





Gellir lawrlwytho fersiwn Gymraeg o'r ddogfen ohn oddi ar wefan Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru: www.dcfw.org/publications/

A Welsh language version of this publication is available to download from the Design Commission for Wales website:
www.dcfw.org/publications/

Published by Design Commission for Wales – www.dcfw.org

Design: Marc Jennings – www.theundercard.co.uk

Photography - Betina Skovbro Photography

Comiswin Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and Wales as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Its Registered Office is at 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL.

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ISBN 978-0-9552657-6-1

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Places for Life was the theme of the Design Commission for Wales' autumn 2016 conference. The event explored the connection between the places where we live and our health, well-being, relationships, access to work, social life, and impact on the environment. The conference brought together a multi-disciplinary group of professionals to engage with the subject and challenge the status quo.

This document provides a summary of the event, distils and further explores some of the key themes in more detail.



A neighbourhood with a friendly corner shop that sells hot pastries on weekend mornings, and where your teenage son can get a job...

akes a great place to li





Foreword

High quality, well-designed, buildings and places should be delivered as standard across all new development proposals in Wales.

The planning system is the key delivery mechanism to help us achieve this and I want all those involved: planners, architects, designers and developers to play their part.

Delivering new developments which provide economic, social, cultural and environmental improvements chimes well with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

From now on, the decisions which the planning system makes will need to take into account all of these aspects. Local authorities and other public bodies will set out how they propose to improve the well-being of their areas in a collaborative way. In addition, Development Plans will need to look at this issue, both in a strategic sense and by localised examination of how new development sites will work together to promote sustainable development.

The principles of good, thoughtful urban design delivering neighbourhoods and communities which are well-connected, reduce the need to travel by car, increase the potential for walking and cycling and promote healthier lifestyles are the key principles which underpin our urban fabric together in a sustainable way to create places where people want to work and live.



“It’s time to think about quality as well as quantity. It’s time to think about place.”

So how can the statutory planning system help deliver this?

Previously the focus of the planning system has been too much about trying to process as many applications as possible in the fastest possible way. This has, sadly, resulted in decision making that focuses on whether a scheme is bad enough to refuse rather than good enough to approve. Developments have often been in locations which haven't focussed on the well-being of the people who would be living there.

We need to address this. It's time to think about quality as well as quantity. It's time to think about place.

The changes in the planning system brought in by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 will enable local planning authorities and applicants the space and time to think about design quality and have early dialogue to help achieve the best scheme. The requirement for pre application advice services and the need to undertake community engagement on larger schemes will help inform the design of a proposal which can be modified earlier and so have less of an impact on costs. This is done outside of the pressures of statutory targets where planning authorities can have real influence on schemes and communities can have a say on the places which will grow up around them.

In this context, the Design Commission for Wales can provide support to all parties. The Commission's design review service gives supportive advice and feedback on individual schemes, masterplans and policy documents in a constructive manner. DCFW can also provide support and targeted training for local planning authorities and communities to help them think about their cities, towns, villages and other places.

My officials are working with the Design Commission to develop a new design skills and leadership training programme for local planning authority officers. This

programme will facilitate the delivery of a series of targeted, practical, training workshops and seminars over a period of months to up-skill planning officers who would then act as design champions.

I would encourage local planning authorities to take advantage of this opportunity when it becomes available. Equally, the development industry itself needs to examine the schemes they are producing to see if they are up to standard and communicate their design principles through Design and Access Statements on larger schemes.

This Design Commission training programme will build upon the Site and Context Analysis Guide, which the Design Commission produced in conjunction with the Welsh Government.

However, our support as a Welsh Government can only go so far. It is down to you as practitioners in both the public and private sectors to go out there and deliver good design. It is you who will be drawing up these schemes. It is you who will be assessing on these schemes. It is you who will be consulting communities on how our villages, towns and cities will look and work as sustainable places.

The urban design of today will be around us for decades to come. It is therefore essential we get it right now and we start delivering high quality sustainable places, for the health and well-being of our future generations.

Lesley Griffiths AM / AC

**Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig**

Introdu

Jen Heal BSc Hons, MA, MRTPI
Design Advisor,
Design Commission for Wales

Places matter. Where we live affects how we live and how we live affects everything else – our health, well-being and happiness. The impact of our living environment, whether positive or negative, will last for many years so it is critical that these places are planned, designed and developed to be the best that they can be; places where life can happen in all its fullness.



unction

A vision for places for life

The Design Commission for Wales' Places for Life conference, October 2016, emphasised the need for a vision for new places. It called for a more inclusive, multi-disciplinary approach, for communities to be engaged and for people to be put at the heart of our thinking about place-making. These ideas are not new. As I sit with the likes of Cullen¹, Jacobs², Bently et al³ on my desk I am reminded that the theory and challenge of place-making has been discussed for many decades. Yet, we still seem to be working within a set of constraints that prevent us from getting where we want to be and making the changes we know are necessary. The majority of residential developments in Wales provide little to celebrate. Placeless developments with mono uses, focused on car movements and lacking any connection to the qualities of the site or indeed to the existing settlement, are all too common.

It was clear at the conference that there is an energy amongst the range of built environment professionals to do good and to create great places. The conference itself brought people from this range of disciplines together, addressing one of the issues that may prevent more rapid progress by considering the issues together rather than in isolation. Creating great places is not just the concern of planners, architects, urban designers, developers or government, it is a collective concern that needs shared vision, cross-disciplinary communication and open collaboration to bring it to fruition.

Great places are vibrant, diverse, active, complex, messy, and creative. This complexity challenges the rigid processes of planning and the risk averse approach to house-building by numbers that currently prevails. The potential for the creation of a great place to live starts with site selection and continues through the life of a development. Place-making needs to be concerned with where, what and how much we develop:

- **Where** must tackle the problems of isolation and ensure that new development is well connected to the existing settlement, not just the least damaging site.
- **What** must address the problem of mono-use developments which result in no sense of community or vitality. The local mix of uses must be considered to promote social interaction and support walk-ability. Land-use allocation that designates one area for employment and another for housing is questionable when what is needed is consideration of how a whole place will work from the perspective of the people who will live their lives there.
- **How** much must be considered to tackle the problem of a lack of critical mass. Density is required to ensure there is capacity to support life and local facilities. A proper mix of dwelling sizes and tenures is needed to provide diversity.

There are benefits for all in the creation of better places – reduced pollution, lower maintenance costs, greater equality, reduced crime, and people who are more connected to one another and to opportunities; who can be healthier, happier, and active. Focusing on speed and number of units over quality in the delivery of housing is counterproductive and will have detrimental impacts for the future. Place-making must be an integral part of the process for all those involved for the legacy of our future places to be a successful one.

Key messages from Places for Life

The first part of this document summarises the topics covered by the speakers at the conference and in the workshop sessions.

The call for quality and greater emphasis on place was set out by the Cabinet Secretary **Lesley Griffiths AM** in her opening address and is re-emphasised in the foreword to this document. Secretary Griffiths set the challenge for all practitioners in the public and private sector to deliver good design and high quality sustainable places.

Both **Marten Sims** of Happy City and **Ashley Bateson** of Hoare Lea outlined their respective research into the relationship between the design of homes or places and our health, well-being and happiness. Factors such as getting a good night's sleep, being able to integrate walking and cycling into daily routines, opportunities for social interaction and the possibility of developing community are all relevant to the way that we design places. These factors must be considered at the early planning stages right through to management and maintenance if we are to create and strengthen places for life.

Viability cannot be used as an excuse for accepting poor development. **Susan Emmett** from Savills outlined the findings of her new report that shows that early investment in elements that contribute to place-making can increase value for developers whilst residents reap the social, health and well-being benefits. That value is also a benefit to the public purse, though not without inherent tension. Whilst demonstrating the value of place-making, this raises questions about whether increased property prices are good for all. People may be willing to pay more to live in a better development but the consequences of this could be the exclusion of people who can't afford to buy into a great place to live. Should such quality not come as standard to help avoid such inequity? An overview of the proposals for the first phase of new residential development in Porth Teigr, Cardiff Bay by **Victoria Coombs** of Loyn & Co Architects and **Mark Hallett** from igloo Regeneration shows what can be achieved when a more socially conscious developer collaborates with a design team that considers the vision for the development, its key characteristics and the needs of future residents.

The need for a vision was explored in more detail by **Gareth Howells** from The Urbanists and **Mat Jones** of Coombs Jones Architects in their respective workshops. Who should uphold the vision throughout the development process? Who or what has the power to erode vision and design quality through the planning process, particularly with the need to meet housing targets? A vision for a development must be built on an understanding of that place to contribute to local distinctiveness. Successful places are all characterised by critical aspects of a founding vision being protected and carried through in delivery. An additional key ingredient is engaging people in the process. Strategic level thinking is needed to ensure that development is taking place in the right locations.

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Place-making must be an integral part of the process for all those involved for the legacy of our future places to be a successful one.

Thought pieces

In the second part of this publication we share a collection of articles written by practitioners as they reflect on the subject of Places for Life.

Studio Response's article considers the role of artists, creativity and culture in place-making. Drawing on their own experience of working with developers as well as a range of case studies, they challenge the preconceptions of the role of an artist in the development process and highlight the added value that a creative perspective can bring through engagement and the development of proposals.

Geraint Talfan Davies reviewed the conference in the context of other events at the time that have been exploring the same themes. He was struck by the energy and conviction amongst the delegates that things should and could be better but also highlights the constraining lack of skills, capacity and knowledge-sharing at the local authority level. Geraint welcomes the more creative and organic approach to the development of places that was being explored at the conference, in contrast to the more brutalist visions of the 1960s.

People are placed firmly in the frame in the article written by **Tamsin Stirling**, Independent Housing Consultant. Tamsin reflects on her visit to Humanité in France where she was struck by how the ethos of an inclusive place has been carried through the mix of uses that make up the development and how they have been designed to work together. Again, a clear vision was the starting point for this development and Tamsin poses the question of whether 'Dinas Dynol' would be possible in Wales.

An anonymous article provides the realities of a **local planning authority** perspective. This piece suggests that the long-term and wide-ranging benefits of place-making are understood, but conflict with other demands placed on LPAs including housing targets and determination periods. The pressure to process applications, combined with capacity limitations are cited as key challenges to more meaningful and proactive approaches to place-making from within LPAs. This anonymous piece also raises questions about exactly what risks are faced by professionals seeking to champion good quality.

Final thought

Across the full spectrum of issues that are important in the creation of great places, design is critical. Good design can make everything better – from the process to the final product. Understanding the power of design, recognising good design and incorporating creativity into the process must be a fundamental part of successful place-making in Wales.

- 1 Gordon Cullen, *The Concise Townscape*, (Butterworth Architecture, 1971) first published 1961
- 2 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (Vintage Books, 1992) first published 1961
- 3 Bently, Alcock, Murrain, McGlynn, Smith, *Responsive Environments* (Butterworth Architecture, 1985)



Present

Happy neighbourhoods, place-making
and mobility systems

Marten Sims

Delivering Healthy Homes

Ashley Bateson

A vision for life in Cardiff Bay

Mark Hallett

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Susan Emmett



tations





Happy neighbourhoods, place-making and mobility systems

Marten Sims, Senior Design and Engagement Specialist, Happy City
Written by Lindsey Brown

Where people were more connected, they were less likely to die.

'What is the antidote to the disconnected city?' was Marten Sims' opening gambit for his session on Happy neighbourhoods. He drew the audience straight in to the subject with an example of two neighbourhoods, 3 miles apart in Chicago. Englewood and Auburn Gresham have similar levels of wealth yet Englewood's death rate was 10 times higher than that of Auburn Gresham during a heatwave in 1995. The difference? Auburn Gresham is far more walkable than Englewood. The neighbourhood is much denser, with a higher concentration of churches, parks and libraries drawing people out in to public life, creating a vital social infrastructure. He described the neighbourhood as 'super-socially designed' and, where people were more connected, they were less likely to die.

Based on research and evidence from cities around the world Happy City created a holistic framework of the key elements of well-being, that can be methodically studied and consistently measured. Drawing on such material, Marten showed how our everyday experiences within our towns and cities could help to meet the key elements of well-being.

Designed well, cities offer the opportunity for people to move more easily, providing a range of transport mode options. Some uncomfortable statistics highlighted the need for us to move more. One being that the UK has the worst levels of obesity in western Europe, with 24% of men and 25% women classed as obese. One of the major issues is the amount of time people spend sitting - 'Sitting is the new smoking! What's needed to help tackle this issue is walkable places that offer opportunities for us to be active in our everyday lives - as a matter of routine. Marten referred to a programme to promote walking as an alternative to the use of the London Underground. The Tube map was annotated with the time taken to walk between stations, helping passengers to decide whether a train journey is necessary or if it is quicker to walk. Creating walkable places can provide multiple benefits, improving health but also relieving pressure on congested transport systems. Creating places that serve more than just the car can also help mental well-being as, on average, those who commute by bike or on foot experience more joy than those taking other modes.

The key to creating happy neighbourhoods and happy people does not just lie in people being able to walk. On average, a person replacing their car with cycling for their commute will lose 6kg in the first year. But what is the key to getting people to convert? The results of an internet image search for Danish cyclists reveals lots of pictures of everyday cycling, compared to a search for Welsh cyclists where the results were mostly Olympic cyclists. This demonstrates the cultural shift needed here in Wales to get more people cycling for everyday journeys. To achieve a happy city, well designed cycling infrastructure is essential in unlocking the potential and enabling people to choose to cycle.

Marten closed his talk with a case study on a community led project, City Repair, founded in Portland, Oregon. Residents of a city block wanted to repair their neighbourhood and took direct action, painting an intersection to create a people friendly space. The reaction that came from the city planners was 'you can't do this, it is public space', but residents pleaded to keep it, stating they had not felt so good in years. That feeling was backed up by measured change - levels of crime, fear, and even commuting times all decreased. This example highlighted one of the key challenges for creating happy towns and cities in here Wales: 'how do we design for people's real lives?' Why we need to design for people is clear, but Marten acknowledges that the how is hard. He believes we need to get better at doing, at collaborating to create structures that allow things to happen. Maybe then we will not only be able to create sustainable places but sustainable people!

How do we design for people's real lives?

Delivering Healthy Homes

Ashley Bateson, Head of Sustainability at Hoare Lea
Written by Claire Symons



Ashley Bateson presented findings from his research with the UK-Green Building Council examining how the layout and features of homes can have a significant impact on the day to day lives of their residents. He outlined key factors that needed to be considered when designing healthy homes, including: physical comfort, mental health and well-being, lifestyle, social interaction, management and resilience.

Ashley started with some of the basics of healthy homes including relatively simple home improvements such as boiler upgrades that can make a vast difference to comfort levels within the home and have the wider benefits of reducing energy bills and reduced hospital visits.

To aid mental health and well-being, homes need to be designed for a restful night's sleep. Noise reduction, reduction of external light pollution and thermal comfort all contribute to this. Likewise, good natural daylight within the home correlates with the body's natural rhythm of the day and should be considered in the habitable rooms within the home. When did we stop designing homes with people in mind?

Ashley highlighted the Swedish model of kitchen-dining-living areas that are designed generously and in an open plan format to allow for greater social interaction within the home. The ritual of eating together is valued within the family unit and is known to have a positive impact on well-being, therefore the communal spaces need to be welcoming and accommodate gathering.

The management and future proofing homes also contribute to how good people feel in the built environment. Studies by estates management teams show that residents feel they are properly attended to when repairs are carried out on time and where features are designed to be robust and last a long time. Shifting some of the management of communal spaces to the residents can help lower overall maintenance costs and provide a sense of ownership of the buildings and spaces, for example allowing residents access to rooftop gardens to plant their own herbs and shrubs.

Good quality outdoor spaces play a key role in the physical and social benefits of housing, whether they are private gardens or local parks. The design of neighbourhoods can severely affect our experience of the outdoor environment, positively or negatively, all the way down to basic, everyday activities such as getting out of the car and to the front door; is it a well-lit route; are there any trip hazards? etc. Ashley described how people with dementia need easily recognisable streets and landscape features for wayfinding so that they may return safely to their home after visiting friends or going to the shops.

Residential developments need to be designed well from the early stages to truly create healthy homes. We have a collective responsibility to consider all elements of the home and the impact they will have on residents, whether it be for basic comfort or for the feeling of safety. Post occupancy evaluations are crucial to understand how well housing schemes work, so that lessons can be learnt and further progress made in building healthy homes for all.

<http://www.ukgbc.org/resources/publication/uk-gbc-task-group-report-healthy-homes>

The ritual of eating together is valued within the family unit and is known to have a positive impact on well-being.

Good quality outdoor spaces play a key role in the physical and social benefits of housing.



A vision for life in Cardiff Bay

Mark Hallett, Development Director, igloo Regeneration
Victoria Coombs, Architect, Loyn & Co Architects
Written by Lindsey Brown

Begin with engagement rather than pen and paper.

'How do we live?' and 'how do we use space?'

Mark Hallett and Victoria Coombs shared the essence of their collaborative approach and how it has placed sustainability at the heart of the development process from responsible real estate to the design of new homes at Porth Teigr in Cardiff Bay.

Setting the scene as the world's first and only sustainable property fund, Mark Hallett explained how igloo Regeneration aims to deliver regeneration that is great for people and the planet. Their approach to development begins with engagement rather than pen and paper and there is an emphasis on action rather than just words. For example, in Cardiff Bay igloo Regeneration has supported meanwhile uses such as Coffi Co., a successful café located within a container unit which has recently been expanded. Permanent projects in the Bay include the BBC Roath Lock Studios – the world's first BREEAM Outstanding building, and GloWorks – a creative industries centre. Mark was keen to highlight that the development process is not just about meeting standards. In developing their products igloo seek to create buildings that are sustainable but also spaces that provide the flexibility to change and grow. GloWorks, for example, provides work spaces for businesses that require just one desk, up to space for a business with 50 people. This allows businesses to establish and grow whilst retaining a presence in the community where they started. This is good for the place and for the people.

Victoria Coombs outlined Loyn & Co Architects' approach to developing a place to live in Porth Teigr. Given the clear brief to 'create good, quality places', Loyn & Co focused on spaces and massing rather than output, encompassing both the micro and macro elements at the concept design stage. The design team sought to understand more about the needs of who they were designing for; principally 'next steppers' (aged 20-38) and 'empty nesters' (aged 50+). Inspired by their experience of working on individual homes and, indeed their own homes, they asked two questions; 'how do we live?' and 'how do we use space?' In answering these they quickly found that flexibility in design is critical. For example, simply designing one floor above another no longer provides the best solution to our needs, it is the connectivity between spaces that is important. To help achieve this they created a list of space ingredients including utility space, cycle storage, even a cocktail terrace which form the micro elements of the house design. Capturing the essence of their approach to creating space, rather than focusing on aesthetics, Victoria concluded by stating that the elevations were the last element to be designed.

Overall there was a clear message, 'create value where there is no value'. Not just financial value in the construction of buildings, but social value, in the way people choose to use and occupy space both in and around their homes. The challenge and vast opportunity it seems, presented for Wales is how to market itself to 'ethical' developers?

Why it pays to invest in place-making

Susan Emmett, Savills
Written by Claire Symons



Susan Emmett addressed how it really does pay to invest in place-making, especially if the investment is more upfront. Investing in the early stages of a project can have multiple benefits both financially and socially.

Susan explained how hypothetical land value models were used to test the impact of more investment upfront based on a 'Basic Scenario' and a 'Legacy Scenario'. The Basic Scenario allowed for a £30,000 investment cost per unit which would yield a sales value of £250,000 per unit, this would give an overall land value of £58m. The Legacy Scenario allowed for a £45,000 investment cost per unit (£15,000 more than the Basic) which would increase the sales value to £300,000 per unit (£50,000 more than Basic), giving an overall land value of £65m. These scenarios do hold variables and will vary regionally, however, testing proved that where developers place more investment up front, the returns are greater.

A partnership approach can help to address matters of timing to ensure that investment is made at the right stage. Joint ventures can hold higher investment upfront, whereas public sector finance can have a long term economic benefit. What is vital is working with the local council and community to truly provide a partnership approach.

Susan explained how implementing certain features within new residential schemes early on can generate interest and demand for the housing. For example, building a school in the first phase of development is attractive to the family market and helps to increase footfall to the area, this increases interest in the housing, thus driving up land values. Implementing high quality public realm (streets, parks, playgrounds, etc.) upfront also increases footfall to the area and creates a more aspirational environment that people want to live in. Similarly, by building retail and employment facilities early in the development, a long-term vision and sense of place is created. This approach was used at Poundbury near Dorchester where 3,000 people now live in the village and where 2,000 work within the 180 local businesses.

Upfront investment can really pay off and, as the demand for housing continues to grow and developments move faster, consideration should be given to providing early phase facilities and spaces that people want to be near to and benefits developers as the land values go up.

The subsequent discussion raised a key question: is the increased property price a good thing overall? There was concern that this could have the perverse effect of excluding people from living in well-designed places due to affordability factors.

Where developers place more investment up front, the returns are greater.



Worksh

Applying Happy City's holistic
well-being framework

Marten Sims

Strategic planning and place-making

Gareth Howell

Developing a vision for places to live

Matthew Jones



shops





Applying Happy City's holistic well-being framework

Marten Sims, Happy City
Nicola Corbishley, Wrexham County Borough Council
Written by Lindsey Brown

Focusing on holistic well-being meant that the driving force behind the ideas for the site was people centred.

This workshop built on the presentation given by Marten Sims and looked at how to apply Happy City's research to a practical, real life situation. Marten and Nicola framed the workshop with a question 'How can we create a new, happy community on a proposed strategic development site between the village of Rhostyllen and the town centre of Wrexham?' Participants were split into groups and each given one aspect of Happy City's Holistic Well-being Framework to consider. The challenge was to think through how the development of the site could improve life satisfaction. In developing ideas participants were asked to consider a hard-hitting fact: 'less urban mix = more likely to die, versus, more urban mix = less likely to die'

Groups found that focusing on the aspects of well-being led to thinking about and designing the elements of this new place in a different way to traditional site design. This stimulated further ideas:

- Providing space to bring people together
- Creating destinations that are a hub and will appeal to all ages not individual elements that divide people into groups. A co-operative farm could give people the opportunity to grow their own food, develop a business, learn and share skills and reach out to the wider community. This might replace the traditional playground or community hall approach.
- Including a skills bank
- Encouraging people to pay more if they own a car
- A maintenance fund to help look after communal spaces and facilities
- Meaningful physical connections that allow people to access destinations easily
- A walkable community that is well connected to Wrexham town centre and adjoining communities encouraging people to move in between communities

Focusing on holistic well-being meant that the driving force behind the ideas for the site was people centred: how will people live in this new settlement, rather than how many buildings can be constructed whilst including the obligatory play/community space. It was both refreshing and exciting – even for designers!



Strategic planning and place-making

Gareth Howell, The Urbanists
Written by Claire Symons



Gareth posed three key questions for discussion in the opening of his workshop on strategic planning and place-making: (i) Who is responsible for place-making? (ii) What has the greatest influence upon sense of place? and (iii) How is a vision maintained in the context of viability? He explained that the workshop would probably raise more questions than provide answers.

Some common ideas, challenges and questions emerged in discussion:

- All built environment professionals are responsible for place-making. Achieving good quality places and spaces should be at the core of what we do professionally.
- People need place-making, whether they know it or not. Built environment professionals should facilitate understanding and access to knowledge on the subject.
- Landscape should lead the place-making process, as it is the glue that binds all the buildings and infrastructure together.
- Local planning authorities often find it difficult to refuse applications as they are under pressure to get the right balance between place-making and other development needs. How can the balance be addressed?
- Often, delivering housing and development targets can have a negative impact on design as there is insufficient time or resources to do the schemes justice.
- There was a consensus that housing developers are risk averse and therefore one development can be the same as the next. Should more emphasis be placed on variety and innovation? How can good design be championed to show what is achievable? Do we have any good examples in Wales to showcase?
- Small ideas can make a big difference, and often allow the end user greater ownership of their building or landscape. This contributes to place-making.
- Political stability is essential to creating strategy for the long term.
- The South Wales Metro is a real opportunity to consider the bigger picture. This is place-making by connecting regions, improving or creating transport hubs thus rejuvenating communities and improving cycle and walking networks.

Who is responsible for place-making?





Developing a vision for places to live

Dr Matthew Jones, UWE and Coombs Jones Architects
Written by Amanda Spence

A good vision is the starting point for creating distinctive places with character and vibrancy.

Mat led a workshop that explored how to develop a vision for places to live. He opened by reiterating that developing a sound vision for a project that will provide places for people to live will add value and drive up quality. A good vision is the starting point for creating distinctive places with character and vibrancy, which are healthy, happy and affordable places to live.

Distinctiveness

Initially the group explored what makes a place distinctive and how this can be a good first step towards developing a vision. There may be cues from the existing site and context which can inform future development in an area. By looking at examples the groups identified the following characteristics which help make a place distinctive:

- Activity and vibrancy
- Scale
- Period/age/history of existing development
- Typical uses or mix of uses
- Uniform materials
- Repetition, consistency and rhythm of built forms
- Landscape qualities, including use and purpose
- Play and community facilities
- Arrival, approach and routes
- Visibility
- Formal or informal features
- Quality of public realm
- Material qualities





Developing a vision

Mat outlined the need for a vision to describe what kind of place will be created and what will make it distinctive. It is the key idea which will underpin the design of a place. A vision should be concise, and might include some of the following components:

- How existing qualities will be drawn upon
- Response to the context of the site
- Address who the project is for
- Ideas informed by site analysis
- Long term strategies
- Inspiration and delight
- What will make the place desirable

More detailed aspects, such as minimum standards, would go into an initial brief to keep the vision succinct.

Engagement

The workshop also explored how a strong vision can provide a useful focus for engaging with local people, community groups, stakeholders and potential users/occupants. The process of engagement can also be used to test and influence the vision.

Engagement is most effective at an early stage in a project where there is plenty of scope to implement changes and incorporate any ideas generated, rather than telling people about a finished proposal and asking whether they like it or not. It is also best if a wide range of people and groups are engaged, including minorities and hard to reach groups. This means that designers and developers must think more broadly about the nature of engagement to make it as effective as possible.

The group considered the format, location and timing of engagement activities and ways to encourage a variety of people and groups to take part. Using a variety of engagement methods may be necessary to make sure everyone is included. It can also be useful to include an activity, event or information which will attract interest or intrigue people to engage further. One example given was Brecon Beacons National Park Authority who used a Minecraft model of a town as part of an engagement strategy which attracted school children and got them thinking about the future of their town, and also provided an audience of parents to contribute to a specific project.

The workshop also addressed the importance of effective communication to good engagement. Drawings, diagrams, photomontages, models and film can be helpful in telling the story of a project so far. Clearly explaining the constraints, challenges, opportunities and ambitions of a project and how the design process is responding to these is likely to lead to more effective engagement than just asking people what they want. It is also important to manage public aspirations about what will be feasible to deliver.

The recent changes to planning legislation which, in certain circumstances, places an obligation on applicants to undertake public consultation at the pre-application stage provides the context for engagement on many projects and should be seen as an opportunity for improving proposals.

Designers and developers must think more broadly about the nature of engagement to make it as effective as possible.

Articles

The role of arts and culture in place-making for residential developments
Studio Response

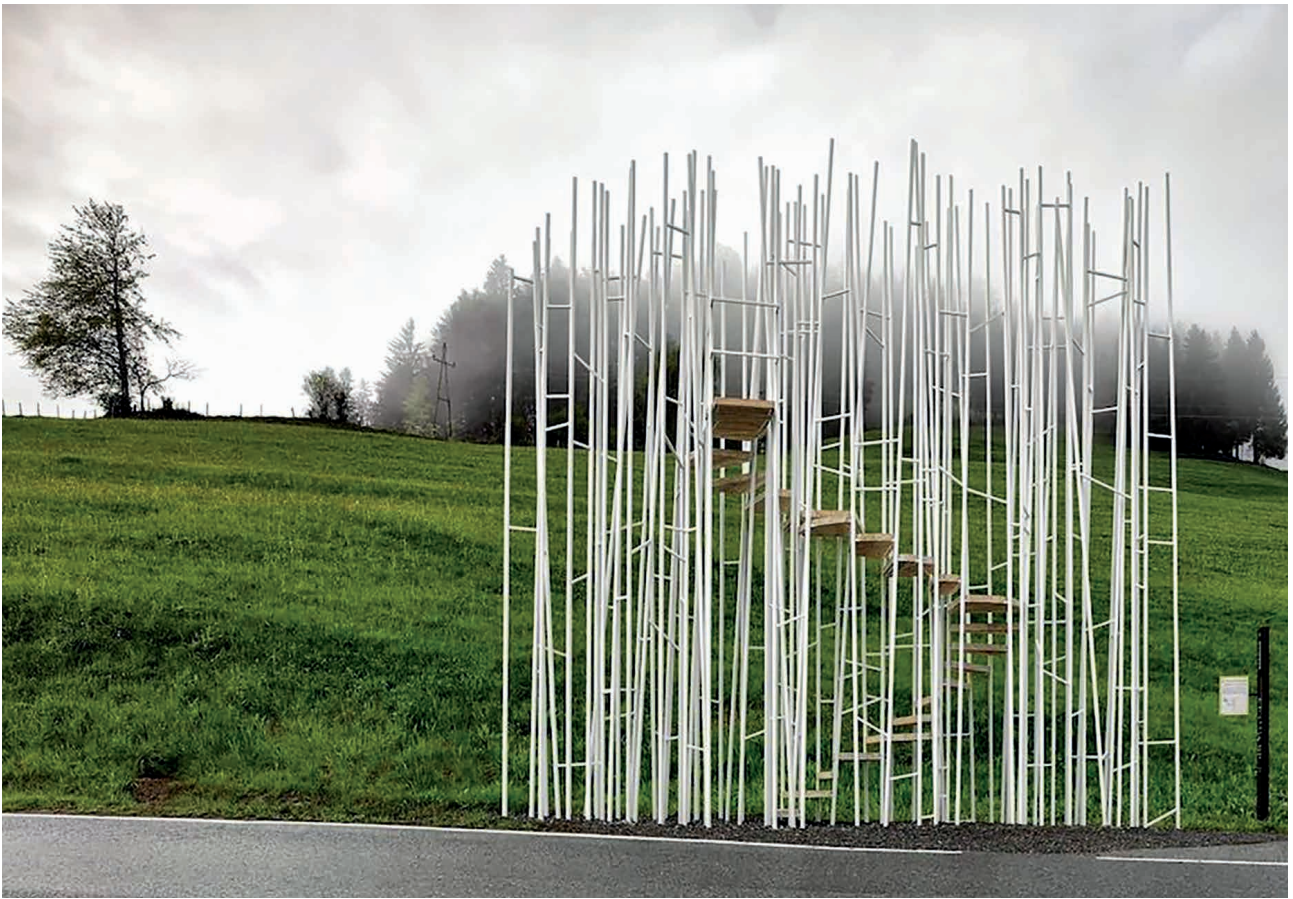
A turning point for better place-making?
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The role of arts and culture in place-making for residential developments

A reflection by Studio Response

“So, we need some help with the art”, said the voice at the end of the phone. “There was a placeholder on the architect’s plans, but we didn’t do anything about it. People are moving in now. What can you do?”

As a curator, it’s the conversation that makes your heart sink. The lost opportunities, the marginalisation of arts and culture, the preconceptions and disinterest. It assumes that the work of artists and designers is nothing more than the reactionary embellishment of the physical environment. It highlights a relationship with the arts which is driven by uncomfortable necessity rather than embraced with anticipation, and it usually

results in underwhelming, bland and formulaic artworks.

How can we ensure that this scenario is not continually replayed in our residential developments, and that the potent added-value that arts and culture can bring to our *'places for life'* is recognised?

Working with artists presents the opportunity to create residential schemes that are not merely functional but which are firmly borne out of the particulars of place and community, reflecting its aspirations and identity.

Challenge preconceptions

“It’s not really about the materials, it’s about our capacity to shape things”⁴

At the outset, it’s important that we challenge commonly held preconceptions regarding public art, and the process and potential outcomes of working with artists. For many, working with artists equates solely to the creation of permanent, stand-alone sculptures. Others will understand that public art can animate and enhance the quality of public spaces, adding focal points and landmarks, and both celebrate and help to create local distinctiveness.

However, defining public art by its materiality or tangibility alone limits our understanding of the artist’s potential in the public realm. It’s important to acknowledge that public art is more about art that belongs to and grows out of a place, rather than locating art in the public realm.

Working with artists presents the opportunity to create residential schemes that are not merely functional but which are firmly borne out of the particulars of place and community, reflecting its aspirations

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and identity. At its heart is the process of artists responding to people, place, culture, heritage and ambition. Or, to put it another way, to the social, economic, cultural and environmental landscape of each residential development.

In grasping this shift, we elevate our frame of reference from commissioning artists solely to create permanent works, to the role of artists, arts and culture in place-making; the powerful and at times transformational process of creating the crucial and ephemeral quality often defined as ‘sense of place’.

It is place-making that transforms a physical space into a destination, and turns a residential development into a place to live and call home. At its best, it creates, with a certain authenticity, the essence of a place, “identifying, elevating or assembling a collection of visual, cultural, social and environmental qualities that imbue a location with meaning and significance.”⁵

In challenging preconceptions, we must also redefine our expectations regarding the role of the artist, and consider the opportunities presented by artist / architect collaborations. When brought on-board with the design process at the earliest possible time, artists can make a real difference to the quality of the built environment, provide different perspectives and alternative methods of engagement.

In this context artists can function as visionary, facilitator, questioner, problem-solver and researcher. They can contribute to the overall conceptual vision, and the process of brief and design development, as well as bringing an alternative creative response to the design of specific elements of the functional fabric of developments.

They can offer a different viewpoint which provokes architects to think beyond the physical constraints of a space or development plot, and can challenge ideas regarding light, colour, materials, shape, or form. They can also bring to the table a poetic sensibility: *“something that can get lost in the bigger picture in which many competing demands and pressures drive the management of a complex process towards closure”*.⁶

Artists can also interrogate architects’ and clients’ ideas and beliefs. They can present new methodologies that promote alternative agendas that are often anchored in the very ethos of place-making. In this way, artists can:

- Act as a neutral outsider, work with communities that are suspicious of change, business or political agendas, helping secure community buy-in
- Ease the process of transition and help bridge the often considerable gaps between the pace of change and the needs, concerns and aspirations of local and new residents
- Help reveal a sense of place, as *“the chemistry needed for cultural place-making begins with knowing where you are”*.⁷ The artist can offer up fresh interpretations and often a unique perspective on what makes a place distinctive or memorable, which then becomes embedded into the development itself.



Case Study

Hafod Housing: Golau Caredig Extra Care Residential Homes, Barry, South Wales. Integrated Glass Artwork and Artist in Residence.

The Golau Caredig public art programme included a glass artwork by artist Kate Maestri, followed by a social engagement residency by artist Heloise-Godfrey Talbot, which tackled the challenge of engaging not only with new residents, but existing ones. The programme has brought into focus the positive effects art in its various forms can have on the well-being of older people and highlighted the richness and depth of public debate around cross-generational collaborations and ageing.

October 2016 saw the unveiling of a permanent wall display and an illustrated book inspired by the personal memories of residents living in Golau Caredig. The memories were captured by Heloise who specialises in creating art inspired by people. She introduced herself to the residents by sending each one a unique hand painted card of a memory which was precious to her. This inspired them to share their own stories which enabled Heloise to produce individual paintings for each to keep. These have been used to create a limited-edition book called 'Treasures'.

Personal stories were explored further during weekly creative 'Get Together Clubs'. Residents and their families were invited to spend time together, learn new skills and talk about their lives. This engaging approach helped to unlock fascinating memories which were shared while enjoying planting, drawing, silk painting, lavender bag and card making.

Case Study

Jeanne Van Heeswijk The Blue House 2005 IJburg, Amsterdam, Netherlands

The Blue House by Jeanne Van Heeswijk created space within a residential development in a newly created suburb of Amsterdam for cultural and creative interaction and the exchange of ideas.

Located in a housing block in IJburg, Van Heeswijk was originally approached to consider a commission to make an entrance to one of the residential blocks more visible, but rejected this due to the limitations of the opportunity.

Instead, Van Heeswijk negotiated for a large blue house in the development to be taken off the market and designated as a space for community research, artistic production and cultural activities. Over a four year period the likes of artists, architects and writers were invited to live and work in the Blue House, and to consider what happens when such a structured and transformational approach is applied to community development. One element of Blue House, the Parade of Urbanity, enabled temporary interventions which responded to the needs of residents struggling through the ongoing construction phase. These included a library, community restaurant and outdoor cinema.

Case Study

Theaster Gates Dorchester Projects (2009)

Through these projects in Gates' home city of Chicago, the artist demonstrates his ongoing work in creative place-making that redefines the role of art in community development and regeneration.

The renovation of homes led by Gates saw a site of neglect and deprivation transformed into a vibrant cultural centre for the community, providing an outlet for expression and preserving local heritage and culture before it is lost. To cite Gates' website:

"The aesthetic of Gates' Dorchester Projects is both practical and poetic, bridging the creation of new art with the adaptive reuse of resources. Within this multi-functional and growing space, community-driven initiatives and experiences foster neighbourhood [sic] revitalisation and serve as a model for greater cultural and socioeconomic renewal. ... It empowers community members to engage in the movement of radical hospitality by physically transforming their surroundings and filling them with beautiful objects, diverse people and innovative ideas."¹⁰

Broaden horizons

“For any place to be truly successful, people must not only feel like they belong, but also that they can play an active part in the creation, management and continued success of that place.”⁸

A shift in mind-set regarding the role of the artist refocuses our expectations of art in the context of residential developments and opens our eyes to its potential. Much of this potential is about artists creating and enabling new ways for communities to participate in place-making, thus reiterating that public art can and should be as much about the process of engaging with communities as providing physical artwork.

It is encouraging to see, therefore, that on some projects where a proportion of the arts budget is sourced from private

sector developments via Section 106 Agreements, there has been a sum allocated towards arts projects that do not result in a tangible outcome.

Through engagement and co-production with communities, artists can interpret, question, represent and advance our understanding of how we live. Artist residencies and durational projects allow artists to become members of communities and can view developments and regeneration initiatives as a subject of them, rather than as an outsider looking in.

Artists such as Theaster Gates and Rick Lowe have become influential agents for change, reimagining the role of art in neighbourhood and community renewal. To quote Rick Lowe: *“artists have really begun to invest their energy in conceptualizing their work so that it adds value to the people within a place, which oftentimes can have some social and even economic benefits for a neighbourhood in transition”*.⁹

Are we saying that there is no longer a place for permanent artworks within our residential developments? No,

not at all. We're advocating that we *“look to our artists to see beyond the obvious and superficial”*¹¹, so that commissions are rooted in place and led by community engagement, whether they're integrated into the fabric of the built environment, site-responsive or functional, permanent, temporary or experiential.

In reality, a successful arts programme for a residential development will incorporate a range of commissions that add value to the scheme's overarching vision, and will be actioned at the earliest possible opportunity, spanning from project inception to post-occupancy.

In this context, we believe that there is an untapped role for art and design in the new pre-application consultation requirements of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.¹² This presents an opportunity to move consultation away from a process driven exercise brimming with clipboards and post-it notes, to an artist-led, more meaningful approach that adds value. Our experience shows that action attracts a wide range of people, not just objectors. It can result in a more engaged constituency that feel valued and motivated to respond, and in so doing helps build local support and encourages ownership.

At the other end of the development we believe there is scope to develop an artist-led, creative approach to the notoriously difficult process of Post Occupancy Evaluation, which often has little more than a patchy response rate.

There is an untapped role for art and design in the new pre-application consultation requirements of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015



Case Study

David Mackie Constellations: Channel Heights Residential Development, Rhoose, South Wales

Artist David Mackie's has been influenced by the coastal panoramic position of Channel Heights. This lends itself to star gazing, which has become a visually rich, playful and educational theme for the commission. The artwork takes the form of a viewing platform that doubles as a functional seating area: a low crescent shaped plinth in pennant stone, the surface of which incorporates a sequence of individual bronze reliefs depicting constellations.

Positioned in Channel Heights' public play area, the artwork creates a reference point for people of all ages to enjoy and learn about the night sky together, feeding our fascination with space.



Case Study

Bus:Stop – Krumbach, Austria

The village of Krumbach's cultural association instigated the Bus:Stop project to boost the number of tourists who already visit the surrounding Bregenzerwald area for its scenery, hospitality and architecture. Hoping to promote an international exchange of ideas, the association engaged seven international architects to design bus stops around the village. Instead of a typical project fee, the architects were offered a holiday in the Bregenzerwald in exchange for their services. Each also partnered with a local architecture office, who acted as an intermediary between the designer and the local craft-based businesses who built the structures.

Image source:

<https://www.dezeen.com/2014/05/16/bus-stop-project-fujimoto-shu-radic-austria/>



Case Study

CHI and Mathilde Lopez (Director) Butetown Community Engagement Programme, Cardiff, South Wales

In August 2013, CHI presented a National Theatre Wales inspired event that was devised, written, performed and hosted by a group of young people from the Butetown, Grangetown and Riverside areas of Cardiff.

The event took place at the Old NatWest Bank in Bute Street and explored the idea of Home, and what it takes to make a Home.

Through workshops, young people contributed different ideas of what home could be. CHI used this resource to develop and collate ideas for the final theatrical event.



The arts can encourage active citizenship by providing a mechanism that empowers communities to shape their everyday lives and their environment.

Advocate benefits

All societies have looked to both their reality and their imagination to help them live... and to live better¹³

The benefits of arts related place-making in residential developments can take several forms. We should not underestimate the intrinsic value of artworks that enhance the environment, enlivening and animating spaces, shifting the mundane into the mesmerising and memorable by punctuating hard and soft landscaping with features that hold your attention, and add a sense of originality, delight and discovery.

Yet the potential benefits can surpass these aesthetic considerations, particularly when rooted in meaningful community engagement. There is a growing body of evidence which shows that cultural participation can contribute to social relationships and community cohesion by reducing social exclusion and/or make communities feel safer and stronger.¹⁴ The arts can encourage active citizenship by providing a mechanism that empowers communities to shape their everyday lives and their environment. They can stimulate debate about the impact and expectations of change in a positive and considered way. In so doing they can help foster civic pride. Feeling part of a community and experiencing a sense of pride about our place within it is important to us all as active citizens.

In addition, there is an increasing evidence base which demonstrates that engagement with the arts and culture can have a positive impact on our sense of well-being and therefore that participation and involvement in the arts helps promote good health.¹⁵

With "sitting being the new smoking" (Marten Sims)¹⁶, arts interventions can encourage activity in

its broadest sense. This could be physical artworks that encourage walking by enhancing a development's legibility and wayfinding strategies, using colour, lighting and signage for example, as well as engagement projects.

Walkable spaces can also be sociable spaces, and there is a real opportunity for the arts to help combat social isolation. Being lonely or isolated can lead to health problems and depression, and it is recognised that it can make older people more vulnerable to abuse.¹⁷ Artworks can be used to create spaces that encourage people to stop, rest, gather and interact, inspiring chance encounters and conversations. Encouraging activity outside also promotes access to nature, and therefore sensory engagement of a different kind. There is a significant body of evidence which demonstrates the impact of the natural environment to health and well-being.¹⁸ Artworks can also encourage play, for adults and children alike, both for social interaction, such as artist Bedwyr Williams' chess tables in Cardiff City Centre, and for physical activity.

But let's not be naïve about this. We must advocate for creativity and the arts to help us persuade developers to commit to supporting an arts programme for their residential schemes. We're asking them to commit resources to ensure its successful delivery. We know the benefits for people and place, but what are the additional benefits for them?

For housing developers and providers, an arts programme can:

- Help them respond to the strategic, political and legislative contexts facing their sector¹⁹
- Contribute to customer satisfaction: the higher quality the environment, the happier the customer
- Increase the desirability and marketability of developments: the quality of the public realm sets the tone

of a development and drives value. Artworks can make developments distinctive and different.

- Offer a more cost-effective and timely route to securing community buy-in, which can contribute to a smooth progression through the planning and development cycle
- Generate positive PR and reinforce a brand message: a successful arts programme can promote developers as forward thinking, and provide the opportunity to present a different face to the public
- Contribute to Corporate Social Responsibility objectives

Build relationships

Fundamental, not ornamental²⁰

For some of our partners, this is preaching to the converted; for others it's, understandably, a whole new world.

As a Studio, we focus a great deal of importance on forging sustainable partnerships with housing developers and providers in order to develop their understanding of the potential for the arts in their developments. How else can we expect them to embrace the arts with any alacrity if they are unclear about its values and the opportunities it can open up?

We work to demystify the process, advocate for the value, benefit and potential outcomes of engaging with the arts and attempt to break down the often-quoted silo based working practices which can stifle innovation and co-production. This helps ensure that the arts are not marginalised in the development process. Marginalisation stems from preconceptions about purpose and constituents; building strong relationships helps to counter this.

Artists can function as visionary, facilitator, questioner, problem-solver and researcher.

All of this helps ensure that our developer partners are 'commission ready'. By this we mean that they're in a position to embed the arts within their core business, with knowledge, confidence and a clear vision. Being commission-ready is important as an informed and supportive client is critical to the success of any arts programme. Importantly, we're seeing a commitment to this approach with at least two house builders with whom we're working on adopting overarching strategies that embed the arts across their developments.

Conclusion

“Cultural creativity may well be the driving force of community revitalisation in the 21st century. It promises more adaptive ways of seeing, understanding, experiencing and transforming where we live, how we work and what we dream”²¹

Embedding arts and culture within residential developments may require a shift in working practices, and there is no one-size fits all, off the shelf approach. But without doubt they have the potential to play their part in elevating places to live, to places for living, and living well.

Images: Studio Response

- 4 Theaster Gates. Quote from Gates' TED Talk, "How to Revive a Neighborhood: with Imagination, Beauty and Art" [sic], March 2015. https://www.ted.com/talks/theaster_gates_how_to_revive_a_neighborhood_with_imagination_beauty_and_art
- 5 *Creative Place-making: Rethinking the Role of Arts and Culture in Strengthening Communities*. Rip Rapson, The Kresge Foundation, 2013
- 6 Collaborative Practices: artists and architects, Susan Francis, Published in *Architects for Health*, July 2013
- 7 *Cultural Place-making in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea*, p.15
- 8 Creative Communities and Arts Based Place-making, Project for Public Spaces
- 9 Lowe's Project Row Houses in Houston is founded on the principle that art and the community it creates can be the foundation for regenerating inner-city neighbourhoods. Rick Lowe quoted in *Creative Time Reports: Rick Lowe, Project Row Houses at 20*.
- 10 http://theastergates.com/section/117693_Dorchester_Projects.html
- 11 *Inspire*, the Arts Council of Wales' Strategy for Creativity and the Arts, 2014. p.7
- 12 The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 requires residential developments of 10 or more units, or 0.5 hectares to submit a pre-application consultation report to its local Planning Authority, and how they have taken its findings into account.
- 13 *Inspire*, the Arts Council of Wales' Strategy for Creativity and the Arts, 2014. p.7
- 14 *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society*, Arts Council of England, 2014. P.33
- 15 A recent report by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) stated: "access to and involvement in creative activity and the arts in all its forms is an important component in both the overall health and well-being of society and for individuals within it" Royal Society for Public Health Arts, Health and Well-being, *Beyond the Millennium*, June 2013 (Quoted in Well-being Assessment of Arts Council of Wales' funded events, presenters and venues, *Lles Cymru / Well-being Wales* for ACW, April 2014 P.14
- 16 Quote from Places for Life Conference, 12th October 2016
- 17 Welsh Governments *Strategy for Older People Living in Wales (2013-2023): Living Longer, Ageing Well. Strategic Delivery Plan*. Accessed 27 July 2016: <http://gov.wales/topics/health/publications/socialcare/strategies/older/?lang=en>
- 18 For example: Ulrich, R. & Zimring, C. (2004) *The role of the physical environment in the hospital of the 21st century*. The Center for Health Design.
- 19 This can include ensuring developments meet planning obligations for art, meeting the requirements of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, and aligning developments strategically with *Planning Policy Wales* (Ed 8, 2016), and *Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12: Design*. It also includes responding to the principles of active travel and sustainable development as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- 20 *A Manifesto for the Public Arts*, 2015
- 21 *Creative Place-making: Rethinking the Role of Arts and Culture in Strengthening Communities*. Rip Rapson, The Kresge Foundation, 2013





A turning point for better place-

Geraint Talfan Davies

When the economic indicators for the UK create such a sense of foreboding, it is both remarkable and hopeful that people can remain so determinedly positive about shaping their communities in new ways. That this is possible has been evidenced in two events in Cardiff in the last month. Both were about what planners and architects call 'place-making'.

The first was a day long exploration of the potential that might be unlocked around six existing or putative stations for the proposed south east Wales Metro. This was organised by the Design Circle, the south Wales arm of the Royal Society of Architects of Wales. The second, the Design Commission for Wales's autumn conference – Places for Life – took a broader look at the impact of design on the homes and communities in which we live.

What characterised these events was the conviction that things should be better and can be better, as long as government, at all levels, taps the imagination and creativity that abounds in our communities and does not use the necessary, or sometimes trumped up demands of viability to crush all vision.

Both the Design Commission and the Design Circle events demonstrated how far we have come since the brutalist visions of the 1960s. The approach of the current generation of architects and designers to developing our towns and cities seems now, thankfully, to be more granular, intimate and organic, assisting our living rather than forcing it into a concrete strait-jacket, emphasising well-being rather than efficient living. Gone are Le Corbusier's notions of "cleaning and purging the city", replaced not only by a desire for more human architecture, but an acceptance, even a revelling in the inescapable messiness of cities.

The Design Commission event sought to explore the essentials of place-

making, and the barriers.

Marten Sims, of the Happy City consultancy – a company that rather obviously wears its heart on its sleeve – was keen to demonstrate the link between urban design and happiness, a concept that he believed was measurable. For instance, behavioural research had shown that those who lived near parks tended to be more helpful, patients who could look out on nature recovered from illness more quickly.

He reminded his audience that much depended on the questions we asked: is our preoccupation with iconic buildings or with walkable cities, with grand design or with creating sociability, belonging and meaning – key elements of well-being? And in a telling juxtaposition he revealed that typing 'Danish cyclist' into Google brings up images of ordinary people cycling around their towns, whereas if you type in 'Welsh cyclist' all you bring up are Olympic competitors. It speaks volumes about the respective planning priorities in each country, not to mention the British obsession with Olympic glory, and all despite the fact that Wales allegedly leads the world in having a Well-being of Future Generations Act on the Welsh statute book.

At a more intimate level still Ashley Bateson, Head of Sustainability at Hoare Lea, spoke of the relationship between design and health and well-being at home, particularly the impact of design on relationships in the home. Is there a

-making?

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relationship between the fact that we build the smallest new homes in Europe, the decline of the family meal, or research findings that British children are among the least happy? Does the standard British suburb, with its emphasis on the single house and space for two cars, actively discourage social interaction?

Arguably, much of this is not new. Echoes of the century old garden city movement are loud today, but if a different generation is coming to these matters anew, bolstered by a more comprehensive environmental agenda driven by climate change and notions of sustainability, it matters not.

One of the disappointments of events such as this is to see featured fine examples of developments in Scandinavia or even in the south east of England, without being able to point to developments of comparable quality here in Wales. It speaks volumes about the disconnect between our groaning shelves of fine policy documents and what manages to get through the planning net: few of our housing estates or the houses themselves even aspire to the very best practice.

Does no-one connect our shrinking space standards – the most common complaint amongst the occupants of new houses – and the fact that it is not a legal requirement on house-builders and estate agents to state clearly the precise internal area of the houses they are selling? It is commonplace in other European

countries. This lacuna is crying out for a simple piece of remedial legislation by our National Assembly.

It will be interesting to see whether Loyn + Co - an architectural practice whose leader, Chris Loyn, deservedly found himself in the shortlist for this year's Stirling Prize – will produce something we can all boast about at Porth Teigr in Cardiff Bay. If so it will be an indication that we have moved on from the disconnected tarmac acres of the International Sports Village that seem to spurn every sensible rubric on the other side of Cardiff's lagoon.

There is a deep irony in the fact that just as the architects and urban designers are recognising the fundamentals of human interaction – that are both simple and complex at the same time – the most difficult connections to make are those between a widespread sensitive professional impulse on the one hand, and, on the other, cruder commercial operators and the practices of our governing authorities.

At the very moment when design professionals – and the public – are crying out for a more imaginative and holistic approach, our local authority planning departments are being stripped of the people and skills that are needed to secure a better outcome for the public and for the future generations that Welsh legislation professes to care about.

The culture change in the professional community has not been

matched by a similar culture change in Welsh local authorities. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the average age of the participants in both these events was, at my guess, around 35, rather younger than the average age of Wales's councillors.

There are echoes here of the situation in Welsh education. Concern about standards in education has led to a recognition that our 22 local authorities would not be able to drive up standards unless they collaborated, hence the creation of regional education consortia. If local government is not going to be reorganised from the top down, is there now a case for the creation of regional planning consortia in which scarce skills and specialisms can be shared? We have to find a way of making best practice travel faster and further.

That might also be a way of increasing the influence of the Design Commission for Wales that has done so much in the last decade and a half to champion best practice and the lasting value of good design, albeit on pitifully small resources.

Geraint Talfan Davies is an Honorary Fellow of the RIBA.



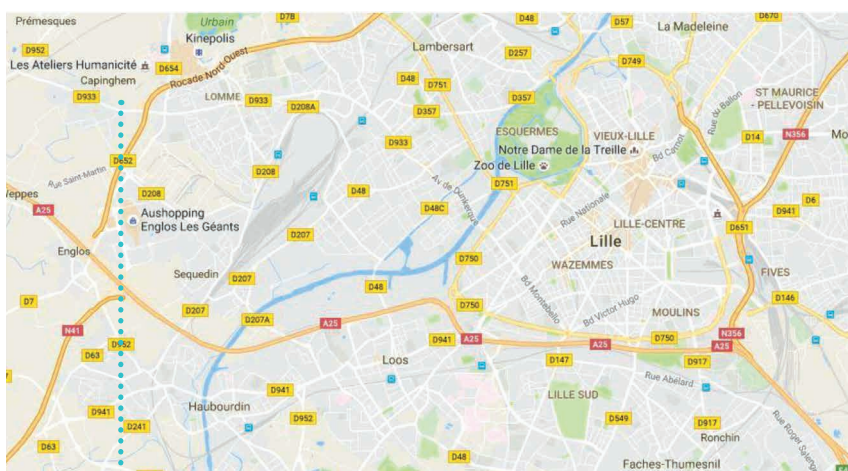


Putting the human in the city; reflections on Humanicité, Lille

Tamsin Stirling, Independent Housing Consultant

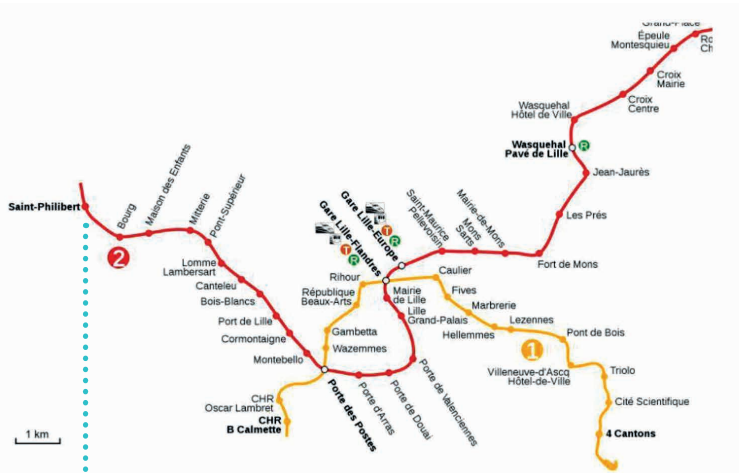
In October 2016, I joined a study tour with the Chartered Institute of Housing South East Branch to Lille in north east France. The trip was hosted by the Baptist Association for Mutual Aid and Youth²² (ABEJ), a third sector organisation that specialise in working with homeless people with mental health and other challenges.

The study tour included a visit to a new development called Humanicité²³ on the north west edge of Lille, in the suburb of Capinghem. ABEJ has several projects within Humanicité including a residential home for disabled people and a supported housing project for single people. The visit left a very strong impression on me; I felt that Humanicité is an example of how places should be designed. It is an area of the city which is both human in scale and humane in design.



Map of Lille showing Capinghem in the north-west

Through their work ABEJ seek to support people to 'take their place in the city', to move from being on, or beyond, the margins, and to participate in everyday activities. To achieve this ABEJ are involved in providing a wide range of services including day centres, night centres, outreach work, supported accommodation, health services, help with accessing mainstream housing and social enterprises.



Metro map of Lille – Saint-Philibert station is at the western end of the red line



Map showing the university-owned hospital – Humanité is the area with a red border

The vision

The original vision for Humanité came from Thérèse Lebrun, Président Recteur of the Catholic University of Lille in the early 2000s. She wanted to see a part of the city developed to *'allow for the innovative care of people who have become fragile due to illness, disability, old age or accident.'*

The Catholic University of Lille is a private, not-for-profit institution whose mission goes beyond education and research to include 'service to society'. The organisation's mission focuses on:

- European integration and global responsibility.
- Being a catalyst for change, contributing to the social and economic development of the community.
- Becoming a mainspring of economic development, particularly at the regional level.
- Representing a place where meaning is sought and debate can take place, with respect for cultural diversity.

The university's mission is evident wherever you look in Humanité. The area has been designed with the input of a wide range of organisations which are now involved in different ways in making Humanité a successful community. The vision on which it is based is inclusion, for all types of people and of all the services that people should be able to access easily as part of their daily lives. It has been designed specifically to bring together *'all human activities'* – housing, business, trades and services, health activities, medical, social, academic and cultural amenities.

The vision for the settlement goes beyond the physical, to imagining *'new forms of social relations'*. Mixing and living together are at the heart of the settlement, as are social and technological innovations. The settlement is referred to as an experiment and the principle of experimentation, drawing on the experiences and views of residents, builds on the initial action research approach.

One example of how the social vision influences daily life in Humanité is the monthly mutuality meeting held in the community centre. This brings residents together to share information, discuss concerns and generate ideas. Mutuality is also expressed through the provision of collective services including district heating, laundry, treatment of waste and the sharing of common household items.

The central role of the University

Since 1977, the Catholic University of Lille has owned and run the 350-bed Hôpital Saint-Philibert, a teaching hospital on land adjacent to the site of Humanité. The hospital is on the edge of the urban area of Lille, but close to the Saint-Philibert metro station which has a regular service to the centre of the city. The work of the teaching hospital resulted in the university being concerned with wider issues of aging, dependency and disability. These practical concerns, combined with the university's mission, led to the desire to create a new part of the city.

In the early 2000s, a collaboration between the Catholic University, the districts of Lomme and Capinghem and the city of Lille gradually developed. The focus of the collaboration was what might be done with land in the Capinghem area. A series of both formal and informal processes followed, including modifications to the local plan in 2004 to include a zone for mixed use development and a series of urban design and accessibility studies. Agreement was reached to jointly plan a 130-hectare site divided into 4 quarters, one of which one was the 15 hectare Humanité quarter.

A number of principles were agreed for the new urban development:

- Improve the accessibility of the site
- Favour public transport and limit parking spaces
- Organise space in a way that ensures continuity and easy transition from one part of the site to another
- Locate economic activities near to transport routes so that noisy activities are clustered together
- Create a mix of functions and populations
- Put sustainable development principles into practice through appropriate density, diversity, high quality buildings and public spaces and the provision of district heating

Development began at Humanité in January 2009, the first residents moved in during January 2013 and two years later, around 1,000 people had made Humanité their home.

The place

Humanité brings together housing - rental and owned - health and medical facilities, two training centres, supported accommodation and businesses.

The design of the buildings and wider environment has taken into consideration the needs of those with limited mobility, natural daylight, insulation and renewable energy sources, while planting in the open spaces is sensory and tactile.

The overall design is based on a series of 'islets' linked by walkways, creating a human scale within each islet. There is planting at the centre of each islet with seating and spaces that encourage residents to meet and share time. Priority is given to pedestrian paths and access to public transport within the development, while shared spaces for parking a limited number of cars are also provided. The layout has considered water management and orientation to maximise solar gain.

Humanité itself is inclusive but it is also outward looking and integrated into the wider settlement. Sight lines extend beyond Humanité to the surrounding area and the site, although relatively high density, has an open feel.

By the end of 2017, there will be around 900 homes, housing approximately 2,200 people, together with commercial units and several buildings housing a range of services and a beautifully designed community centre. The homes are available for private rent, social rent and purchase. Over 350 jobs will have been created during the development of the area and 1,100 students will study in the hospital and in adjacent businesses.

The site is inclusive for a wide range of people including those with physical disability and mental health issues as well as different generations, with some housing for older people, some specifically aimed at families with young children and accommodation for students. Humanité has been planned as a place for the whole of life and a good life.





LE SITE HUMANICITE



Two of the public authorities involved in the partnership describe the settlement in the following ways:

Lille Metropole

'... a sustainable city, convivial and emphasising solidarity, an intense city – Humanicité firmly demonstrates the Lille Metropole values of living together'

Ville de Lomme

'Humanicité is a site that will strengthen the town of Lomme in both its human and ecological dimensions. We are very proud to welcome Humanicité into our area'

Partnership

Those involved in developing the concept and the reality of Humanicité identify partnership and collaboration as fundamental.

Partnerships were developed between a wide range of organisations and people were brought together from various disciplines. Organisations and individuals from the private, public, charitable and not-for-profit sectors had time to get to know each other well and brought their skills and expertise to the project. They worked in an environment of reciprocal trust and mutual support.

The fundamental role of the Catholic University of Lille was acknowledged by all involved, as is its track record of being active in the economic and social development of the region. In Humanicité, the university has put its resources where its mission is. The settlement will help the university to *'shed light on the major economic, cultural and social developments of our society and draw conclusions in terms of the how our cities will need to adapt in future'*.

Reflections

Why did I like find Humanicité so appealing? Firstly, it is an attractive development. Considerable care has been taken in the design of buildings and public space and the build quality. Too many developments in Wales lack such quality in the homes themselves but also, perhaps more critically, in the space between the buildings which is too often focused on parking for cars and little else. High quality, well-designed public space provides aesthetic qualities, space for social interaction, a place for people to get away from things and for their senses to be stimulated. It is an aspect that deserves, and requires, more attention.

The inclusive nature of Humanicité is important to me. I dislike segregated

Humanicité has been planned as a place for the whole of life and a good life.

development, whether on the basis of tenure, age, income, or a combination of all of these. Too often in Wales and across the UK, mixed-tenure developments still involve a degree of separation. For example, when I was a local housing officer, I recall proposals for a large development in Cardiff Bay where the social housing was located at the edge of the development, to provide a 'buffer zone' between the privately-owned homes and the existing council housing on the other side of the site. In contrast the mix of people living in Humanicité is seen as a positive thing, *'a source of wealth and therefore a source of innovation'*, not something to be 'managed'.

The importance placed on mutuality is another positive aspect. This reflects my personal interest in mutual and co-operative forms of organisation and service provision and their capacity to enable the creation of resilient communities and to support well-being, inclusion and personal development.

A further factor was the value base of ABEJ. They work with some of the most excluded people in society with empathy and compassion. The atmosphere of all the services we visited, including those based within Humanicité, and the demeanour of all the staff we met, was calm. However, beneath this lay a steely determination amongst the team that ABEJ's clients should be able to *'take their part in the life of the city'*. In my mind, this contributed to the inclusive approach and feel of Humanicité.

Is Humanicité a one-off that simply can't be replicated? The vision came from what might be viewed as an unexpected quarter, although the University already

had a stake and a physical asset in that part of the city. Thérèse Lebrun not only had the initial vision, but also the communication skills to persuade others to share that vision. The complex partnership involved in developing Humanicité has been expertly led and partners have come to trust and respect each other demonstrating the importance of good leadership and appropriate organisational structures. The development has drawn on positive attributes within the city such as its excellent community-based mental health services as well as the expertise and experience of third-sector organisations such as ABEJ which work alongside some of the most marginalised people in the city.

Might a Dinas Dynol be possible in Wales? If it is, it will require a number of things: a clear vision, determined and principled leadership, robust partnership working where different skills and expertise are respected and fully utilised, and a shared ambition to make a good place where all sorts of people will be happy living together and seen as having value. My view is that all of these factors are present in Wales today, but they do not come together as often as any of us would like.

Further reading

Blog post exploring the issues of mutuality a bit further.²⁴

Images from <http://www.humanicite.fr/galerie-photos>

Photos: Tamsin Stirling

Too often in Wales and across the UK, mixed-tenure developments still involve a degree of separation.



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<http://abej-solidarite.fr/>

<http://www.humanicite.fr/>

<http://www.everyonesbusiness.coop/en/2016/12/01/co-operative-housing-in-wales-building-homes-creating-communities-changing-lives/>





Housing numbers v place-making: the challenge

A local planning authority perspective – submitted anonymously

Is there a disconnected message about place-making, one that puts Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) under significant pressure to deliver land, homes and meet qualitative determination targets on the one hand, whilst giving them the responsibility to deliver sustainable, high quality places to live – i.e. places for life – on the other?

This LPA is concerned that the Welsh Government's (WG) agenda to deliver housing numbers is out of sync with other more desirable governmental outcomes including good design, place-making and the well-being of future generations.

Is it possible to effectively deliver both the housing numbers and places for life agendas? It is our view that the current system does not readily facilitate this and we consider that a range of significant changes are needed if the two agendas are to align more effectively. This paper explores the key issues and barriers to achieving high quality design and delivering places for life within the planning process, and considers some potential solutions to address them.

What are the barriers to achieving places for life?

Place-making v quantitative targets

Housing Land Supply: We are concerned that the primary focus on delivering Local Development Plan (LDP) housing targets and maintaining a 5-year housing land supply has negative implications for place-making because design and place-making are typically given less weight than other material planning considerations, including land supply and viability issues.

It's very difficult for an LPA to refuse an application on design grounds alone, particularly when under pressure to maintain a 5-year land supply and deliver LDP housing targets. The housing numbers and place-making agendas appear to be competing and, in our view, it is proving onerous to effectively achieve both. Indeed, there appears to be a greater focus at the national level on delivering housing numbers rather than creating places for life, resulting in quantitative

outputs over qualitative outcomes.

Development Management Targets:

Within the development management process there is arguably a greater focus on the speed of determination of planning applications in order to meet WG targets than on the quality of decisions. This approach tends to act as a 'stick' for LPAs to determine applications within a specified timescale, as failure to meet such timescales results in penalties for the LPA. In this context, there is a clear lack of a 'carrot' to encourage and enable quality outcomes. This has been compounded by the changes following the Planning Act 2015 whereby, after 24 weeks, application fees can be refunded if the application is not determined. This typically undermines the LPAs position in negotiating higher design standards as developers can use this timeframe to push an LPA into 'making a decision'. Application fees, particularly for large housing sites, are the primary income for an LPA.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) aims to improve well-being in accordance with the sustainable development principle - ensuring that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act will make the listed public bodies think more about the long-term; work better with people and communities and each other; look to prevent problems; and take a more joined up approach.

Place-making v Local Planning Authority Resources

We consider the lack of urban design skills and knowledge within LPAs to be a significant barrier to creating places for life. LPAs rely on a limited urban design resource, with many having no in-house urban design practitioners to draw upon – a situation exacerbated by current fiscal pressures. Furthermore, LPA officers typically do not have sufficient skills to effectively consider design and place-making throughout the application process.

Officers do not have the technical depth required to properly consider place-making or make justified changes to a scheme particularly given increasingly heavy workloads, the requirement to meet WG targets and time pressures. We also feel that consideration of place-making is sometimes given too late in the planning process and where LPA officers will often comment on architectural details (which does little for place-making), when the developer would have probably welcomed earlier discussions about the more strategic aspects of place-making.

It's evident that there is a need for urban design input at the inception and feasibility stages, to ensure that initial design comments are clear and concise. According to a recent survey of Housebuilders²⁵, LPAs are advised not to communicate personal or opinionated

design preferences and should, instead, ensure that design principles or prescriptive changes are based on technical expertise and evidence based rationales only. A lack of consistency from the LPA will cause delays to the planning application process and will surely weaken the potential for good place-making during the design and planning process.

It is reassuring to learn that, where local authorities have the necessary staff with the skills and knowledge to undertake this urban design function, in conjunction with an able developer team, very good results that meet all of the parties' objectives can be achieved.²⁶

The above clearly suggests the need for urban design officers and champions within LPAs, if we are to achieve higher design standards and create sustainable, quality places for life.

Such barriers to place-making within the LPA could also have wider policy implications including, for example, the ability of local authorities to deliver Well-being of Future Generation goals. The 2015 Act places specific sustainable development duties on Local Authorities who will be assessed against the state of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the area. The impact of this Act could have far reaching positive consequences in delivering well designed and sustainable places for Wales. However, the extent to which these goals could be achieved is questionable given the barriers to place-making outlined.

Place-making v Housebuilders

While many house builders take a reasonable approach to new housing and take great pride in the places they help create, they are ultimately businesses seeking to make a profit. Subject to satisfying shareholder requirements, it seems that most will take the line of least resistance to achieving planning permission.

Site viability is a key factor impacting place-making, with developers often claiming that they 'can't afford' higher specification materials due to site viability issues²⁷. We typically see an array of competing priorities on sites, including affordable housing, S106 contributions and considerable debate over land values, which often means that design is pushed down the list of priorities. Developers seem to have the 'upper hand' in the current planning system which arguably favours quantitative outputs (housing numbers) over quality outcomes (place-making).

Housebuilders use standard house types and layouts to make the most 'efficient' use of land and best practice guidance to 'create' places. We question whether this is the most productive and most viable way to deliver homes? For the LPA it raises specific issues over the quality of place or the pace of development being delivered and we feel that the current situation is unsustainable. It is arguably a desk-top solution for maximum profit, not for people or communities.

The use of standard house types and layouts adopted by many developers creates places with a lack of identity, places that do not respond to their environment, its people and policy. It is very typical to be consulted on proposals that have no evidence based rationale to support the proposal i.e. they have not considered the site and its surrounding environment. It is therefore imperative that LPAs have the ability, skill set and experience to seek modifications, to ensure that they meet the objectives of the Welsh Government, Local Development Plans, and the needs of the wider community. Good layouts rely on this analysis and appraisal work to ensure streets and spaces between buildings become places and where a sense of community and social interaction can be fostered.

How can we address the barriers to create 'places for life'?

Potential Solutions

Role of the LPA

We think there is a clear need for LPAs to adopt a more innovative approach to residential allocations and development, and to be more proactive in terms of design solutions and enabling the creation of places for life. As noted above, many LPAs adopt a reactive approach to design considerations given the barriers encountered. Therefore, the introduction and/or retention of officers with a high standard of urban design and place-making skills within the LPAs is considered essential if we are to deliver quality, sustainable places for life. There is a need for LPAs to recognise urban design or place-shaping champions, with a dedicated role (or roles) to enable the effective consideration of place-making in the planning process. Place-shaping champions should be brought into project discussions much earlier than they currently are to embed the principles of place-making at inception stages, which is a key factor in delivering good design. It is often the case that place-making is considered far too late in the planning process, when LPA officers may go in to detail rather than discussing the key aspects of place-making with developers at an earlier stage where there is scope to have a meaningful impact. We also consider that it would be beneficial to establish an internal place-making team to ensure the LPA provides concise comments and eases the frustration some housebuilders feel over the inconsistency of comments provided by LPAs.

The preparation and effective use of places for life SPG, design briefs and masterplans which reflect and

actively require high quality, sustainable design standards in new developments are also key in creating sustainable places for life. Such local policy could be strengthened by the introduction of statutory design or place standards for Wales as outlined below.

If LPAs are to succeed in this context, there will need to be a step change in the way they plan, design and build places for life. They will need to balance the principles of place-making and delivery into all policy areas and the development management processes. LPAs need to adapt and respond positively to this and they need the support of both the Welsh Government and Planning Inspectorate to do so.

Role of Other Policy/ Decision Makers

It is our view that the planning system should be *outcome* rather than *output* driven, if we are to succeed in delivering sustainable places for life and be proud of our decisions for future generations. To achieve this there needs to be a shift away from quantity driven targets (5-year land supply and application determination targets) to a focus on quality objectives.

In the context of the current WG focus on delivering housing numbers, we question the need for 5-year housing land supply. Arguably it is causing planning by appeal, ad-hoc development contrary to LDP strategies and a shift away from the plan-led system, typically resulting in unsustainable, poor quality places. Should there be a shift away from such a quantitative approach to housing delivery, given that it does not appear to be delivering sustainable places for life? Similarly, should there be a shift

in the approach to current quantitative development management targets towards quality driven outcomes? Quantitative targets are acting as 'sticks' and as such are typically not enabling quality outcomes. Such an approach has been successfully implemented in Scotland and there could be lessons to be learned from this.

Is there a role for national statutory design/place standards for Wales, set out by the Welsh Government, like that in Scotland? The Place Standard could be a resource for all to assess the quality of places, proposals for new development and the impact on the health and quality of life of the people who live there.

Support is also required from the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) if we are to effectively deliver sustainable places for life in practice. The material weight given to quality design and place-making in appeal decisions is questionable. LPAs are often reluctant to reject proposals on design grounds alone given the perceived (or actual) lack of weight given to design considerations at appeal, particularly when there is a shortfall in the housing land supply. Arguably, design should be awarded greater weight, when considered against land supply to ensure higher quality outcomes which accord with the places for life agenda.

Role of developers

Developers have a fundamental role in enabling the development of sustainable quality places for life but how can they be persuaded to actively embrace this approach? If there was a greater focus on quality outcomes in the planning system and less focus on land supply/

The preparation and effective use of places for life SPG, design briefs and masterplans which reflect and actively require high quality, sustainable design standards in new developments are also key in creating sustainable places for life.

quantitative targets, coupled with statutory design standards and supporting local policy, developers may be 'forced' to up their game in terms of creating places for life. However, developers should also be aware of the financial benefits of creating quality places. Recent research by Savills²⁸ clearly demonstrates that investing more in a development (for example facilities, high quality materials etc.) enables higher profits to be gained. This requires a shift in approach from 'develop and go' to 'stay and place-make', in other words long-term investment for long-term gains.

A comparative analysis of good and bad designs show that good quality place-making does not cost more than a less well considered project. On average, most schemes will have similar costs for roads and sewers and for professional fees. But a strong focus on design can lead to good quality place-making with both short and long term benefits and ensure that expensive architectural or decorative features (for example chimneys) with limited benefit to the user are restricted. The need to focus on cost and achieve financial viability need not be an impediment to delivering better quality urban design.

CONTEMPORARY BY DESIGN

Should a contemporary solution to house building be sought? Embedding green infrastructure and zero carbon buildings into development will create modern, sustainable 21st Century character areas and places for life. This does not have to be costly to developers or sacrifice the high design standards we all a striving for. We want to achieve both architectural and environmental excellence in all new housing development.

Concluding Remarks

We consider that there is a clear need to address the competing agendas of delivering housing numbers and creating sustainable places for life, to ensure that they more effectively align and achieve desired objectives. Creating places for life requires input, support and a shift in focus from all those involved in the development industry including LPAs, WG, PINS and developers. Delivering places for life cannot be achieved in isolation. As planners, we want to help shape and create sustainable quality places and ultimately leave a positive built environment legacy for future generations. Accordingly, there should be less focus on the short-term vision of delivering housing numbers and a greater focus on the longer term vision of creating quality sustainable places that we are proud of. We would like to see a step change from policy makers and practitioners to progress the places for life agenda and make this a reality.

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- 27 Emmett, Development: The value of placemaking. Savills World Research (UK Development) 2016
- 28 Emmett, Development: The value of placemaking. Savills World Research (UK Development) 2016



About the Design Commission for Wales

The Commission is Wales' champion for good design in the built environment: in buildings, places and public realm. We connect the design disciplines of architecture, urban and landscape design with decision makers who shape the countryside, cities, towns and villages of Wales. Through our networks we connect with professional bodies, local authorities, clients and commissioning bodies, in planning, regeneration, housing and infrastructure.

Thanks

The Design Commission for Wales would like to thank the following people and organisations for their support and contributions to Places for Life:

Lesley Griffiths AM/AC, Welsh Government, Cardiff and Vale College, Marten Sims, Ashley Bateson, Mark Hallett, Victoria Coombs, Susan Emmett, Gareth Howell, Matthew Jones, Studio Response, Geraint Talfan Davies, Tamsin Stirling, Anonymous Local Planning Authority, Lindsey Brown, Claire Symons, Marc Jennings, Betina Skovbro. Rightacres who sponsored the conference lunch.

Places for Life was originated, organised and delivered by the Design Commission for Wales and led by Jen Heal.







Design Commission for Wales

Autumn Conference 2016
