

Editorial: Making the connections

Wei Yang MSc, PhD, MCIHT
Director, Wei Yang & Partners, London, UK



Recently the UK Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA, 2011) published a new report, *Re-imagining Garden Cities for the 21st Century: Benefits and Lessons in Bringing Forward Comprehensively Planned New Communities*. The report was published at a sensitive time during the UK planning system's reform. Despite the UK coalition government's localism agenda and the abolishment of regional development agencies, local governments still need to address the housing shortage, generate economy growth, create healthy inclusive communities, as well as address the global challenges of the globalised markets, and the adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts. By revisiting the legacy created by TCPA founder Ebenezer Howard and other garden city pioneers in the current context, the report enables people who are interested in community-making, reconnecting the legacy with the current challenges.

Furthermore, the UK has been planning and establishing comprehensively planned new communities for over a century. It is all too easy to forget that 100 years ago the primary challenges in the UK urbanisation process were urban sprawl, pollution and ribbon development. These undesirable issues are rather similar to some of the urbanisation issues in many current fast-growing countries in the world. Again, it would be beneficial for the knowledge from the UK planning legacy to be better transferred to facilitate those fast-growing countries' own sustainable development agendas; and at the same time help them avoid the mistakes made in the UK in the past, such as ignorance of social integration, undefined public realms, poor quality in design and maintenance, and segregated professional disciplines.

Urban planning is fundamentally about people. Like the question Howard attempted to answer more than a century ago: 'the people, where will they go?', more questions need to be asked such as, 'who are they?', 'what they will do in the new community?', 'how could they cultivate a sustainable lifestyle in the new community?' and 'how to facilitate that?'. The TCPA (2011) report recognises that governance (people and planning), vision and master plan, and a long-term investment and implementation model are three key issues which must be addressed to obtain the benefits of comprehensively planned new communities.

Local community needs can differ, but the best place-making principles are universal. In this issue, Kelbaugh (2011) highlights

the accessibility issues of Dubai – a fast growing high density city. However, it is argued by the author that because the city master plan privileges mobility over accessibility, the city fails to achieve genuine mixed-use development with attractive destinations supported by transit and walkable street networks. The issues outlined in the paper, such as self-contained large land parcels, large traffic roundabouts, wide highways with numerous lanes, cul-de-sacs and unnecessary speed bumps are the same problems existent in UK highway design less than a decade ago. In the UK, the car-oriented highway design approach has already been abolished after the publication of the new UK highway design guidance, *Manual for Streets* (DfT, 2007), a revolutionary guidance directly influenced by the substantial review carried out by Urban Task Force (1999) in identifying issues preventing the development of sustainable cities in the UK.

Breeam, the UK Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method, is another good example of the UK's legacy in promoting sustainable development. Although originally designed for a UK context, Breeam is already one of the most commonly used sustainability assessment methods for buildings in the world, which has been adapted for and influenced a range of building rating systems worldwide. In this issue, following a thorough analysis of indicators in Breeam's domestic scheme Ecohomes, Forbes *et al.* (2011) propose a means of incorporating an economic dimension in relation to the building cost. This proposed approach could be a significant step in empowering different communities with the ability to measure the three dimensions of building sustainability, which will in turn help communities to make their decisions in relation to their local needs and aspirations.

A holistic and comprehensive master plan is fundamental in terms of delivering a sustainable community for generations. The master plan should act as a framework for development, rather than a blueprint, with the flexibility to adapt to change (TCPA, 2011). To assist design decision making in the planning application process by clarifying design approach of the applicant from the outset, UK planning regulations require developers to submit a design and access statement (DAS). In this issue, Paterson (2011) investigates the background of the UK government intervention in design decision making through planning. It is recognised that the requirement of a

DAS was a logical development from the promotion of good quality design within a systematic decision-making process by Cabe, the public design champion formed after Urban Task Force's (1999) recommendations. Through case studies carried out in north-east England, the author further concludes that improved practice is needed at local level to ensure the effectiveness of this mechanism in delivering a long-term successful master plan.

It is already widely recognised that greater community involvement is needed in shaping the places in which we live. However, it is important too that it is a well-informed community making place-making decisions. There is a greater need than ever for the planning professionals to communicate and connect with the general public, to articulate their vision of the new community. Isaacs *et al.* (2011) present the results of an initial application of a prototype simulation and visualisation tool that was developed to enable all stakeholders, regardless of background or experience, to understand, interact with and influence decision-making on the sustainability issues of urban design.

City infrastructure is a long-term investment. The funding and delivery of it must be carefully co-ordinated and well integrated with the management regime. In the context of the current unprecedented climate change, it is important that the master planners give extra attention to designing sustainable measures to mitigate the issue. However, it is also important to ensure that the city works as a whole – a well-connected system, and the decision makers are open-minded to adopt best practice elsewhere. Adeloje and Rustum (2011) suggest that there is no evidence that rainfall has been the dominant cause of the increasing flooding problem in Lagos, Nigeria. The existing provision of the conventional drainage system is insufficient to prevent flooding and the continued reliance on this approach is unsustainable. The paper calls for a paradigmatic shift on the part of the Lagos state government to introduce sustainable urban drainage systems (Suds) as a way of reducing flooding problems in Lagos by integrating Suds with the existing structural drainage system in the city.

This issue of *Urban Design and Planning* covers a wide range of topics in relation to mechanisms of shaping more sustainable communities. Past mistakes in urban planning were painful to the community and costly to correct. It is therefore particularly valuable for planning professionals to learn from the past and from the experience of other countries and thus to build up a better future with the connections to the present and past.

REFERENCES

- Adeloje AJ and Rustum R (2011) Lagos (Nigeria) flooding and influence of urban planning. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Urban Design and Planning* **164**(3): 175–187, doi: 10.1680/udap.1000014.
- DfT (Department for Transport) (2007) *Manual for Streets*. Department for Transport, London, UK.
- Forbes D, El-Haram M, Smith S and Horner M (2011) Incorporating an economic measure in sustainability assessment. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Urban Design and Planning* **164**(3): 147–154, doi: 10.1680/udap.900030.
- Isaacs JP, Falconer RE, Gilmour DJ and Blackwood DJ (2011) Enhancing urban sustainability using 3D visualisation. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Urban Design and Planning* **164**(3): 163–173, doi: 10.1680/udap.900034.
- Kelbaugh D (2011) Briefing: The environmental paradox of cities: getting around Dubai. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Urban Design and Planning* **164**(3): 143–146, doi: 10.1680/udap.2011.164.3.143.
- Paterson E (2011) Design and access statements: north-east England case study. *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Urban Design and Planning* **164**(3): 155–161, doi: 10.1680/udap.900038.
- TCPA (Town and Country Planning Association) (2011) *Re-imagining Garden Cities for the 21st Century: Benefits and Lessons in Bringing Forward Comprehensively Planned New Communities*. TCPA, London, UK. See www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/reimagining_garden_cities_final.pdf (accessed 25/07/2011).
- Urban Task Force (1999) *Towards an Urban Renaissance: final report of the Urban Task Force*. HMSO, London, UK.