W [www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning/programmes/postgraduate/mresinter-disciplinary-urban-design](http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/planning/programmes/postgraduate/mresinter-disciplinary-urban-design)

The MRes Inter-disciplinary Urban Design cuts across urban design programmes at The Bartlett, allowing students to construct their study in a flexible manner and explore urban design as a critical arena for advanced research and practice. The course operates as a stand-alone high level masters or as preparation for a PhD.

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## Street view

In UD 137 I mentioned the photographs that Janet Mendelsohn took in the streets of Balsall Heath in the late 1960s, when she was studying under Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University. Her photographs were forgotten about until recently, when a researcher documenting the history of the CCCS discovered some of them, and they featured in a rather ad hoc exhibition in Balsall Heath last summer called *Ghost Streets*. In January a more professional exhibition of her photographs opened at the Ikon Gallery in Brindleyplace, called *Janet Mendelsohn – Varna Road*.

Varna Road was one of those streets scheduled to be demolished and redeveloped that Mendelsohn documented. It no longer exists, but it was famous in Birmingham and beyond in the 1960s as a signifier for prostitution, just as Fleet Street meant newspapers and Whitehall meant government. (Its name commemorated the Crimean War, the Bulgarian city Varna on the Black Sea being a landing point for British troops). One of Mendelsohn's documentary themes was prostitution, and in particular she photographed a prostitute we know only as Kathleen, who worked from Varna Road.

In the 1970s the 19th century grid of streets next to the river Rea which included Varna Road was cleared of all its buildings, and redeveloped with new houses. Having a convenient geometry, the street pattern was retained. The street names were retained as well, with the single exception of Varna Road, which was renamed Belgravia Close. (Close, because it was made a no-through-road to deter nostalgic kerb-crawlers). The associations of the name were clearly too strong to allow it to survive. It is quite common for inanimate places to be treated as though they have moral characters, can absorb guilt for events which have happened there, and deserve punishment. Houses in which murders have taken place are often demolished, as in the case of Fred and Rose West's house in Gloucester, which was demolished in 1996 and replaced with public open space. Demolition is seen as a form of cleansing. I am reminded of Richard Sennett's 1970 book *The Uses of Disorder*, in which he uses the word 'purification' to typify orthodox modern urban redevelopment, in contrast to what he saw as a more mature attitude which could embrace and make use of diversity and disorder.

A symposium was held in connection with the Ikon exhibition, presenting and discussing issues around 1960s culture, community photography, and prostitution and other forms of street life. In discussion the playwright David Edgar, a resident of Balsall Heath, raised an interesting issue

1 Varna Road 1964. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Birmingham



1

2 Varna Rd from Balsall Heath Rd 1964. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Birmingham



2

3 Belgravia Close from Balsall Heath Road



3

about CCTV, which I suppose is a form of street photography. He cited two instances of CCTV in Balsall Heath, which produced different responses from residents. In the 1990s there was a successful organised campaign by residents to deter kerb-crawlers (in a later, post-Varna Road manifestation of prostitution, by then migrated to a different part of the neighbourhood). The residents' Street Watch organisation was assisted by police-installed cameras, although many probably didn't have any film in. The cameras were recognised as being on the side of the community.

In 2010, a large number of automatic number plate reading cameras were installed in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook, in

a move by police to track the movements of terrorist suspects among the Muslim community. The installation was done covertly, and generated a huge reaction against Big Brother-type surveillance. The police backed down, and agreed not to switch the cameras on. Edgar contrasted these two instances of surveillance of public space, with and without the knowledge and support of the community. He also suggested that CCTV, now so omnipresent in Britain, may be replaced by drones. But who would monitor the drones? ●

Joe Holyoak, architect and urban designer

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