2009

PLACE*making*

Celebrating quality and innovation in urban life

A synthesis of professional practice and case studies about better living environments

Produced by RUDI with the Academy of Urbanism

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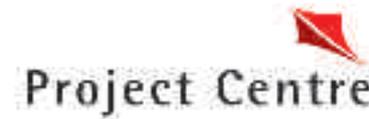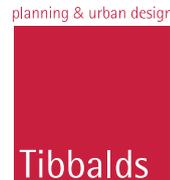
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FOREWORDS

THE ART OF MAKING PLACES

Welcome to the second edition of our annual publication *PLACEmaking*. It was conceived to help define and explore the newly-emerging synthesis of professional skills that contribute to the creation of better human living environments. We were delighted with the response that our initial issue received and have been most encouraged by the enthusiasm with which the placemaking community have worked with us to disseminate knowledge and help us produce this second issue.

The emphasis in the current economic climate is less on big schemes and more on the improvement and enhancement of existing places. Resources are being squeezed and value for money is at a premium. We are grateful for the continuing support from the professional organisations and practices in sponsoring this publication despite the other pressures they face.

The process of shaping the physical setting for life in cities, towns and villages is so much more than just a design challenge. The pace of change in our built environment and the range of influences on it provide a sometimes frightening context for professional activity. No one perspective can individually address the topic of how places function and evolve, and the patterns of behaviour and needs of the people who live or work and visit them. The art of 'making places' brings together the design – or re-design – of buildings, groups of buildings, streets, spaces and landscapes, and the establishment of processes that ensure their functionality and sustainability.

The range of processes includes:
- economic viability and market forces
- community participation and recognition
- design principles and sustainable construction
- local, national and international governance
- planning and regulation
- long-term project management and accountability
- embracing technology, innovation and creativity
- the sense of belonging, distinctiveness and cohesion

PLACEmaking brings together examples and discussion on all these elements – and their fusion into an overall process. More detailed examples and case studies are continually being added to the RUDI site, www rudi.net, and we hope you will use RUDI as 'your' place for comment, discussion and reference as we build better places for everyone.

Peter Stonham
Chairman, RUDI

POSITIVE THINKING

PLACEmaking 2009 features a range of case studies and comment illustrating the many issues and challenges facing placemakers today, and demonstrates how much progress is being made. It is clear that designers are aware of the complex interplay between environmental, societal, physical, economic and governmental forces that define place, and how the resulting mix can prescribe how places may be used, and whether or not they will be loved.

It is a journalist's role to talk with a great many people, and to get underneath the skin of their aims, objectives and difficulties. In many ways, it is hearing about their difficulties, and the ways in which these have been overcome, that is the most enlightening part of this privileged education. I am convinced that we would all be much better off were such candid observations and discussions to find their way (politics, commercial concerns and partnership boundaries notwithstanding) freely into the public domain. *PLACEmaking* was conceived to help with the dissemination of lessons learned and to inspire new thinking about old problems, and we hope that our contributors and sponsors will continue to support us in our attempt to encourage creativity and candour for the benefit of all.

During the course of 2008, and so far during 2009, several key issues have been much discussed in the placemaking community. Those most frequently heard have been the drive to create an evidence base for good design that will inform future policy and guidance; the need to develop robust monitoring and evaluation practices so that we can see how well, or how poorly, forecast designs and interventions actually perform when faced with the rigours of active living patterns; and the importance of supporting integrated, collaborative planning and working practices.

Above all, I hear community leaders, designers and academics speaking of the need for those with the power and the ability to positively influence public attitudes and behaviour in the move towards low carbon lifestyles. This involves much more than attaining high environmental standards; it touches upon facilitating health, security and access to opportunity for everyone. While there is much to learn from the successes of the past, we are also faced with fresh challenges that require new thinking. As the range of content that follows illustrates, successful placemaking requires that we understand and channel local ambition in positive directions, using quality design to help deliver equitable, socially cohesive and manageable places that make people happy to inhabit them.

Juliana O'Rourke
Editor

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RUDI: THE ORIGINAL INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING NETWORK

RUDI, the Resource for Urban Design Information, is the leading UK-based international information and knowledge network in its field. Its core aim is to promote best practice in urban design, to raise the standard of placemaking and to bring together the ever-expanding circle of professionals who contribute to this key area of policy and practice

Much more than a website, RUDI facilitates communication across different media, linking the community of placemakers via online and offline networks. Via discussion events, seminars, conferences, publications, training sessions, web events and multimedia, RUDI takes a creative approach to knowledge exchange.

RUDI has more than a decade of experience. It is independent, international, authoritative, inspiring and highly regarded by its target audience, regularly receiving messages of appreciation.

RUDI supports and promotes a cross-disciplinary approach to quality placemaking as well as playing a key role in educating a wider group of current and new generation placemaking professionals.

The 'original' online resource, since its establishment over 13 years ago, has grown progressively to hold a wealth of information and is supported by its expanding membership network, which contributes ideas, experience and best practice. In a market with many voices, including government, campaigning agencies and interest groups, promoting a diverse and sometimes conflicting range of policies, perspectives and agendas, RUDI continues to provide an independent view based on shared vision.

RUDI welcomes new partners who share its aims and mission: to develop long-term, supportive relationships of mutual benefit in the cause of the better design, management and equitable use of the built environment.

The Resource for Urban Design Information (RUDI) main areas of activity include:

- www.rudi.net – an established not for profit web-based resource dedicated to urban design, development and placemaking
- www.urbandesignjobs.com – a recruitment platform providing a cost effective solution to finding staff with core skills
- a series of placemaking-related knowledge sharing and networking events and conferences http://www.rudi.net/urban_design_update/events
- tailored training courses, study tours and CPD development http://www.rudi.net/urban_design_update/skills_and_training
- a range of specialist publications including *PLACEmaking, Technology, space and place* and *Transport and the Urban Environment* http://www.rudi.net/reading_room/bookshop
- a publishing/content creation and dissemination service spanning print, web, photography and multimedia.

RUDI's established network links together placemaking professionals and their clients with policy makers, students, academics and neighbourhood and community citizen groups across the world.

Support the RUDI mission and join the network today

To find out more about RUDI, or to discuss partnership opportunities, please contact **carey@rudi.net** or call **0845 270 7894**

To register for a trial of the resources and to join the network

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DESIGN & DELIVERY

Expanded versions of many of the case studies and articles in *PLACEmaking* 2009, along with related content on similar themes, can be found on www.rudi.net

NATIONAL REACH, LOCAL AMBITION

The Homes and Communities Agency, formed in December 2008, defines its mission as creating quality places. For the next three years it has almost £18 billion at its disposal to achieve this aim. In today's challenging times, many are waiting see what kind of placemaking revolution the HCA team, led by chief executive Sir Bob Kerslake, can deliver

At its inception, Sir Bob outlined his approach: creating opportunities for people to live in homes they can afford, in places they want to live, and for local authorities and communities to deliver the ambition they have for their own areas. 'The critical thing is that we're a national agency that works locally,' says Sir Bob. 'We see our success coming from our ability to act as a bridge between the national targets set by government and local ambition.'

Key areas of focus will be growth, renewal, sustainability and affordability. The agendas driving these deliverables work differently in different places, and the HCA sees its task as helping stakeholders to overcome barriers that prevent good places being delivered. The most important concept in the HCA business processes is the 'single conversation': the agency is aiming to deliver a place-based, rather than a programme-based, agenda. Put simply, says Sir Bob, we want to make the programmes fit the place rather than adapting places to fit programmes.

For Kevin McGeough, HCA's policy manager (planning and design), the agency is about working with people locally to clarify and support their understanding of place, and to help local stakeholders to realise their vision. 'The idea of the single conversation is to get in early and influence projects in the best way that we can. The conversation involves standards, design quality, long-term management, community safety and community engagement initiatives. It's about working collaboratively with people, and sharing risk and reward,' says McGeough.

There are no other public agencies at the minute with £18 billion to spend, he notes. But the agency's short life has already been impacted by the economic crisis, and many of its challenges are different than those anticipated when it set up last year. Already, there's a new focus on stimulating housing development, working more effectively with developers, and the financial re-profiling of existing projects. 'One advantage of the agency is that it's big enough to make an impact,' says McGeough. 'The challenge of addressing the current market has encouraged us to work more collaboratively. Our economists and financial brains are also working on delivering quality places. It's not all about design; we need to be able to deliver.'

As the agency moves forward, we will be able to influence what's built to a much greater extent, says McGeough, 'raising standards through the promotion of initiatives inherited from the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships (EP), for example quality standards including Lifetime Homes, Building for Life and Secured by Design, as well as support for Home Zones, the Code for Sustainable Homes, the integration of tenure, the use of design statements and recommendations on car parking and the provision of infrastructure.

A revised set of standards will come into effect next year, says McGeough, sitting within a framework that has 'placemaking at its heart.' In addition, 'requirements' will relate to long-term management and community engagement as well as design: requirements rather than standards, he says, because they must be proactive, positive and appropriate to the site and context.

Lessons learned from Design for Manufacture have informed the HCA Carbon Challenge project, the UK's first zero carbon housing development, to be developed with Barratt Homes Bristol (left and below). New housing will be designed to meet Code level 6, the highest category of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The brief requires stable design and construction teams to form and work together from design to delivery. 'We wanted to be sure that the first Carbon Challenge project, Hanham Hall, became a great place that also happened to reach Code level 6 standards,' says McGeough. 'There had been a risk, in the beginning, that the all the focus was on environmental standards. We had to fight to make sure that the principles of 'good place' were also incorporated. Much of this has involved sharing risk.' A full planning application has been submitted for 195 homes

Many designers are familiar with these evolving standards and, as several of the case studies in *PLACEmaking* 2009 indicate, they are already widely implemented. 'What's not so well understood,' says McGeough, 'is how much standards have positively influenced place and streetscape. When we first discussed standards, some thought them to be a "tick box" approach to urban design, encouraging the creation of repetitious and monotonous places. But it's more about making sure that places are safe, secure, inclusive, accessible and well connected. We recognise that standards don't create places by themselves, but they can set a firm foundation upon which to build appropriate site specific responses.'

The first time that EP standards were used was on the Design for Manufacture (DfM) competition sites. 'They've proven that standards can work with affordable construction costs, and can also contribute to streetscape.' Requirements such as maximum street surveillance led to the creation of design items such as corner windows, creating nicer internal spaces but also supporting vibrant streets. 'These are basic urban design concepts,' says McGeough, 'but they'd been forgotten to some extent, and house building had become repetitive. We started thinking about housing in more 3D ways; focusing on corners and glazing and surveillance.'

Monitoring and evaluation

Several recent academic projects focusing on sustainability and low carbon living have highlighted the poor state of monitoring and post occupancy evaluation in the UK, both in terms of design and construction processes, leading in turn to a minimal evidence base on which to base future policy and practice. This holds true for both tangible aspects of performance such as energy use, and for less tangible areas such as the relative added value gained from investing in quality; be that in buildings or in the public realm.

Although several 'evidence-based' approaches to understanding the built environment in quantitative and qualitative terms are developing, there is an urgent need to tackle the more obvious aspects of performance and to implement 'lessons learned'. A recent study led by Leeds Metropolitan University, focusing on new housing built in the north of England, for instance, has revealed that homes projected to achieve Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 standards actually performed at levels closer to Code level 1.5 once occupied.

As standards evolve, the HCA will work locally to broker a positive response to placemaking; helping to raise ambition and using its skills to support enabling and design review in partnership with CABE and others. 'The HCA Academy will try and ensure that an integrated approach to skills and urban design as a discipline is established nationally,' says McGeough. 'If we develop standards, then we need to make sure we are achieving them,' he adds. 'In the DfM competition, we realised that a lot of people onsite didn't understand the standards as well as they should have, highlighting problems with design and construction generally. In this instance, we employed monitors to check on progress. Now we have experience, and we plan to continue to monitor. We need to

At the Allerton Bywater Millennium Community (left), planning permission was secured for 'home zones', a way of giving equal consideration to the needs of pedestrians and car-users in street design. By delivering infrastructure directly and using a design code to guide the principles of development, the children's play area, the village square, and the sustainable urban drainage system have been delivered in advance of the housing. The design code supports quality and variety, promoting strong corners and maximum street surveillance, and has facilitated the provision of homes by different architects on the same site. Car parking is allocated close to all homes, however it is not allowed to overpower the quality of the street. Home zone and Secured by Design principles have helped to establish 'community' from an early stage. Allerton Bywater uses modern methods of construction in the delivery of many of its homes; the homes on the 60k phase of development are unique, interesting and of a high quality both inside and out

keep populating the evidence base with better information as we go along.'

Collaborative working

A current big issue, says McGeough, is collaborative and integrated working. 'Too often in government, or through agencies like ourselves, there's a focus on this year's agenda. Now it's community. Last year it was environment, and the year before it was urban design. What we really need to do is make sure we think about all these things at the same time.'

Keeping some element of control over the development process helps to ensure quality. The DfM initiative, for example, enabled EP to bring in new suppliers and new designers to the market, and encouraged them to work more collaboratively and with a focus on higher quality. Where the HCA has no land or economic interest in a development, it hopes to influence through example. 'But we're not the only people in the game,' notes McGeough. The range of bodies and organisations with responsibilities for the many aspects of place highlights the need for joined-up placemaking policy in the UK context: the roles of the planning system, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and government-sponsored agencies – as well as the roles of the Department for Transport, Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform, DEFRA, and the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

In a single week in which one local authority in east England is aiming to change its planning framework in order to increase parking provision in residential areas due to public demand, a transport select committee is losing its battle to encourage local authorities to make it easier for children to get to school by walking, cycling or public transport, and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has called on the Government to abandon its target for zero-carbon new homes by 2016, it's clear that we have a long way to go before we're all 'on message' in the vision for sustainable living in safe and healthy great places.

With the need for a collective vision sorely evident, the HCA could not have come along at a better time. 'We all know that design is a critical part of great placemaking,' says HCA's Sir Bob, 'but it's not the only part. To achieve great places we have to look at issues in the round: transport, environment, and the underlying social fabric of a place as well as the built environment. We're seeking to instigate a holistic approach to placemaking that embeds design sustainability and community engagement in the process of setting investment priorities and ambitions.' In responding to the credit crunch, he adds, we must try and keep activity and capacity in the system. 'We must hang onto the long term vision for places.'

Juliana O'Rourke spoke with Kevin McGeough

HCA: ways of working

The Housing and Regeneration Act that outlined the HCA's remit stressed that it be required to deliver quality housing and sustainable development through good design. The HCA is, it states, in a 'unique and powerful' position to facilitate decentralised, low carbon, and integrated infrastructure solutions for new and existing developments. The largest single component of the HCA budget is the National Affordable Housing Programme, supporting the delivery of social rented and low cost home ownership housing. Brownfield land regeneration is another focus; the area that used to be managed through English Partnerships. The HCA Academy will focus on skills and resources. Sir Bob Kerslake refers to the overall programme as 'the forerunner of a space-based approach to regeneration, bringing in renewal and growth, decent homes, retrofitting existing stock and housing market renewal.'

The majority of the HCA's 1,000 staff will work in regional teams, with at least one office in every government office region. The idea is that having money in one 'pot' will make it easier to access: there's one point of contact for several strands of funding.
www.homesandcommunities.co.uk
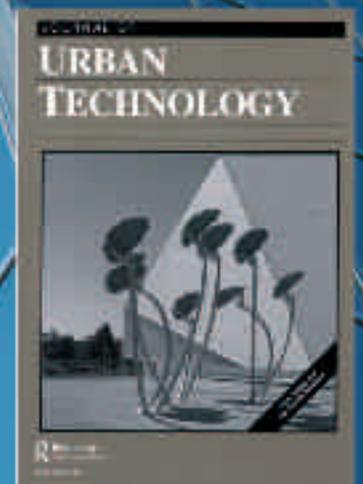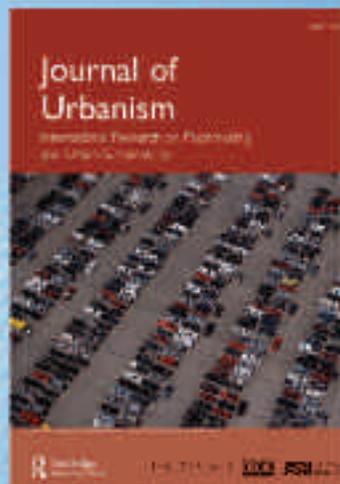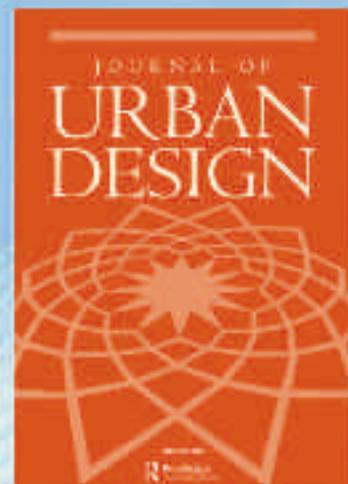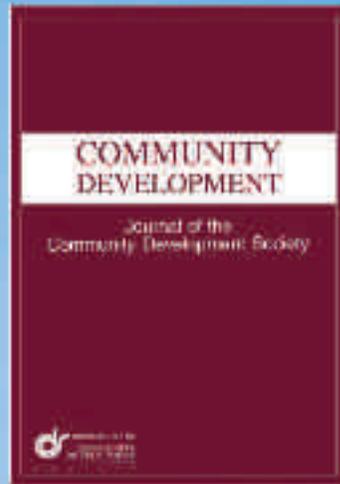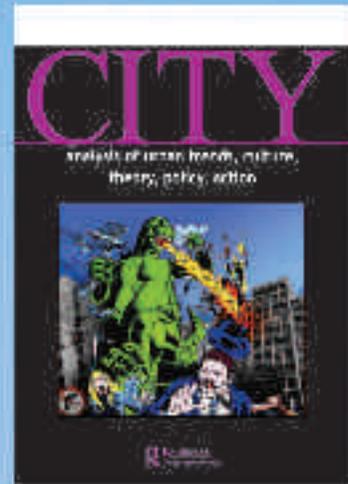
Urban designers used to look forward to the day when each local authority would have at least one urban designer. They still do, but with rather lower expectations than they once had. They know that some local authorities do have an urban designer, but that he or she sits in a corner of the office, occasionally being consulted on some aspect of a planning application, or sometimes asked to write a design guide, but rarely being involved in any meaningful way in making what are – even if they are not identified as such – the big design decisions.

The challenge now is to ensure that, first, all local authorities have access to urban design advice and second, that every council uses such assets as effectively as the best of them do. This is not simply a case giving the urban designer something to do. Those local authorities that have a positive influence on design achieve this through a wide range of different means. Only a few draw on all the weapons in the armoury.

The recession is putting councils under pressure to allow development at any cost. We need jobs, some councils say, and we cannot risk frightening developers off. Other councils recognise that recession is a time to concentrate on what they have to offer to the developers, investors or to the potential residents that they want to attract. These councils do what they can to show that they accept only good design, that they are consistent in their approach to planning and design, and that they know how to make the most of the things that people value.

There is plenty of evidence that when local authorities expect more from developers in terms of design, the developers raise their game. They make more effort to get the design right because they think that their efforts will be repaid, and that what the council demands of other developers will have indirect benefit on the value of their own sites and operations.

The developers who are put off by the council's expectations are probably ones that the area will be better off without. They will lower the tone of the area and contribute to the impression that it is a place where an investment may be devalued over time. They will destroy value, and destroy opportunities to do something better on the site later.

By Design, published in 2000 by CABE and the government department DETR, presented local authorities with a toolkit of things to do to embed urban design in the planning system. This was a new idea at the time. Today that toolkit is still available, with

ORGANISATION AND EMOTION

We need to ensure that all local authorities have access to, and make good use of, urban design advice. But raising design standards also depends on decision-makers developing a real emotional connection with design, says Rob Cowan

a decade's added experience. Canny local authorities make sure that they are using the toolkit effectively, and that they are developing an organisational culture that will make the most of it. CABE is taking the lead in explaining how this can be done, in terms of what it classifies as behaviours, resources and processes.

Councils can perform a 'stock check'. Do we have leaders who understand the potential of good design and make sure that every aspect of the council's work is geared to achieving it? Do we have the partnerships with public bodies and private companies that we need to make things happen? Are these effective partnerships, or just series of meetings that go through the motions? Do councillors and council staff have the skills and understanding that they need?

A council may have an individual nominated as design champion, or it may decide that championing design should be a corporate endeavour. Like the urban designer, the design champion needs to be given not just a title, but a real role and the necessary training.

What does the *By Design* toolkit consist of? Design policies. Decision-making procedures that take design seriously. Procurement processes that set design as an objective. Careful appraisals on which to base design guidance. Design guidance that tells developers what is expected: urban design frameworks providing broad-brush guidance; design guides on specific topics; area action plans; masterplanning (the collaborative and multidisciplinary process, not the slick graphic that bears no relation to what is either needed or feasible); public realm design guides (the sort that are based on partnerships and lead to action); and design coding.

What else? A planning process geared to using design and access statements effectively, making sure that every applicant has analysed the site and its setting, and formulated and applied design principles to achieve good design. Design advisory panels to supplement the skills of the council's in-house team and of its consultants. A process for monitoring the council's performance

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> Do we have leaders who understand the potential of good design and make sure that every aspect of the council's work is geared to achieving it? Do we have the partnerships with public bodies and private companies that we need to make things happen?

Graphics: Rob Cowan

by visiting and evaluating completed projects. A method of making sure that the council gives priority to the standard of design when it acts as a client for development, when it sells land, and in looking after its own building stock.

Above all, what is needed is a method of organisation that gives everyone a part in the processes of making decisions about design: design champions, council members, highway engineers, development control planners and everyone else. The test of the organisation will be whether these people feel that they are working as a team, whether they value what each other has to offer, and whether they learn from each other.

In *PLACEmaking 2008* (p7) we described Capacitycheck, the urban design skills appraisal method (download it free at

www.capacitycheck.co.uk). A year later the method is being used by local authorities and other organisations that are gearing themselves up to raise standards of design. CABE is funding pilot projects for Nottingham and Peterborough City Councils, using Capacitycheck to assess skills and to plan how to build on them. Architecture and Design Scotland is funding a Capacitycheck pilot for Highland Council. Capacitycheck is being used in the Teamwork Programme, a partnership programme with local authorities in Kent, East and West Sussex and Surrey, funded by SEEDA and managed by Kent Architecture Centre. These projects, like much of CABE's recent guidance, are helping to set a manageable framework for action on urban design.

But as well as urging local authorities to get their act together,

we expect the people who run them to understand the difference between good and bad design. Is that too much to ask? Is it really a matter for professional experts, and expert design review panels?

Let's not make it all too complicated. Whether a local authority really becomes committed to raising design standards will depend on whether there is some real emotional connection with design. Are the leaders of the council – members and officers – ever inspired by new buildings? Are they ever gut-wrenchingly appalled by some of the dross that gets built? If so, they will find ways of encouraging good design and suppressing the bad.

Rob Cowan (rob@urbandesignskills.com) is a director of Urban Design Skills and author of The Dictionary of Urbanism

Remixing place: young people get hands-on

The Rootscape project enabled young people to experience urban design in ways that they could relate to, and equipped them with the means to communicate their knowledge

Led by the Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University, this project mixed confidence-building, multimedia training, site visits and hands-on exercises to enable young people in Oxford to get involved in placemaking. 'The biggest lesson that we all have learned is that we need to respect each other,' says project coordinator Professor Butina Watson. 'This is key to partnership working and community engagement, and is absolutely critical to the sustainability agenda.'

No matter how carefully researched, current advice on child and youth-friendly design is articulated from adult perspectives. The project team has built wide partnerships between a range of young people, is working on a live community development project, and has produced a good practice toolkit.

'The next stage is to take the project plan into local schools and implement the methods and techniques developed with the pilot group,' says Professor Butina Watson. 'This will enable teachers to talk with young people about urban design from the point of view of urban geography, history, citizenship, IT, art and through the various modules that are taught in local schools.'

EVERY REVOLUTION NEEDS A CATALYST

The UrbanBuzz programme, supporting 27 knowledge exchange projects, was created with one key aim in mind: to overcome the barriers inherent in creating sustainable communities. It has highlighted the power of innovative collaborative thinking, rooted in existing knowledge of what really works, says programme director **David Cobb**

The two-year, government-funded programme was led by University College London (UCL), with University of East London (UEL) as its prime partner, and involved more than 150 partner organisations from the worlds of finance, management, design, policy, planning and the third sector.

The programme funded, supported and administered 27 collaborative projects, each addressing key sustainability issues such as community empowerment, low carbon lifestyles and planning for new settlements. Each project built on the research evidence base and, through partnership working, developed new tools, processes and techniques to help build sustainable communities and great places. The range of challenges tackled by the project teams included:

- simulating the impact of the Mayor of London's transportation strategy on CO_2 emissions;
- spatial mapping techniques relating to anti-social behaviour and designing out crime;
- energy-use reduction through retrofitting housing stock;
- tools and techniques to engage communities in local decision-making and social infrastructure planning;
- urban agriculture demonstration for the Thames Gateway, incorporating an exploration of local governance (see page 55).

The question facing us is whether the time is ripe for action in the face of the sustainability crisis, says UCL's Professor Alan Penn, the UrbanBuzz lead academic. UrbanBuzz followed a proposition: that universities hold a strategic position and a special responsibility with respect to catalysing action in the face of the unsustainable behaviours of humanity.

Academics like Penn, along with others at UCL and UEL, believe that universities are heavily implicated in the construction of the sustainability problem. Effectively, our knowledge of the world has become segmented. Although interdisciplinary graduate studies are becoming more common, it remains the case that the structure of academia largely defines segmentation, and works actively to reproduce it. Yet those behind UrbanBuzz realised that universities can also play a key role in resolving this issue, and it is in this area that they wished the programme to have impact.

'It was UrbanBuzz's ambition to unlock professional "silos" and ways of thinking, and to create an intellectual and skills mix as rich and complex as the problems it sets out to resolve,' says Penn. Essentially this involved building a shared vocabulary, a shared vision and a degree of trust between individuals and organisations in knowledge domains that historically have not interacted well.

Cultural change at this level is a risky venture. For individuals, much is at stake. It is too soon to say whether or not the UrbanBuzz adventure has succeeded in its aim to catalyse widespread change. What can be said is that the novel approach to intervening in academia's relations with its public, and its user communities, has succeeded in constructing a wealth of personal contacts and new shared understanding.

Making the intangible, tangible

The i-VALUL team has developed an evidence-based urban layout evaluation programme able to overcome the barriers that prevent layout factors from being considered in economic appraisals

Understanding that patterns of space, land use, activity and development are closely related, this project took a contextual approach to quantifying and measuring the relational properties of urban layout. Technology and tools exist to analyse spatial layout and forecast movement patterns, but only a handful of local authorities and Regional Development Agencies make use of them during the planning process. I-VALUL aimed to develop a user-friendly layout evaluation toolkit, focused on the needs of potential users rather than led by academic researchers, that would lead to an increase in the levels of spatial analysis being undertaken in our towns and cities.

The project team brought together more than 20 public, private and academic partners, led by Space Syntax. It identified, and overcame, three main barriers to the use of layout evaluation tools: it created a layout value map of the greater south-east, using both existing space syntax tools and those developed by the project team, as a basis on which to apply layout evaluation tools across south-east England; it developed an accessible training programme; and created a set of generic, benchmarked layout valuation tools that can be updated with local data as it becomes available. The tools can quantify and monetise the socio-economic benefits of urban layout, and can be updated to take in more detailed local data in specific areas.

The project findings support the case for improving street layout design, and provide evidence of the likely economic returns to be gained from investing in high-quality residential and town centre street layouts. The new tools that i-VALUL has created will help to identify public sector development priorities, offering private sector investors a greater level of confidence and a more secure framework in which to invest.

The greater south-east layout value map (left) comprises every street segment of the city-region, and calculates its accessibility according to different radii. 'The map will facilitate the analysis of centres and neighbourhoods in relationship to their wider spatial context,' says project coordinator Christian Schwander. 'The map can be used for layout valuation, either to assess the value of urban layout in existing places, or to test the impact of new development onto the surrounding area.' The map will be licensed to the project partners, and training and other licensing arrangements are in development.

> " There is a compelling need to equip "placemakers" with evidence-based tools to help them create the public and private realms of the future, generating activity, vibrancy and a sense of proud association
> Peter Bishop, Design for London

How the programme worked

UrbanBuzz accepted the challenge of unlocking potential by boldly going where other funders did not go. This innovative approach has enabled many new ideas to take root, and wide-ranging academic-private-public partnerships to thrive.

UrbanBuzz was funded by The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), to the tune of £5 million, supported by further 'contributions in kind' of around £2.75 million. The bulk of this funding supported the 27 project teams. Although they addressed very different issues, each project team shared a view on what sustainability means in practice.

Sustainable communities use resources effectively and efficiently. They are low-carbon, low-crime, inclusive democracies in which agents for economic change thrive. Residents benefit from integrated transport, housing supply and tenure. As Peter Bishop, design director in the office of the Mayor of London, made clear, speaking at the UrbanBuzz conference in December 2008: 'There's no simple solution, due to the complexity and the diversity of our environments. Looking at the placemaking agenda, we have to answer some simple questions. Do we want dysfunctional, failing cities, or thriving cities designed around human beings that provide a sound foundation for 21st century life? 'There is,' says Bishop, 'a compelling need to equip "placemakers" with evidence-based tools to help them create the public and private realms of the future, generating activity, vibrancy and a sense of proud association.'

Bishop's appeal neatly reflects the motivation of the UrbanBuzz programme, and the key issues tackled by the projects it supported. From food production capacity in cities to social cohesion and low-carbon lifestyles, each project has tackled one or more aspects of the complex interaction between the physical, social, environmental
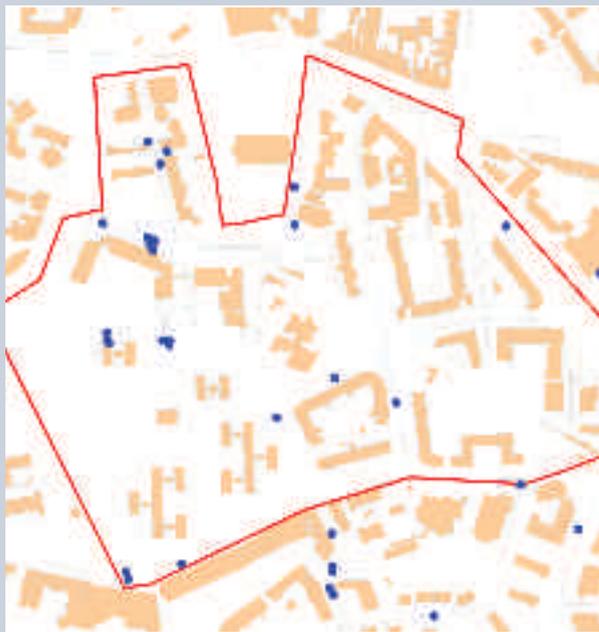
Place and anti-social behaviour

The SEDUC project brought academics, local authority officers, police, data analysts and community workers together to analyse relationships between antisocial behaviour and urban layout

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) and environmental disorder such as flytipping, litter and graffiti can be viewed as barometers of sustainability, with areas of high ASB frequently attracting crime and fear of crime, eroding community cohesion. Incidents of ASB across east London boroughs, recorded in local authority datasets, were geocoded and analysed to inform thinking about effective interventions for designers, social infrastructure planners and community safety officers.

According to space syntax analysis of urban layout, accessibility and movement potential define activity patterns for the street network. These activity patterns are closely linked to patterns of land use, and relate to how busy, active and safe the street is likely to be. The key question is: do specific spatial factors of our urban environments increase the level of ASB occurrence and risk?

The space syntax analysis detected two key types of layout in two case study areas: 'street-based' layouts (top left, with incidences of types of ASB marked) and 'estate-based' layouts (bottom left). The results are complex and bear detailed investigation, yet revealed clear patterns. 'We were taken by surprise by the results of the spatial analysis,' says Professor Bill Hillier, UCL, and a founder of Space Syntax Ltd. 'It indicated that there were contrasting patterns of ASB relating to different kinds of layouts. This was especially unexpected as it applied to areas with different urban characters. These results are the most striking that I've seen suggesting that traditional-street based patterns are the right way to organise housing.'

Along with a 'good practice' resource kit, the project team has produced an extensive literature review of material relating to anti-social behaviour, the built environment and community cohesion. Training sessions on the analysis methodology will be available for interested local authorities.

and economic processes that underpin sustainable communities.

Key outcomes are new and effective processes and practical tools that can be used by public, private, community and third sectors partners. Some projects have succeeded beyond expectation; others have faced insuperable challenges. Many have involved local communities where, ultimately, the benefits of UrbanBuzz will be most strongly felt and appreciated. All have delivered different kinds of lasting change, and the ripple effect from project legacies will continue to be felt in the coming years.

As project funding drew to a close at the beginning of 2009, the programme's outputs and outcomes are being widely disseminated to their target communities through partnership networks. One potential partner is the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which has a remit to enhance skills and training through the HCA Academy (see page 4). 'The key is for us to invest in transferring knowledge and skills through the HCA Academy, which I believe can be a very powerful transmission mechanism for learning, including that from UrbanBuzz,' said Sir Bob Kerslake, HCA chief executive, speaking as the HCA came into being at the end of 2008. 'Some of the UrbanBuzz outcomes would be an extremely good fit. It's particularly important at this difficult time that we build on existing learning.'

David Cobb is programme director, UrbanBuzz. For more details on UrbanBuzz and the 27 projects it supported, visit www.urbanbuzz.org or email d.cobb@ucl.ac.uk

The Complete UrbanBuzz, a 250-page book that tells the programme's story and outlines the key objectives, responses, outcomes and outputs from each project, will be published in May 2009. Details on: www.urbanbuzz.org

Videos and multimedia presentations from the projects and programme events can be viewed online: visit www.urbanbuzz.org

02

NEW COMMUNITIES

MOVING TO LOW CARBON LIVING

The government's eco-towns initiative has highlighted the challenges facing new communities. Overcoming barriers to low carbon living is more about attitudinal and behavioural change than strategic design solutions

Times are changing: all design professionals are conscious of the need to develop healthy and active places, lively public realms and liveable, inclusive, economically viable communities. There is realisation that issues around economic growth, transport planning and urban development need to be managed at a range of scales, from national to local. Professor David Lock, Chair of the Town and Country Planning Association, advised the government on development criteria for the eco-towns initiative. 'I think the challenge for all the various professions and the politicians is getting together and trying to deliver quality of life in a holistic way.' When carbon reduction enters the planning equations, the need for integration is clear.

The government's eco towns initiative tackled these issues head on – and met with major resistance. According to the national press at the start of 2009, officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government have concluded that only 'one or two' of the 15 shortlisted projects are genuinely viable. The Eco-Towns Challenge Panel, appointed by ministers to ensure the plans were genuinely green, is understood to have reached similar conclusions.

Many of the criticisms have related to lack of connectivity and poor transport links. Eco towns were originally defined as freestanding locations, making it challenging from a transport point of view to deliver sustainable standards, says Keith Mitchell,

partner at Peter Brett Associates and transport advisor for the Marston Vale eco town (which has now pulled out of the eco-towns programme). Looking at typical projects, says Mitchell, non-urban development typically has 70-80 per cent of residents using cars for their main trips. Eco town standards suggest a target of less than 50 per cent of main trips by car – although the Eco-Towns Challenge Panel favoured a target of less than 80 per cent.

The Peter Brett team came up with four key transport strategy objectives to guide the development of eco towns, and by extension all low carbon developments: reduce the need to travel; minimise car journey lengths; reduce pollution from transport; and use transport strategy to encourage healthy living.

Car culture

Mitchell refers to research work by Peter Headicar at Oxford Brookes University, which suggests that nationally, 85 per cent of travel by members of car-owning households is as a car driver or a car passenger. In non-car owning households, this drops to 29 per cent. Car owners opting for car pool or car share activities can reduce their car mileage by about 70 per cent.

'These very simple statistics state the obvious; that car ownership is a very important factor in whether or not you travel by car,' says Mitchell. 'An effective transport policy needs to tackle car culture. There needs to be significant change in

Making it happen: development at Freiberg, Germany, demonstrates the power of integrated ticketing, with one ticket for all transport amenities. A significant charge (of up to £14,000) for a car parking space and a green transport plan have led to 60-80 per cent of commuting journeys being made by bike, and 15-25 per cent by public transport. For those who own a car, on average just 21-28 per cent of commuting and total journeys are made by car (CABE)

the way that masterplans, road networks and transport systems work in eco town proposals.'

Today's typical developments focus on direct convenient routes for walking and cycling. But is this truly being done as the first and most important consideration in the design process?' asks Mitchell. 'Have we really looked at ways in which we can locate development so that the most obvious and the most convenient way to get between home and destination is to get on your bike or to walk? We have to look at public transport connections, and the ways in which development is co-located around public transport systems. We have to look how origins and destinations are connected, and at how we deal with what's left, which is car use.'

Attitudinal change

Moving to low carbon living will involve significant behaviourial and attitudinal change. Technology can help: personal travel planning and remote working can help to cut down on rush hours and commutes. But we need to do more, says Mitchell. We should consider building office developments for a variety of employers who buy desk space, so catering for remote workers *and* providing rich social networks. 'If we're really going reduce car dependency from 80 per cent to less than 50 per cent, then we have to make major inroads that haven't been seen before in terms of the way that people travel.'

Developers should think about how to attract champions and ambassadors for sustainable living to their low carbon communities, says Mitchell. 'But perhaps the single most important thing we need to focus on is car-free areas. In Marston Vale, we were suggesting that nearly 5,000 of the dwellings in the central areas would be in car-free areas.' This doesn't mean that you can't have a car, he says, and doesn't mean you can't park it. But it does mean that the central area of housing is focused on public transport, walking and cycling. 'If you want to have a car, you have to park it on the edge of the area. It's probably an inconvenient distance away to walk. You have to pay for that space, which should be charged at the full economic and environmental cost of owning and running that car. In Freiberg, Germany, they charge about £14,000 per space.' Raising revenue in this way would overcome some of the issues about paying for public transport infrastructure.

There are some small areas of car-free development being constructed and delivered in the UK, says Mitchell, 'but I don't yet see yet the real ambition to find a way of making these kinds of developments attractive and marketable in British society.'

There are several other areas in which new communities could reduce carbon emissions. Locally generated low carbon energy could also help to power a transit system, says Mitchell. Policy drivers and innovative vision is, as ever, key to delivery in the long term. Development plans are affected by politics and policy

Bo01, the first phase of Western Harbour, Malmo, is nearly all pedestrianised and frequent buses, running on a natural gas/biogas mix, connect it to the rest of Malmo. Most people in Bo01 walk or cycle the short distance into the city centre

decisions, especially as change can happen fast. 'We need to be able to monitor and review the way we deliver development and transport strategies over a period of time.'

For David Lock, future development has to go hand in hand with provision of public transport infrastructure. 'We must rid our culture of the concept that public transport should be profitable,' he says. 'My opinion is that it's a utility that makes life work, and that we should be very happy to pay whatever it takes to make it function. I think we've been led up a blind alley for 20 years, which has wasted an awful lot of time and left a lot of people unconnected.' He also rues the lack of control he has over transport strategy. 'As a town planner and a masterplanner, the inability to manage or plan public transport networks is a fundamental flaw,' he says. 'I can't structure a region if I don't know how to help people move around it. It's profoundly basic.'

The uncertainty of planning for a future over which looms climate change and social inequity must encourage politicians to practice what they preach and learn to work together at all levels, with a focus on clarifying the key messages. Although cars aren't going away any time soon, they take centre stage in most discussions on sustainable development. Issues of street use, parking, pollution, healthy public realm activity and the need for public transport are all packaged in the car debate. And as David Lock says: 'Once the technology has fixed the motive power for transport so it's clean, and I believe it will, we're still left with transport as a land use, and cars as users of space. The fundamental size of that unit is a problem. That's why I'm very keen on seeing investment in alternatives.' *Juliana O'Rourke*

SEXY SUSTAINABILITY:
A DEFAULT SETTING FOR DESIGNERS

High carbon living is substance abuse, but designs that embody a certain spatial typology can help people want to recover, says **Professor Ian Bentley**

Most people will only give up carbon addiction and embrace low carbon living if they feel that this change will be pleasurable. As with alcoholism or any other form of addiction, people can only recover if they actively want to: it can't be done for the benefit of others. (The word 'feel' is important here: thinking will not do it). As the sociologist Andrew Ross puts it in his book *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 'the ecologically impaired need to be persuaded that ecology can be sexy, and not self-denying'.

All places, sexy or not, are designed through the creative use of spatial types: generic 'DNA codes' in the designer's mind, acquired either through formal learning, work or experience. These types are embodied in designers' memories; not as rigid 'cookie cutter' templates, but as generic relational structures that can be used in a wide range of creative ways: they are humanly constructed, but they have the flexibility of dreams rather than the rigidity of formulae. As I have argued in depth elsewhere, it is only the creative use of types that makes design possible; whether designers realise this consciously or not.

Highly connected tartan networks

In *Identity by Design* I argued, along with my colleague Professor Watson at the Joint Centre for Urban Design, that places have the best chance of attaining sexy sustainability when their design embodies a *particular* spatial typology: highly connected tartan networks of public space and green connections, active interfaces between buildings and public spaces generating perimeter blocks, and the finest grain of mixed land uses that can be achieved.
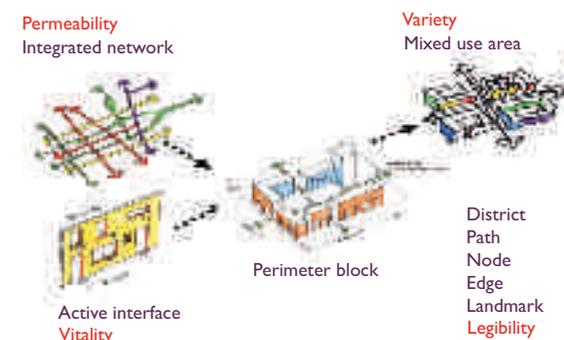
Admirable types of responsive environments

These ideas, in their modern form, have been in the public domain for a generation. They have, of course, evolved further during that period; but mostly the evolution has taken the form of discovering more and more reasons *why* these are the best types to use, rather than calling their use into question. I grow ever more sure that they should form the sexy sustainable 'default setting' in urban designers' minds, to be called on in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

Time is short. We need sexy sustainable places *now*, not in the medium term; but there are two arguments within urban design culture that currently block this typology from being accepted as a default setting. The first claims that it is *not* a sexy typology,

There should be a sexy sustainable 'default setting' like that at Angell Town, Brixton, in urban designers' minds, to be called on in all but the most exceptional circumstances

Regina Lim

Brixton's Angell Town has been received with enthusiasm by its users

because in practice users do not want it. The second claims that even if it *is* wanted, there are valid reasons why it *should* not be used, at least as a 'default setting'. Let us explore these in turn.

We should not spend too much time on the first argument. Leaving aside the fact that many of its protagonists turn out to have voted with their feet and their mortgages to live in old places which have themselves been formed according to this typology, it is also clear that new places so formed, from Brixton's streetwise Angell Town to Poundbury's rustic charms, have also been received with enthusiasm by their users.

The detailed design vocabulary

More interesting are the arguments that claim that this typology *should* not be used, at least as an urban design 'default setting', even if users react positively. These arguments follow two main lines: first that this particular typology is *nostalgic* because it has been around a long time, and second that it is *uncreative* to have a 'default setting' at all. These arguments are commonly heard, particularly within the culture of architecture to which so many urban designers feel an allegiance. Taken together, they make this typology seem decidedly unsexy to many designers who are genuinely concerned with making better places. It is therefore important to dispel them if we can.

The 'nostalgia' argument is fundamentally silly. It is not in the least nostalgic to use good ideas that have been around a long time; *vide* the round wheel, and the fact that I am writing this in English, rather than making up a new language as I go along. It would be nostalgic if I were promoting the use of this (or any other) typology *because* it was ancient; but I'm not: I'm simply claiming it as the best typology there currently is for making sexy sustainable places.

Since I personally know people who use this silly argument, and I also know they are not *themselves* silly, I think there is a confusion going on. I think it would *not* be silly to argue, for example, that the *detailed* design vocabulary used in places like Poundbury is nostalgic, in that it can easily be interpreted as giving out messages that the past was better than the present or, more important, that we should be frightened of the future.

Personally, I share those concerns. I would vote for Angell Town's detailed design over Poundbury's any day – but the point is that they both (more or less) use the same underlying typology of highly-linked public space networks and active building fronts, with attempts to create mixed use, that I am advocating here. How that typology is *interpreted in concrete form* is beside the point of this argument, and has to be resolved by the individual designer in any particular situation – that need for individual interpretation is what makes urban design an art form.

A performance art of urban design

To most urban designers – certainly including me – the idea that urban design is an art is about as sexy as it gets. How can the creativity of art ever be squared with the suggestion of consciously using a particular, given spatial typology? To address this question, we have to think more about the nature of art than we usually do in urban design.

If we think across time and across cultures, it is perfectly clear that art has fulfilled a huge range of different roles, and that artists' understandings of themselves and of the nature and purpose of the works they produce – their *identities* as artists – have evolved in relation to all sorts of economic and social changes.

Now we face new challenges. It is time to use the fact that art has many faces to break free from the limitations of a view of

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All places, sexy or not, are designed through the creative use of spatial types: generic 'DNA codes' in the designer's mind

Above: The detailed design vocabulary used in places like Poundbury is nostalgic; the idea of using good ideas that have been around a long time is not

Below: A wide range of users' experiences tell us that the Angell Town typology can be used to design sexy places

Graham Paul Smith

architecture as a quasi fine art, which emerged during the 19th century as a strategy for positioning architecture effectively within the ferment of industrialisation.

We need to seek a more progressive identity, to position ourselves effectively in relation to today's ecological crisis. To be sexy, that new identity will have to be based on some new way of conceiving the art of urban design.

This cannot just be 'made up': we have to build creatively from those types of art that are culturally available to us today. The only available type of art that would work naturally with a default spatial typology is, I suggest, *performance* art: the default spatial typology is analogous to a very 'open' script for a film or a play, or score for a musical performance.

What makes a performance art of *urban design* unique in the art world, however, is the fact that its *particular* typological score has not been created by 'someone else'. There is no film director or composer involved: rather, the open score of our default setting

has emerged through a process of evolutionary trial and error, over millennia; and it will no doubt continue to evolve in the future if our current ecological crisis can be overcome.

In effect, what we have here is a natural code for generating the type of human habitat that we call urban. I am not here making an analogy with natural processes: rather, I am acknowledging the fact that we humans are a *part of* nature, rather than separate from it.

As the physicist Fritjof Capra puts it in *The hidden connections*: 'ecodesign principles reflect the principles of organisation that nature has evolved to sustain the web of life'. Reconceptualising urban design as performance allows us to link with these principles, and offers us a way of facing the ultimate design challenge: recreating our own identities in a sexy sustainable way.

Ian Bentley is Emeritus Professor of Urban Design at the Joint Centre for Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University

The main square sets the tone for the development, with a focus on quality usable public green space

" "

The surrounding urban fabric of Harold Wood was developed in the 1930s. The designers have emulated the surrounding context by placing elegant contemporary buildings in a mature landscape setting

A LATTER-DAY LEAFY SUBURB

The provision of high quality, well-defined public spaces is creating an active environment for a new suburban community on the former Harold Wood hospital site in Havering, greater London. By **Andrew Stainsby**

Creating a 'sense of place' in suburban lower to medium density housing developments, where public transport is limited and streets are traditionally dominated by the car, remains a challenge for designers and policymakers. On the site of the former hospital at Harold Wood, Essex, developer Countryside Properties and architect and masterplanner Scott Brownrigg set out to create attractive new neighbourhoods defined by open spaces.

The development proposals were guided by a thorough understanding of the site and its wider context. Key issues such as planning designations, capacity and density were examined; constraints and opportunities such as access and movement, landscape, services, built form and listed buildings considered.

The surrounding urban fabric of Harold Wood was essentially developed in the 1930s and includes nearby Gidea Park, an exemplar project of its time. The designers have emulated the surrounding context by placing 'elegant contemporary buildings in a mature landscape setting'. This provides 1.9 Ha of open space strategically placed to form a network of green spaces and links through the site, with a central park of 0.6 hectares. The setting of a Grade II listed building on the site has been improved, with reference to historical records, and ponds reinstated as part of sustainable urban drainage proposals.

Open spaces, community development
Harold Wood Hospital site provides the opportunity to create a distinctive residential development. Five character areas of houses and flats will be created within the landscape context. A sequence of generous public open spaces defined by the built form will provide space for community development.

An emphasis on the creation of residential streets which link to a primary road provides a connective movement structure that develops a sequence of spatial experiences, incorporating numerous public open spaces and clear way-finding views and vistas.

Development parameters
Harold Wood Hospital redevelopment will knit with the bordering residential areas to form a cohesive plan. Whilst the ethos of a 'garden suburb' has been considered, positive urban design principles, such as grading block building frontages to provide a hierarchy, help to create a sense of place. Streets, avenues, mews, courts and squares all benefit from active street frontages. Building

heights, key views and vistas were considered through the site to ensure that the sequence of spaces was attractive to move through and that way-finding is clear and legible.

Design evolution
During discussions with the Greater London Authority and the London Borough of Havering, a nine-storey tower was introduced onto the western side of the Central Square. This provides both a focal point for the square and a way-finding device.

The masterplanning process evolved through several iterations to accommodate a wider range of unit types with the aim of creating a balanced community. There are now 874 proposed new dwellings over the 12.7 hectare site. The density reflects the PPS3 aspiration to maximise the use of available land, whilst also being sensitive to the suburban context of the wider area of Harold Wood. All dwellings are within 10 minutes' walk or a short bus ride to local shopping facilities. The provision of a new bus route and improved pedestrian permeability will also bring the benefits of local shopping along Station Road to a wider community.

The development will be designed to Code for Sustainable Homes levels 3 and 4 standards. There will be a central wood chip and gas-fired community CHP (Combined Heat and Power) plant with two booster stations that will both heat and power the entire development. Heat will be distributed via a network of water pipes, with individual heat meters in every home.

Healthy community
The development structure is based upon the avenue which connects to the existing main access route, Gubbins Lane. The avenue becomes the backbone of the development from which the rest of the masterplan develops. Its character and scale retains a common theme as it travels through squares and open spaces.

A pedestrian and cycle leisure route is proposed to follow the edge of the Area of Nature Conservation Interest along the site's railway boundary, providing access to recreational activities. It is proposed that there will also be a trim trail and children's play along this route.

The illustrative masterplan ensures that all significant landscape features have been integrated into the development.

Andrew Stainsby is an associate at Scott Brownrigg
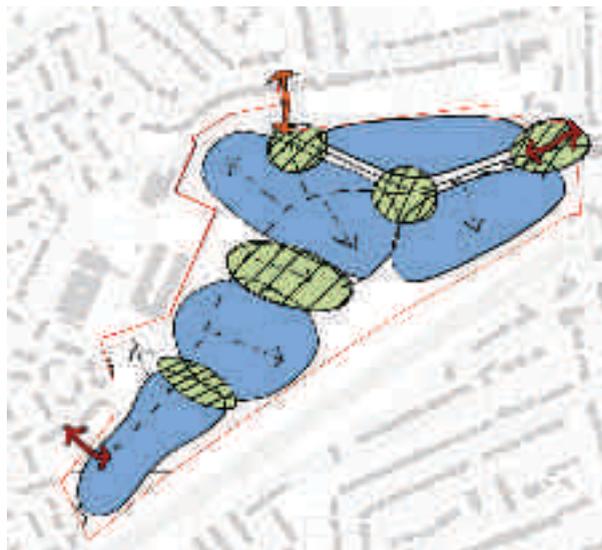
The density reflects the PPS3 aspiration to maximise the use of available land, whilst also being sensitive to the suburban context of the wider area of Harold Wood

Clockwise from top left: Concept sketch illustrates the strategy of delivering a network of green open spaces; Harold Wood redevelopment site in wider context; Harold Wood masterplan

KEY POINTS
• Designed to Code of Sustainable Homes levels 3 and 4
• Reflects PPS3 aspiration to maximise the use of available land, whilst also being sensitive to the suburban context
• New neighbourhoods are defined by open spaces
• Urban designer: John Richards

PRACTICE DETAILS
Scott Brownrigg
www.scottbrownrigg.com
Contact: Bruce Calton, director

BUILDING ON THE NATURAL ELEMENTS OF PLACE

A site of natural beauty overlooking Portland Bill has inspired a design embracing rainwater harvesting and rain gardens set in a series of court-style living spaces, says **Jonathan Reynolds**

Street life: rills and rain gardens, maritime planting and local stone

There is something about Portland Bill, Chesil Beach and limestone quarries that makes you think differently: rock, stone blocks, water and a very strong sense of place. Unique, in fact.

The site is part of the Osprey Quay Regeneration Area and overlooks the new marina and sailing venue for the 2012 Olympics. Portland Bill forms a distinctive backdrop for the site. The views out from the site are dramatic, with a wide panorama of the south coast seen beyond the high shingle bank of Chesil Beach. The site lies on rising ground and its lower, more sheltered area adjoins a Victorian town park with formal gardens, seating areas and tennis courts. The site also has frontage onto Castle Road, the main highway into Portland. The higher area has been terraced and is exposed, but it is from this area that the breathtaking views can be seen. The site has a clear physical and visual link with its place.

The conceptual plan for the site was prepared in-house at the RPS Bristol office, involving close teamwork between urban design, architecture and landscape architecture disciplines. The team also worked in collaboration with Synergy Housing Group and Leadbitter, the client, and the project was shortlisted as part of a bid process for the site. The resulting scheme is 'of the place' responding to the natural environment and its challenging setting and topography. This was not just an exercise about aesthetics, but about the people and life of Portland itself. A large percentage of the units were intended as affordable homes, and ideas for the improvement to the Victorian park and 'calming' on Castle Road were incorporated.

Creating linkages

Linkages, both visual and as walkable routes, provide a sound basis for tying a scheme and points of destination to the surrounding area. In this case, the town's football pitch and a future location for a community 'hub' sat just off-site, and the main entrance for the scheme was linked to these important destinations. This was achieved by creating a tapering street, framing views towards the community facilities and the 2012 sailing venue beyond.

The quarried blocks on Portland Bill are reflected in the fenestration and articulation of the buildings. Portland stone panels on buildings are complemented by large paving blocks. This is an elemental place, so close to so much water, and the design has
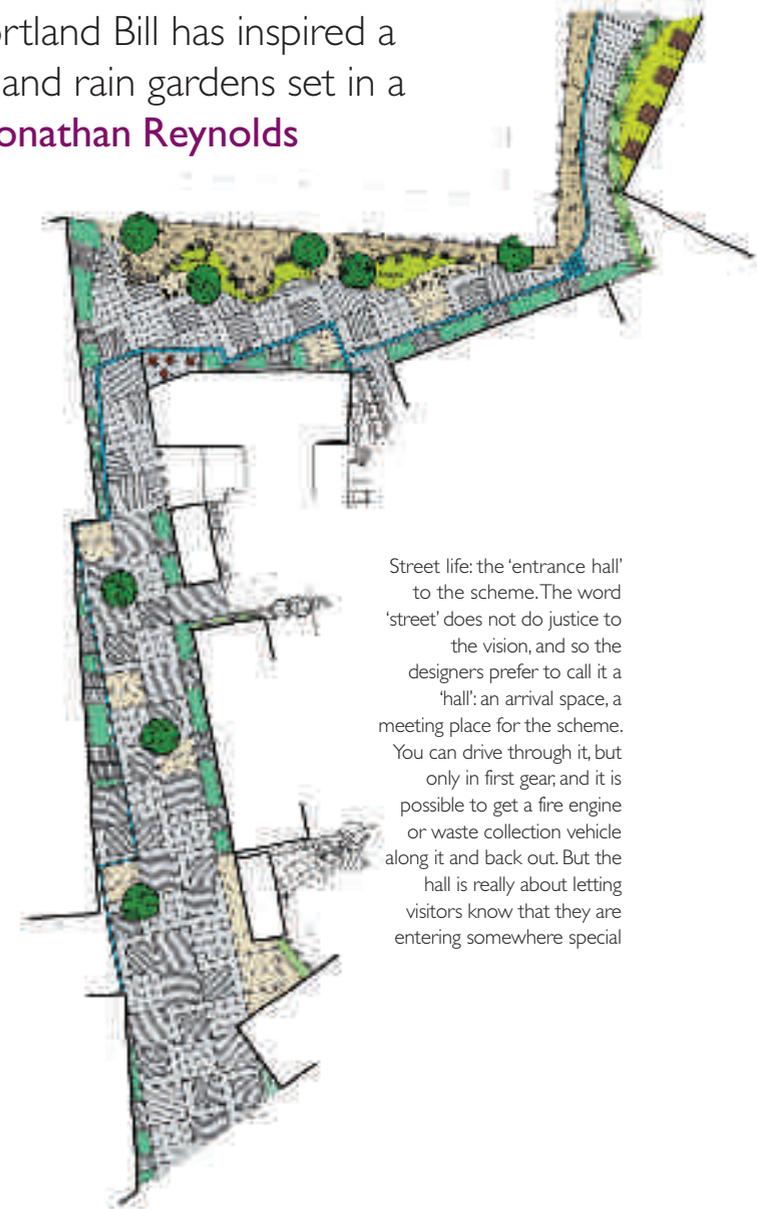
Street life: the 'entrance hall' to the scheme. The word 'street' does not do justice to the vision, and so the designers prefer to call it a 'hall': an arrival space, a meeting place for the scheme. You can drive through it, but only in first gear, and it is possible to get a fire engine or waste collection vehicle along it and back out. But the hall is really about letting visitors know that they are entering somewhere special

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> **Gardens, parking and play: lifestyle features of the scheme's court living spaces include gardens or private decked spaces above car parking, creating vertical as well as horizontal activities**

(from left) Court life, with gardens, parking and play; a simple massing model; the proposed frontage to the promenade creates a 'place'

reflected this with rainwater harvesting in rills and rain gardens in the 'hall', creating interest and bringing water into the public realm. This will encourage interactive child play: step over it to go home.

Court life: creative use of space

Behind this central spine are a series of varied living spaces in the form of courts. We wanted to take a new look at courts as places in their own right: to design and encourage 'court life'. It's complicated at first glance as space is tight, but a look at the images gives a clue as to what the design team is trying to achieve. Is this a view from the front or the back? Is it private or semi-public?

Once in this space, residents will feel safe. It's home. Rills, rain gardens, parking, play: boule, hopscotch, table tennis and barbeques, maritime planting, seating and neighbours interacting. Features include gardens or private decked spaces above car parking spaces, gardens and terraces on rooftops and living space or workshops above spaces for cars. This creates a

vertical as well as horizontal change in activity, making creative use of all the space.

A promenade has been designed, rising up the slope from the central spine 'street' to the upper level, and fronted and overlooked by dwellings jostling for the views. The promenade, with its irregular shape and continuation of the design ethos and features for the entrance space – maritime planting, paving structure, seating, rills, materials – reflects this unique location in a contemporary way. The style and massing of the buildings changes to reflect the larger Victorian villas and massing of nearby buildings.

The RPS design team in Bristol created a unique concept for a site that responds to its setting and the natural and built environment. What came out of the creative, collaborative design process was a contemporary scheme that makes a positive intervention in place.

Jonathan Reynolds is principal associate, urban design, RPS, Bristol

KEY POINTS
- The scheme is designed to respond to the spectacular natural environment, setting and context
- The main spine or entrance 'hall' defines a meeting place for the scheme
- A series of court-style living spaces encourages activity and interaction. Vertical as well as horizontal change in activity makes creative use of all available space

PRACTICE DETAILS
RPS Bristol
www.rpsgroup.com
Concept masterplan/urban design for this scheme by Jonathan Reynolds, conceptual building design led by Martin Denley, concept landscape architecture led by Richard McWilliam, from RPS Bristol design team

03

PLACE & SUSTAINABILITY

TUNING IN TO THE SOUND OF THE SUBURBS

New analysis revealing the scale and diversity of socio-economic activity taking place in and around suburban high streets belies the widespread perception of suburbia as synonymous with social and architectural homogeneity, says Laura Vaughan

More than 80 per cent of UK residents live in suburbs, and the suburban model is expected to grow by some 2.5 million people. Yet the aspirations of suburban lifestyles, and the barriers and opportunities for change, remain poorly understood. The *Towards Successful Suburban Town Centres* (SSTC) research project at UCL is investigating the strategic contribution of Greater London's smaller and district centres to the sustainability of the metropolitan region. The project team interprets 'sustainability' as referring to those conditions that are favourable to local concentrations of socio-economic and cultural activity that persist over time.

The project has found that the widespread perception of suburbia as synonymous with social and architectural homogeneity belies its spatial, social, ethnic and economic diversity. With pressure to build large numbers of new homes increasing, there is a real danger that such perceptions of homogeneity become self-fulfilling.

The project team mapped and analysed a range of spatial data, relating configurational aspects of space with socioeconomic distributions, and discovered the untapped resource that is the 'back lands' of the high street. This illustrated the extent to which suburban town centres are commercial and business destinations in themselves. Traditional data sources do not reveal these types of activities, and so they have been effectively invisible.

Avoiding a self-fulfilling prophecy that focuses on residential or retail-based development solutions is not simply a challenge for recently planned settlements. The critical problem is the extent to which existing suburbs can adapt for future growth. There is an urgent need for designers, planners and policy makers to recognise how suburbia contains a great variety of distinctive places for living and working. Such an improved understanding of suburban settlements must be grounded in historically informed research into the process through which the suburbs became absorbed into urban networks, and their emerging position within increasingly complex, multi-scaled urban regions.

A distinct genus

Until suburban settlement forms are approached as a distinctive genus in their own right, the planning debate will continue to revolve around the pros and cons of brownfield densification and the absence of adequate transport and public service infrastructures. Such debates, although important, tend – in the absence of an appropriate research framework – to recycle the politically charged questions of the 'urbanisation of the suburbs' and the perennial problem of under-investment in urban infrastructure.

The project's research has identified the ability of smaller centres to adapt to changing circumstances as key to the emergence of a greater diversity, or 'mixed-use' of activities, than is usually associated with the suburbs. By using space syntax methodology within a Geographical Information System (GIS), we are able to analyse the ways in which suburban space is used. We can also integrate social and economic data with information

Underlying map: © Ordnance Survey 2008
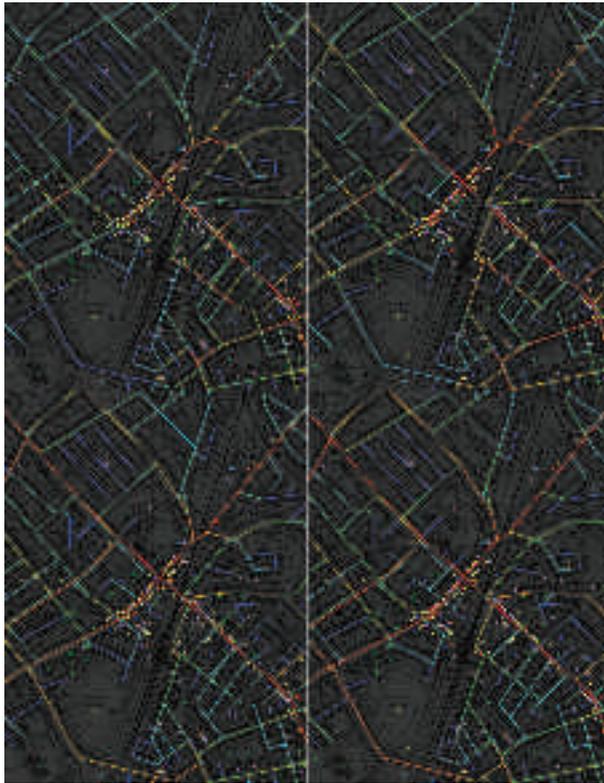
Left: Non-residential activity and segment angular choice in South Norwood (top-left: radius 400 metres; top-right: radius 800 metres; bottom-left: radius 1600 metres; bottom-right: radius 2000 metres). The four images show how the distribution of land uses is associated with the configuration of the urban grid at different scales. The space syntax measure of 'choice' essentially measures overlapping paths (using a graph network analysis algorithm). The degree to which a street section forms part of all paths at a set distance is quantified numerically and coloured on the map in a spectrum from red to blue

Above: The team works with practices and local authorities to develop its analyses, and has recently been in discussion with the London Mayor's Outer London Commission. Yet without detailed analysis, there are key ideas and study outcomes available on the project's 'Profiler' webpages that can help to contextualise specific sites (outer London suburbs) and explore the many ways in which they work at a range of different scales. Understanding these activity patterns can bring insights into the natural evolution of place, and how this can best inform future interventions

about urban form to analyse the spatial configuration of Greater London. The project provides examples of how to use data that local authorities have, but typically have not used in these ways.

The project explores the role of the suburban road network in organising land uses at different scales of movement, both pedestrian and vehicular. We find that where regional planning is restricted to a limited number of large centres, or retail-driven 'hubs', the danger is that the strategic contribution of suburban form to the urban system as a whole is easily neglected. Many local centres are places of work and leisure as well as consumption and, though they are small in size, they have a strategic role to play in the future of large cities such as London, due to their widespread location around the outer suburbs. Detailed fieldwork conducted by the project in Chipping Barnet, South Norwood and Surbiton shows how these various activities ought not to be seen in

isolation from each other, but as interconnected within the everyday life of the suburb.

Retail benefits from diverse neighbours, creating a richer mix of footfall. But what tends to happen, several local authorities have told us, is that developers and designers try to 'tidy up'. Suddenly, you can't get through from the high street to the 'back lands' where other activities take place. Adding residential land uses may densify the town centre, but it's important not to lose opportunities to enrich the town centre with activities that are beyond retail.

Success and adaptability

The project has developed an algorithm in a GIS to enable mapped land use data to be analysed in relation to space syntax measures of network accessibility. This has enabled a novel understanding of the relationship between urban form and patterns of land use activity, and has led to findings which suggest that the success of local centres is conditional on their built form adaptability to social and economic change through time. The team concludes that 'adaptability' in local centres can play an important role in supporting a wider range of locally generated activity than the retail functions with which they are most commonly associated. This feature of adaptability is, suggests the team, a sign of the potential for suburban town centres to be economically sustainable.

Although the importance of retail in suburban town centres cannot be overlooked, the *by-product* activity generated by the co-location of a diverse range of activities is clearly vital to the sustenance of smaller centres. It is also not purely an economic function – the fact that additional activities are supported within the locality of the suburb ensures that more time is spent locally, supporting the suburban *virtual community*.

We suggest that this potential embedded in the street network

– the basic ingredient of society – is the critical element for sustaining the vitality of local centres,' says Vaughan. 'The extensive and varied activity in such areas seeds daily/weekly/periodic movement and engagement of individuals with their locality. Thus, we further propose that suburban town centres have the potential to be both socially and environmentally sustainable.

RESILIENCE, RISK AND THE FUTURE OF PLACE

The rapid economic shifts we currently face have a profound impact on cities, towns, neighbourhoods and streets. A new programme, City X-Rays, aims to find new ways of capturing, measuring and analysing these trajectories of change. By Sarah Chaplin, The Urban Renaissance Institute, and Joost Beunderman, Demos

Placemaking is central to the mission of the Academy of Urbanism. But, despite the timeless nature of many of the qualities of place, the rapid economic shifts we currently face have a profound impact on cities, towns, neighbourhoods and streets. A successful place today may face an uncertain future. How might place quality be affected? And how can existing assets (whether physical or economic, or social) inform positive responses? How do these differ from place to place? In other words, what differentiated patterns of risk and resilience do we see emerging across localities in the UK, and what hints do they give about the future of place? The Academy, together with independent think-tank Demos, hosted a roundtable seminar to debate these questions.

We heard reports from the field, namely from shortlisted nominees or winners of the 2008 Academy of Urbanism's Awards: Chichester, Skipton and Richmond in Yorkshire, North Laine in Brighton, Oxford Castle and Birmingham's Jewellery quarter, spoke about the impacts of the crisis and the resilience of their places. Common strands emerged as they each considered their prospects. For example, the uncertainty of a tourism and visitor economy – perhaps buoyed by the rediscovery of Britain as a holiday destination, but equally vulnerable if retail businesses fail and leave empty premises. Or the possible drying up of infrastructure and regeneration funds that underpinned many successful projects over the last decade.

Based on this small but dynamic sample, three sources of resilience emerged as particularly relevant:

Local ownership – both legally / financially and socially. The desire and ability of a local population to invest energy, time, creativity and money to nurture and protect local assets can make an enormous difference. Family businesses, volunteers and third sector organisations can leverage a type of resources that absentee landlords and multinational conglomerates can't. Heritage partnership schemes and proactive local initiatives for spaces vacated by Woolworths and others should be seen as a sign of strength.

Smart spending – not any just Keynesian largesse will do, and ways to deal with financial scarcity will become increasingly important. Therefore local stakeholders face choices, such as what 'doing more with less' actually means in practice: focusing resources on a smaller number projects of high design quality, or finding new ways of working that are less high-spec and capital-intensive, but achieve cumulative change?

Leadership, strategy and communication – this is a time to reflect and act strategically. As less energy is spent on 'responding to market proposals', policymakers should use the time to devise intelligent responses rather than knee-jerk panic measures. Lead by listening, debating, planning and being prepositional in recognition of a fundamentally changed context, and then creating the conditions to increase our collective capacity to act. Politically, participants agreed that this is easier to achieve with greater local, rather than national resources.

The afternoon session took up these place-specific experiences, and opened them up to a wider debate, with invited experts making contributions from the floor.

Indy Johar from Demos reminded us that, only a few months ago, comparisons with the Great Depression of the 1930s seemed far-fetched, but it is now becoming accepted that this is the scale of the situation we find ourselves in. Questions about how we revalue assets, recalculate indicators and reassess targets and, as a result, adapt to the realities of economic contraction, are set against the already urgent agenda of climate change. This raises profound questions: how do we conceive of people's livelihoods if the job-creating sectors of the recent past disappear?

Joost Beunderman from Demos argued that even the identified strengths may come under stress: The role of volunteering and the third sector was being flagged up as a potential saviour, stepping into the brink where commercially-orientated solutions were no longer available. However, as with all resources, this one may also be depleted if no meaningful investment is made to underpin and harness this potential.

Chris Balch from DTZ asked what 'place vulnerability' really means. With something in the order of 25 million square feet of office space becoming available in the last two months, figures have indicated that the British high street is sadly more vulnerable than out of town shopping centres. His big concern echoed Indy Johar's: where are the jobs going to come from, and where will they go? Big cities might actually become especially vulnerable, he predicted, with a move away from globalisation and increasing regionalisation, and indeed localisation, becoming possible new driving forces.

Yolande Barnes from Savills intimated that quality of place is still a major selling point for end users. There is an enduring need for more housing (estimated shortfall now 1 million homes by next year in the UK), but other trends will change dramatically: cheap space will be in demand, and previous expectations about yields and returns will be scaled back to something more realistic. All this would take some giant leaps of imagination, she argued, because the property sector seems to have lost sight of the real role of property: as somewhere to live and work, learn and play – not (just) as an investment vehicle.

Stephen Hill from Futureplanners sketched out a scenario for a new model of partnership working that he called 'Place-shaping Co-investment Partnerships'. In his view, we have all become land-trading dinosaurs, yet have a professional obligation 'to secure

optimal use of land for social and economic needs' (RICS). The new model, Hill argued, would need to be imaginative, responsible and long-term. Local communities can become the driving force behind development opportunities, creating initial temporary uses for sites; combining grants, donated materials, and voluntary labour. He imagined a central role for Community Land Trusts: these would only approach investors that could demonstrate how they would add value, rather than simply extract it.

Biljana Savic from CABE reflected on her experiences working in rundown areas of the UK where property values had virtually collapsed. It was apparent that these issues need to be addressed at a larger spatial scale than that of the particular neighbourhoods affected. She argued that although we may have a better understanding of living in a 'spiky' world, with huge differentials between political and economic systems and performance, we still find it difficult to talk about certain issues and responses. Shrinkage is one: we need to face up to the reality that some places now lack a rationale to continue to exist, and might need to be abandoned – as have some North American cities. She also drew attention to the continuing need to build capacity and knowledge with front-line public sector practitioners

Kevin Harris from Local Level hinted that there was a danger of over-emphasising the impact of social networks. Social capital had dropped out of government speak and the public sector was guilty of squeezing out creativity and ideas because of its procurement process and target-orientated mindset. He took heart from the fact that the idea of thinking and acting collectively was becoming acceptable again. He warned that community cohesion and community engagement were not the same thing, and that the practice of making communities 'responsible' for their own destiny was borne of political convenience. Nevertheless, he predicted an explosion of online neighbourhood networks, and a movement away from a desire to create manicured, corporate environments. He ended with this call: If time is no longer money, then what is it?

A very intense, insightful and wide-ranging discussion ensued, which covered topics such as the rise of squatting, the importance of sweat equity, the concept of time banking, the impact of peak oil, the dismantling of toxic assets, and the opportunities for micro-finance. It became clear that those present were actually feeling positive about future prospects: yes, the current situation hurts, but we had it coming, and sustainable place-making was always

The rapid economic shifts we currently face have a profound impact on cities, towns, neighbourhoods and streets: busy and vital or abandoned?

going to require something quite different: radical, collective, tactical, authentic and focused on social value.

Adrian Lee from Hands On Project Management pointed out that we will see increasing numbers of empty properties across our beleaguered cities. In the present circumstances, people will, regardless of moral viewpoint or legal niceties, simply find ways to occupy and use empty property. John Worthington, DEGW, suggested that the future would not see the pendulum swinging back to something we've known before, but a remapping of how we see our lives and how we want to spend our time. Underpinning all this, he argued, was one immutable principle: the value of the property and built environment sector will only be as good as its values.

There was a telling moment when someone asked if we were still talking about urbanism, and if so, then what was it, really? Urbanism, another participant proposed, meant getting under the skin of a place, dealing with all its facets, and understanding its story

of change. The stories of change for places everywhere are going to be challenging and extraordinary. Our children and our grandchildren will learn from, and be inspired by, the resilience of people in those places.

The next step for this discussion is to find new ways of capturing, measuring and analysing these trajectories of change. This event laid the foundation for a new Academy programme called City X-Rays, which takes as its premise the notion that current ways of measuring economic performance, cultural experience, emotional landscapes, in relation to place, may well be inadequate indicators for the times ahead. The Academy of Urbanism is committed to compiling a new set of methodologies, working with a wide range of partners from think tanks to universities, to serve and enlighten us as we enter a new era.

Anyone interested in progressing this new learning agenda should contact: Linda Gledstone: lg@academyofurbanism.org.uk

LEARNING FROM PLACE: KING'S CROSS

Can a developer-led approach to regeneration on a grand scale, such as that proposed for King's Cross, London, really deliver wide-ranging neighbourhood renewal? By Janet Sutherland

Learning from Place

The Academy of Urbanism, a *PLACEmaking* supporter, is creating a body of evidence-based enquiry that can 'inform our goal to identify and deliver best practice in urbanism'. Its programme of 'learning from place' is a key component of this drive, and regular study visits and seminars are key to success. The latest session on this theme, held in March 2009, took in visits to the Brunswick Centre, London WC1, and to Kings Place, N1, followed by analysis of a new London quarter that is taking shape: King's Cross Central. The aim was to explore how such ambitious developer-led regeneration can proceed and bring about neighbourhood renewal in today's challenging times.

The communities of King's Cross suffer high levels of unemployment, with a life expectancy 10 years lower than in nearby Hampstead. The railway lands and surrounding areas at King's Cross have been blighted for decades whilst awaiting development. Until recent successful intervention by local councils and police, this had led to problems including prostitution, drugs, high levels of homelessness and street crime. Recent neighbourhood renewal programmes have sought to empower local residents to seek benefits from the transformational potential that the King's Cross Central development might bring to their communities, and although these have increased social capital, they have not always improved life chances.

Investment in buildings around the railway lands has been underway during recent years. Islington Council has driven a programme of investment in some of its housing estates, and a range of landowners has been bold enough to invest ahead of major redevelopment. Most notable is the exemplary project of

Kings Place on York Way, developed by Parabola Land and designed by Dixon Jones. This privately-funded office development, now home to *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, has a world-class concert hall, a free art gallery and public space with restaurants and cafes opening onto the canal and basin, all provided with no public subsidy. This development opened in autumn 2008 and is already acting as a cultural magnet, bringing new life into what will become the gateway to the new King's Cross quarter.

The 67 acres of railway lands around King's Cross are being developed by Argent plc. Roger Madelin, Argent's Joint Chief Executive, recognises the scale of the challenges to be overcome, and the importance of improving the economic life chances of the surrounding communities.

He acknowledges the debt the development owes to London's successful 2012 Olympic bid, which breathed new life into the area's transport plans. By the end of the decade, he says, King's

Kings Place: canal view

Richard Bryant

Cross will arguably be the best public transport hub in the western hemisphere. With this fortunate boost, and after nine years and more than 350 policy statements, the development is now moving towards detailed planning stages. King's Cross Central's 20 new streets will be adopted by Camden. There will be new offices and centres for leisure, retail and culture, and up to 2,000 homes (1,700 are guaranteed, including housing for 650 students). The University of the Arts' Centre of Design will occupy some of the site's plentiful stock of historic buildings. The educational facilities, and the students they attract, is 'a huge pump prime for our whole development', says Madelin.

Job creation

The mixed use area will contain health centres, bike storage, games centres, play areas, skill and recruitment centres, along with a construction training centre – larger than the developer is

King's Cross Central, The Coal Drops

Miller Hare

King's Cross Central visualised

contractually obliged to provide under section 106 agreements. 'The four contractors we're working with want to train people to work on the development,' says Madelin. 'The first intake of 90 in January 2009 was three times oversubscribed. The next development in the first phase will include schools and a recruitment centre for retail jobs, community jobs, security jobs, all of which the local community should be able to fill.' The construction centre will continue to connect employers to new recruits, and will guarantee each trainee a work placement.

Madelin is confident that, as many London office leases will expire in 2013, there will be demand for the new offices in King's Cross, with space for as many as 25,000 workers. There are 2,000 homes wrapped around the central University of the Arts, at the heart of the retail, leisure, entertainment and culture complex and the largest public space in central London, slightly larger than Trafalgar Square. There's a mix of housing. Development plans ensure that affordable homes will not look 'architecturally' different

from the most expensive accommodation. The scheme includes housing for families, with at least 23 per cent of up to 500 social units having 3-4 bedrooms, although Madelin believes that too many family-sized homes are included in the scheme.

Some buildings will be complex: it is proposed that one will have roof gardens, games areas, a nursery school, parking, a police station, a pub, social housing, and private two-storey homes with roof gardens and penthouse. Maximising the use of outdoor space will be important. 'We're trying to have more educational facilities on site. We're creating three parks and two sports facilities, and planning to use every piece of public space for recreation.'

Quality design is important, and Argent is working with three Stirling prize-winners on the project. Eco credentials are also vital the main carbon reduction initiative is trigeneration. A large Combined Heat and Power system is being used, generating 7.5 MW of electricity and, outside of the Olympic site, is the largest private power generation initiative in central London. All homes will be built to at least Code for Sustainable Homes level 4. Code level 5 is 'slightly too challenging' at the moment, noted Madelin.

The developers are optimistic that the project will progress during the current recession, albeit at a slower pace, as it had always been the intention to plan for a lengthy period that included at least two downturns. The investors are looking for long-term gain and not development profit, Madelin states.

Local input

Local stakeholders responding to Madelin stressed the wide range of connections: social, cultural and psychological that work together in great places, and which they hope will have their place in influencing King's Cross. Bob West, Head of Urban Design and Renewal, London Borough of Camden, spoke of the importance of place-shaping; of a focus on issues outside of the physical. Places draw people together to live, work, learn and play, he says, In practice, this involves the exploration of social and economic space, integrating space psychologically, environmentally and socially, and examining the geographical spread of activity.

The role of partnership working was stressed by Mick Sweeney, Chief Executive of Argent's housing delivery partner One Housing Group. These relationships must include voluntary groups working with deprived communities, he said, and housing initiatives focused on housing local people through lettings policies. Amongst Mick's

proposals for building a cohesive new community were establishing a partnership network to support 'financial inclusion', as the majority of tenants have no bank accounts, nor education about how to deal with the financial world. He also favoured training and employment activities, community arts and sports development; and engagement strategies aimed at older residents, providing them with access to open spaces, lunch clubs and sessions in learning new skills.

Gill Henderson, Director of Create KX, addressed the role of culture within regeneration. There are 2,726 creative and cultural sector businesses and centres for education in the King's Cross area, she said, offering much potential. Development should begin the process of establishing the area as a cultural landmark.

The presentation session ended with the wide-ranging discussion that has become a hallmark of Academy events. Questions were raised about how King's Cross Central can better integrate with the wider area and enhance the life opportunities of the people living around it. One suggestion was that there should be a 'planning lite' period so that the area has the potential to bring in new people, new cultures and evolving businesses, who will spark vibrancy in their own ways.

Another was that the stakeholders should learn from Berlin and Amsterdam and plan for change through colonising space. As some of the King's Cross Central area may be empty for a period of time, ways of using space for the common good should be found. There are lessons to be learnt from past success stories, such as Camden market, Spitalfields and Borough market.

One popular idea was the creation of a bank of renewal and regeneration. Another was an example of a Dutch approach to developing land, whereby infrastructure is provided to serviced plots and the value of land is set, seeking 20-30 per cent return, with tenders assessed for the quality of their proposals. This leads to higher quality standards than a more typical British approach that seeks predominantly to increase land value.

There was some consensus that the credit crunch may lead to opportunities to create social capital, perhaps through temporary use of land whilst value is low. It was thought that such an approach may have more of a regenerative impact on communities than is usually possible through traditional developer led-regeneration.

Janet Sutherland is director, JTP Cities

KENT'S ROAD TO RECOVERY?

Ashford's shared space relies on layout and the language of materials rather than traditional highway traffic calming measures, says **Lindsey Whitelaw**

Ashford is one of the UK's four major growth hubs under the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan, which aims to create 28,000 new jobs, 2m sq ft of commercial space and 31,000 new homes for the region. Fundamental to the success of this plan is the need to improve the town centre to create a viable and sustainable place for living and working. The need to 'de-ring' the three-lane, one-way ring road was established in the Greater Ashford and Town Centre Development Frameworks. This led to the 'Breaking Boundaries' project, which has delivered a shared space accommodating up to 10,000 vehicles a day where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles have equal priority.

Reclaiming the public realm

Whitelaw Turkington's involvement began with a commission to put 'flesh on the bones' of the Town Centre Development Framework and Public Realm Strategy. The brief was to deliver a 'unique and distinctive' public realm for Ashford, raising the town's profile and setting a new standard for future development. This was some challenge, given that the available 'public realm' was mostly under the jurisdiction of highways planners.

Reclaiming the public realm from vehicular-dominated space has always been at the heart of the design ethos. The team was inspired by the work of Danish engineer Hans Monderman, and Ashford presented the perfect opportunity to introduce his successful approach to reducing traffic accidents. This involved removing traditional highways signage and markings and

Nayan Kulkarni, a lighting artist, has designed a series of curved lighting columns creating a distinctive rhythm along the street. The placement of the columns has been used to provide visual clues and to help subtly direct traffic in shared surface areas

introducing an element of uncertainty as to who has priority. Drivers, cyclists and pedestrians have to negotiate their way across the space. Some have described it as effectively throwing away the highway design rule book. The long-term vision is to transform the entire ring road into a series of interconnected town centre streets. The first phase, completed in November 2008 (along Elwick Road, Godinton Road, West Street and Forge Lane), lies alongside the primary town centre development sites. The remainder of the ring road has been converted to two-way flow with straight-across pedestrian crossings to provide low-key improvements until funding is in place to complete the works.

The Champions Group
High-level political backing was needed to support the project. The long journey to convince the sceptics was eased by the establishment of a 'Champions Group' comprising specialists from all areas of expertise and interest. This group ensured that the overall vision was not compromised by traditional, single issue, pragmatic solutions.

Changing perceptions
Public artists were integrated into the design team from the beginning in order to introduce the innovative and distinctive elements that would set Ashford apart, in addition to the radical approach to the change in traffic priority. Public art was instrumental in helping to celebrate the changing perception of this ring road. 'The Lost O' (www.losto.org) public art project was held during the Tour de France in summer 2007, when the work had just started on site. It transformed what could have been mayhem and irritation during the transition period into a celebration. Throughout the project, a media and marketing campaign, running in parallel with the Champions Group, has been invaluable in promoting the scheme at a local and national level.

An integrated and interdisciplinary design team
Kent County Council's (KCC) Regeneration Team supported the creation of the Integrated Inter-disciplinary Design Team (IDT) from the outset. Landscape architects Whitelaw Turkington led the team at detailed design stage, with the latter stages being shared equally between Jacobs (KCC's term consultants) and Whitelaw Turkington.

Shallow level changes, lighting, tree planting, seating and cycle stands guide the transformation from highway to public realm
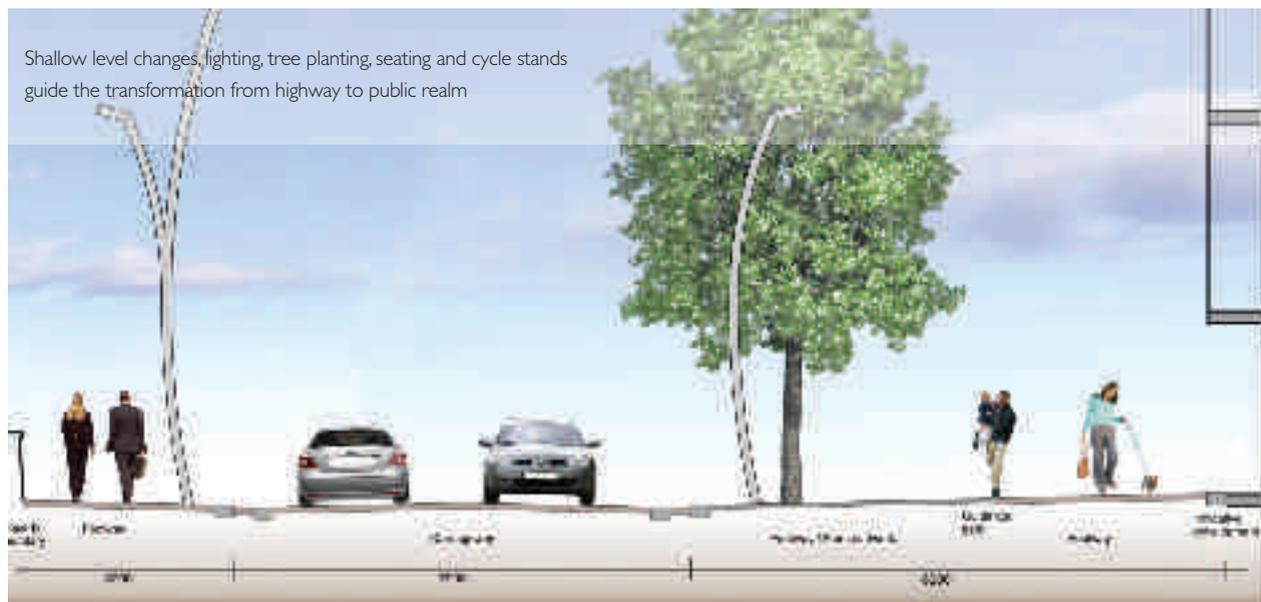
Artist John Atkin has taken reference from Ashford's engineering past and the tannery industry to establish a 'place DNA' that permeates the street at a range of scales, such as the surface inlaid forms and sculptural features at West Square, which literally directs traffic through the space

Three artists were appointed as part of the IDT from inception to completion. This has led to a healthy and, at times, challenging marriage between the creative and the functional. Yet as a consequence, the resulting works are truly embedded not only in the engineering and functioning of the street, but also in the context of Ashford.

Engagement and re-education
Such a transformation of the ring road has required an extensive programme of community engagement and, in some ways, re-education. Tenders were also assessed in terms of quality and cost, with a major emphasis on how contractors would phase work and ensure an ongoing dialogue with local residents and businesses.

Meetings with representatives from local access groups, including Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and long cane users, were set up and their concerns about safety addressed within the design concept. A 50mm upstand provides guidance for the visually impaired, and a tactile guidance strip designed into the square provides a 'safe route' away from moving vehicles.

Left, from top: Masterplan of the south-west quadrant of the ring road, now a series of connected streets, squares and public spaces

The residents have claimed part of the street for themselves. Proposals for West Street show the integrated drainage within the central linear park

Simon Nelson's 'Flume' reveals and celebrates local topographical and hydrological characteristics. As an integrated part of the drainage system, it traces the normally hidden engineered processes of rainwater management within the urban realm

Avoiding mixed messages

In order for the shared space concept to work, it is important not to give mixed messages to users of the street by reintroducing standard highway signs, lines and signals into a scheme which relies on less formal, social rules implicit in the use of the street.

Our intention was to remove all signalised crossings from the scheme and to provide courtesy crossings along natural desire lines for pedestrians. This approach was backed up by the Stage 1 Safety Audit, which also considered the potential risk of mixed messages. Nevertheless, it was decided that given the predicted volume of traffic (between 8,000 – 10,000 vehicles per day) and the valid concerns over negotiating a courtesy crossing without the possibility of driver/pedestrian eye contact, one signalised crossing has been introduced. Designed with minimum requirements for lining and associated visual clutter, it is positioned outside Elwick Square opposite the entrance to a new shopping centre extension.

Environmental transformation

The appearance of the street is paramount in providing the required signals to drivers about appropriate behaviour and speed in a scheme of this nature. It is important to give psychological clues to drivers, through the layout of the space and the language of materials used rather than through traditional highway traffic calming measures.

A complete environmental transformation at the transition point from traditional highway to shared space scheme has been created, although the usual forest of signage (20mph zone, restricted parking zone) is required at the entry to the scheme.

One consistent material is used in the carriageway and footway (a slimline natural clay paver by Vande Moortel), and the road is narrowed to appear 6m wide with a 0.5m overrun strip

> **It is important to give psychological clues to drivers, through the layout of the space and the language of materials used, rather than through traditional highway traffic calming measures**

introduced to cope with the park and ride buses. Subtle gateways are created at each transition point in a mid-grey granite, with shallow level changes, lighting, tree planting, seating and cycle stands completing the transformation from highway to public realm.

Technical performance, buildability and maintenance were as much of a consideration as aesthetics when it came to material specification. The client supported the use of high quality natural materials to set the standard for future town centre projects and provide an enduring design aesthetic.

Lindsey Whitelaw is a director at Whitelaw Turkington

KEY POINTS
- A strong delivery framework and vision drove the project forward. In this case the enlightened client was also the local highways authority
- An integrated, multi-disciplinary design team took a design-led approach with an emphasis on placemaking, as opposed to slavishly following rigid highway standards and guidelines
- The design team took an inclusive approach requiring extensive consultation; careful specification and detailing of materials met demanding performance criteria

PRACTICE DETAILS
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THE REGENERATION RIPPLE
STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

Latham's much-heralded transformation of the Victorian Quarter, Leeds, created both a successful local retail destination and a catalyst for wider city centre regeneration, says **Marc Sanderson**

It is by no means uncommon to celebrate the success of urban design projects within months, or sometimes even days, of their conclusion. But the real impact of the sought-after 'regeneration ripple' can only be seen and judged over years, or even decades. Leeds' successful transformation into a business, retail and cultural success story, for example, has been well documented in recent years. So much so that it is sometimes difficult to remember the late 1980s when the Victoria Quarter project was first mooted.

Frank Matcham designed the County Arcade as a fashionable shopping centre in the Edwardian heyday of Leeds. By the late 1980s it had lost its upmarket appeal, and become a mish-mash of plastic and neon shop fascias offering mainly second-hand and discounted goods. This was symptomatic of the wider area, which was generally in poor shape and stuck in what appeared to most observers to be a downward spiral.

The owners, Prudential, had acquired the County Arcade as

A huge amount of architectural detail was restored or carefully managed to ensure consistency through the area. All surviving Edwardian mahogany shop fronts on the estate were restored; signage and graphics rigorously controlled; original terracotta faience finishes repaired and cleaned; ironwork painted and high quality paving, landscaping and fittings designed and fitted in Queen Victoria Street. The single most significant design challenge was a 'means of escape in case of fire' caused by covering a hitherto open street

part of the larger Leeds Estate, which included the Cross Arcade and the adjacent Queen Victoria Street. It was quickly apparent that this investment needed reinvigorating, and so they invited ideas from the retail interior designers McColl and regeneration specialists Lathams.

Making change happen

Derek Latham was a member of the Lathams team faced with the challenge of making change happen. He believes that the key to the project's success lies in not relying on a simple restoration of the existing architecture, but in building from a complete reappraisal of the role and context of the whole Leeds estate.

'At the heart of this was understanding the role that The County Arcade and its neighbouring street played in linking the main office areas to the west and the extensive markets and bus station to the east,' he says. 'This provided a constant throughput of potential customers, so it would be hard to imagine a better location for shops. The challenge was to create a destination rather than a route.'

The clinching concept in the whole Lathams scheme was to continue in Leeds' grand theatre tradition by creating a new shopping arcade along the adjacent Queen Victoria Street, pedestrianised and roofed in glass. This new arcade encouraged passers-by to linger by protecting them from the elements. Even more inviting were the restaurants, cafes and wine bars that spill out on to the pavement, along with a range of public artworks,
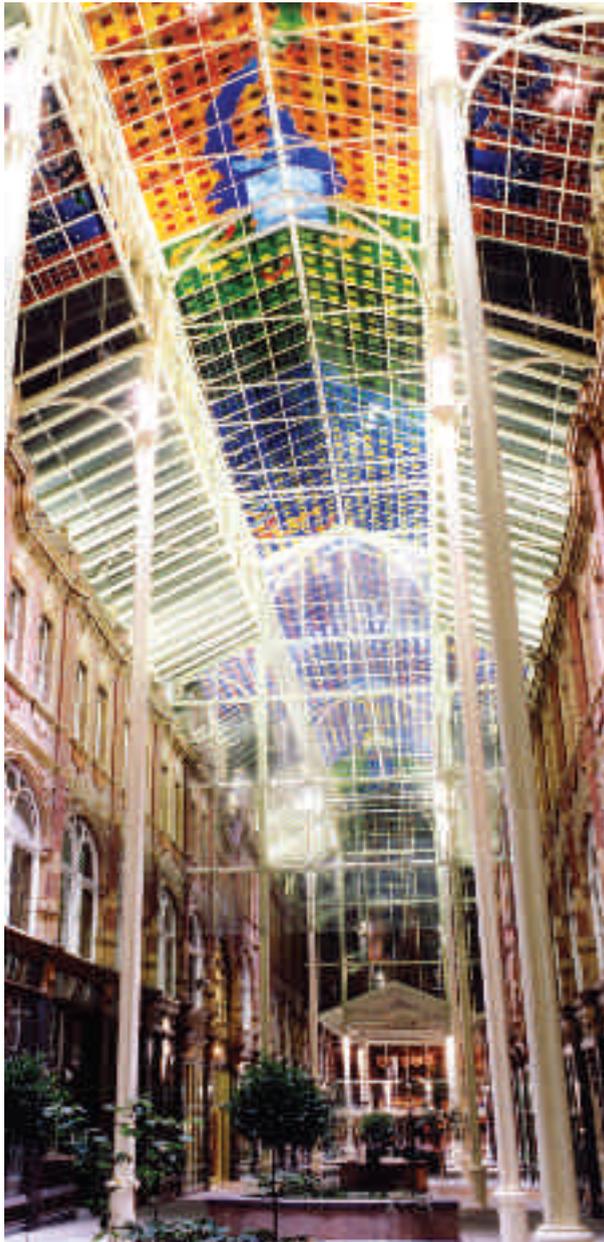
The arcade, pedestrianised and roofed in glass, encouraged passers-by to linger by protecting them from the elements

> "Without any hesitation I would say that the Victoria Quarter was the catalyst for the major regeneration of the whole of the retail core of the city centre. The scheme reopened the city's east-west routes, linking the more prosperous areas through to the city markets. It provided an absolutely vital link that simply helped the city to work better

including gates and mosaics, which help to transform the shopping experience.

The original scheme did not include the site of the 19th century Frank Matcham-designed theatre, which had been the cultural centrepiece of the development. The theatre burnt down in the 1950s, and the intention had been to include it in the scheme, but the budget at the time did not allow for such a purchase. The success of the scheme was proven when the theatre was finally purchased from the proceeds of the Victoria Quarter's increasing value. It was demolished and rebuilt as the Harvey Nichols department store, crowning the development as the queen of retail outlets in Leeds.

Arcade artworks
By far the most spectacular of the arcade's artworks is Brian Clarke's technicolour stained-glass roof for the new arcade in Queen Victoria Street. Totalling 750 sq m in area, it was the largest secular commission of stained glass in the world, and is described in Clarke's own words as 'an unending floor of liquid colour'.

The project, which saw the area rebranded as the Victoria Quarter, quickly proved itself successful in its own terms. The quality and variety of retailers improved out of all recognition, and the arcades did indeed become a sought-after location. But the effect was much wider, and much more enduring, than that.

'Without any hesitation I would say that the Victoria Quarter was the catalyst for the major regeneration of the whole of the retail core of the city centre,' said Peter Vaughan, Major Project Officer at Leeds City Council.

'What the Victoria Quarter scheme did was reopen the east-west routes, linking the more prosperous areas through to the city markets. It provided an absolutely vital link that simply helped the city to work better.

'As a piece of restoration work, it was absolutely first-class. Secondly it sorted out a lot of technical issues such as fire and smoke containment. Thirdly, the public art had a huge impact.

'From the moment it was implemented it has been the ripple effect that has been its greatest legacy. The ripple has run north and south, up and down Briggate and Vicar Lane, and the retail impact of that has been immense. The highest profile element was obviously the arrival of Harvey Nichols, but the whole area now houses designer boutiques, stylish cafes and the like – it remains a hugely popular place.'

Lessons learned
The lessons learned from of the Victoria Quarter are very much in the minds of city planners today. The project brought back into focus the tradition of covered arcades in the city and bright open public spaces, as opposed to artificially-lit and closed malls. Continuing that traditional has brought into play a number of other factors, such as ensuring that the external character of a space is maintained, investing in good quality paving materials, and using glazed ends to ensure the legibility and connectivity of the schemes.

Above all else, it is clear that development or regeneration schemes under consideration today are looking at a radically different retail environment to the one they would have found 20, or even 15 years ago. There are important lessons to be learned about the need to take managed risks in order to follow a vision. At the time, it was thought unlikely that retailers would accept shop units with uniform fascias and signage, as the only other place that this had been achieved was the Burlington Arcade. Following the success of Victoria Quarter, however, several developments have followed suit, using this approach as a way of driving an image upmarket. The key is to provide a distinct

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The project brought back into focus the tradition of covered arcades in the city and bright open public spaces, as opposed to artificially lit and closed malls

identity, both through design and the management of lettings to a predetermined balance of complimentary retailers, so that each benefits from limited direct competition along with the support of outlets of similar quality in different fields. The Victoria Quarter is a managed environment with control over maintenance and public access, ensuring that the quality of place can be assured.

Peter Vaughan has no doubts about where it all started. 'The Victoria Quarter scheme was the first to turn the tide. It was quickly followed by the regeneration of the city markets, and then the Corn Exchange. The ripple effect can be seen throughout the area, and it stands as a real landmark in the city's regeneration.'

KEY POINTS
• The Victoria Quarter scheme reopened the east-west routes, linking the more prosperous areas through to the city markets, providing a vital city link
• The tradition of covered arcades in the city and bright open public spaces, as opposed to artificially lit and closed malls
• The need to maintain the external character of space
• The benefit of investing in good quality paving materials, and using glazed ends to ensure the legibility and connectivity of the schemes

PRACTICE DETAILS
Lathams
www.lathamarchitects.co.uk
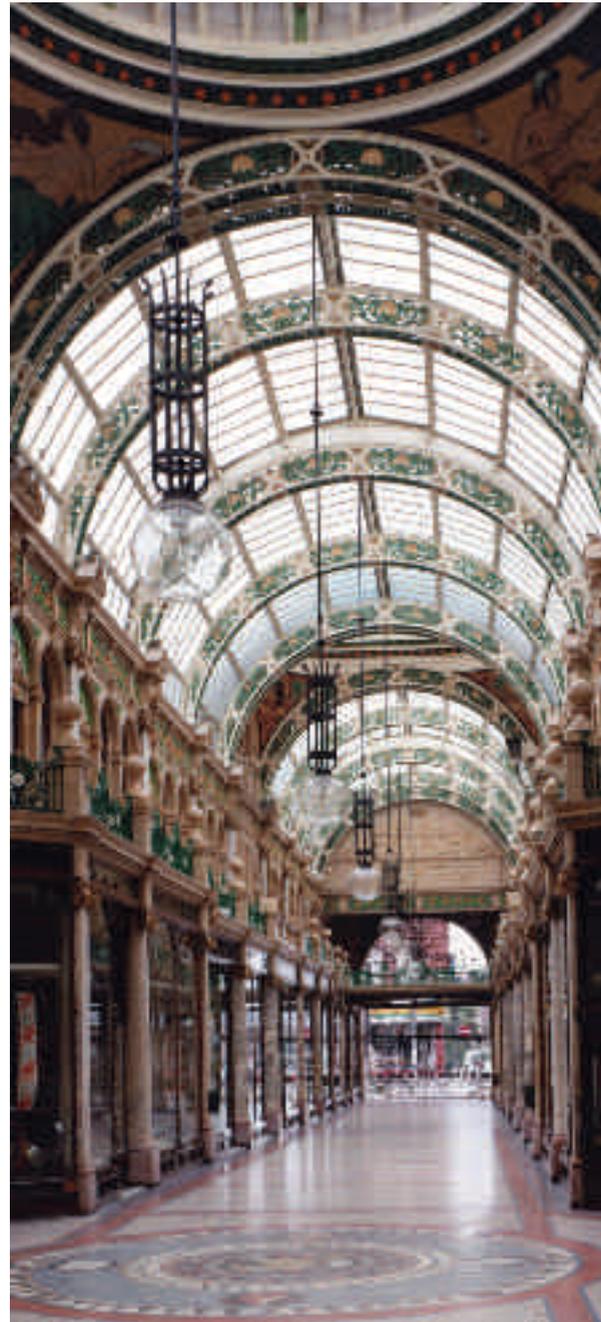
Railings and gates conceived by Lathams and made by blacksmith sculptor Jim Horrobin turned the necessity of security into added value

DELIVERING CHANGE

The zero carbon growth regeneration of Elephant & Castle, London, is based on an understanding of key spatial implications: access to transport, energy, education and housing. By **Jennifer Ross**

Illustrative masterplan, 2004

Elephant & Castle occupies a pivotal position close to the centre of London. Approaching from the south, several major vehicular routes converge before fanning out again to bridge the river Thames. The area is focused on two major roundabouts with pedestrian underpasses. The product of comprehensive redevelopment in the 1960s, the core of the area features a system-built housing estate of 1,212 dwellings and a shopping complex, serving a local population with many social and economic problems.

In the late 1990s, Southwark Council (the major landowner of the core area, as well as the local authority) realised that comprehensive regeneration was needed to address the complex and interlinked failings of the area. The council ran a competitive process to select a preferred development partner. However, for a number of reasons, including both planning and design issues, the deal was never finalised.

Southwark then decided to take a far more active role in the process of masterplanning and development. It wished to clarify what regeneration was aiming to achieve, and to put into place a statutory planning framework for assessing future proposals.

Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design was appointed as planning and urban design advisor to the regeneration team, and worked closely with officers to define the new approach, identify key spatial principles and coordinate a team of specialist consultants, including: Foster & Partners (more recently MAKE), Gehl architects, Space Syntax, JMP, Roger Tym & Partners, Arup, GVA Grimley and Battle McCarthy (more recently Brian Dunlop & Associates), all working together to come up with an achievable vision for regeneration.

Spatial planning was placed at the heart of the regeneration approach. Based on the vision, Tibbalds prepared a comprehensive development framework document for the core area. This identified the change that was required, and defined urban design principles to guide the future redevelopment of key sites.
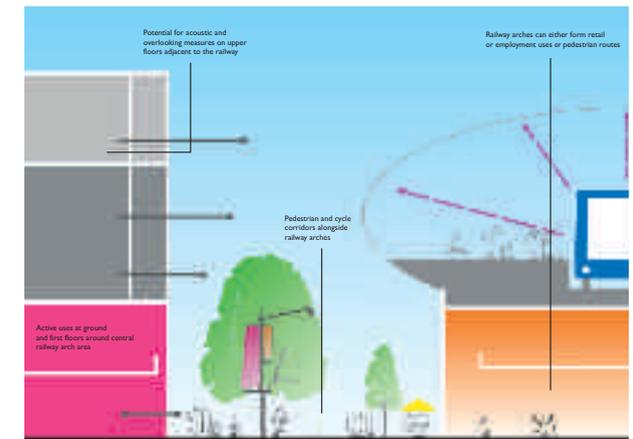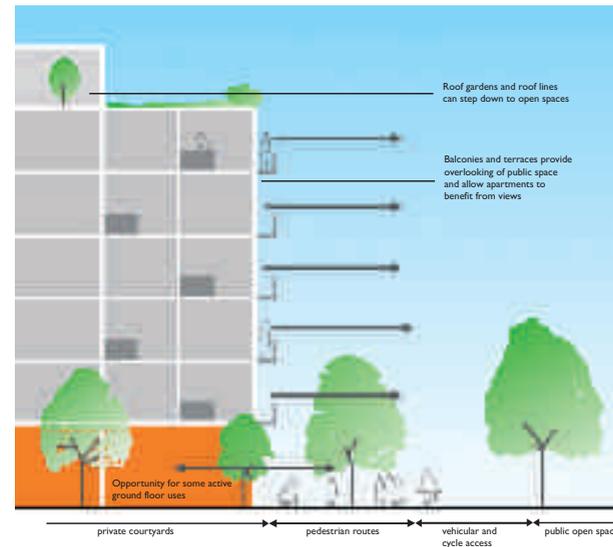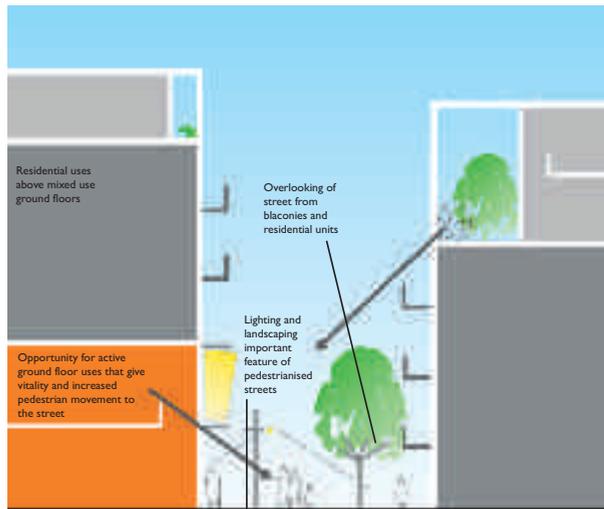
A comprehensive development framework document defined urban design principles to guide the future redevelopment of key sites

The vision for Elephant & Castle is to create a high density, sustainable town centre that makes the most of its highly accessible location on the edge of central London

Although produced ahead of the introduction of the new planning system in England, the development framework guidance corresponds broadly to an Area Action Plan, in terms of:

- considering the place as a whole, not just in terms of land use, to understand the spatial implications of issues such as transport, energy, education and housing
- putting in place a comprehensive evidence base to support the changes required, for instance including modelling pedestrian movement and accessibility;
- creating a clear focus on delivery from the outset, for instance identifying sites within the area for replacement affordable housing;
- integrating sustainable approaches to energy, waste and water so as to promote a sustainable form of development; and
- emphasising the importance of design and environmental quality.

Capacity for the new development has been identified as in the order of up to 75,000 sq m of retail and complementary town centre uses, 32,000sqm of mixed employment floorspace, and 4,200 new and 1,100 replacement residential units. It will support a broad mix of uses and activities to complement the existing Walworth Road shopping street; this will take the form of an extended high street rather than the all too prevalent indoor shopping mall. A mix of housing types and tenures will create a diverse community in the area, as well as re-housing all existing tenants who wish to remain locally.

The strategic road network will be altered to make it easier for people to move around on foot and by cycle; interventions will include surface crossings and the removal or adaptation of roundabouts where capacity allows. There is excellent public transport accessibility by underground, rail and bus, so the new development could be largely car-free and will contribute to public transport improvements.

Zero carbon growth

The development will be zero carbon growth, maintaining carbon emissions overall at their current level despite almost tripling the available floor space. To achieve this, the package of measures includes area-wide data services and water supply, and an area-based Combined Heat and Power (CHP) system. Waste will be dealt with via an underground vacuum system.

Tibbalds' comprehensive development framework provided the evidence base for setting specific planning requirements for reducing the consumption of energy, waste and water, based on a series of development capacity and technical feasibility studies. All developments within the area are expected to contribute towards:

- reducing carbon emissions from total energy needs by at least 10 per cent through area-based energy generation and renewable technologies integrated into buildings;
- reducing the demand for drinking water by 20 per cent and provide untreated groundwater for non-drinking purposes;

'Early Housing' sites have been designed by a range of architects, including (from left) Metaphorm Architects, AOC Architects, and DDRM Architects (front and back of completed homes)

- providing a fibre optic network to all addresses;
- establishing a Multi-Utility Services Company (MUSCo) to provide and run all the sustainable community infrastructure to meet these targets.

Connection to MUSCo services has been made a condition of planning approvals and a Section 106 obligation. Southwark Council has prepared technical documents that set out the requirements for connecting to the network so that all developments will be compatible with the sustainable infrastructure.

From spatial planning to delivery

Southwark Council formally adopted Tibbalds' comprehensive development framework document as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in February 2004. More recently, development pressures in other parts of the Elephant & Castle area, such as Walworth Road and the Enterprise Quarter around London South Bank University, have led to the Tibbalds' team preparing detailed Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) to guide the

process of change in these areas. A spatial strategy for re-housing existing tenants on a series of 'Early Housing' sites within the local area was also developed. The 'Early Housing' sites were identified as 'demonstration project' opportunities, showing how change could improve the area.

The SPG also played a key role in the procurement of a developer partner who would commit to Southwark's vision for the future, by means of a three-stage *Official Journal of the European Community* (OJEU) process. In 2008, Lendlease was selected as the Council's preferred development partner. Despite the 'credit crunch', negotiations are progressing towards the signing of a formal development agreement, now anticipated in mid-2009. Planning permissions have been granted for the 'Early Housing' sites and works are about to start on site. Dalkia plc, Veolia and Independent Fibre Networks have been selected as the council's sustainable infrastructure partners, and works are now progressing.

Jennifer Ross is a director at Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design

KEY POINTS
- The development has its heart in spatial planning, considering the place as a whole and not just in terms of land use
- A detailed evidence base was created to support development principles
- The development will be zero carbon growth, despite tripling the available floorspace

PRACTICE DETAILS
Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design
www.tibbalds.co.uk

> The masterplan and design approach evolved significantly to take account of the requirements and aspirations of various interested groups, consultees, organisations and the wider public

RE-MAKING A MARKET TOWN

Evidence-based research including social economic surveys, housing audits and demographic studies informed the decision-making process and design rationale for the East Street, Farnham, town centre extension. By **Paul Hogston**

Site boundary

Existing retail area adjacent to the site is a potential for additional retail activity

Existing on-site movement desire lines inform the future layout of the site

favourable vehicular access in both East Street as well as Dogflud Way

Proximity to main public services including shopping area, hospital, schools as well as transportation nodes such as bus stops, car parks and train station

Gateways to site

Long views into the site including views from the Castle

Potential focal points

Existing landscape such as Haren Gardens, Brightwell Gardens and Borelli Walk and potential green fingers infiltration to the site

Potential development plots allowing for optimal permeability, legibility and accessibility

Site orientation to sunlight

The urban design framework creates quality public realm spaces and permeable design with strong links to the town centre

The site forms the transitional link between the historic core of Farnham to the west and the less-attractive, low-quality development to the east. It currently contains a disjointed mix of surface level car parking, derelict buildings and under-utilised open space. It suffers from poor legibility, a lack of permeability and linkage to the town centre, low quality built form and neglected public realm. Acting as masterplanners, urban designers and architects, Scott Brownrigg aims to regenerate the 4.5 Ha site, creating a development that promotes access for all. A renewed public realm will provide a town square, public gardens and space for café bars, restaurants, retail, leisure and community facilities.

At times progress has been difficult. The consultation and planning processes became highly politicised as local interest groups expressed conflicting aspirations and expectations for the area. Scott Brownrigg maintained its focus on the need for high quality, design-led solutions, and the scheme has recently attracted the overwhelming support of key consultees and stakeholders. The local authority recently granted planning permission, with a councillor vote of 33 to 1 in favour.

The delivery process

Detailed contextual and technical analysis of the site and surrounding area, along with an extensive consultation programme, informed the strategic focus. Following the confirmation of Crest Nicholson Regeneration and Sainsbury's as preferred developers in 2002, discussions with the local community, stakeholders and

From left: Improved footpaths, cycle routes and cycle facilities in safe and convenient areas; the masterplan defines an improved green landscape with leisure opportunities within and around the town centre

key consultees began in earnest. The masterplan and design approach evolved significantly to take account of the requirements and aspirations of various interested groups, consultees, organisations and the wider public.

However, the urban design fundamentals remained constant throughout. In this respect, it was considered essential that pedestrian linkages with the rest of the town centre were improved. East Street will be pedestrianised and the majority of the site made 'car-free' through use of underground and multi-level car parking, and access provided on the periphery of the scheme. To reduce the impact of construction traffic within the town

centre, a temporary road and construction bridge linking the site to the adjacent by-pass will be created.

A series of high quality public spaces is proposed. Linkages provide legibility and act as important connections to the existing urban fabric. Pedestrian alleyways, a common feature of the historic core of Farnham, are used to connect a proposed new town square to the existing centre. High quality green open space, a key factor in developing the masterplan, is located within the heart of the scheme to help enrich the environment and setting of the new development.

In the centre of the site is the 18th century Grade II listed Brightwell House which, in the 1970s, was unsympathetically

extended by the addition of the Redgrave Theatre. The theatre closed in 1998 and has remained vacant. The scheme provides for the removal of the inappropriate extension and renovation of the listed building, bringing it back into beneficial use as the centrepiece of the new town square.

Local character
The proposals specifically draw upon local character and encompass the essence of place. Through careful study of the local vernacular, the scheme has been developed to utilise traditional forms, quality materials and a variety of heights and scales. The
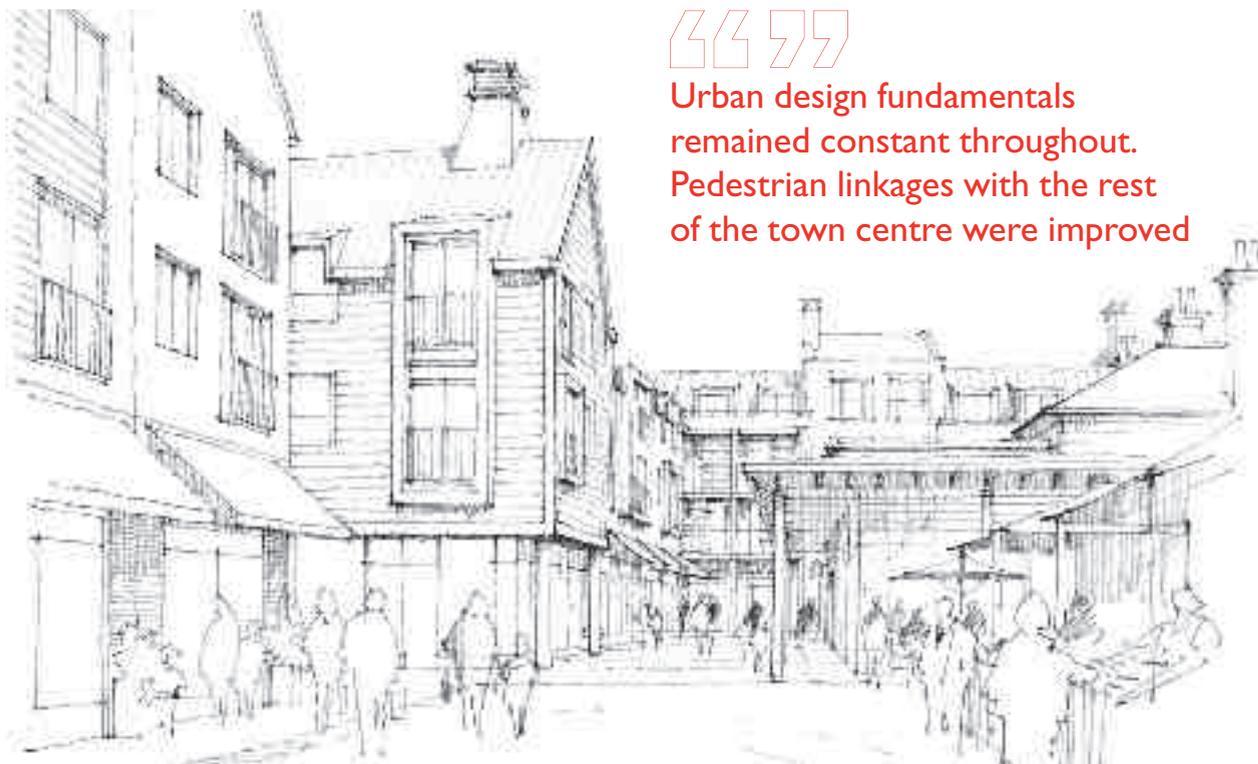
" Urban design fundamentals remained constant throughout. Pedestrian linkages with the rest of the town centre were improved **"**

Much of Farnham's street architecture has evolved from medieval times, and was significantly influenced by the Georgian period. This history has created a traditional market town with a variety and richness of building forms, styles and materials, all helping to give Farnham its special character

range of design treatments and styles – varying roofscape, the differing shop fronts and signage – all come together to create an architectural rhythm that is natural to Farnham.

The scheme provides for a new community centre and a multi-screen cinema; these being the facilities most requested in a comprehensive study undertaken by Farnham Town Council. The scheme proposes 239 additional dwellings to help contribute towards local housing needs. Apartments help screen the cinema and car park shells, and are sited to provide active frontages to main public areas. The design seeks to maximise potential of the relationship with the River Wey (south of the site). Principles of Secured by Design have been adopted throughout.

Sustainable initiatives were a fundamental element of the design process in terms of the physical and social aspects of the scheme from the outset. The design incorporates 'green walls', 'green roofs', a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant and SUDS. There will be innovative waste collection and disposal systems encouraging onsite composting and separation of waste for recycling. Onsite solar and/or wind power generation will power street lighting and other communal activities.

The experience of developing this scheme has shown that, over time, partnership, perseverance, patience and flexibility are key to resolving the complicated issues involved in regenerating a heavily constrained site. However, maintaining the principles of quality design throughout helps to ensure that positive outcomes can be delivered.

Paul Hogston is an associate with Scott Brownrigg

KEY POINTS
- A mixed-use scheme that delivers what the community wants: homes, a town square and a pedestrianised quarter
- Improved footpaths and cycle routes discourage car domination in the town and create a mobility network
- High thermal performance; green roofs and walls
- Urban designer: Luan Deda

PRACTICE DETAILS
Scott Brownrigg
www.scottbrownrigg.com
Contact: Bruce Calton, director

COMMUNICATING THE CITY

In 2005, Southampton City Council embarked on an ambitious strategy to re-image the city centre, promote legibility and create a positive identity, says **Mike Rawlinson**

The vision and organising idea for the project – to align and improve the image, identity and legibility of Southampton

Southampton is the largest city in the south-east of England, outside London. It has a major port and a huge economic impact on the region, with its retail core ranked in the top 10 in the UK. Despite being a global gateway and creative, cultural hub with a legacy of innovation in the science, aviation, transportation and educational sectors, the city has little recognition, nationally and internationally. Nor does it have a clearly defined image.

This lack of image is in part compounded by a number of inherent urban structural problems, not least a city centre that is disconnected from its waterfront and fractured by a legacy of open spaces and developments that have not been stitched coherently into the city centre. The result is a city of parts that are difficult to read as a whole.

In 2006, in partnership with Bristol, Bruges, Hagen, Kaiserslautern, Leeds and Leverkusen, the City Council was successful in attracting funding from the European Regional Development Fund through Interreg III B North West Europe Programme and the South East of England Development Agency. The focus of the programme was to pilot a series of projects and initiatives to promote the city's image, identity and legibility. From the outset, the project had the support of Southampton City Centre Management, Southampton Partnership and Business Southampton.

Two work programmes emerged. The first focused on the examination and identification of a city brand, based on fostering people-based innovation and creativity. The second explored a design strategy and visual expression of the city – a visual identity – to guide and aid the design of the city's streets and spaces, public transport infrastructure and overlaying information and wayfinding systems. This process led to the engagement of a design team led by City ID, who had also led the development of the multi award-winning Bristol Legible City project. From the outset, the design team worked in a highly collaborative way with key officers, stakeholders and members of the Council. During a series of workshops, presentations and sessions in the city, the team rapidly developed concepts and distilled ideas into concrete proposals.

Responding to challenges

In response to key challenges facing the city, the scope and course of the project evolved to address the need for a more holistic response to place branding that would improve the totality of the city's image and identity in a coordinated way. Four key challenges emerged:
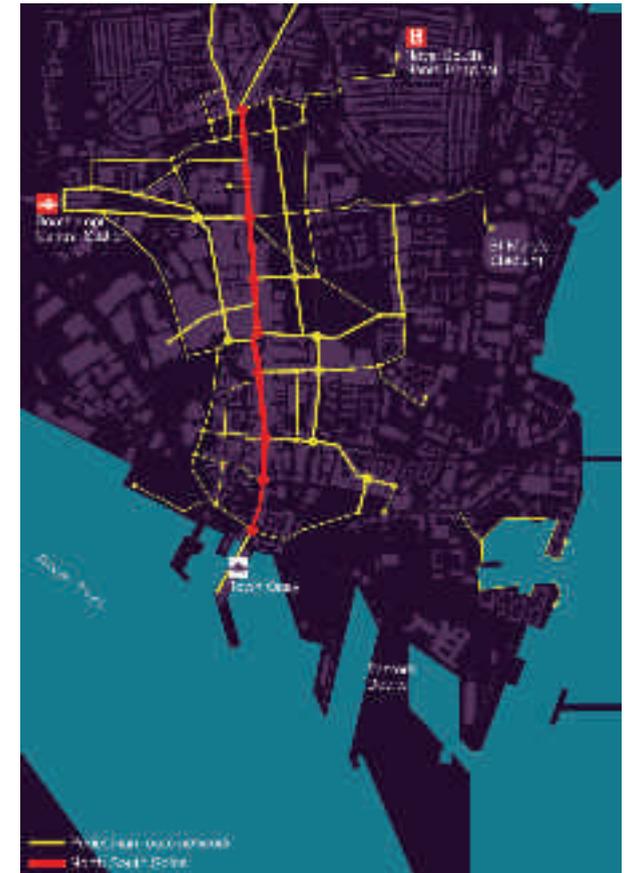
The proposed hierarchy of streets, showing the city's key north-south spine highlighted in yellow – the focus of major streetscape improvements

1. To connect the urban structure – promote a radical shift in the quality, coherence and connectedness of the urban structure;
2. To align place marketing and place making agendas – align the ongoing branding process with on-the-ground improvements that enhance the everyday experience of using the city;
3. To change current attitudes to service delivery, management and partnership working;
4. To deliver early wins of outstanding quality.

A new range of products and services are planned, linked by a specially designed visual identity that builds on the city's visual legacy. The identity includes a range of unique elements that have been created as a celebration of the colours, shapes, textures, landmarks and materials found in the city, reinforcing a sense of place and supporting the Southampton brand. The visual identity includes the design of a bespoke family of typefaces and pictogram set developed with Dalton Maag

Design approach

A design strategy and framework was developed to coordinate the delivery of a range of products and services that would help to re-connect the city. The aim was to reveal the city's hidden assets, promote sustainable transport choices and create a radically improved, pedestrian-friendly public realm that encourages exploration and a healthier lifestyle for all.

The recommended approach rejected the promotion of the city's image in isolation from direct physical measures to improve the identity and user experience of the city. Instead, a design philosophy evolved that was grounded in an urban semiotics approach – based on an understanding of the complex interactions between the functional (land use), movement and spatial components of Southampton's urban structure and its proposed information 'overlay' – the literal signs and communicated messages that collectively shape our reading of place.

A unique visual identity, initially encompassing brand identity, graphic design, illustration, cartography, product and street furniture design resources, was developed. In implementing the identity, the team's approach was to choreograph the range of design elements to provide a 'city narrative' and 'voice' for communicating the city.

The proposed visual identity, design elements and underlying brand values are now being used to develop and communicate a range of integrated services and products spanning destination marketing, inward investment and event management, as well as the design of the city's movement and information systems. These elements will contribute to the development of an over-arching 'brand book' for the city of Southampton that will lay the foundation for future design innovation and service delivery.

Ultimately, the project could influence the 'look and feel' of thousands of products and services across the city, from the design of information centres at the airport and ferry terminals, through to bus tickets, timetables, route maps, liveries and uniforms as well the design of the city's streets and spaces. The long term aim is to address more fundamental issues related to the city's underlying urban structure by reconfiguring the city's land use mix, transportation systems and the city's streets, spaces, parks and waterfront to create a better connected, user friendly and distinctive city centre.

Mike Rawlinson is design director, City ID

KEY POINTS
Direct/Guide/Show, a design publication, is now available from harriet.miller@cityid.co.uk. The publication provides further information on the project, explaining how it has been developed and how it will evolve to support future design innovation within the city

PRACTICE DETAILS
City ID: www.cityid.co.uk

A 'whole street' approach to design – the aim is to improve the quality of the city's streets and spaces. The approach has been piloted in London Road by Southampton City Council and is to be extended to the north-south spine, connecting the primary retail and cultural destinations in the city centre. Various bespoke elements have been commissioned, including seating by Chris Tipping
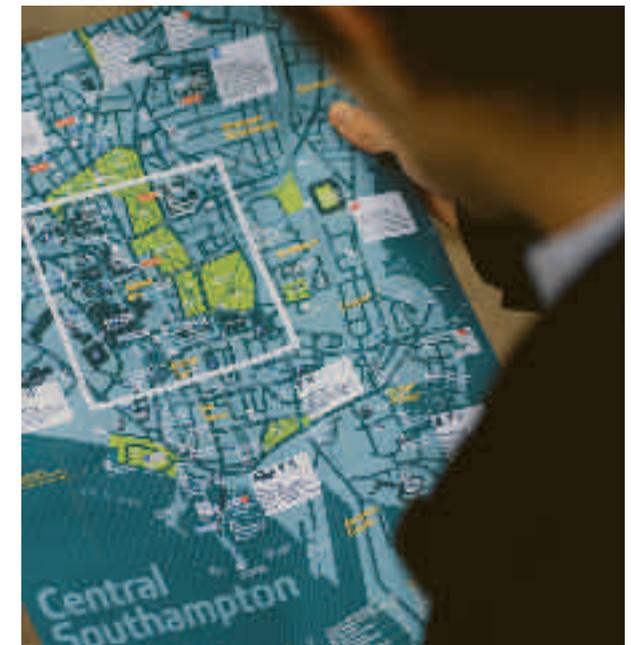
New products will also help to encourage active travel, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, whilst promoting key areas of the city. Products and services will be delivered through all channels – web, mobile, print, signs and people. They will span the complete journey from the moment of searching for Southampton online, through to arrival, getting around the city and finding and enjoying the destination

04

STAKEHOLDERS & COMMUNITIES

CAN WE 'DO' PARTICIPATORY DESIGN?

Wary of change that they cannot influence, many communities are choosing to limit the impact that development of any kind will have on their lives – for better or worse. Can we – and should we – encourage communities to re-engage with the planners by offering participation and empowerment rather than consultation? By Juliana O'Rourke

In its 2008 *Communities in Control* consultation document, CLG states: 'We want to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens. This is because we believe that they can take difficult decisions and solve complex problems for themselves.'

Speaking in December 2008, Sir Bob Kerslake, chief executive of the Homes and Community Agency (HCA), outlined his commitment to community engagement: 'We don't invest in things where we're not convinced that we're going to get a return, whether that's a social return or a financial return. I think one of the litmus tests for development is whether those seeking investment have good approaches to community engagement. We will develop a standard for community engagement, which will apply to how we do our business – and how we expect others to do it too.'

Since the planning wars of the 1980s and the battle of Twyford Down, it has become clear that huge gaps exist between the views of developers, designers, elected representatives with single-issue priorities, minority interests and the public at large. These days, the public experiences an immediate negative reaction to most development: be it roads, runways or eco towns. This negative perception has grown as we have realised that planners, architects, developers and builders have frequently made serious mistakes.

No longer does the public assume that all local authority policies, or most development proposals, are in the interests of entire communities. A recent report (Saint, March, 2009) suggested that opposition to development may have reached a plateau at 85 per cent of the population, but that Britain's hardcore contingent of active NIMBYs (those that have actually objected to a development project in the last year) has increased to 21 per cent. 'It's not about facts, it's about politics,' says the report. 'Whether it's London, England, London, Ontario, or London, Kentucky, people are going to decide based on the politics of the community.' Developers and designers need to 'spend the shoe leather and go out into the neighbourhoods', it states.

Disconnected citizens

The varied experiences of a recent two-year knowledge-sharing programme in the south-east of England (see page 11) revealed just how disconnected much of the public feels. Community members involved in engagement projects expressed serious distrust and lack of confidence in the planning system; at the same time proving themselves to be more expert on the needs of their localities than most professionals. They were certainly willing to 'get involved' if enabled to do so in ways they considered fruitful. Many complained that they are brought into the process way too late and offered no real choices: they have little interest in commenting on development options that seem designed to serve profiteers rather than people.

Do people want empowerment, rather than consultation? Evidence suggests that they need to feel at least a little encouraged that someone's going to listen to them – and have the power to act on what they hear. The recent *Disconnected Citizens* report from the Social Market Foundation suggests that 'evidence of concrete

outcomes of community empowerment is patchy at best, as is evidence of a huge and unsated public appetite for engagement'. In part, says the report, this mismatch between evidence and enthusiasm reflects that the concept itself remains ill-defined – in language, aims and ambitions. It further suggests that there is also mismatch between the Government's ambition to reinvigorate local democracy and the community empowerment mechanisms that it hopes will provide the solution.

A 'false dichotomy' between representative and participatory democracy; a failure of initiatives to transfer power in a meaningful sense, and a lack of clarity and transparency in lines of accountability for decisions all lead to the public's seeming non-interest in engagement activity. As one planning policy officer in Lewisham stated: 'It's very difficult to engage with people so you can move on to offer different channels and methods of consultation. Getting people's attention is the main sticking point for most councils. We also need to bear in mind that our efforts are measured in results.'

Engagement is part and parcel of living in a democratic society, and despite the complexities of conflicting interests, we need to do it better. Successful engagement requires a two-way flow of information – real knowledge exchange – and for those organisations leading the engagement process to be willing, and able, to act on the outcomes.

Overcoming cynicism
Such cynicism can be overcome, says Nick Wates, editor of communityplanning.net. 'The key to success is to select an appropriate sequence of methods to form a coherent overall strategy that suits the specific situation that a community faces. Where the process is well-organised, local communities can be fully involved in even highly complex planning issues, reaping huge benefits in the quality of the end product, citizen morale and even development value.'

The engagement methods he speaks of range from discussion, hands-on model manipulation, group exploration and photography, poetry sessions and visits to inspiring sites at home and abroad. Many such activities have indeed proved successful – but we need to go further, says Christoph Hadrys of the University of East London (UEL). Hadrys is organising a series of workshops with residents, academics and professionals in Beckton, east London, on local design and planning issues. 'There is no established method of employing

The learning from a project at University of East London clearly suggests that successful engagement lies in the degree of influence that people feel that they may have on issues under consideration

collaborative design practices that "build in" community participation,' says Hadrys. 'The practice of sticking to established negotiation and decision-making processes means that, all too frequently, community workshops are merely 'tick box' exercises that don't offer participants the opportunities to ask 'how' or 'why'.

'Most workshops are designed to collect information or to gauge community acceptance of pre-determined ideas, and are not regarded as key sources of design information. Established design processes "lock in" knowledge exchange gaps between planners, designers and communities. Our team wished to explore different approaches to 'doing' design, and to seek design frameworks that will enable communities to participate fully in the creative process.'

Architect Roger Zogolovitch, a member of Hadrys' team, suggests that these kinds of participatory workshops should not be thought of as 'consultations', but rather as opportunities for exploration, interaction and the recording of knowledge exchange. 'In order to determine a framework and methodology to deliver such a process in future, it's important to establish a series of objectives concerning the role of local communities in collaborative and participatory design processes, whilst remaining within current planning frameworks,' he says.

Professionals with responsibility for engaging communities agree

that, at the very least, expectations must be well-managed. 'The most successful engagement occurs when you identify what kinds of "stake" different groups have in any project,' says Adeola Dada, Southwark regeneration team. 'There are winners and losers in all initiatives, and it's important to manage expectations. Even diverse views can be handled, if the communication is honest and candid.'

The ability to deliver
It has long been recognised by practitioners that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' engagement strategy. 'The more forward-thinking and canny developers have come to understand this, especially when they are working on contentious projects,' says Julian Hart, planning consultant. 'They engage with, and involve, the local community from an early stage in order to pre-empt problems at a later stage, by which time it would be very expensive to change course and would increase "planning risk". Unfortunately, such developers are few and far between. A great deal of consultation for the purposes of planning determination is still a very cynical affair.' Local authorities may be full of good intentions when seeking to consult with local communities, says Hart, 'but the real issue lies in their ability to follow through and deliver.'

Engagement practice needs to promote social sustainability alongside economic and environmental sustainability. Successful engagement is complex, intensive, creative and expensive work, frequently reliant on the communications skills and strategies of individuals rather than rooted in robust policy, practice or process. While there is useful generic understanding of these processes, context is critical.

Wary of change that it cannot influence, many communities are currently choosing to limit the impact it will have on their lives – for better or worse. There are three possible responses to be made, says Hart. One: let it happen. Two: call this a failure of local democracy and enable policymakers to drive through a more sustainable and planned development. Three: view it as a failure not of democracy itself, but of democratic processes. Instead of removing choice from the community, should we be looking to enable communities to better understand, influence and so embrace the change that is happening around them? Ideally, this would lead to more informed choices being made, although such a route will likely require substantial investment in both time and resources. Which response leads to the most sustainable future?

DON'T TELL US, ASK US…

Effective community engagement enables communities to get organically involved in the design process. It's not easy, and it's not cheap, but it's the best way to deliver stakeholder buy-in and to move complex schemes forward. A successful project in Washington, USA, outlines what can be achieved…

Placemaking is a complex task requiring input from a wide range of professionals and community stakeholders. Parsons Brinckerhoff's multidisciplinary PlaceMaking team, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, blends urban design skills with the company's traditional transport design expertise to create viable and liveable communities. Its key focus, however, is human interaction and the building of 'civic infrastructure'.

'The core of how we work is community engagement,' says GB Arrington, head of the PlaceMaking team. 'There are two ways to handle community involvement. One is to tell people what you're going to do, and the other is to ask what you should do. We do the latter.'

'For better or worse,' says Arrington, 'Europeans don't look to America for inspiration on community engagement. In a simplistic way,' he says, speaking with the experience of a UK planning education, 'I would say that the UK community engagement process is by checkbox, with an emphasis on talking to all the people. But even when you talk to the right people, there's a difference between talking and actually listening. We aim to have people organically involved in the design process.'

Fear of risk-taking and weak client vision are often cited as excuses for poor placemaking. As Arrington points out, there's risk in genuinely engaging communities and stakeholders in the design process. 'Clients can get really nervous, because essentially the design team is sharing power with the people that are brought to the table,' says Arrington. 'But the other way to look at it is that you're not just sharing power, you're borrowing the power of others. By owning the outcome, those involved bring their clout back to the process and allow the results of the process to become real. This builds a stronger political base for being able to move projects forward.'

PB's PlaceMaking team has recently been leading on a complex urban design framework and engagement strategy for the radical Tyson's Corner development in the US: an 'edge city' halfway between Dulles International Airport and downtown Washington DC. 'Tyson's is a place that grew up defined by the automobile,' says Arrington. 'You could describe it as a suburban apocalypse.'

In October 2008, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (the local authority for Tyson's Corner) accepted the recommendations of a 37-member Land Use Task Force that had

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3

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Before | After

5

There's risk in genuinely engaging communities and stakeholders in the design process. Clients can get really nervous, because essentially the design team is sharing power with the people that are brought to the table

1,2,3: Community members attended meetings and small workshops, working with hands-on tools to explore design scenarios
4,5: As the sessions moved on, more complex ideas were considered and discussed, with progress rooted in outcomes from the previous session

been debating the Tyson's development plans for more than three years. The board finally voted, said the local *Washington Business Journal*, 'on a proposal that managed to garner the support of the business community and environmental groups alike'.

The comprehensive engagement strategy that successfully brought stakeholders and community members together was developed by Arrington's team. The client, the Land Use Task Force, comprised landowners, elected officials professionals and advocacy groups for both developers and neighbourhoods. The task force was formed to create a vision for the area, mediating between the many conflicting views that development proposals raised. The project land is in fragmented private ownership in an

'unincorporated' county. A development moratorium on the area proclaimed that no new development would be allowed until the planning proposals emerged. 'That created a lot of angst,' says Arrington. 'But it also bought us time to get through the process without more bad things happening.'

Although the range of opinion it represented was diverse, the taskforce brought the PB team on board with good, but unrealistic, intentions, says Arrington. 'When they hired us, they thought that they were broad-based enough to be "the community". We suggested that they should bring in an even broader group of people.' The taskforce agreed, and a series of community-wide workshops was organised.

'At that point, the task force realised that by engaging the community once, they had the responsibility of engaging the community continuously. This changed the whole design process and the schedule of the project. The complete task force held more than 60 meetings, with many more held among its subcommittees. All were open to the public. In addition, 45 public meetings and workshops were attended by more than 2,000 participants. Importantly, the first meetings were held at the beginning of the process before any actual plans were drafted, with additional meetings and workshops held at key decision points throughout the process.

Realising that it's very difficult to plan for 1,760 acres in one go,

6,7: By the end of the process, workshop participants could feel like local experts with a sense of ownership of design proposals.
Computer generated visualisations and 3D models of the site show what future growth might look like

the placemaking process looked at a series of discrete districts. 'We brought in designers to take workshops with groups of six, and to generate ideas. People could feel as if they were experts in an area. We reframed the questions, and gave people design tools. We started with very simple Lego-like blocks for allocating different kinds of growth. But by the end of the process, we were showing sophisticated computer generated visualisations of what growth looked like, and 3D models of the entire site built out.' With each session, the involvement process began by going over the outcomes from the previous meeting. 'We'd say, this is what you told us last time. So this is what we've done. Now, what do we need to do next?'

The PB approach suggests that successful community engagement is creative, resource-heavy and expensive. The PB team worked hard to get people to understand and 'own' key concepts, and then moved through a series of alternatives towards tangible and specific options. 'What was interesting is that people became owners and advocates of the plan. Of course, we had lots of time to work with the various groups, and a reasonable budget. We spent a million dollars on this process.'

As well as consulting with the task force, the PB team arranged meetings with a range of potential stakeholders. 'We talked to employers, and also approached neighbourhood representatives on the project fringes about their concerns. We held our design workshops during the day and over multiple evenings so that different people could come. And we put everything on the web because this is a high technology corridor, and we didn't have problems with people having access to the internet.' The website featured summaries and materials from each meeting and videos of presentations from public meetings. Online input was used to augment public meetings and workshops. Regular emails, fact sheets, and in-depth media coverage also kept the public informed. This broader public input helped to shape the direction of the recommendations from the very beginning.

The long journey to task force agreement has not been an easy one, and reflects the need for stakeholders to be involved in design processes, and not merely asked to comment on finished schemes. Placemaking is about human interaction and building relationships. A sense of trust and involvement is key. 'We're building civic infrastructure and civic engagement. This creates a sense of trust. People engage because they believe that their involvement will make a difference,' says Arrington.

Juliana O'Rourke spoke to GB Arrington

Planning for Tyson's Corner

The 1,700-acre area has only 17,000 inhabitants. There are 46 million square feet of buildings and 40 million square feet of parking for 120,000 people working there. The new plans will see Tyson's Corner divided into eight neighbourhoods with a street grid system, open space, and commercial and residential properties served by four Metro stations. Developers will be able to build taller and more densely near those stations. All new construction will meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ratings. Tyson's Corner will be turned into a model for mass transit-oriented development (TOD). Significant changes will include:

- A dramatic increase in housing at different income levels to create a balance of residents and workers;
- Eight pedestrian-oriented neighbourhoods of mixed use development;
- Taller buildings and higher densities near Metrorail tapering to lower densities at the borders with surrounding neighbourhoods;
- Extensive venues and opportunities for arts, culture, and recreation;
- Less overall parking, with much of it placed underground
- More local streets which invite and protect pedestrians with sidewalks, trees, street level retail, and facilities for bicycles;
- Efficient and frequent transit to rapidly move people throughout Tyson's Corner;
- Main routes 7 and 123 serving as tree-lined boulevards to calm traffic while still allowing it to move through Tyson's;
- New buildings constructed to green standards;
- New open spaces and parks connecting people and neighbourhoods.

"

The design principle is to work with what already exists, introducing minimal interventions to spark people's creativity and to gain local community-based organisations' support for the upgrading programme

CINDERELLA WILL GO TO THE FOOTBALL

While the Greater Ellis Park area of Johannesburg is enjoying major regeneration ripples from the 2010 World Cup, urban designer ASM has focused on re-connecting and uplifting a community blighted by 'apartheid' planning practices

Aerial masterplan

BRT route

Railway

1. Northern gateway
2. Siemert Sivewright upgrade
3. Eastern gateway
4. Bertrams + Bezuidenhout Road upgrade
5. Nugget + Saratoga Road upgrade
6. Ellis Park Square
7. Ellis Park station node
8. Doorfontein Station node
9. End Street park

Albonico Sack Mzumara (ASM), an architectural and urban design practice based in Johannesburg, South Africa, was appointed by the Johannesburg Development Agency, in association with MMA Architects, to prepare an urban design framework and business plan for the city's Greater Ellis Park development. With Ellis Park Stadium selected as one of the venues that will host the 2010 World Cup, the Greater Ellis Park precinct, an area housing many of the city's sports complexes, has benefited from a ZAR 2 billion facelift (£145,000,000).

An area of social diversity

The greater Ellis Park area comprises approximately 260 hectares including four of Johannesburg's oldest residential neighbourhoods, with a registered population of about 14,000 people (2001 census). However, the current population, according to random sample surveys of legal and illegal residents, is approximately three times higher. The Doornfontein, New Doornfontein, Bertrams and Troyeville areas have significant heritage resources and have historically been home to a mixed population, in terms of both income and racial background. Since the mid-1980s, the social diversity and richness of the area has been compromised by steady decline in public and private investment.

The Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), through its inner-city development programme, is actively addressing this

The African Angels watch over the environment

decline. Initiatives include upgrading infrastructure, improving environmental conditions, stimulating investment, promoting the development of affordable housing and the conversion of derelict buildings to more suitable uses. In addition, issues related to city management, safety and security are being addressed.

The 2010 Soccer World Cup has been a springboard for economic and social regeneration. In this case, two key urban design drivers have been upgrading the Ellis Park stadium and surrounding public spaces; and the introduction of a citywide bus rapid transport (BRT) system, connecting the precinct to the city, serving surrounding educational institutions and alleviating the impact of parking associated with the upgraded sports facilities.

Working with existing elements
The design principle is to work with what already exists, introducing minimal interventions to spark people's creativity and to gain local community-based organisations' support for the upgrading programme. The area's key resources – cultural diversity, heritage, environmental features and human resources have all been as important in this process as upgrading the area's infrastructure and unleashing its economic potential. While the area has many assets, there are widespread challenges: unplanned informal trading, poor and unsafe transportation solutions, a lack of accessible social and entertainment facilities, fragmented land use, poorly maintained commercial and

industrial buildings, many of which were being used as unofficial residences, and a poorly managed public realm, leading to safety and security concerns.

Local buy-in has been partially achieved through the provision of social and affordable housing, the redesign of neighbourhood parks – complete with management initiatives – and the introduction of community sporting facilities and youth programmes. However, much remains to be done to support the significant homeless and dispossessed population that currently lives in unacceptable conditions. If this issue is not handled in an effective and sustainable manner, it may very well undermine the progress made to date.

Given the transient nature of the population and South Africa's history, dealing with crime and urban management are still the project's biggest challenges. Even though 'design out crime' principles have been applied to various facilities, the reality is that good design alone cannot prevent people committing crime, especially in an environment with such a stark contrast between 'haves' and 'have nots'. Reduction in crime requires passive and active surveillance supported by an ongoing community-based awareness programme – all of which rely on continued community participation. To this end, the local police department has organised such a programme run by volunteers from the community.

Public art: cultural cows and African Angels
Historical connections with the city's 'old town' are celebrated and reinforced. The heritage routes, with their particular character defined by early Johannesburg architecture, are linked to green corridors and a network of vibrant city streets with strong local character. This system is primarily pedestrian-oriented with an emphasis on bringing in public art at various intervals to capture the spirit of place and showcasing the work of emerging local artists.

The introduction of public art is also an attempt to transform the neighbourhood's unsafe spots, such as the notorious area around Joe Slovo Drive and Beit Street. A collection of artworks known as the African Angels watch over the environment, symbolically representing hope and elevation for the human spirit across all creeds. The African Angels concept represents the belief that every city needs its guardian angels; symbols of hope and elevation for the human spirit across all creeds. Rather

Local art reflects the forthcoming event and and city life

Nguni cows are symbolically important and celebrated

than evoking Christian religious connotations, the angels reflect a time when many ancient cities were dedicated to, and protected by, gods.

Central Square as a connection
The Central Square of the Ellis Park Sport Precinct is of major importance for sport and social interaction. The design aims to increase unity and flexibility, and creates a space through which large crowds can comfortably pass. The square establishes a connection between the two stadiums. The square's clear edges

are defined by a double line of trees while the large scale is composed of sub-spaces as far as possible.

The origin of the Juskei River is also celebrated within this space by means of an interactive water feature in which children can learn about the historic river system. The water feature works in four parts: fine mist bubblers symbolise origin, followed by small jets and a transition to larger bubblers symbolising the flow of a river. The feature concludes in a waterfall structure that further enhances the idea of origin and magnitude. Sculptural, indigenous trees and focal planting provide emphasis and an aesthetically pleasing environment around the water feature.

Transport Square links with city
The second high-activity open space upgraded is the New Doornfontein Transport Square. This area was derelict and had become increasingly dangerous over the years. The redesigned taxi rank accommodates the same number of taxis as before. In addition, a market and a basketball court have been constructed and landscaping includes a stand of indigenous trees. A herd of Nguni cows celebrates the importance of cattle in local culture, reflecting the formal and informal commercial activities in the surrounding area, and softening this relatively harsh space. The upgrading of the taxi rank highlights that this precinct is not only about public spaces, but also about connections that should be celebrated and made more attractive to users.

Essentially, the emphasis has been on the integration of an improved public transport system to reduce the need for private cars, and the design of green corridors to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians, connecting various destinations within the area.

Green corridors stitch the area together
The network of public open spaces and green corridors help to enhance legibility and sense of place. Formerly 'lost' spaces dotted along a 2 km route have been turned into pocket parks connecting to the renewed existing parks along the Juskei river valley.

In the early stages of the process, there was a general apathy and lack of faith in what could be achieved through the collective process. Strong and uncompromising leadership and commitment from the city's stakeholders was needed to get everyone pursuing the same objectives, and to ensure synergy between public private investment in the short and medium term.

Ellis Park: The new configuration visualised

Legacy projects
Viewed as the 'Cinderella' project of 2010, Ellis Park stands to benefit greatly in terms of legacy. The introduction of a city-wide public transport system, the re-design of the Doornfontein railway station to comply with international standards and the proposed Ellis Park Central Square – new public space and park in the heart of education and sporting facilities – are amongst the most significant interventions. Work on upgrading and converting existing buildings to create 2,000 affordable residential units in close proximity to the stadiums is evidence of a new impetus in private investment.

For the city, however, ensuring that the local community benefits from the influx of visitors to the area, and from the infrastructure provided, during and after the event, remains a major challenge.

Oliver Spratley spoke to Monica Albonico, a partner at Albonico Sack Mzumara

KEY POINTS
• The project is focused on creating local 'buy in'
• Minimal interventions will spark creativity and gain local community-based organisations' support
• Existing community tensions need to be resolved to help reduce crime – passive and active surveillance supported by a community-based awareness programme has been set up

PRACTICE DETAILS
Albonico Sack Mzumara: http://asmarch.com

South African Cities Network
http://www.sacities.net/members/sustainable.stm

Shared aspirations for this project, from client Sovereign Housing Association, working with Cavanna Homes and Torbay Council, include the delivery of an 'exemplar' sustainable, mixed tenure housing scheme. The sustainability targets set mean achieving the highest practical environmental standards; Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) levels 3 & 5. The project is expected to have a 'wow' factor; a landmark scheme that will trigger similar low carbon developments in Torbay.

The site is owned by Torbay Council and lies north of Torquay centre. It sits on the side of a steep valley, the bottom of which is now a gas-emitting capped landfill area requiring significant mitigation. Public access onto the landfill site is not permitted, but this creates the opportunity for an area of visual amenity.

The brief from the client is for a contemporary, high-density development of around 140 dwellings with two-thirds affordable housing, a mix of houses and apartments and a range of tenures.

RPS believes it is important that design development is an inclusive process, and that local residents are consulted regarding the principles of sustainable design and placemaking. A public consultation event was held, and members of the public were asked for their response to the emerging development proposals. Two main concerns were identified: massing and architectural appearance; and traffic and road safety. There was a specific local dislike for wind turbines, and it was clear that the public preferred the selection of integrated solutions with less visual impact when it came to achieving a high CSH rating.

The results from the consultation were evaluated and a revised approach evolved, better reflecting the character of Devon hill towns. The use of similar roof forms and a contemporary interpretation of traditional materials provides a commonality to the design. The Beechfield scheme is less about 'token gestures' in response to sustainable parameters, and more about responding to public reaction about what these should mean. The buildings are not designed to be recognisably 'eco' in style, but the approach is sensitive in response to the site context and public opinion.

The impact of the development was further reduced through the redesign of the apartment blocks to deliver five flats around the core. This meant that storey heights across the apartments could be reduced.

The site is heavily constrained, but the challenges have been used to advantage. The main constraints are the steep slope and the landfill area to the front of the site. Whilst the slope faces north, there are benefits to the residents in the views across to the distant Dartmoor Hills. The slope has been utilised for undercroft parking, minimising the impact of cars on the site.

Ecological surveys of the site identified the need for the enhancement of ecological features. New habitats for relocated species have been built into semi-natural features on the landfill site to improve biodiversity.

The initial concept prepared by RPS consisted of lozenge-shaped blocks in a landscaped setting. Upper and lower roads

MOVING TO LOW CARBON LIVING

RPS's approach to delivering a low carbon project at Beechfield, Torquay, has involved acting on community feedback to meet high environmental and design standards and to minimise local impact, says Ruth Millington

Responding both to community feedback and to the site context made delivering the Code for Sustainable Homes target levels 3 and 5 very challenging

Above and right: The revised design approach better reflected the character of Devon hill towns. Early designs were more recognisably 'eco', featuring mono pitches, timber cladding and large areas of glazing to allow for maximum amounts of daylight. However, this meant that the buildings were at risk of overheating so solar shading was introduced, leading to higher construction costs. The design was amended to achieve a balance between daylighting and sunlighting

The layout was improved to provide a series of villas along the hillside and curved, key, gateway buildings. The spaces between the buildings are considered to define a sense of place

follow site contours to maximise development density; transverse roads were not achievable.

The proposals were developed, and a preliminary CSH assessment produced. Initial input from assessment identified those points that were high scoring and low cost. It was important to choose a form of construction that would yield the lowest possible U-values so that the maximum amount of energy points could be achieved against the Code. It was also necessary to achieve the right balance of daylighting and sunlight, allowing for normal occupancy patterns without the need to switch on lights. However, the team avoided using too much glazing, which could lead to heat loss, glare or solar gain. Throughout the redesign, it was very important that the points agreed in the preliminary assessment were adhered to.

RPS has found that CSH Level 5 can be achieved through maximum thermal insulation and air tightness, with minimum power needed for heating. These solutions can be integrated into the fabric of the buildings. Heating and electricity can be produced by zero or low carbon technologies such as biofuel boilers and photovoltaics (PVs) on the roofs. The dwellings are designed to

Lifetime Homes standards, and the scheme conforms to Secured by Design standards to encourage community safety and cohesion. Additional factors which have contributed to a Code 5 rating are 'in-built', provision of dying space, low energy light fittings and cycle storage. Residents will benefit from a 'current cost monitor'; a small device in the home that displays the amount of energy being used. The proposals therefore achieve the high energy efficiency requirements of the sustainable agenda while delivering recognisable architecture within the local context, as required through the consultation process.

To deliver this project, RPS brought together its in-house team of designers and scientists, working closely with client and community. The project team includes architects, urban designers and assessors who have all worked closely to meet the aspirations of the client, local council, members of the public and the Code for Sustainable Homes. This has resulted in a scheme that addresses the fundamental principles of sustainability and also aims to create a sense of place.

Ruth Millington is an architect at RPS Bristol

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> ## CSH Level 5 can be achieved through maximum thermal insulation and air tightness, with minimum power needed for heating

KEY POINTS
- The key concerns of the community were acted upon and the design concepts revised
- CSH Level 5 can be achieved through maximum thermal insulation and air tightness, with minimum power needed for heating
- RPS assessors advise the BRE of the ongoing development of assessment tools, including advice on the Code for Sustainable Homes

PRACTICE DETAILS
RPS Bristol
www.rpsgroup.com

05

PUBLIC SPACES, PUBLIC PLACES

SHAPING PLACE, BEHAVIOUR AND INTERACTION

New technologies offer urban designers opportunities for shaping the public spaces in which people move, behave and interact

Crowds gather round an urban screen, Trafalgar Square, London

The public arena offers a range of opportunities for promoting social interaction. Public spaces such as bus stops or cafés can act as 'encounter stages' on which people meet, recognise, interact with or ignore one another. Many factors influence the ways in which public space can be used for social benefit, and one that merits the attention of urban designers and public artists is the range of rapidly emerging interactive digital technologies that are fast becoming part of the cityscape.

The new mobile and pervasive systems that are appearing in our towns and cities – networked urban screens, interactive media platforms integrated into buildings, virtual space games, bus stop information systems, Bluetooth, wifi and mobile phone networks – have the potential to modify existing social practices, encourage the emergence of positive new social behaviours and to help build social capital.

In order to achieve a better understanding of urban landscapes and the impact of digital media, we need to expand and adapt our understanding and practice of urban design. We need to view the urban environment as an integrated system and, in order to achieve real integration on an urban scale, to consider the design of space holistically. This means taking account of urban space, social interaction space and dynamic visual information.

Interaction spaces

Building pervasive systems requires a new way of thinking about the design and use of ICT systems, and how they interweave with the built environment. In urban areas we have opportunity to design and build such systems, but as yet urban design has not featured strongly in pervasive systems research. We have no fundamental theory, knowledge base, principled methods or tools for designing and building pervasive systems as integral elements of the urban landscape. There is much potential for designing not just the architectural space in which people move, behave and interact; but also the interaction spaces for information and services that support movement, behaviours and interactions.

Emergent technologies such as RFID and Bluetooth are becoming embedded in many consumer goods. Bluetooth-enabled mobile devices, if set to discoverable mode, emit a digital field that enables them to interact with nearby devices, creating a platform that could act as a 'stage' for potentially new interaction types. The Cityware project in Bath (www.cityware.org.uk), for example, is

using Bluetooth networks to record how people move about the city. The project team has constructed a network showing where phones have been logged over time. This gives us a statistical view of a network, and of proximity of people to each other.

Bluetooth scan data may provide us with an understanding of movement rhythms in real time. Being able to draw on the temporal aspect of scan data and determine the pace of movement is of value in cases where the rhythm of the flow is important, for instance when designing the content of urban screens.

In the last decade, cityscapes have been undergoing major transformations. LCD screens and LED billboards are appearing as part of the city – the Live Sites project will see big screens appearing across London for 2012. Dynamic moving images affect our perception and the experience of the space around us. Both the screens and the content they display take many forms – movies, news, city information and, of course, commercials.

We are just beginning to understand the potential of these screens for public information, art and community engagement. We need to see more negotiation between commercial, public and cultural interests. The use of these screens will bring new potential and new challenges for city regulators, artists, architects, urban designers, producers, broadcasters and advertisers.

Developing an understanding of the way that cities are structured, and how people use and move in them in real time, will underpin the most creative use of digital city media. Understanding movement flow and movement rhythm, for example, in the morning and evening commute, will determine the choice of content for urban screens. Although the 'commute' may appear obvious, the different role played by different urban locations during that period is less so. Some spaces become important meeting and interaction spots, where one buys the paper or coffee, while others are strictly 'head down and move through' spaces.

Other opportunities also arise. Data visualisation is becoming increasingly real-time, with immediate mobile access to easy-to-read data maps fast becoming the norm in western cities. Such media could inform new approaches to personal travel planning.

Ava Fatah gen. Schieck
For more on technology and urban design, visit www.rudi.net and download the Technology, Space and Place publication

CREATING PRODUCTIVE PLACES AND SPACES

From urban agriculture to supporting social interaction, the public realm can accommodate a wide range of creative uses

The UK is no stranger to urban agriculture: plots, parks and gardens were heavily cultivated during the food shortages of wartime Britain. Surveys suggest that a significant amount, as high as 60 per cent, of food needs could be met within cities if all available space were to be cultivated, including rooftops, balconies, allotments and urban green space.

The emerging global food crisis and the desire to reduce food miles is driving a resurgence of urban agriculture across the UK. With food and fuel prices soaring and global urban populations outstripping rural ones for the first time, public and private urban green spaces are being eagerly cultivated by a public keen to progress the sustainability agenda. Across the capital, initiatives to encourage food cultivation are underway: food is even being grown in the Royal Parks. Capital Growth, for example, is a new 'growing places' project that aims to establish 2,012 new urban agriculture plots by 2012.

The team behind the Abundance urban agriculture project in Brixton, London, wished to demonstrate the potential of currently unused urban green space in cities by creating a community-managed agricultural plot on vacant land belonging to a social housing estate. A key driver for this project, which was supported by UrbanBuzz (see page 11) was an exploration the policy and planning arrangements that lie behind land cultivation.

The UK policy context is complex: do residents have the right to cultivate land on social housing estates? How can common property management criteria regarding the management of space, and distribution of food, be established? The team produced a toolkit that outlines the process for identifying, mapping and developing small urban agricultural plots of less than two acres (5,000 square meters). The toolkit is focused on determining the accessibility, suitability, current usage and feasibility of a particular land parcel for urban agricultural use, including the necessary processes for identifying and engaging local stakeholders and landowners. The institutional issues involved in surveying the land, and understanding how to resolve ownership problems, was a very important part of this project, along with exploring potential links and policy opportunities in regard to urban planning and land use planning.

Brixton, home of the first Transition Town in London, is one of the many UK communities to have established a food group and a series of community growing spaces. The group has taken over the management of the Brixton community plot developed by the Abundance team, and will continue to cultivate it. Transition Towns is a community-led initiative that seeks to raise awareness locally of climate change and to the need for a low energy, low carbon future: http://www.site.transitiontownbrixton.org

Urban agriculture in Brixton

CLEAR VISION CREATES VALUE

" In the last two decades, attitudes to open space and its role in our cities have changed dramatically. We have reached a consensus that parks and green space are essential elements in the urban environment

In uncertain economic times, good design can add quality, character and value. From suburban open green space to urban public space, thoughtful schemes demonstrate that vision makes commercial sense. By Alex Whitbread and Denise Murray

The many and varied benefits of open space have long been appreciated. The public parks of the Victorian era were provided for city residents by those in positions of wealth who began providing parks as philanthropic acts – Victoria Park in east London was known at the time as the people's park.

The motivation was not completely altruistic, the factory owners and merchants knew that the congested city centre slums were adversely affecting the health of the workforce. By providing open space accessible to the poor, they would improve

the health of their workforce. These parks were seen as 'green lungs' for the city.

In the modern city, open space remained an essential ingredient. Modernist urban planning was also motivated by a desire for more 'hygienic' environments. During the 20th century the state took over the role of providing these spaces for the benefit of 'the people'. However the open space provided was largely in the form of amorphous, ill-defined, green spaces around high-rise housing, and no longer in the form of defined new parks.

Investment in parks, public housing and landscaping dwindled during the second half of the 20th resulting in a legacy of poorly-maintained and run-down urban green spaces across the UK. During this period, very little open space was created in our towns and cities whilst the government did not take a lead and the private sector did not see such investment as its responsibility.

In the last two decades attitudes to open space and its role in our cities have changed dramatically. We have reached a consensus that parks and green space are essential elements in the urban environment. Publications such as CABE Space's *Start with the Park*, and its more recent toolkit proposing a new framework for the valuation of park assets, have highlighted this change. Yet the question remains: who should deliver these spaces – and why?

In new developments it typically falls to the developer to provide the required open space. The size and type of the provision will be established by the local authority in the form of a Section 106 agreement. This has often been seen as a burden from the developer's point of view, but we think differently. A well-designed, well-used and well-maintained public open space, such as that designed for Newlands Common in Hampshire (left), will add character, identity and value to any development.

The following schemes by FCB Studios, one suburban and one urban, illustrate the point that well-designed public space has economic, as well as social and environmental, benefits.

The scheme presented a great opportunity to establish a strong link between Waterlooville and the countryside, and to create parkland for new and existing residents. Research into the value of open spaces has shown that it has a tangible, and positive, impact on property values

WATERLOOVILLE, HAMPSHIRE

Open green space provides tangible benefits that developers should be able to take into account in their business plans

FCB Studios was engaged in 2005 to develop a masterplan for the majority of the Major Development Area (MDA) site in Waterlooville, Hampshire, for client Grainger plc. The northern part of the site was developed by another team. The overall development brief had been established at this stage, and a masterplan created. However neither planners nor councillors were happy with the masterplan, and FCB Studios was appointed to rework the masterplan to the development brief.

The previous iteration of the masterplan was not seen as suitably ambitious. It proposed a generic layout for the site that, it was felt, would not result in a site-specific development. It included all the required elements, including the council's brief for open and amenity space, but it lacked 'vision'. The open space was confined to the edges of the development and the layout did not react to the many landscape features of the site.

Our first task was to gain a full understanding of the context, both in terms of the immediate site and the wider town of Waterlooville. We found that the existing town, while being surrounded by countryside, had little relationship to it. There were virtually no public open spaces or parks for residents to enjoy. We also saw that the site itself had many interesting landscape features: the River Wallington to the north, a belt of ancient woodland along its western boundary, drainage channels and many protected trees and hedgerows.

We felt very strongly that this scheme presented a great opportunity to establish a strong link between Waterlooville and the countryside, and to create new parkland for the new and existing residents. Working with the other consultants, we decided to consolidate the brief for open space into continuous parkland, in the form of a Common that could serve community needs. Working within the development brief, we reorganised the masterplan to create a wonderful central parkland instead of a series of disparate peripheral open spaces.
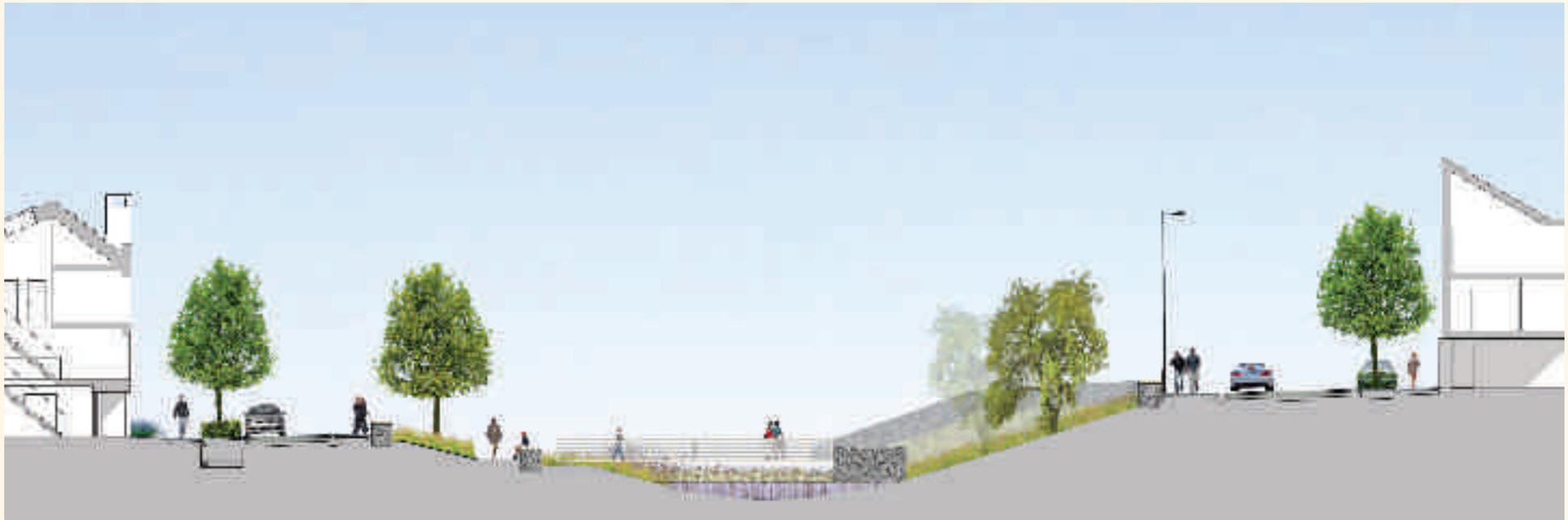
Our strategy was to see the existing natural features of the site as assets to be exploited, rather than as constraints. Existing features were used to create a unique setting for a new community, establishing a strong identity and adding value to the overall development. As Sir Stuart Lipton, chairman of CABE Space, states; 'Research highlights the increase in property and land values surrounding good quality parks.' Creating a place with a strong sense of identity on a greenfield site can be challenging but working with the existing landscape, and not against it can deliver unique character and a real sense of place.

Research into the value of open spaces has shown that it has a tangible impact on property values. A study carried out in the Netherlands by Luttik demonstrated that the value of a house with a garden bordering water can increase by 11 per cent, while a view of water can add 10 per cent to the value. Having a park nearby adds 6 per cent to the value of a house. All of these are tangible benefits that developers should be able to take into account in their business plans.

The value of trees, water and open spaces as reflected by house prices in the Netherlands, by J Luttik, was published in Landscape and Urban Planning, Vol. 48, pp161-167 (2000)

Denise Murray is an architect and urban designer with Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

KEY POINTS
- Existing natural features of sites should be seen as assets
- People like living and working near parks and open green space
- There is a demonstrable increase in property and land values surrounding good quality parks

PRACTICE DETAILS
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
www.fcbstudios.com

The common is the primary landscape space running through the centre of the development. It is to be lined by large three-storey detached and semi-detached houses that will create a strong edge to the space. A wide range of activities are planned within the Common area, including a cricket green, large areas of informal amenity space, a skate park, a multi-use games area, a playground and a cemetery

WELLINGTON PLACE, LEEDS

Both developer and designer have a vested interest in creating places that are socially and commercially viable for the longer term

In 2006, FCB Studios were appointed to work alongside Carey Jones Architects and Martha Schwartz Partners on the redesign of an approved outline design for the Wellington Place development, Leeds. Changing market conditions and new proposals for the surrounding west end of the city centre had led developer MEPC to reconsider its approach to the site. Working closely with the city architect, the team established the key principles of the previous proposal relating to scale, routes, spaces and massing as a basis for a new design for the former railway station site.

The site enjoys a prominent position with major frontage onto the major commercial route of Wellington Street to the north, and a strong relationship with the River Aire and the Leeds-Liverpool Canal to the south. The prime objectives of the new scheme were to better integrate the proposals into the existing city fabric and to significantly improve connections to a range of proposed new developments.

The new scheme sought to reconcile two differently-oriented city grids around a new axial route linking Wellington Street to the River Aire. This new pedestrian street, named Canal Street, not only provides a key connection, it also links the major new spaces proposed on the site. These two spaces will combine to significantly improve the city centre's urban realm.

Public space as a focus for development

Design studies for the overall proposal have focused on an architectural language of masonry and glass to provide a cohesive feel for Wellington Place. The intention to create a more unified backdrop of buildings will bring the street sequences and public spaces to the fore as a focus of the development.

Tower Square is envisaged as a major new civic space for the city, a focus for a series of new commercial buildings. The square is a relic of the former railway station, with a listed lifting tower forming the centrepiece of the space.

The second proposed space has been nicknamed The Beach, and will be the most significant space in the city to directly address the river. The Beach will complement the harder urban feel of Tower Square by providing a softer and more informal place, formed as a series of landscaped steps to the water's edge. A large stone viaduct, also a relic of the former station, closes one side of the space, a residential building and possible cultural centre encloses other sides. A significant new tree-lined boulevard will mark the large south-

facing frontage along Whitehall Road, a major route into the city centre from the west.

From the outset it was the intention of MEPC to create a new commercial destination for the city with a strong identity; this was part of the strategy for creating a commercially successful urban quarter. As a long-term occupier the developer has a vested interest in creating a place that will remain both socially and commercially viable for the longer term.

This strategy not only related to Wellington Place itself, but also to the wider West End of the city. A partnership between developers has been formed to create new public space, improve pedestrian connectivity and adopt a coherent urban realm design code to embed a sense of place into this part of the city.

The new Tower Square will be the commercial focus of the district, adding value to the West End by catering for daily social needs on the site as well as significant city-wide events.

Alex Whitbread is a partner at Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

The developer has a vested interest in creating a place that will remain both socially and commercially viable for the longer term

We effectively doubled the footways and halved the extent of carriageway by removing the bus lanes, and the spatial gain was turned into public realm improvement

From left: Street trees have been planted, sequestering over four tonnes of CO_2 annually, halving the carbon footprint of the new carriageway lighting. A central pedestrian island was introduced to help transform Walworth Road from an arterial corridor into an attractive and safer place to visit and shop in

RECLAIMING OUR HIGH STREETS

Supported by national and local government, a scheme in London has tamed a busy road, improved public safety and created a civic focus for a busy town centre high street

Despite a renewed political focus on placemaking, design professionals engaged in the process of urban design are frequently heard to despair of the highways design legacy of the '60s, '70s and '80s, with its focus on increasing capacity for vehicles at the expense of creating places for people. The Walworth Road in London used to be a good example: the busy high street forms part of the A215 arterial corridor to central London. The existing design prioritised the daily traffic of 20,000 vehicles. Catering for 180 buses an hour, bus lanes on both sides of the street took up a substantial proportion of the road space.

At the street scale, design professionals from all disciplines are becoming increasingly successful at working together to create quality streetscapes and people-friendly places. The Project Centre led the team working on the Walworth Road environmental improvements, completed last year. The innovative scheme was supported by the Department for Transport (DfT) as one of 10 gateway pilot projects because of Walworth Road's high number of pedestrian casualties. DfT allocated £1 million for safety improvements, with Transport for London making available a

further £1 million. This funding, along with support from Southwark Council, has demonstrated what how relatively minor interventions can make highly successful impacts on streetscape.

'We looked at how we could gain more space out of the existing relationship between the carriageway and the footway,' says David Moores, lead designer and head of public realm at the Project Centre. 'Essentially, the project was generated out of a traffic scheme. The first phase looked at the signalisation of the whole road, and the obvious suggestion was to remove the bus lanes and simplify the traffic movements.'

'A lot of streetscape work is tied up in legislation and spatial requirements for the accommodation of vehicles,' says Moores. 'Traffic-based design issues such as carriageway widths, turning movements and traffic signalisation can lock up space. But as a landscape architect, I look at design spatially and aesthetically. The trick with public realm improvements is the relationship between pedestrian, vehicle and space, and how you manage it. The objective is to regain space for pedestrians, which involves undoing some of the traffic engineering of the past.'

TfL made it clear that the Walworth Road had to accommodate high levels of vehicular traffic. The design team modelled the bus movements to demonstrate that removing bus lanes would not adversely affect travel times. 'We effectively doubled the footways and halved the extent of carriageway by removing the bus lanes, and the spatial gain was turned into public realm improvement,' says Moores.

TfL's approval to remove the bus lanes gave Southwark Council the green light for a far more extensive regeneration of the area. Guard railings were removed from the road at the centre of the high street, pavements could be widened and loading facilities could be provided for local shops.

Regaining identity

'Traffic engineering guidelines have tended to create the same set of elements at every junction,' says Moores. 'Same signals, same materials, same guardrails. As a designer, you've got to look at all the elements; traffic engineering, signal engineering, parking provision, spatial design and aesthetic aspirations.'

On occasion, traffic engineers may not realise that they have solutions to a streetscape design, says Moores. 'Traffic engineering is a design profession. People don't think of think of engineering as such; rather as a range of technical solutions. But that's not so. We're all designers. We have a range of tools, and what is important is understanding how they can be used, and how the different elements come together.'

On any team, it's important to get the skillset right, regardless of professional labels. Working with urban designers can be a moveable feast as the skillset is wide and variable – urban design is a process involving a range of skills, although professional urban designers do exist. 'Some urban designers are skilled in detailed design, some in the massing of buildings and development of spaces,' says Moores. 'Landscape architects and architects generally know how to deal with details, and it's important to understand the complexity of the detailing in any design.'

There also needs to be clear vision for any team, with a range and balance of inputs. 'I've worked on schemes where there are five traffic engineers and one landscape architect or urban designer sitting around the table,' says Moores. 'Immediately, the balance is wrong. We need to look at spaces more holistically. We need to combine the skills and challenge people about how they interpret the guidance,' says Moores.

Each project brief has its own emphasis and aspiration, Moores adds. 'I have a huge problem with individual professions focusing only on their own design details,' says Moores. 'Sometimes projects are all about traffic engineering solutions, with only a small percentage of the budget allocated to environmental improvements. In these cases, you can't really call that placemaking.'

Innovative design inevitably entails some element of culture change and risk-taking on the part of all concerned – a risk that requires political leadership to encourage all designers to come out of their comfort zones. 'The more design work I do, the more I'm aware of the behavioural changes that take place as a result, which you can't quantify,' says Moores. 'You know that people are going to start using the space differently, for example there may be more eye contact between pedestrians and drivers. You can't come up with a formula, but you know it's going to happen.'

Juliana O'Rourke spoke with David Moores

Anticlockwise from top: Within the redesigned area, there has been a remarkable reduction in accidents, and traffic surveys show that average bus times have slightly improved through the new road layout

In addition to the poor road safety record, people said they didn't feel safe after dark on this section of the old Walworth Road. The road divided the shopping centre and communities on each side of the street. Loading provision for businesses has now been improved, and there has been a reduction in the 4,500 parking tickets issued annually for parking in bus lanes on this section of the road

Energy efficient lighting columns produce a white light. New traffic and pedestrian signals on lamp columns are mounted to reduce street clutter and increase luminance at junctions and crossing points. Since the new lighting has been introduced, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of accidents recorded in the hours of darkness
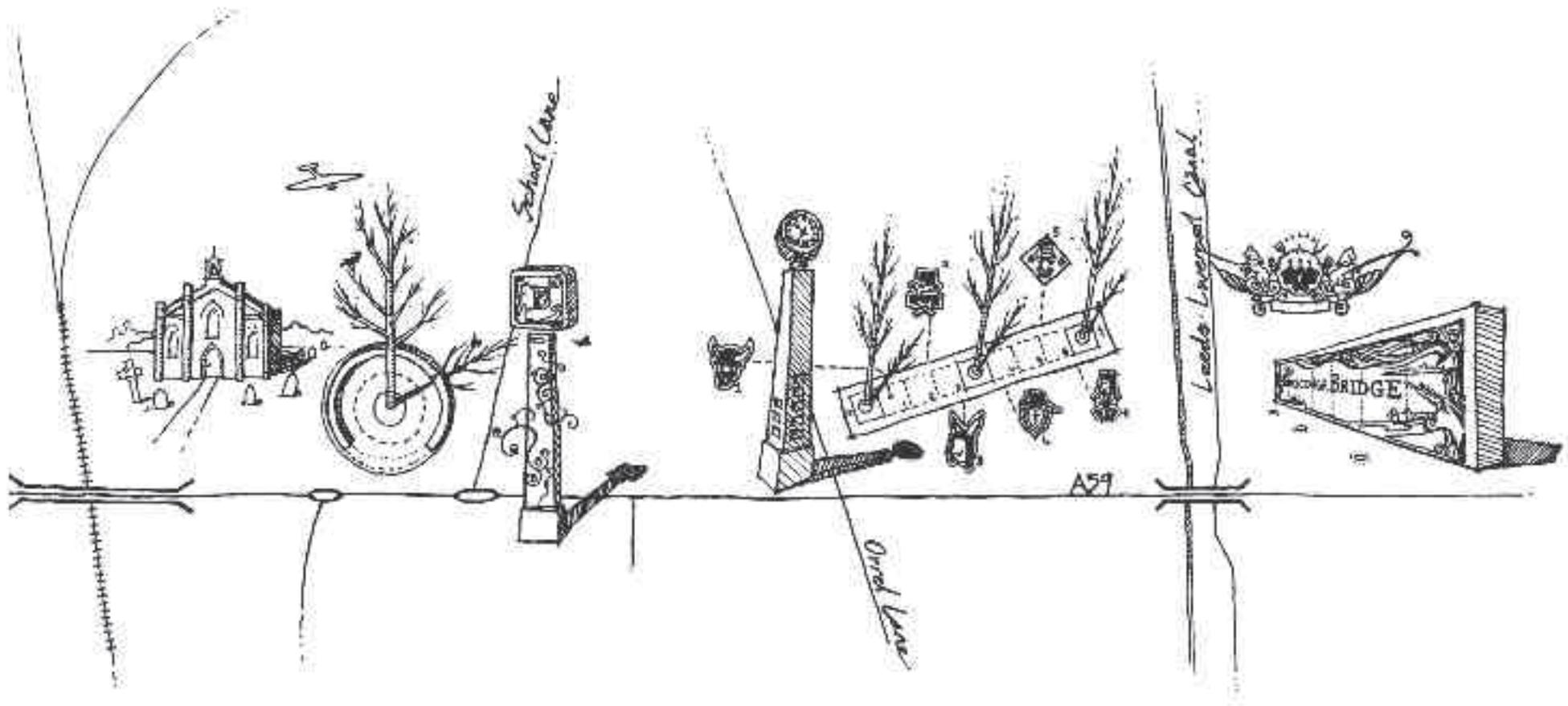
A FAIRYTALE MADE REALITY

An inventive townscape regeneration project in Burscough Bridge, a large village in Lancashire, has delivered an inspiring new public realm. Vision, innovation, craftsmanship, quality materials and partnership work together to underlie the project's success

A series of squares, pedestrian routes, street furniture and public artworks inspired by local myths has created a new heart for Lancashire's Burscough Bridge. The village had over the decades lost its sense of identity and become dominated by traffic and the busy A59 road that cuts through it.

BCA Landscape, working with hard landscape supplier Hardscape and designer Smiling Wolf, have reclaimed the many underused spaces next to the busy road. Physical improvements were rooted in ideas to renew the village's identity, although many residents had only a sketchy knowledge of local myth and tradition. 'A collective notion of identity is a notoriously complex idea to pin down,' says BCA's Andy Thomson. 'Ultimately it is the little things that have meaning, woven together from a greater picture, rather than grand sweeping sloganeering or imaginary visions that people don't trust, and see through immediately.'

Above: A circular map of Burscough's past in Church Square
Right: Graphics of the Pace Eggers in the flagstones
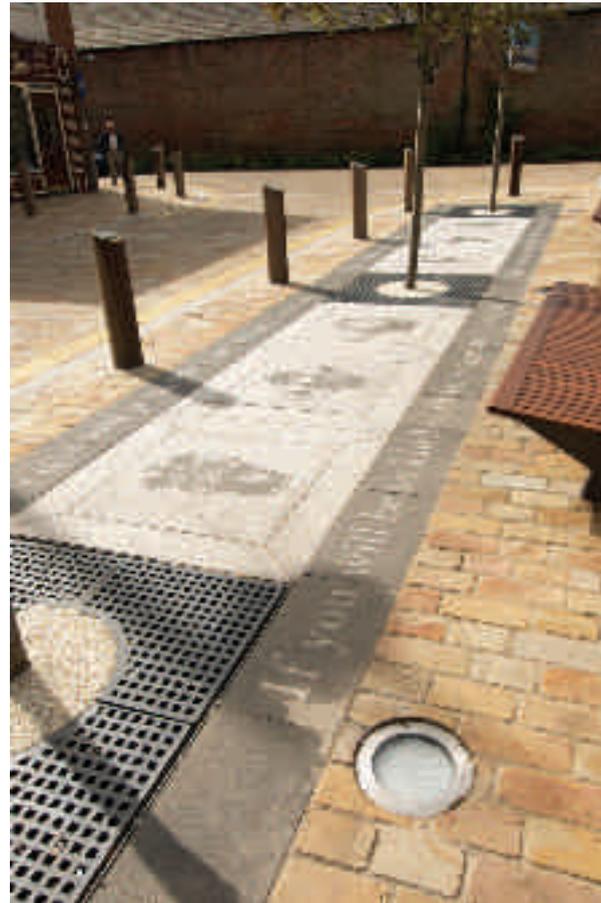
Clockwise from top left: Graphic artwork made physical defines a quality new public realm. Intricate carvings celebrate a re-invigorated village identity. A commitment to quality materials, craftsmanship and an innovative approach to delivering complex designs underpins the project's success

The design partnership worked closely with West Lancashire District Council, Lancashire County Council, Burscough Parish Council, Lancashire County Council and a local community steering group. The community had clear preferences, with a new village clock being a top priority. The £1 million scheme, funded by West Lancashire Investors in Business Regeneration Programme (NWDA) also had the key objective of bringing about a dramatic change in how Burscough Bridge is perceived.

Rather than rely solely on the recent past and the Victorian heritage of Burscough Bridge to recreate a sense of place, the design team reached back further in time, to a 'weirder, stranger' England rendered almost invisible by the Industrial Revolution. Much of the iconography in the design scheme is inspired by the Pace Eggers, local performers with bowler hats and black-painted faces, who would re-enact scenes from the Crusades during Easter festivities.

Designs based on these ideas, realised in a circular map of Burscough's past in Church Square and graphics of the Pace Eggers in the flagstones of Wharf Square, have created a sense of place that the local community can relate to and enjoy.

Hard landscape consultant Hardscape was involved from the outset in the complex design process, ensuring that aspirations met deliverable reality. 'Our role was to interpret the designs and put them into a drawing format that we could use to manufacture the graphics into pavement,' says Hardscape director Mathew Haslam. 'We advised on the choice of materials and made production drawings from BCA Landscape's designs which were then used in the water jet cutting process.'

Already, as with many other regeneration scenarios, a key impact of this successful placemaking initiative is confidence and positivity: a number of local shops have been given facelifts since the project was completed. It's clear that investment in a quality public realm adds value in quantitative as well as qualitative terms.

Juliana O'Rourke spoke with Mathew Haslam, Hardscape Products Ltd, and Andy Thomson, BCA Landscape

KEY POINTS
• Client: West Lancashire District Council; project collaborators included Lancashire County Council, a church group and a community steering group
• Area of project: 0.9 ha
• Funding: West Lancashire Investors in Business Regeneration Programme (NWDA); value £1 million
• Principal suppliers: Hardscape Products Ltd www.hardscape.co.uk

PRACTICE DETAILS
BCA Landscape, Liverpool
www.bcalandscape.co.uk

05 PUBLIC SPACES, PUBLIC PLACES

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PLACEMAKING FOR POSITIVITY

Successful placemaking results from 'designing in' flexibility and adaptability, and from uniting stakeholders with a long-term vision. By Andrea Lazenby Simpson

Focusing stakeholder commitment on improved placemaking is one of the benefits of creating an Urban Framework Plan. KSA was appointed by Dundalk Town Council to prepare such a plan, with a brief that it should be flexible enough to adapt to changing retail, commercial and social trends.

Obtaining a detailed understanding of a place is fundamental to establishing character. This plan was based on considerable historic research, resulting in comprehensive guidelines for shopfront design, massing and scale, use of materials, change of use, restoration and extensions. Certain challenges, such as the conservation of historic buildings while ensuring their long-term active usage, will require ongoing innovative policy guidance and practical solutions.

Future secure: the many fine shop frontages that grace Dundalk are to be maintained

Dundalk is an established Irish town with a rich heritage

The Urban Design Framework is designed to utilise key sites as a catalyst for development and regeneration, particularly those in public ownership. This will introduce a broader mix of uses in the town centre, so rejuvenating the local economy and stimulating vibrancy. A necklace of urban squares and green spaces will enliven and improve the leisure potential of the town, creating pleasant places to sit and walk, and for casual trading.

The plan was presented in mid 2008, and a BIDS scheme (Business Investment District Scheme) has since been set up, with representatives from the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce and the local authority on the committee. Under the auspices of this group, a Town Centre Manager will be appointed, one of the first such posts in Ireland. The position will be funded from Council business rates, and will guide the essential coordination necessary

The town centre manager's job has been created and founded under a BIDS proposal, the first such departure for an Irish town

between public space activity, security and ongoing place management. The plan, it is hoped, will drive the growth of Dundalk as the administrative capital of north-east Ireland. A population of less than 30,000 is projected to increase to 50,000 by 2010.

The Dundalk Urban Design Framework Plan

The DUDFP is based on a thorough and real understanding of the place, its history, its morphological development, its people, its activity and its challenges. The plan encompasses several sets of 'mini design guidelines', including a section on guidance for development within the historic core and a section on shopfront design guidelines. Given the challenging economic times ahead, this plan provides a framework to secure the future of the town and to deliver on the plan's proposals in a meaningful way.

KEY POINTS
- The stakeholder consultation used traditional, yet effective face-to-face methods of meeting all individuals and parties concerned to ensure a holistic development of the UDFP
- Stakeholders were supportive of the macro and micro-level proposals contained within the plan
- Town centre retail locations developed and promoted
- Town centre retailing supported by the town centre manager

PRACTICE DETAILS
KSA is based in Dublin Ireland: www.ksa.ie

www.rudi.net

RUDI — Resource for Urban Design Information

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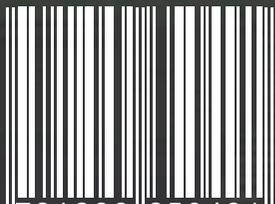
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