

It's time for a 'CABE down-under'

Bill Chandler

Over the past decade, CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) has been making a significant difference to how things are done in the United Kingdom. Its heritage lies in the Royal Fine Arts Commission - but a major coup through the work of Lord Rogers' Urban Design Task Force transformed into something very different - and last year they celebrated 10 years of achievement. (For details about CABE and their approach, see www.cabe.org.uk) Some features are:

- it was set up by, and has significant funding from, the National Government
- it has high profile members - and status and clout relating to both urban spaces and buildings
- it has an impressive list of achievements in influencing urban design (and some failures no doubt?)
- its publications are relevant for many jurisdictions and cultures - including Australia

As CABE's reputation grew, a number of Aussies (including myself) were attracted to see what they were doing. And we were impressed. Creating an even stronger association, a number of wandering Aussie professionals sought employment there, and became part of the CABE experience. Some of them have now returned to Australia, and are working in positions of influence.

Cultural cringe?

Our cities and towns have many good planning and design aspects, and we have professionals operating with 'best practice' skills. But are we ahead of the game internationally? I think not.

Francis Greenway was the first (Colonial) Government Architect. And his legacy includes fine buildings which we have managed to retain. In more contemporary times, most State Governments have appointed Government Architects, and they are making contributions in raising the design bar. But is this enough?

I am always wary of introducing ideas or processes from other places and other cultures - even if many of our city names and designs

originated in the 'Old Country'. But, in short, what Australia needs right now is its own version of CABE.

What shape should it take?

Firstly, it is important to recognise the National/State/Local structure of jurisdictions - it is different from UK. Infrastructure Australia does just that, but its emphasis is on big engineering - such as roads, railways and ports. All good stuff, but its associated 'Major Cities Unit' (see below) has a minuscule budget and staff - nowhere near enough given its importance and its potential.

COAG (Council of Australian Governments) has already begun to address what is happening in cities, and referred to 'city strategy' in its December 2009 communiqué. It is crucial that all three levels of government be active players in any version of CABE down-under that evolves.

Secondly, it is now widely accepted that good design is good economics. Good urban design (both the functioning and the aesthetics) of cities and towns is not an added extra - it is a vital part of our national economy. Therefore, the positive economic benefits of urban design need to be part of the 'down-under' remit.

Thirdly, what's in a name? Many professions contribute to the design success of cities and towns. None of them can claim primary ownership. So, looking at the creative integrated dimensions of the challenge should be the focus. It is interesting to see that the South Australians are about to create an 'Integrated Design Commission'. So, what about a national IDBEC - the Integrated Design of the Built Environment Commission (pronounced id bec!)?

Fourthly, do we have sufficient professional skills to operate IDBEC? The simple answer is - yes! They, with whatever help from other places is relevant, could make a major contribution to the key challenges facing Australian cities: population increase; civic diversity and harmony; climate change, water and energy issues; quality of places, and overall sustainability.

Major Cities Unit

Dorte Ekelund

Communities across the globe are facing unprecedented population growth and urbanisation, changing age structures, structural shifts in economies, rapid technological innovation, climate change uncertainties, and resource limitations.

Despite our vast continent, Australia is already one of the most urbanised countries in the world - with cities over 100,000 being home to 75% of our population. They also produce approximately 80% of the country's wealth. Cities are therefore the stage on which we must address a multiplicity of complex contemporary challenges.

The Australian Government recognises the critical importance of cities to our future national prosperity and community well-being, and has committed to an active involvement in planning and investment in our cities. The Australian Government established *Infrastructure Australia* to provide advice on national infrastructure needs and policy reforms. It also established the *Major Cities Unit*, collocated with *Infrastructure Australia*, with a mandate to work across portfolios, and with all spheres of government, the private sector and the community to help transform our cities to be more sustainable, liveable and productive.

The *Major Cities Unit* has been researching established and emerging trends and issues in Australian cities, and working with stakeholders to develop a national urban policy for release later this year by the Hon Anthony Albanese, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

Concurrently, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has taken a stronger interest in planning and cities. Whilst attention to the micro-economic reform agenda (which seeks greater efficiency in statutory planning processes) continues, the need for bigger picture strategic planning is now also gaining prominence. Of particular importance was the establishment of the COAG Cities Planning

Taskforce, which culminated in the COAG agreement on 7 December 2009, agreeing to a national objective and set of criteria for future strategic planning of capital cities. The objective is: *To ensure Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive and are well placed to meet future challenges and growth.*

Need for land use/infrastructure alignment

The catalyst behind the establishment of the COAG Cities Planning Taskforce was the lack of alignment within some jurisdictions between metropolitan land use plans and infrastructure proposals submitted for *Infrastructure Australia's* consideration. Within this context, and an acceptance that it is reasonable for the Australian Government to maximise outcomes for the Australian taxpayer, COAG agreed that by 1 January 2012 all States will have in place plans that meet the criteria, and noted that the Commonwealth will link future infrastructure funding decisions to meeting these criteria.

These decisions constitute significant reform in urban policy and seek to secure better outcomes from the investments of all governments. It is expected they will also give greater certainty for private sector investors and strengthen public confidence in planning systems.

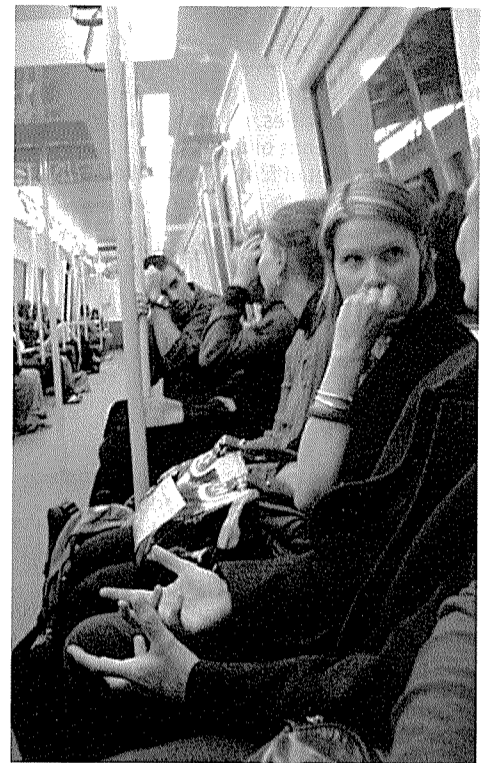
The Australian Government's interest in the role of cities does not end with better metropolitan planning. Additional work is also being done to develop a clearer understanding of the roles cities can play in areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation; innovation, workforce participation and productivity; the provision of more diverse, affordable and appropriate housing; and the pursuit of a fairer Australia.

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▲ People and places

Don't just sit there!

When all is said and done, this is hardly a new idea. Australia had its own Urban Design Task Force - set up by then-PM Paul Keating in 1994. It spawned the Australia Award (see below), and accelerated interest in urban design - but it lost impetus when the Howard Government took over in 1996.

Time is long overdue to move the debate along and, more importantly, do something about

a 'IDBEC down-under'. Send your ideas and intentions, for publication in the next Urban Design Forum.

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2010 Australia Award for Urban Design

Call for Nominations

Nominations are now open for the 2010 Australia Award for Urban Design. This is your opportunity to highlight leading examples of urban design in Australia.

The Australia Award for Urban Design was created by then-PM Keating's Urban Design Taskforce, and was first awarded in 1996. The Prime Minister, The Hon. Kevin Rudd, is now Patron of the Award. The Award was established to recognise recent urban design projects of high quality in Australia - and to encourage cities, towns and emerging settlements of all sizes to strive similarly for improvement. It acknowledges the critical role of good urban design in the development of our cities and towns.

The Australia Award for Urban Design is hosted by the Planning Institute of Australia, with support from the Australian Institute of Architects, Property Council of Australia, Green Building Council of Australia, Association of Consulting Engineers Australia and the Urban Design Forum.

Act now!

Have you been involved in a recent project demonstrating excellence and innovation in all elements of urban design? Are you aware of recent Australian urban design initiatives, projects or developments that deserve national recognition?

The nomination form is available at www.planning.org.au. To purchase tickets to the Award dinner please visit www.bemp.com.au. Nominations close 30 April 2010. For more information please contact the Planning Institute of Australia on 02 6175 2110 or email events@planning.org.au



▲ A 2009 Award Winner, Paddington Reservoir

Is a dead end a thing of the past?

Last year, the New York Times' annual "Year in Ideas" listed the cul-de-sac ban in Virginia as something to watch for. "Nothing divides suburban developers and 'smart growth' advocates as much as the lowly cul-de-sac. The real estate community loves the meandering, dead-end streets; lots on them sell quickly and at a premium, thanks to their low traffic and perceived safety benefits. But critics complain that cul-de-sacs are a poor use of land; they funnel cars onto clogged arterial routes and restrict access to neighbourhoods when emergency vehicles need to respond.

For decades, the developers have been winning this battle. But, Virginia, under the leadership of Gov. Tim Kaine, became the first state to severely limit cul-de-sacs from future developments. New rules require that all new subdivisions attain a certain level of 'connectivity', with ample through streets

connecting them to other neighbourhoods and nearby commercial areas...If subdivisions fail to comply, Virginia won't provide maintenance and snowplough services, a big disincentive in a state where the government provides 83% of road services.

On the other hand, there is a sentiment out there that cul-de-sacs are safe - though some research actually shows fewer traffic fatalities occur on connected roads. Other states are watching the Virginia rules closely, and Benfield says he expects to see similar regulations adopted around the country in the next few years - which means the dead end may soon be a thing of the past."

[Thanks to Marc Sharifi, Senior Urban Designer with the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, for bringing this interesting site to notice www.nytimes.com/projects/magazine/ideas/2009/#a]

FOD ('Food Oriented Design') for thought

- returning agriculture to our urban spaces

Nick McGowan

Not so long ago we, the urban-dwellers, knew where the majority of our food came from. Backyard gardens were prevalent, as were inner-urban orchards. In many cities, edible food was grown in public places, and allotment gardens were a popular past time.

Today we live in cities which have (with some exceptions) in the name of "production efficiencies" and "higher and better land uses", driven the production aspect of our food cycles out of the cities, often to rural areas in countries thousands of miles away – the typical Australian basket of food has travelled in the order of 70,000km to get to our stores.

This production-by-proxy has not only contributed to our reliance on oil and the creation of GHGs (28% of our CO₂ per capita is food related) - but it has also deprived us of what was once a healthy and rewarding association with our food.

We now find ourselves as a nation, running out of oil, running out of water (up to 65% of Australia's water consumption is food related), running out of soil (in the past 200 years Australia has lost about 70% of the nutrients in its soil), running out of farmers (the average age of farmers in Australia is now 62), and running out of phosphates (researchers say we will see severe phosphate shortages within the next 30 years).

Returning agriculture to our urban spaces would allow us to remedy or avoid some of these problems and return a raft of other benefits, including: re-using waste; recycling water; closing nutrient loops; reducing energy consumption; acting as a catalyst for urban regeneration; enabling rehabilitation of ecosystems damaged by industrial agriculture; contributing to a city's

green spaces (thereby reducing heat island effects, improving amenity, and providing eco-services); providing employment and skills development opportunities; contributing to local character and sense of place; improving the physical health of society; fostering a stronger connection between people and the environment.

What is holding us back?

So, what is holding us back? There are a number of challenges that other cities worldwide have faced, including:

- lack of understanding of benefits and financial feasibility - specifically, there is lack of data on life-cycle financial feasibility of UA compared to traditional agriculture
- lack of access to suitable land
- lack of secure land tenure
- restrictive planning provisions which hinder rather than encourage UA efforts
- lack of leadership, co-ordination, motivation – such as development incentives and ongoing support
- lack of system facilities in place, such as distribution networks
- the need to manage and design for amenity impacts (noise, smell, etc) and transfer of zoonotic diseases
- an ongoing stigma attached to agriculture, and subsequent NIMBYISM.

Above all else, as Kirsten Larsen of Melbourne University explains, "we need to change our understanding of cities and start to see them as productive, not consumptive spaces".

By overcoming these challenges we can ensure that urban agriculture initiatives (whether backyards, rooftops, public parks, vertical farms or other types) are developed



▲ Machu-picchu terraces

▼ Open space for food production, Avignon

as an integral and equitably accessible part of our urban fabric and socio-ecological systems, a fundamental element of our green infrastructure, and the medium through which citizens can reconnect with their environment.

Nick McGowan is an Urban Designer with LVO' Architecture and a PhD candidate at QUT. He was awarded the Centre for Subtropical Design and mec sponsored travel bursary for 2010 to study urban agriculture models around the world, with a view to developing an understanding of appropriate models for subtropical cities such as Brisbane. For more details, Nick has a blog at <http://subtropicalurbanagriculture.blogspot.com>



Urban design tipping point

Andrew Hammonds

Planners, with possibly more influence than any other built environment profession, play a significant role in the dissemination of urban design to consumers. They are often in a powerful position to raise expectations on urban quality and importantly, check compliance. Therefore, national urban design training, recently announced by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), will contribute to the diffusion of urban design into the community. This two day unit of the Planning Practice Course, to be delivered regionally, nationally and internationally over the next three years, will spread urban design qualities, processes and tools.

In 1962, Everett Rogers' influential marketing book, "Diffusions of Innovation", described the process by which new ideas are communicated through a social system. Symes and Pauwels (1999) concluded that this theory can be applied to the take up of innovation within urban design. According to Rogers, each member of the system faces his/her own innovation decision that follows a five-step process:

1. Knowledge – person becomes aware of an innovation and has some idea of how it functions;

2. Persuasion – person forms a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the innovation;
3. Decision – person engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation;
4. Implementation – person puts an innovation into use; and
5. Confirmation – person evaluates the results of an innovation-decision already made.

Most planners would be aware of urban design and appreciate its place-making role in our urban environment. Yet, targeted training could 'push' them through the remaining stages of the decision process by:

- assisting them to integrate urban design into their professional practice;
- providing them with processes, tools and guidelines for implementation; and
- identifying the benchmark for 'quality urban places' to assist in confirmation.

Consumers – the mass market

In a broader sense, urban design as an outcome can be related to many new ideas or products that are valuable for the masses, yet to date have resisted diffusion. While the results of the training remain to be seen,

could we dramatically improve the quality of places by targeting consumers as well as practitioners? That is, the 85% of Australians living in urbanised environments.

While we all appreciate that urban design represents principles of urbanism established over thousands of years, can we accelerate change by adopting approaches which influence the mass market?

Malcolm Gladwell's international bestselling book, "Tipping Point", relates significant change (which affects our lives) to epidemics like measles. This could range from the emergence of new ideas or social trends to crime waves. He relates these changes to three principles:

1. contagiousness;
2. little causes have big effects; and
3. change happens dramatically, not gradually.

Tipping point refers to the third principle and describes "the moment of critical mass, the boiling point, the threshold". Gladwell's three rules of the Tipping Point are:

1. The Law of the Few: a small number of people can influence many (80/20 principle)
2. The Stickiness Factor: the specific content of a message renders it memorable.

3. The Power of Context: human behaviour is strongly influenced by its environment.

With new communication networks, technology and software (like twitter), diffusion is happening faster and faster in our society. Therefore, understanding and utilising social networks can assist us to induce system-wide change. As built environment professionals, we probably all qualify as urban design innovators in our society. Should we now be targeting the early adopters who fall outside our profession?

I believe the challenge for urban design protagonists is to influence the mass market, the remaining 18 million people living in urbanised Australia.

The PIA urban design unit will commence in March 2010. More information is available at the PIA website www.planning.org.au or the Chifley Business School www.chifley.edu.au/cpp_programs.asp

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These streets were made for walking

- an urban design training program for Victoria 2010

The quality of life we enjoy in Melbourne and across Victoria is recognised around the world. Much of this is can be attributed to the design of our built environment which supports the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of our communities in cities and towns. Increasingly we are aware of the need to design our built environment in more sustainable ways-for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Victorian Government's Urban Design Training Program offers courses that introduce planners and designers to the principles and methods of urban design. This outstanding program is unique in Australia and is an important initiative contributing to the implementation of Melbourne 2030: a planning update, Melbourne @ 5 million. The program improves the skills and competencies of

participants so that they can better shape the urban environment through improved public safety, improved urban layout and subdivision design, well functioning activity centres and good design for higher density residential developments.

Now in its fifth year, the Urban Design Training Program continues to be a great success with more than 700 public and private sector built environment professionals from metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate participating in a variety of urban design training events.

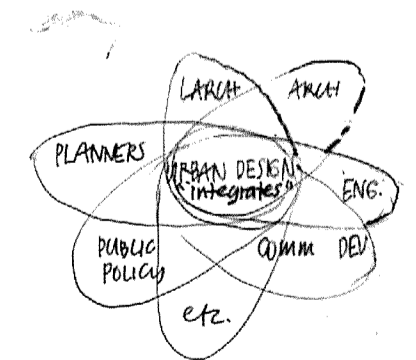
Each year the program is reviewed with key stakeholders to meet changing needs and priorities and to develop specialist modules. For the first time, the Urban Design Training Program is offering a series of 'Urban Discovery Walks' to showcase a range of projects

UD TP 2010
an urban design training program for Victoria

evolving in and around Melbourne and regional Victoria. Industry experts will help to guide the site visits, highlighting exemplars of public realm, street and property projects. These visits will provide an opportunity for you to experience new places, engage with others interested in urban design and discuss recent projects with peers.

If you have a project that you would like to showcase as an 'Urban Discovery Walk', or would like further information about the program, please contact the Urban Design Unit, DPCD on (03) 8644 8819. www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/urbandesign

To register with PLANET Training and Professional Development Program, contact DPCD on (03) 9637 8605 visit www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planet



Dear Editor

Just a petty (but personally important and passionate) comment on the article by Juris Grete ('UDAL Landmarks' UDF 88) that a correct reference to Mr Richards' 'daisy' would be to call it a 'Venn Diagram' - a mathematical concept created by my namesake circa 1880.

Regards, John Venn, Director

What is Urban Character?

Gethin Davison

Urban intensification is a key development strategy for Australian cities, but proposed projects are frequently resisted by local residents on the basis that they would be 'out of character'. This resistance can have serious implications for the realisation of policy objectives, and the task of ensuring that projects are 'in character' then becomes a crucial one. This article looks briefly at how this was attempted in one Australian and one Canadian neighbourhood.

Subiaco is an inner-suburb of Perth, originally settled in the nineteenth century. It has a bustling commercial centre, a large stock of heritage buildings, and many leafy residential streets. Despite the quality of Subiaco's physical environment, however, local residents described its character mostly in terms of community cohesiveness, its diverse social mix, and the wide range of shops and cafes - these were all more significant to its character than were features of physical form.

There was a deliberate effort to reflect "Old Subiaco's" existing character in the planning and design of the eighty hectare 'Subi Centro' project. Guidelines were prepared for streetscapes, building types and detailing, and

▼ Collingwood streets (before and after intensification)



over one thousand homes and 200,000 m2 of commercial space have been developed since 1998. Subi Centro has been successful in many ways, but residents in Old Subiaco nonetheless claim that the project is out of character because its community is not as socially cohesive, nor as mixed as Old Subiaco's community: whilst the project may be physically in character, they argue, socially it is not.

Collingwood is a low-income residential suburb of Vancouver. In the early 1990s, it was low-rise, low-density and most dwellings were single-detached with front and rear yards. For residents, Collingwood's character at the time was about knowing your neighbour and participating in community life, the neighbourhood's physical form was not part of its character.

Density and community facilities

Following public consultation on a proposed eleven hectare intensification project, residents raised concerns that high-density development would damage this social character, and requested that the project incorporate community facilities in order to address this. Planners explained that community facilities could not be provided unless development densities were increased, due to the developer's narrow profit margins. Residents were then given a choice between a high-density project with many community facilities, or a lower-density project with fewer facilities. Their response was to negotiate for an even greater increase to development densities in exchange for a broader range of community facilities.

Completed in 2006, the 'Collingwood Village' project houses 3,000 residents in buildings of up to twenty-six storeys. There are three parks, a community centre, gymnasium, community policing centre, school and childcare centre. Despite the significant impact that the project has had in changing the physical appearance of the neighbourhood, residents claim that the community facilities which it provides have



▲ Subiaco Mainstreets (old and new)

allowed Collingwood's social character – the high levels of engagement, cohesion and spiritedness – to be maintained. For them, the neighbourhood's character has not changed, in spite of the fact that its appearance undoubtedly has.

These two case studies do not provide all the answers for urban designers, but they do challenge our conceptions of what makes a project 'in character', and they demonstrate that urban intensification does not have to involve a change to neighbourhood

character. Perhaps most importantly, however, they suggest that social relationships and experiences of a neighbourhood can be just as important a component of its character as features of physical form.

Gethin Davison is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. The article above is based on findings of fieldwork research undertaken in 2007. For more information on these and two other case studies in London and California, contact Gethin Davison at g.davison@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

From renaissance to recession: maintaining urban quality

Lee Pugalis

Drawing on evidence and experience from the UK, I present the case that quality counts in times of recession as well as times of renaissance. My brief foray into changing UK regeneration practice is intended to highlight some important lessons applicable in other development contexts, including parts of Australasia. Commencing with a swift review of the UK's urban renaissance agenda since 'New Labour' came into power in 1997, I go on to examine the changing nature of renaissance programs brought about by the infamous 'credit crunch': questioning the wisdom of cuts in urban quality.

The Urban Task Force and the UK's urban renaissance agenda

As Tony Blair's 'New Labour' gained national political control in 1997, they quickly set about reconstituting the Conservative's urban policy framework by implementing an urban strategy with a spatial focus on deteriorating city centres. Such political imperatives were supported by an Urban Task Force chaired by internationally renowned architect Lord Richard Rogers. The Task Force published the landmark document *Towards an Urban Renaissance* in 1999, which proposed over 100 recommendations to improve the future sustainability of urban spaces, and thus enhance quality of life.

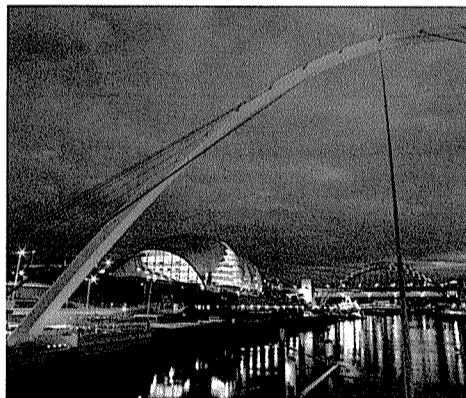
Design-led regeneration

Whilst many of the Task Force's recommendations are yet to see the light of day, their 'quality counts' stance espoused through design-led regeneration has had a noticeable impact on the design and production of UK cities and city spaces, including:

- 'brownfield' site redevelopments and urban densification
- public realm and streetscape enhancements
- provision of new urban public spaces
- repopulating city centres with residents, tourists and consumers
- public transport and infrastructure investment
- leveraging greater amounts of private capital
- iconic development and mixed-use schemes

Many Northern UK – former industrial – cities provide tangible 'evidence' of such an urban renaissance, or at least in the case of their public-facing city centres, gateway sites and other choice places. Notable examples include Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle.

▼ Tyneside regeneration



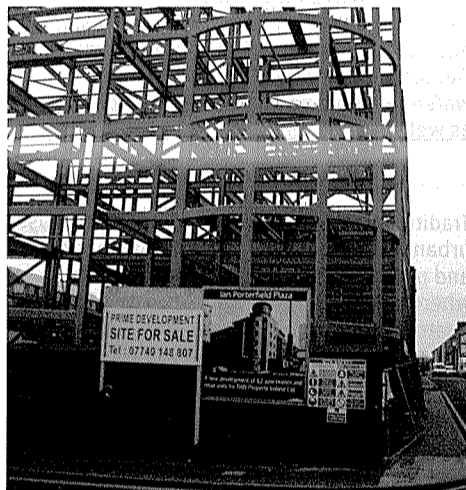
Renaissance of Newcastle's Quayside

Yet such renaissance has taken place in the 'good times', riding on the cusp of urban prosperity and macroeconomic stability. During the good times, developers, investors and speculators cherry-picked the best sites to regenerate, which are now hailed as beacons that an urban renaissance was delivered.

From renaissance to recession

Since late 2007 – with what began as a local phenomenon in the US sub-prime mortgage market – the credit crunch has impacted the real economy on a global scale. The UK has been in the grips of its worst recession since 1921, resulting in a whole host of socio-economic ramifications, including rising unemployment and homelessness, fueling poverty and significant business closures.

As it now stands, the good times of urban renaissance are a distant memory. The pre-1997 highly-g geared regeneration model has been shattered - with development viability called into question. Consequently, risks are now higher and returns reduced. This is impacting on the ability to complete current projects, to realise projects in the pipeline, and to bring forward new schemes.



▲ Mothball!

Mothballed housing development scheme

With many renaissance project now 'mothballed' for the foreseeable future, and those presently being brought forward looking to cut costs wherever possible, there is an impending danger that the 'quality counts' mantra – which recognises the value of design – is replaced by a short-term view that equates lower costs with higher profits.

Maintaining urban quality

Despite raising the design bar over the past decade, and the steady progress made in educating different communities of practice that urban quality and good design makes commercial sense, the prevailing outlook in recessionary times risks undoing such progress. As built-environment consultants and public sector officials alike face redundancies – together with the complete dismantling of regeneration bodies and departments in the most extreme circumstances – there is a distinct possibility that design skills lost now will not be replaced once the good times return. The loss of skills refined over many years of practice could have severe repercussions for the design of cities over the next decade. I therefore end with the clarion call that, while urban quality is not easily counted or quantified, it surely counts.

Lee Pugalis is based at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University in the UK, and is the economic policy lead for County Durham Economic Partnership. He can be contacted at lpugalis@gmail.com

Peak oil – head in the sand?

Robert McLean

Peak Oil is a concept, an idea, a reality that has obviously not yet filtered through to many of Australia's decision makers and planners. Even a cursory look at most of Australia's towns and cities illustrates that developers, responding to society's wants and needs, build for a car-bound future, a future that will simply fade as this century evolves.

A recent trip to Queensland took me along some of the major freeways in that state's capital and over the Gateway Bridge crossing the Brisbane River illustrating, beyond doubt, that policy there is about doing more for road users. A whole new Gateway Bridge, next to the original built in the 1980s, is an integral part of massive road works stretching over about 15 kilometres costing millions (the original bridge cost \$140 million). Queensland has created a worthy public transport system, but if just a fraction of what is being spent on roads was applied to moving the public then Brisbane people, in particular, would have a transit system among the best in the world.

Melbourne has challenged the mindset that has dominated lifestyles, and so housing, in Australia for decades and is looking to halt the sprawl that is eroding the city's liveability status. We need to import some of those refreshing thoughts to Shepparton and do what we can to lessen sprawl here that is leading people to live further from city centre and so depend even more heavily on cars to move about.

Transport, primarily road transport, is probably the most obvious causality of Peak Oil, but it really just a fragment of the paradigm change facing us as oil becomes rare and by implication more costly. What is happening in Brisbane is being repeated with unthinking enthusiasm throughout Australia and, although Shepparton is some way down the same path, we are in a position to arrest the situation and plan for a rather more dense way of living.

While considering how to live in a less expansive way, it is important work at improving our public transport system and, along with that, we need to better understand Peak Oil.

Robert McLean is a UDF regular, a journalist, and a resident of Shepparton. He can be contacted at robed@mcmedia.com.au

Can Essex come to Queensland?

Tony Hall

From the standpoint of sustainability, new housing in Australia often ends up with the worst of all worlds. At low density it is characterised by car-based estates of air-conditioned McMansions with minimal backyards and few trees. At high density, tall blocks have both high embodied-energy and high daily energy consumption. However, there are alternatives.

In current European practice, densities of 30-60 dw/Ha or more are obtained with low-energy houses and gardens, plus low-rise flats interspersed with communal planted areas. The well-known example of Freiburg was described in UDF 85. Contemporary British practice is readily accessible because it is now extensively documented through guides and reports.

Of particular interest is the long-standing Essex Design Guide. It first appeared in 1973, long before New Urbanism was thought of in the US, and was revised in 1997 and reprinted in 2005. For schemes over 20 dw/Ha, it requires terraced 2-3 storey houses with substantial backyards, but reduced space at the front. It advocates creating a sense of place through reference to local styles. It differs from New Urbanist approaches in having no rear lanes or parking courts. Garages are in the backyard but accessed from the front, normally through archways, preserving the security of the perimeter block.

Australian conditions

Could the Essex approach be applied in Australia? Inner Sydney is formed of terraced town houses adapted to the climate in a

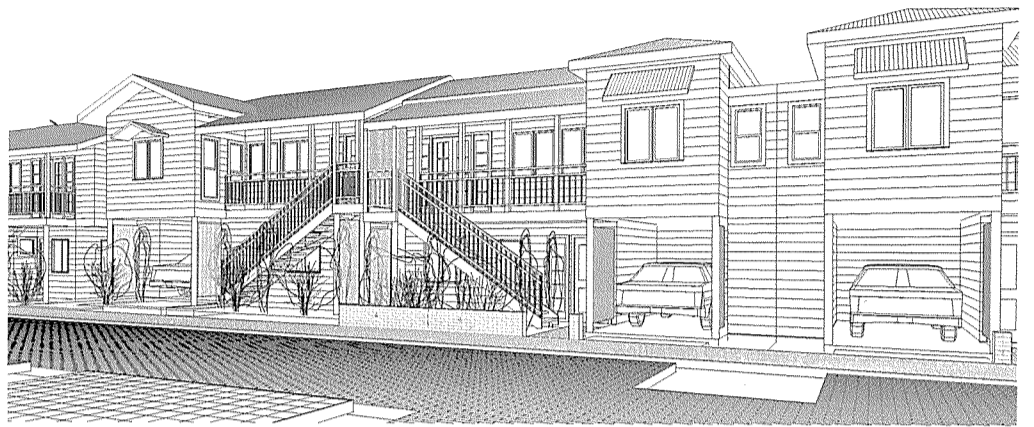
distinctive local style. Queensland has its own vernacular architecture in the shape of the eponymous houses which reflect its sub-tropical climate. Queenslanders (the dwelling type) predominate in inner-suburban areas that provide fairly dense urban vegetation, particularly trees, which play an important role in microclimate, sustainable drainage, biodiversity and absorption of pollutants, particularly carbon sequestration.

However, it would be inappropriate just to replicate Queenslanders. The sound and climate insulation of their walls, for example, can leave much to be desired. The idea should be to learn from their good points, which include:

- natural ventilation
- management of sunlight and shade
- adaptation to the terrain
- flexible use of space underneath
- external staircases releasing space inside the house
- substantial backyards
- charm and cultural continuity.

What can be imported from the English practice is raising densities through terraced form and narrower (although not as narrow) road reservations and carriageway widths.

The illustrations show examples from a study combining the principles of the Essex Guide with the best aspects of Queensland vernacular. Net density is 34 dw/Ha. There is a range of dwelling types. The lower level of the Queenslanders is used to accommodate a car and either a storage space, a second floor, a granny flat or a second self-contained



▲ Drawings by Richard Gibbs

unit. There is a large house type that turns the corner of the block. The block shape is narrow and can be aligned to the sun. A slightly wider block can be formed that could accommodate a communal swimming pool and/or children's play facilities at its centre.

Tony Hall lives in Brisbane. He was, for some years, a local councillor in Chelmsford, UK where he was a champion for urban design. Tony can be contacted at tony273@bigpond.net.au

Urban design for sustainability

6-9 April 2010, Perth

The Urban Design Centre of Western Australia (UDC) and the Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute (CUSP) are offering an intensive one-week course in Urban Design for Sustainability. This course will provide students and professionals in the fields of planning, policy and sustainability studies with an opportunity to develop an understanding of the core concepts involved in urban design.

It will also allow students enrolled through CUSP to apply urban design concepts in a practical fieldwork project, in addition to the formal lecture and seminar sessions.

Speakers will include Munira Mackay and Malcolm Mackay as urban design practitioners; Jan Scheurer, Peter Newman

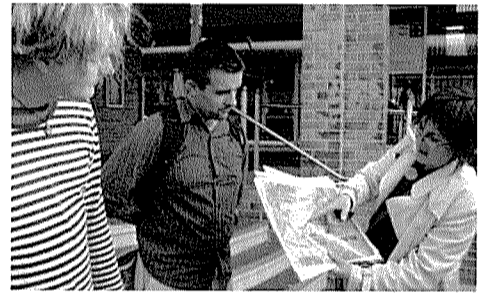
and Annie Matan from CUSP; Billie Giles-Corti from UWA; Ruth Durack from the UDC; policy makers from the City of Perth and the Government of Western Australia's Department of Planning; practitioners in water-sensitive design and landscaping, as well as representatives from local Councils and Redevelopment Authorities in metropolitan Perth.

Traditional urban design contributes to robust urban places that can reduce car dependence and provide for 'complete' neighbourhoods where people can live, work and play. Western Australia was one of the first jurisdictions in the world to base its urban development code, *Liveable Neighbourhoods*, on the principles of traditional urban design, or New Urbanism.

In this short course, we will critically review the elements of this approach, learn about its implementation in practice, and visit three examples of innovative urban development and redevelopment in Perth.

The course will be held from Tuesday to Friday, 6-9 April 2010, from 9.30am to 5.30pm at the Urban Design Centre in central Perth. Registration is \$275 (incl GST) per day, or \$1,100 for the full week.

For more details about the program and registration procedures please contact the UDC at email info@udcwa.org or phone (08) 9440 2400.



Conferences, etc

Room in the city: a forum for the civic square

22-24 April 2010, Glasgow

With keynote speakers Ken Livingstone and Ed Uhlir, this gathering of specialists in the field of urban design, town planning and architecture will provide an opportunity to explore issues relating to the urban square as a vital component of a healthy city.

With Glasgow's principal civic space, George Square, running through the conference as a leitmotiv, but encompassing design initiatives that have been developed internationally, the speakers will address a variety of topics relating to the multitude of diverse roles a civic space can perform in the context of a modern city.

Sponsored by The Glasgow School of Art and Deloitte. More details at www.roominthecityconference.com

Australian Council for New Urbanism Congress

28-30 April 2010, Adelaide

This Australian Congress for New Urbanism will focus on how we can improve our implementation of plans into actual places, at all urban scales and across Australia and New Zealand. Join Australian New Urbanists, our allies and hopefully some critics, at our fourth National Congress, for in-depth presentations, critical analyses and debate about what we have achieved, how we have failed, and how together we can do better. For more details see www.acnu.org

Attractive place to live
Call for papers

Urban Design International invites authors to submit papers for a special issue on the topic 'Attractive Places to Live'. With this new call we are looking for short research, review and viewpoint type papers that focus on the major themes that are directly related to the urban design of attractive cities, including but not limited to: urban environment and ecological design; historic preservation and cultural heritage; housing and urban social design; walkability and public spaces; architecture and urban form; transport and accessibility.

We are also interested in success examples, comparative studies and futuristic views on the urban design of attractive cities. Papers should not exceed 5,000 words in length, and be written in English. Deadline for submission is 12 May 2010.

We also invite high quality reviews and research papers on the topic 'Ecologically Sustainable Development in Urban Design'. Deadline for submissions is 15th December 2010. However, earlier submissions are encouraged and will be handled as they are received.

All papers will be double blind peer reviewed. Full submission, format and style guidelines can be found at: www.palgrave-journals.com/udi/author_instructions.html

3rd International Urban Design Conference

30 August-1 September 2010
National Convention Centre- Canberra

Last year, the second conference in this series, sponsored by Gold Coast City Council through the Office of the City Architect and Heritage, had the theme "Survival: Implementing Tomorrow's City". The theme of the conference was chosen to emphasise the need for our city leaders and urban designers to re-strategise and re-prioritise our usual way of planning, and build the momentum of change necessary for our cities to survive the looming stresses of climate change, peak oil, food shortage, economic uncertainty, increased population, housing affordability, urban densification, equitable transport and access to green spaces, and social/cultural community engagement.

Conference organisers, AST Management Pty Ltd, have decided to make this series an annual event, and move it to Canberra. The theme for this year's conference is 'Designs on our future'. Australia's population is projected to increase by 60 per cent in the next 40 years. What impact will this have on our existing cities? The conference will examine how our new cities are conceived and our existing ones are adapted, re-designed and managed. Abstract submission will be open until 29 April, 2010. For more details see www.urbandesignaustralia.com.au

(For more details about future conferences and the awards program on the Gold Coast, contact Lily Chan, Senior Architect with the Office of the City Architect and Heritage at lchan@goldcoast.qld.gov.au)

48th International Making Cities Livable Conference

17-21 October, 2010 Charleston, SC, USA

Co-sponsored by the City of Charleston and IMCL Council, this conference will focus on ways to improve children's health and development by improving the built environment. For more information see www.livablecities.org/conferences/forthcoming-conferences/18.html

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Web: A new consultant register and an increasing range of related information is available at www.udf.org.au

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