Planning, urban design and placemaking

Chapter 8 – Planning, Urban Design and Placemaking

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Learning outcomes

This chapter aims to**:**

- provide readers with an understanding of the key principles of urban design and ho these can inform placemaking;
- explain how urban design relates to common planning practices and systems;
- identify the skills that planners need to recognise the value of good urban design;
- help planners identify opportunities for, and support others in, the delivery of good place-making.

Introduction

The term 'urban design' defies straightforward definition and is used to refer to a process, domain or area of practice *and* a product (Rowley, 1994). For some, it is "easier to say what urban design is *not* (i.e. architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, city planning) than what it is (Knack, 1984: p.4, emphasis added). But this is not to say that urban design is disconnected from these disciplines – quite the reverse:

> Urban design is derived from but transcends related matters such as planning and transportation policy, architectural design, development economics, landscape and engineering. It draws these and other strands together. In summary, urban design is about creating a vision for an area and then deploying the skills and resources to realise that vision (English Partnerships / The Housing Corporation, 2000: 10).

Creating and delivering a vision is a complex task involving various actors (with associated skills and knowledges) and a number of methods, processes and systems; including those related to planning. This chapter focusses on the interface between urban design and planning. It argues that planners have a critical role to play in making well-designed places. In order to deal with some of the definitional complexities that surround the term, the chapter distinguishes between urban design *activities* and as an *area of professional practice*.

Urban design *activities* are often discussed in terms of key *aspects, aims* or *objectives*. These are typically broad, descriptive and aspirational in nature and set out what good design should seek to achieve. There is overlap, but, in contrast, design *principles* and *characteristics* tend to focus on *how* to achieve these goals. They are often expressed in more technical language and may have an objective or measurable component. For example, designing places according to the principles of *character* and *distinctiveness* may help achieve the goal of making 'Places for People' (see Table 1). Tools such as *masterplans* - overarching planning documents that visually express spatial layout, land use and other factors to guide development – can be used to help covert broad principles into deliverable qualities that apply to a particular site and/or over a wider development area (see also Boxed Example 1).

Principles such as 'ease of movement' have informally guided the development of human settlements for millenia. Many ancient cities display the principles we would recognise today as making good places: human in scale, walkable, with a clear hierarchy of streets and spaces,

public spaces, and buildings that are well proportioned and relate to their surroundings. Over the years, these qualities have become codified through governance systems (including planning) as part of institutional efforts to improve "the human experience that the built environment evokes across private properties or in the public realm"(Sternberg, 2000: p266). By way of example, Table 1 presents some of the design guidance published by the UK government and its advisory bodies over the last 20 or so years including guidance issued as part of national planning policy (ODPM, 2005). This was revoked in 2012 as part of a broader streamlining of planning policy (see Chapters 1, 5 and Boxed Example 3).

Table 1: Examples of urban design principles in UK design and planning guidance

By Design (DETR&CABE 2000) ***Principles of urban design***	*Urban Design Compedium 1** (English Partnerships/The Housing Corporation 2000*, see also: English Partnerships 2007; HCA 2013) ***Key aspects of urban design***	*Planning Policy Statement 1* (ODPM, 2005) ***Principles of good design***	*National Design Guide* (MHCLG, 2019) ***Design characteristics***
• Quality of the public realm • Continuity and enclosure	Places for People	Create an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society	• Public spaces: Safe, social and inclusive • Homes and buildings: Functional, healthy and sustainable
• Character	Enrich the existing	Be integrated into the existing urban form and the natural and built environments;	• Context: Enhances the surroundings • Identity: Attractive and distinctive • Built form: A coherent pattern of development
• Ease of movement • Legibility	Make connections	Be integrated into the existing urban form and the natural and built environments; Address the connections between people and places by	• Movement: Accessible and easy to move around • Nature: Enhanced and optimised • Homes and buildings: Functional, healthy and sustainable

		considering the needs of people to access jobs and key services;	• Uses: Mixed and integrated • Context: Enhances the surroundings
	Work with the landscape	Consider the direct and indirect impacts on the natural environment	• Nature: Enhanced and optimised
Diversity	Mix uses and form	Address the connections between people and places by considering the needs of people to access jobs and key services	• Uses: Mixed and integrated
	Manage the investment		
Adaptability	Design for change	Create an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society;	• Lifespan: Made to last
			• Resources: efficient and resilient

Source: Adapted (and updated by author) from HCA (2013, p.13)

This only a selection of the guidance published in the UK over this period but demonstrates some consistency in the principles featured (see also Boxed Example 4). The existence of design guidance in of itself represents awareness that getting urban design right can deliver significant benefits for the human population and natural environments while the consequences of getting it wrong are significant. As Bentley et al argued in 1985 (p.9) "the design of a place affects the choices people can make, at many levels". The existence of guidance and other regulatory measures including those within planning systems may also represent tacit acknowledgment that, without intervention, markets may not deliver optimal (design) outcomes (see later sections of this chapter, and Chapter 7).

Continuing with this theme, some see the emergence of urban design as a *distinct area of professional practice* as symptomatic of planning's failure to deliver high-quality physical environments (see also Boxed Example 3):

> Urban design is the process of planning for land use and of devising the physical form of development in cities, towns and villages. You might ask: is that not equally a definition of planning? Yes, it is, if the planning process in question focuses on the physical form of development, rather than on the uses alone. But too often planning lacks that dimension, which is why urban design emerged as a distinct field of activity. (Cowan, 2021, no page)

This connects to debates about whether planners have the skills, tools and capacity to support good design. Talen (2018: p2) argues that planners have lost ground to other professionals in the pursuit of *placemaking* (see below) and need to "regain confidence in the realm of urban design" (Talen, 2018: p2). In the UK context, the RTPI have acknowledged that: "the teaching of urban design principles on…planning courses could be strengthened" (BBBBC, 2019, p.48). Others have gone further, recommending government-funded design training be made available to planners (BBBBC, 2019).

Ultimately, a range of professional skills will be needed at each stage of the design-planning-development process if 'good design' is to be achieved. It follows that it is important for all planners to have a grounding in key aspects and principles of the specialism, plus an awareness of when and where they can use planning processes and systems to shape decisions that deliver well-designed buildings and places that promote quality of life for all. The negotiative, market-orientated nature of many modern planning systems (including England, see Chapter 7) means that generic planning skills are also needed to ensure that good design outcomes are supported through the process and not dismissed as too costly or difficult to deliver (see later sections of this chapter).

It may be desirable for all planners to have knowledge of, and skills in, design but the reality is that while some may have undertaken specialist training - for instance as part of a spatial planning degree - many will have had little or none. Whether or not they *self-consciously* identify as designers (Beckley, 1979), it is likely most planners *are* engaging in urban design work. As much is suggested by Carmona and Tiesdell (2007: p.1,2) who define urban designers as broadly as "those who make decisions that affect the quality of the urban environment" but that they may do so "without appreciating that this is what they are doing".

This chapter aims to raise readers' awareness of design issues and increase planners' confidence in dealing with them effectively and proactively. It has benefitted from inputs from practitioners working in the urban design and planning fields. The chapter provides readers with an introduction to some of the design principles and concepts they may encounter in planning practice, drawing on examples from policy and practice by way of illustration. These focus mainly – but not exclusively - on the English context. The chapter's basic premise is that if *all* planners recognise and - place value upon - the components of good design they will be more effective at using the system and influencing others to prevent poor design and promote better outcomes. What constitutes 'good' design is subjective, especially where aesthetics are concerned. This is highlighted by recent debates in the UK over what constitutes 'beauty' in the built environment (BBBBC, 2019, see also Boxed Example 4).

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However, there are discernible objectives and features that can support positive engagement with place; some of which can be measured more objectively.

A few words on placemaking

Before the chapter turns to considers the development of urban design as a distinct area of professional practice, it is worth examining a term that has become commonplace in design, planning and development practice and policy in many countries. *Placemaking* (see also Chapter 1) has its origins in the United States and is closely associated with the work of 'Project for Public Spaces' a non-profit established in 1975 to "strengthen the connection between people and the places they share" by developing the work of thinkers including Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte (PPS.org, no page; see also later sections of this chapter). In the US, placemaking has retained its focus on grassroots action and community collaboration as a vehicle for the creation of liveable, sustainable places.

In the UK, *placemaking* (the term 'place shaping' is also used, sometimes interchangeably) is more loosely defined and has been widely used in industry and policy circles since the 1990s. It is a normative term based on judgements about what a 'good' place is. This makes it political and its nebulous nature can be problematic. For instance, notions of *place* can be used to deflect attention from inappropriate practices or even 're-brand' poor-quality development. Urban regeneration schemes seem especially prone to this kind of activity (see Allen and Crookes, 2009). Planners need to be alert to how terms like placemaking may be used by different actors and look for opportunities to promote optimal design outcomes. In private planning practice this could mean advocating for solutions that go beyond the regulatory minimum with developer clients despite possible cost implications. In England, local government planners can (still) wield (some) influence via policy and local plan-making; the development management system also has an important role to play in preventing poorly conceived schemes gaining approval (see later sections of this chapter).

While placemaking has its limitations, there is potential to put the term to work for progressive ends. Good place-making can be a tonic to what Friedmann (2002, p.13) has called the "forces of contemporary life that steadily eat away at our sense of being anywhere at all, erasing our sense of place". Focussing on *neighbourhood revival* is one way to 're-humanise' the urban Friedmann argues, since many of the most common and highly-valued social interactions such as chance-encounters with neighbours, occur at this scale.

Making 'good places' – at any scale - involves an in-depth understanding of how places work for different users; consideration of the impacts of development on natural habitats is also crucial (see Chapter 4). Task 1 of any urban design project is therefore to understand existing conditions as this analysis will inform how and where intervention is required. This links to an appreciation of *context* – the setting in which a building or development site is located - and the evolution of place over time. It also means understanding how different components of place give rise to - or may discourage - the types of activities that make for vibrant urban environments. Gathering local knowledge about what works in different settings should be integral to this.

This might seem self-evident but work to understand the rhythms of urban life *prior* to intervening (for e.g. through planning) has not always been undertaken. *Urban analytics* -

using data from intermediaries such as governments to monitor and help plan (future) urban environments - and digital technologies such as Virtual Reality have a role to play here. Collaborative workshop methods such as *design charettes* and *Enquiry by Design* can also be used to articulate users' aspirations and needs at an early stage in the design-planning-development cycle. However, barriers to participation are multiple and often deeply entrenched meaning that engaging and communicating effectively with citizens remains a key skill for those involved in place-making, planning and design (see Chapter 12).

Development of the specialism

Urban design as a *distinct area of professional practice* has a relatively recent history and is linked to the limitations – both real and perceived - of other disciplines. For instance, the failings of post-war rational comprehensive planning and modernist architecture were a prompt for the emergence of the urban design profession in the United States during the 1950s (Rowley, 1994). Universities acted as incubators for the maturation of the specialism with courses (then commonly known as civic design) connecting "the physical world and object-making and design" with a concern to understand "the way people were and how they behaved, rather than trying to alter how they behaved through changes to the physical world"(Farrell, 2013: 22).

Particular individuals have also been instrumental in the development of the specialism. While it is difficult (and arguably problematic) to narrow this down to a few individuals, there are certain figures who have had a particularly enduring influence. The American journalist and author Jane Jacobs is one. Jacobs was a fierce critic of planners and designers, accusing them of wilfully destroying the urban fabric under the aegis of post-war urban renewal programmes. In her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* Jacobs argued that much of the richness of cities was a result of the (unplanned) messy, daily complexities of urban life which was neither understood nor valued by planning and development systems. Urban design principles relating to the street-scale and qualities of *liveability, walkability* and *vitality* can be traced back to her work.

It is important to note the longer history behind some of Jacobs' ideas. In the late 19th century, Patrick Geddes was pioneering an approach to urban renewal that enhanced (rather than threatened) the existing character of neighbourhoods (see Chapter 9). Geddes was himself an influence on the author and thinker Louis Mumford whose extensive body of work includes a critique of the early 20th century drive towards automation and cultural reverence of machines which he saw as a threat to more "organic", humanistic ways of living (see, for example, Mumford, 1961).

Other formative figures in the development of the urban design specialism include Kevin Lynch who, in 1960, argued that:

> '*A city is a multi-purpose shifting organization, a tent for many functions, raised by many hands and with relative speed. Complete specialization, final meshing, is improbably and undesirable. The form must be somewhat non-committal, plastic to the purposes and needs of its citizens' (p.91).*

The ongoing influence of Lynch's work can be seen in urban design's focus on *sense of place* and in principles such as *legibility* - used describe how different components of the urban can be recognised and organised into a coherent pattern - and *imageability* - the qualities of an object that determine how strongly an observer is able to form an image (Lynch, 1960). There are parallels here with Gordon Cullen's (1971) work *The Concise Townscape* which explores the visual impact – and associated emotions – that collections of buildings engender in those who live in or visit towns and cities. Cullen argues there is an "art of relationship" to be found in weaving together the elements that make up the urban environments (buildings, nature, traffic…etc) in "such a way that drama is released" (Cullen, 1971, p.7-8). Cullen's work is enduring and has (for instance) informed research about measuring the urban design qualities of streetscapes and their impact on decision-making including personal travel choices (Ewing et al, 2006).

Other drivers in the development of the urban design specialism came from wider society. From the 1960s onwards, communities across the globe began to organise against urban development schemes especially where a threat to the existing (historic) environment was perceived (see Chapter 9). In England, one of the early and high-profile campaigns of this type centred on retaining and reusing Covent Garden market in central London, now considered to be a successful mixed-use space. Anti-development campaigns also often had a strong social (in)justice orientation and sought to make visible where planning and design decision-making serviced the interests of a privileged few and/or threatened existing ways of life (Agyeman, 2013; Davidoff, 1965).

As Madanipour (2006: p186) points out, social injustices continue remain a present threat:

> *'there is always a danger that, in the name of environmental quality, the civil society is ignored through top-down solutions that favour economic development. Furthermore, capital investment could benefit the better off, and the resulting urban environment could be exclusionary, rather than promoting tolerance and integration'*.

Or, to put it another way; the policies, processes and decisions that underpin the planning, design and production of the built environment have a direct impact on the quality of life of those who occupy it (Cowan, 2021). To this end, urban designers have a civic or moral duty to seek the best outcome for the users of built environments (Chapter 3). This is especially important because structural injustices mean that the impacts (positive and negative) of design are felt unevenly across society.

Values of tolerance and inclusion are becoming more deeply embedded in contemporary planning and design education and practice. But historically, design and planning practitioners were schooled in particular ways of thinking and methods of working that reflected particular (limited) world views. This was compounded by the fact that those working in planning and design (including higher education) were almost exclusively white, middle-class, males. This lack of diversity stymied built environment professions' ability to reflect the needs and aspirations of those they purported to act on behalf of.

There is still work to do to ensure that urban design and planning practice reflects the diverse society we live in today (see Chapter 12). However, it is now widely acknowledged that there

is a complex interplay between the design of the built environment and those who occupy and experience it. Professional membership and campaigning groups have helped to strength this message. For instance, the Urban Design Group was founded in the UK in 1978 to improve the quality of urban life and promote collaboration between the wide range of professionals who shape the built environment and those who use it.

By the 1980s urban design was being presented as an antidote to the 'placeless' urban development being delivered at scale across much of the developed world via property markets. In the US context, the predominance of urban sprawl and the corresponding loss of 'urbanity' (Beauregard, 2006) has informed the New Urbanism, a design movement seeking to rejuvenate the urban scale through principles including a mix of uses, density, compactness and walkability, and the use of tools such as *design codes* (see Boxed example 1). New Urbanist theory has been subject to critique (see Beauregard, 2002) while the aesthetics of developments produced in accordance with its principles such as 'Seaside' in Florida, US (the setting for the film the 'Truman Show') and Poundbury in the UK, have been labelled by some as 'pastiche' .

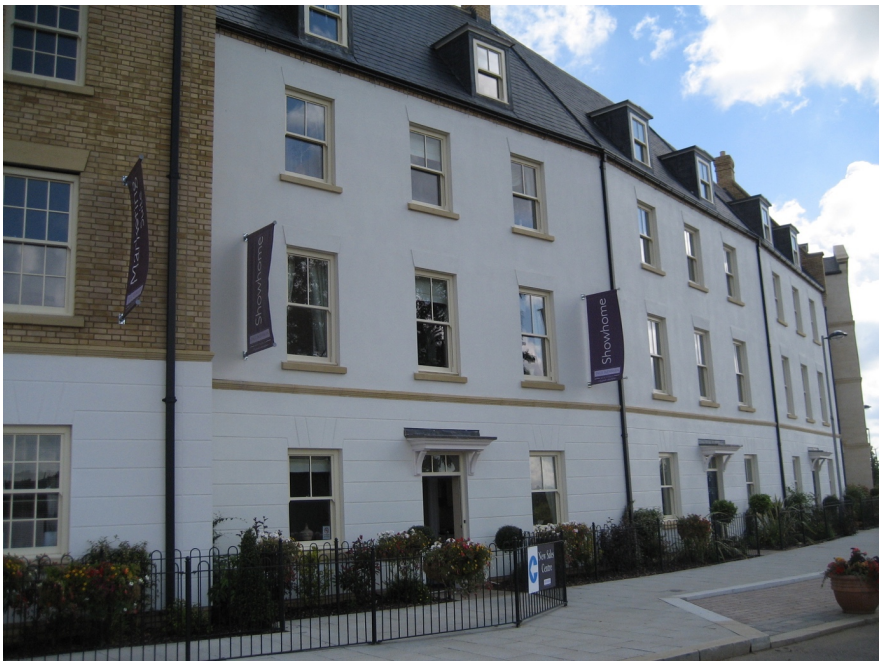


Figure 1 – The Upton development in Northampton, England (Source: Authors own)

Boxed example 1: Design codes and guides in England

The Upton design code was produced in 2003 and guided the strategic urban extension of Upton located on the outskirts of Northampton, England. Following a masterplanning exercise, the Upton Design Code was used to guide the application of design principles such as the use of existing local or *vernacular* styles and *palette* of construction materials across the site. The Code also acted as a tool for dialogue between different project partners across the stages of development with the aim of delivering a consistency of approach across different development phases and parcels.

Design codes and guides have been used by British local authorities since the 1970s to improve the quality of development and offer some protection for the existing local architectural style. One of the best-known examples is the Essex Design Guide. Still in use today, the Guide was first published in 1973. An illustrated statement of planning and design policy set out the criteria by which proposed developments would be judged for planning approval and the principles underlying them (Whitfield et al, 1981). For example, principles of 'unity', 'restfulness', 'stability' and 'balance' were related to fenestration (window) design (ibid: p.27). To see what kind of place the guide produced, readers are directed to the town of South Woodham Ferrers in Essex, often referred to as the 'original Essex Design Guide Town'. The most recent version of the guide is available here: https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/

Key ideas and elements

The previous section focussed on the development of the urban design specialism and described how it has been shaped by key thinkers and institutions including governments, professional organisations and educational bodies. This section builds upon this discussion and considers how two major global governance agendas allied to the global challenges of climate change (*sustainable development*) and human rights (*inclusivity*) have informed contemporary urban design theory and practice.

Sustainable development is a meta-concept that guides urban design thinking and practice as it does in many areas of contemporary life. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have generated a call to 'design for a better world' are one expression of this (see Chapters 1 and 4). Definitions of sustainable design abound but tend to coalesce around a concern to create places that function over time and promote behaviours which do not unduly deplete the world's resources. For example, *sustainable urbanism* advocates combining 'good' urban design practices such as the creation of walkable neighbourhoods with high-performance infrastructure and buildings (Farr, 2008). Responsibility for the latter may reside primarily with engineers or architects but the integrative skills held by planners and urban designers will be key to the delivery of sustainable places at scale and with community input.

Recognition of the urgency of addressing climate change has prompted criticism of the sustainable development agenda as being both too broad and closely tethered to existing economic systems to help safeguard the future of the planet (see Martinez-Alier, 2010). Other terms have come to prominence in recent years including *climate resilience* which incorporates many of the features of SD but more directly addresses the need to ensure

systems and physical environments are able to withstand and/or recover from the risks associated with global warming. *Climate resilient design* looks to create environments with the adaptive capacity to respond to extreme weather events of increasing frequency. For instance, at the city scale, *urban heat island effects* can be mitigated through design *urban ventilation* and *green infrastructure* strategies to maximise prevailing winds and improve air quality (Raven, 2011).

Sustainable development – and the effects of the climate crisis – are bound up in the notion of spatial justice. Over the last few decades *inclusivity* has become an important benchmark in reducing the risk of some groups from being marginalised from society and the spaces it inhabits. This has particular import in the context of the built environment as it can in of itself be exclusionary. This may be visible and stark; for example, steps to a building prevent a wheelchair user from gaining access independently. Physical spaces can also exclude in less obvious ways. For example, streets may be configured to prioritise particular modes of transport and – by extension – their users' needs, creating safety and equity issues.

More positively, good design can facilitate inclusivity. *8-80 Cities* is a global movement that campaigns for urban spaces to be designed with the needs of the oldest and youngest in society in mind. These groups are often disproportionately at risk from problems such as poor air quality. They also tend to have more constrained choices, for instance around mobility. This compounds their exposure to urban risks; creating a potential cycle of injustice. *8-80 Cities* advocates design with these groups' needs to the fore, arguing that this creates better places for *all*. Maximising opportunities for *active travel modes* such as walking and cycling is an important part of this. An example of the agenda in action can be seen in Bogota, Colombia. Here the former Mayor Enrique Penalosa diverted funds earmarked for new highways to create a network of cycle lanes. He also extended the 'Ciclovia' event - where highways are closed to motor traffic one day a week to provide a safe space for pedestrians, cyclists and skaters – and invested in public spaces and a Mass Rapid Transit bus system as part of a public declaration that: "a citizen on a $30 bicycle is equally important as one in a $30,000 car".

Another way in which urban design can promote social justice is by enhancing a sense of safety and facilitating access to the public realm; issues that disproportionately affect women and girls in the developing world. Resources such as the World Bank's (2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design point to the importance of gathering data on women's daily routines and routes through space to inform design measures to promote safety and (more) equal access to the public realm such as better street lighting. Such considerations are integral to the concept of *inclusive design* (see Boxed Example 2).

Boxed Example 2: Inclusive Design

Inclusive design is a concept used by designers to try and ensure the physical urban fabric meets the needs of a diverse profile of users. Campaigns that recognise the particular challenges faced by disabled people have been instrumental in its development but, as Imrie and Hall (2001: p18) argue, inclusive design:

"is more than a technical response to the needs of disabled people or just an 'add-on'….It is part of a lineage of ideas which seek to prioritise building users' views and values and

to challenge the social and institutional, as well as technical, relations of design and building processes".

Principles of inclusivity and access have become embedded in law in many countries. For example, in the UK, Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) giving disabled people a right of access to goods, facilities, services and premises has shaped industry standards such as the Building Regulations (England and Wales, 2010) that exist to protect health, wellbeing and safety. Part M of the regulations deals directly with matters of access and building use. Inclusive design principles have also informed non-statutory measures such as the concept of Lifetime Homes which includes 16 design criteria intended to help homes meet the needs of individuals and families at different life stages.

The examples above primarily apply to the building scale but inclusive design principles can guide practice across different scales. For example, the work of architect, planner and urban designer Jan Gehl focusses on developing and promoting the use of 'humanistic' principles to produce high-quality *public spaces*. These have long been the heart of civic life but have not always been treated as such by professionals. In 'Life Between Buildings' (2011), first published in the 1970s, Gehl emphasises the value of a vibrant street scene, pointing out how the physical environment is an influence on the outdoor activities – categorised as *necessary, optional* and *social* - that occur in space. Creating good quality outdoor space encourages activities beyond those that are simply *necessar*y (such as travelling from home to a place of work), leading to a rich and vibrant street scene and impacting positively upon inhabitants' quality of life.

Key actors

The breadth of urban design activities means there are many actors involved and a range of skills required. Planners play a key role in shaping places, even if they may be "unknowing" designers (Carmona *et al*, 2003). Besides planners, professional urban designers and the *users* of the built environment (including local communities), other actors that are either directly engaged in or supportive of design include: architects, landscape architects, highways and drainage engineers, developers/investors, viability consultants, cost consultants, arboriculturalists, conservation and heritage specialists, archaeologists and ecologists. These professionals may enter the frame at different stages and for different time durations, for example, as specialists servicing a particular task on development project design teams. This fluidity underlines the need for those with *integrative skills* to ensure inputs and tasks are coordinated and that design principles are maintained.

Being able to communicate across disciplinary divides where different languages and technical competencies might predominant is an important skill. Urban designers and planners are well-placed to perform this kind of role. The educational and professional development pathways common to these roles emphasise the value of communicating across diverse interest groups; planners and specialist urban designers also tend to be well-versed in techniques such as end-user engagement and the analysis of a range of different information types. However, a lack of technical skill can prevent planners from supporting good place making. A basic level of technical competency such as the ability to read – and critique – a scheme design 'off-plan' is one example where planners can lack in confidence.

Resources such as Capacitycheck – a self-assessment toolkit to help individuals understand their level of awareness, understanding and professional competency in different elements of urban design – may help in clarifying where further training is needed (Urban Design Alliance, 2008).

The fragmented nature of the contemporary design-planning-construction cycle – and speed of legislative and regulatory changes (see Chapter 2) - can compound these issues. For instance, while most planners are expected to play an oversight role, in practice their exposure to the detail of design may be limited to the assessment of a development application leaving little opportunity for formative dialogue. Here, tools such as the Place Alliance's *Ladder of Place Quality* which provide a checklist of urban design characteristics such as Greenness, Visual Permeability and Sense of Place on a sliding scale (*Require, Aspire, Beware, Avoid*) may help planners identify features that deliver *place value* defined as being*: "*generated by places that enable users to sustain healthy, socially rich, economically productive lifestyles with minimal environmental impact" (placealliance.org.uk).

Policy, processes, tools

Adopting a shared *vision* from the outset of a project can aide communication across disciplinary areas and give shape, structure and a focus to placemaking activities:

> A plan's vision and objectives can be used to set out the types of place(s) which the plan aims to achieve, how this will contribute to the sustainable development of the area and how this translates into the expectations for development and investment, including design. (MHCLG, 2014 (2019): no page)

Ideally the process of vision-making is open, transparent and collaborative to reduce the risk of certain interests dominating and ensure expectations across different actor groups are clear from the outset. Early-stage engagement can help with this although the challenges associated with participation are ever-present (see Chapter 12). Where resources and capacities are stretched, opportunities can be exploited to drive down design quality. For instance, in the English context, *development viability* can be used as a rationale to renege on previously agreed goals (see Chapter 7). This can be the case even when these are supported in policy or plans. Installing chief officers for 'design and place-making' in English Local Authorities has been mooted as one way to strengthen leadership on design (BBBBC, 2020).

This is linked to a broader evaluation of the English planning system's (in)ability to deliver good places:

> At its best, planning has the potential to deliver vibrant, beautifully designed places. The problem is that the outcomes of planning decisions often fail to realise this opportunity and, in some cases, result in extremely poor-quality development. Despite, or perhaps because of, the seemingly continuous process of 'reform' of the planning system in recent years, there remains deep concern that planning no longer delivers for people (Raynsford Review of Planning in England, 2018: p.5).

While there are undoubtedly problems it remains the case that planning systems are the locus for placemaking. In England, planning policies can be used to set out the "design outcomes that development should pursue as well as the tools and processes that are expected to be used to embed good design" (MHCLG 2014; 2019: no page). For instance, a plan's vision, objectives and overarching strategic policies can embed good design; there is also a role for non-strategic policies such as those in local or Neighbourhood Development Plans (ibid). Further detail about design matters can be contained in supplementary planning documents such as local design guides, masterplans or design codes (see Boxed examples 1 and 3). Other tools that sit outside of, but connect to, the planning system include Design Review Panels whereby an expert panel critiques development schemes and works with applicants and other stakeholders to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design.

Since the introduction of the Town and Country Planning Act (1947) local planning authorities have exercised control over the visual impact of developments by the award of planning permissions – part of what is known as *development management*. Today, Paragraph 130 (p.39) of the NPPF is the most critical in relation to design and the granting of planning permission in England. It states that:

> Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

While the intention is clear, the reality is that poor quality design often gets through the system. There are several reasons for this. Professional cultures including education and training practices may act to reinforce fragmentation and deepen professional silos and skills and knowledge gaps. This is despite strategic reviews such as the Egan Review (Skills for Sustainable Communities) (ODPM, 2004) identifying the need for better partnership working across the built environment professions to produce good quality places. The orientation of the English planning system towards a 'presumption of sustainable development' (Chapter 1) is arguably also part of the problem. The term's imprecise definition makes it hard for Local Authorities to refuse development even where sustainability credentials may be lacking.

In relation to design outcomes specifically, if local design standards, guides and policies are not clear, easy to use and understand, lack ambition, or simply do not represent good guidance or policy, then it is difficult for planners to cite poor design as a reason for refusal. Ensuring that good, locally-responsive - as opposed to 'could be anyplace' solutions - design principles are embedded in policies and plans is not a magic bullet but helps to strengthen planners' hand. Local design codes being mooted in the UK Government's Planning White Paper *Planning for the Future* (2020) may have a role to play here. Given the political nature

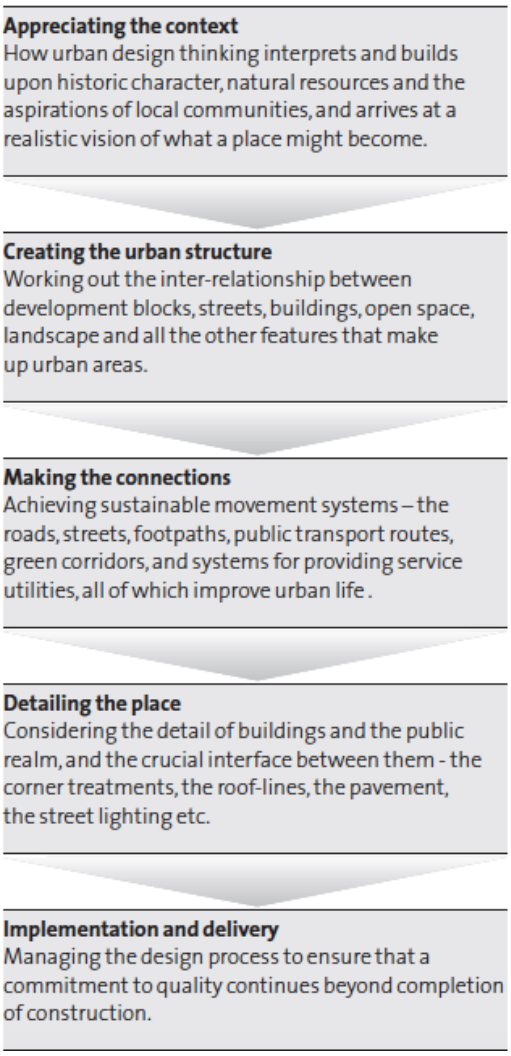
of planning systems, ensuring that decision-makers such as politicians have a good grasp of key design concepts and buy-into the need for good design, is important too (see CABE, 2003).

For those directly engaged in design work, being able to navigate the amount of guidance and regulation on offer and choose the right delivery tool for the job (e.g. at the development application stage) is an important skill. Fundamentally however, the designer's first task is to consider the main components of well-designed places and how these can be assembled optimally to meet the particular goals or needs of the development and its users. There is no set formula here, but key components to consider include the layout (or masterplan), the form and scale of buildings, their appearance including detailing, landscaping and materials. While designers receive training in the theory and application of these kinds of design components, planners and other professionals who may need to increase their level of understanding are directed to resources such as the National Design Guide which provide definitions (see Boxed Example 3 by way of example) and illustrative examples from practice.

Boxed example 3: Components of design
Detailing
The details of a building are the individual components and how they are put together. Some are a deliberate part of the appearance of a building, including doors, windows and their surrounds, porches, decorative features and ironmongery. Others are functional, although they can also contribute to the appearance of a building. These include lighting, flues and ventilation, gutters, pipes and other rainwater details.
Detailing affects the appearance of a building or space and how it is experienced. It also affects how well it weathers and lasts over time.

Decisions about how to assemble component parts to create good places will rest with different professionals at various stages of the planning, design and construction process but planners are likely to be expected to have some kind of critical 'oversight' role. Understanding where opportunities to foster good design sit within the chronology of development projects can therefore be very useful. Figure 2 is one representation of where design tasks might be undertaken as part of a new development, with further detail about the specific activities involved, and outcomes that might be expected from them, provided in the HCA (2013) document (see below).

Figure 2 – Chronology of the project design process



Source: HCA (2013, p.14)

Commented [ES2]: If this is deemed a useful inclusion I can reformat.

Each of these stages presents the opportunity to embed certain design principles. There are numerous examples of these but thinking of these using an *integrative* approach or theory of design may be most useful for planners. For instance, Stenberg's (2000) examination of the *integrative* principles of *form, legibility, vitality, meaning* and *comfort* shows how – when effectively applied - they can counteract the tendency of real estate markets to "slice up and subdivide the urban environment into self-contained compartments, generating cities that are incoherent and fragmented" (ibid, p.275).

At this point, the reader may be feeling overwhelmed about the sheer volume of guidance, tools and ideas that circulate around placemaking, design and planning. Perhaps a useful way to think about how to operationalise the kinds of design principles and characteristics (as set out in Table 1) is that they *could* feature to *varying degrees* and in *different combinations* to help inform a clearly-expressed design concept. A *design concept* is a coherent idea which "may draw its inspiration from the site, its surroundings or a wider context" (MHCLG, 2019, p.4) and is carried through to the design proposal stage:

> Well-designed places and buildings come about when there is a clearly expressed 'story' for the design concept and how it has evolved into a *design proposal*. This explains how the concept influences the layout, form, appearance and details of the proposed development (ibid).

In the English system, a planner might encounter these elements in the *Design and Access Statement* accompanying a planning application which sets out how a proposed development responds to its site and setting (ibid). Indeed, planners may be involved in authoring DAS alongside designers and other project professionals; an example of collaborative-working on design-related matters. Recognising where design principles have informed a design proposal - and judging the extent to which an applicant's scheme has delivered on these – is part of planners' recognising and valuing design. Knowing what questions to *ask* of a design is an important skill to try and foster here.

There is a balance to be struck in the use of design guidance to support placemaking. If design characteristics are too loosely defined the quality and coherence of development is likely to suffer. However, if principles are too stringently set out, and narrowly applied, then uniformity may be the result. The Municipality of Almere in the Netherlands is often cited as an example of a place where an effective balance has been achieved. The Council has promoted self and custom build housing creating a special district where 'plot passports' have been used (along with design codes and a land use zoning plan) to establish the parameters for acceptable development (height, density, etc) while maintaining a highly varied but coherent street scene.

These issues go to the heart of debates about regulatory systems and institutions and their role in the production of the built environment (see Imrie and Street, 2011). These are perennial and relate to changing political agendas and preferences (see Boxed Example 4).

Boxed example 4: The politics of design and planning policy in England: 2000s to present

The value placed on good design by government - and the extent to which this has been supported by planning policy - has fluctuated in recent decades. The political currency of design peaked during the 2000s when a flurry of design guidance emerged. This included materials produced by the government and industry advisory body the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) such as By Design (2000) and the Manual for Streets (2007). CABE was also instrumental in promoting the use of ***design review panels*** and ***workshops*** to improve the quality of design.

Design quality was supported in planning policy, most notably Planning Policy Statement 1 which stated that 'high quality and inclusive design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process' and Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3) on housing which introduced targets to promote higher density and encourage the development of brownfield sites.

National planning policy was streamlined in 2011 and the regional planning tier and several 'quasi-autonomous governmental organisations' including CABE were either abolished or significantly scaled-back. Since then, there has been a clear direction of travel towards deregulation but design policy and guidance seems to be bucking this trend. In 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) produced a National Design Guide which sets out how the: *"the long-standing, fundamental principles for good design are that it is: fit for purpose; durable; and brings delight".*

There have been calls for the re-establishment of a dedicated design advisory body (Place Alliance, 2020) in response to the 'overwhelmingly mediocre or poor' quality of housing development. A similar sentiment features in the *Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission* report (BBBBC, 2020: v) which advocates an integrated approach to design: "*in which all matters relevant to placemaking are considered from the outset and subjected to a democratic or co-design process".* The BBBBC report makes a number of recommendations, some of which have made their way into the UK Government's White Paper *Planning for the Future* (2020). This sets out proposals to reform planning and deliver "beauty" in the built environment including revising the NPPF to embed the principles of good design and placemaking, encouraging local authorities to produce design codes as part of Local Plans and encouraging local communities to set out locally-acceptable design principles in Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Conclusion

Good design is collective endeavour. It is not easy to achieve and nor does it come without a financial cost. In contexts where property markets deliver much of our urban environment, good design can be seen as unnecessary extra. However, the costs of bad design can be high. Poorly designed places can limit life people's chances, undermine their physical and mental health and create negative economic and environmental externalities. The COVID-19 global health pandemic has revealed the huge variation in access to good housing and high-quality open space. The crisis has also destabilised some of the key urban design principles favoured

in recent decades such as density and compactness. In the UK, it has prompted calls to 'Build, back Better' and ensure that chances to embed more resilient and sustainable ways of living are taken. For instance, designers, planners and highway engineers delivered schemes in urban centres to enable social distancing, encourage walking and cycling, and reduce traffic congestion and pollution.

This kind of collaboration underlines how, ultimately, delivering good design is a shared responsibility. As Cowan (2021, no page) notes:

> When urban design fails, it is usually because the process has failed to resolve conflicts between statutory duties, regulations, common law duties, national government policies and guidance, local authority policies and guidance, detailed design guidance, construction standards, construction design management regulations, codes of practice, funding regimes, assessment requirements, road safety audits, other audits, and the values and practices of various professions. It's a complicated process! Successful urban design is a result of people making all these things work together.

This chapter has shown that planners have a critical role to play in designing successful places. The precise role played by planners is likely to vary significantly according to context but, in the English system, is typically filtered via plan or policy-making activities and development management. Having an awareness of key design principles and characteristics, how these inform vision-making, design proposals and concepts is important if planners are to use their involvement in development to promote good design and protect against the worst outcomes where possible.

The judgements made by professionals about how (best) to shape urban space are by their nature *political.* This should prompt engagement with as many different users of the urban environments as possible to ensure that urban design reaches its emancipatory potential.

Further Study

To deepen and extend their knowledge of urban design, placemaking and planning, readers are directed towards the following resources.

Carmona et al's (2010) textbook *Public Places Urban Spaces* deals with key principles and concepts in an accessible way. Cowan's (2021) *Essential Urban Design* is also a must-read. Madanipour's (2014) book *Urban Design, Space and Society* explores questions of social inclusiveness, participatory democracy, cultural meaning and ecological sustainability. Bentley's (1999) book examines the interface between the physical built environment and the complex social processes that give rise to them. Carmona and Tiesdell's (2007) *Urban Design Reader* is a collection of essays on urban design theory and practice by leading names past and present. On sustainability and urban design see the 2010 edited collection by Ritchie and Thomas, while *Urban Design: A Typology of Procedures and Products* by Jon Lang (2011) contains dozens of illustrative international case studies.

On urban design process, policy and tools, readers looking to practice in England should familiarise themselves with the contents of the National Design Guide (2019); other design guidance referred to in the chapter (e.g. Table 1) remains relevant although refer to national

government websites for the most up-to-date documents. On urban design skills for planners, see Talen's (2018) book; the Capacitycheck tool (Urban Design Alliance, 2008) is also recommended.
Useful web resources include those hosted on the Urban Design Group (https://www.udg.org.uk/) and Place Alliance (http://placealliance.org.uk/) websites.

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