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Editorial

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Urban design and planning has a scope that is both wide and diverse, but what brings all the disparate facets together, which should never be forgotten, is that we are designing and planning for people, or as is summarised by Lorna Walker's Briefing,[1] we are designing and planning not just buildings, but also spaces and places, with people's lives as their central theme. Lorna states that the aim of urban design and planning should be to create thriving places for people to meet and to communicate, to exchange ideas and to engage in healthy and active lifestyles. She stresses that a step change is required by built environment professionals to fully integrate spaces and places into wider urban design, which often focuses just on the buildings to the wider detriment of the people and public who will actually interact with the buildings, spaces and places as part of their daily lives.

This theme of using urban design to benefit the entire community is taken up by Jamie Kerr in the second Briefing[2] where he describes a £450 million regeneration partnership between John Laing plc and Croydon Council. This unique public–private partnership, the first of its kind, utilises an urban regeneration local asset backed vehicle (LABV) - with Croydon Council investing the land, and John Laing the equity. Croydon Council's aim is to deliver sustainable facilities to help support its ambitions to make Croydon a hub of living, retail, culture and business in south London and south east England. Construction is hoped to begin in November of 2009.

These large inner-city regeneration programmes are frequently used as iconic 'flagships' for the wider area, particularly in former industrial cities that have suffered from both economic decline and/or poor image problems. This theme is expanded upon by Doucet [3] in the first of the papers in this issue. He explains how these projects are intended to act as catalysts for further development, to attract inward investment to the area and to help produce a new icon or image for the city. However, as they are often directed towards outside audiences of tourists, investors and/or potential residents, many are focussed upon becoming global emblem or symbol, rather than a space and place for local people. Doucet reviews the development and evolution of these iconic 'flagships', contrasting them with other forms of urban regeneration, paying particular attention to their impact on local residents.

Continuing this historical analysis and critique, Hamilton[4] describes some of the historical measures taken by the water sector in order to increase the resilience of the urban landscape, particularly those related to water resources, supply, drainage and flood protection, as well as analysing more recent developments. He concludes that clearer responsibilities between differing parties and stakeholders are required, as well as better data, risk and response analysis, and more focus and resources. The involvement and preparation of the public is also essential for robust emergency response planning, which brings us back to the key theme of people, and what all the design and planning is really for.

While built environment professionals design and plan buildings, spaces and places for use by other people, let us not forget that they are only human themselves, and thus the more assistance, tools, and information that they can be provided with for them to discharge their duties, then (it is hoped) the better, and more effective and appropriate, their final designs will be. This brings us on to several papers outlining what tools and techniques have recently been developed to assist urban designers and planners. Capacitycheck is one such tool, a new method for helping appraise and develop urban design skills, and Smachylo's briefing[5] describes its development. The tool is designed to help 'professionals to free themselves from their silos' as well as help 'landowners and developers to discover the value of making places'. Capacitycheck addresses this need by assessing what capacity individuals and organisations have and then it helps you draw up a plan for increasing it.

Stevenson[6] meanwhile outlines the challenges of implementing post-occupancy evaluation in relation to rapidly developing UK government policy on climate change and other sustainability issues. He thoroughly reviews developing methodologies in terms of their qualitative and quantitative aspects, advocating a diagnostic approach that avoids any unnecessary and costly monitoring and concluding that it is not desirable to have one single method for evaluation, as each typology requires its own set of criteria. Various barriers to the use of post-occupancy evaluation are also discussed, including lack of legislation, threats of litigation, cost and the perception that the work of the design and building team is finished at the point of handover. Positive signs are also identified however, with evidence showing that feedback is beginning to be taken up in design office practice.

The final paper by Fu and Aouad[7] builds upon their previous work in nD modelling and describes the development of an integrated data repository for urban sustainability analysis,

which aims to enhance the quantitative analysis of urban sustainability using statistical data with relevant geographic references. The background and importance of using statistical data for urban planning and analysis is highlighted, and selected statistical sources and geospatial objects are reviewed. Case studies of the application of the database for urban sustainability analysis are outlined and potential applications, barriers and future improvements are also discussed.

These high-tech tools, models and technologies aid modern-day designers and planners in ways which were previously unimaginable, even a decade ago. We should never forget however, the reason for which all this work and investigation is conducted, that of providing a space and a place for us all to live, work, travel and play, in a comfortable, healthy, economic and sustainable manner. As Walker[1] reminds us, this does not always mean we have to build something - Britain's most valuable tree in Berkeley Square, London, is valued at £750 000, based upon its size, health, historical significance and how many people enjoy it, so as well as designing buildings we should also not forget the people, the spaces, and the places, and of course the trees.

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