

The design dimension of planning: making planning proactive again

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A century ago planning was largely a physical preoccupation, with architects (the master) producing grand visions for cities and neighbourhoods (masterplanning) that were then implemented often with little political discussion and certainly no citizen engagement in those plans. Whilst this very narrow and top down type of planning went out of fashion (indeed was discredited) many decades ago, this chapter argues that in the face of the global and local challenges discussed in earlier chapters, there is a need to remember some of this early vision, and to make planning proactive once again. This design dimension of planning requires that planners do more than simply allocate sites, write policies, and regulate development, it requires that they bring forward positive visions for change. The chapter discusses some of the conundrums associated with such an approach and considers the best tools to improve practice in the future.

A bumpy road

In the UK, as elsewhere globally, planning has been on a journey. From its beginnings as a physical subject, by the 1960s and 1970s it had completely rejected such approaches in favour of systems thinking in which cities and regions were seen as a series of overlapping social and economic systems that could be tweaked through policy in order to manage growth or decline. By this time few planners were receiving any design training as part of their university education and the professions of architecture and planning increasingly took divergent paths with disastrous consequences: planning was increasingly divorced from a place perspective and from a sense of its ultimate impact on the built and natural environment, whilst architecture was increasingly divorced from any serious engagement with the social and economic consequences of design.

Whilst other countries recovered their confidence more quickly and in the 1980s began to systematically address issues of physical planning alongside their social, economic and environmental aspirations (notably parts of Continental Europe), in the UK it took a little longer. Indeed up until the mid 1990s an unwarranted nervousness persisted within Government over conflating design with planning at all, reinforced in the 1980s by a strong concern to avoid what was seen as undue interference in the market (a perspective that has returned to some degree in the austerity years).

A first toe back in the water was the commissioning by Government in 1993 of research that eventually led to the publication of the book 'The Design Dimension of Planning' (Punter & Carmona 1997). The 'Pink book', as my co-author Professor John Punter, (commenting on my design for the front cover – Figure 1) christened it, argued: first, for the central role of design within the planning system; and second, that this should begin with the comprehensive treatment of design within the new generation of local planning authority development plans. In other words, in planning policy. Today, while I still hold to the first of these principles, I am now far less convinced about the second, precisely because abstract policy can never be a substitute for truly proactive planning that more clearly defines aspirations for how places should be. At the time, however, we argued that design policies within development plans had the potential to:

- Establish and articulate the spatial vision of the plan
- Reflect the design aspirations of the local community and other stakeholders
- Guide the 'process' of design as well as the outcomes
- Give designers, developers and the community greater certainty
- Move beyond a narrow aesthetic to a more fundamental place-making view of design
- Deliver a more positive, enabling and even visionary planning process

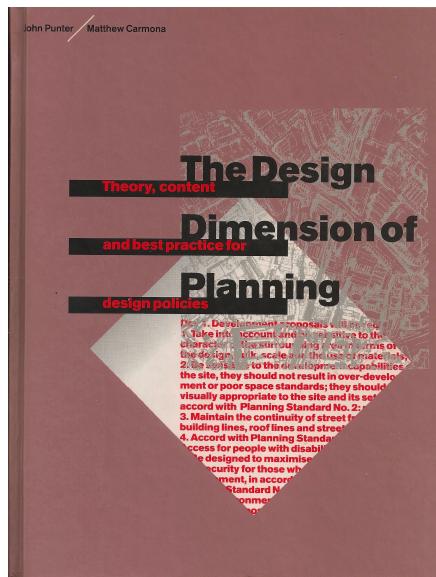


Figure 1: The 'Pink Book'

During the 1990s and into the 2000s, Government gradually warmed up to the idea of design quality as a political objective, and national policy in Scotland and then in England (and a little later in other parts of the UK) caught up with what we were advocating, moving from a prohibitive to a permissive environment as far as the treatment of design through the planning system was concerned. Indeed, following the creation of the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) in 1999 as a body dedicated to moving the national culture away from a 'development at any costs' model to one based on adding value through design, for a time the national policy environment exceeded even our wildest dreams of what might be

possible (Carmona et al 2017)'. That was until the financial crisis of 2008 hit, leading to the eventual demise of CABE, retreat of government from engaging with design, a dramatic hollowing out of design skills within local authorities as discretionary activities were quickly cut, and a growing obsession with the quantity of development above all else, and certainly above its quality. Planning in England, perhaps more than any other policy arena and more so than other parts of the UK (which retained their equivalents of CABE), is and remains a roller-coaster. Nowhere more so than as it relates to design.

So with all this going on, was our faith in the potential of the statutory development plan to establish and deliver a clear local design vision and agenda justified? Before we get to that, first it is worth considering some of the key themes and problematics associated with any attempt to engage in design, whether in England, elsewhere in the UK, or overseas.

The problem with design governance

"It seems that whatever the system, whatever the governance, no matter what our rules and regulations, however we organise our professions, and no matter what our histories, placeless design seems to be the inevitable consequence of development processes outside our historic city centres. Moreover, this is despite the ubiquitous condemnation of such environments as sub-standard by almost every built environment professional you ever meet" (Carmona 2010a)

This was the somewhat damning conclusion from a European research project that focussed on the governance of design beyond the continent's historic city centres. So what do the various systems investigate (and many more beyond Europe) have in common? One thing is a crude love of standards and regulations as a substitute for design: parking standards, highways regulations, zoning controls, density guidelines, health and safety regulations, construction codes and the like. Typically these are: limited in their scope; technical in their aspiration; not generated out of a place-based vision; and imposed on projects without regard to outcomes. Nobody is consciously designing the places that emerge – just the parts: a housing estate, a road, a cycle track, some signage, etc. etc. In a neo-liberal world where the unskilled application of such standards is all there is to safeguard the public interest, the danger is that the work of unscrupulous private developers will largely go unchecked, whilst the work of enlightened developers will be needlessly and crudely undermined.

All this raises the thorny question of design quality, and what we mean by it? 'Design quality' means different things to different actors and there is often little consensus on the scope of design in the built environment (from a narrow aesthetic perspective to a broad holistic view of place), let alone what, in any given circumstance, qualifies as 'good' or 'bad' quality design (Carmona 2016). The endless circular debates that characterise so many of the exchanges between traditionalists and modernists within the architecture profession represent a case-in-point.

Like other aspects of planning, processes of design governance ultimately restrict private property rights, and those who perceive their freedom to design to be most directly affected – typically designers and developers – often resist such intervention the hardest (Walters 2007: 132-133). For their part, planners have not always had the confidence and training to define and deliver a positive public design agenda. As one commentator on the state of British planning recently complained: "Vision is something that your average planner simply does not have ... Hence noddly box / upvc heaven from one end of the country to the other" (Bellay 2013).

Despite this (perhaps because of it), public authorities (including but not limited to planning authorities) have typically been highly adept at applying the sorts of 'technical' standards and regulations previously referred to. The question then arises, might it be possible to raise the general standard and expectations in order to focus mainstream efforts more concordently on higher order principles, those associated with the making of coherent, sustainable, equitable and life-affirming places? This is the design governance conundrum: Can state intervention in processes of designing the built environment positively shape design processes and outcomes, and if so, how? There are certainly plenty of good examples where this has occurred, almost always defined by the public sector playing a far more proactive role in shaping the built environment (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Birmingham, the team working on the centre of the city from the late 1980s onwards transformed it from vehicle to people dominated space (Matthew Carmona)

The design governance conundrum

Here we need to be careful. More public intervention might seem to be the most appropriate response to poor place-making (correcting the market failure), but the presumption that more design regulation will, ip so facto, lead to better design must be treated with caution:

- In some places there may be no market failure, but instead a failure in governance or regulation
- Sometimes the solution may be worse than the problem e.g. the creation of a safe street environment but one that no one wishes to inhabit because it is devoid of character.
- Narrow 'conservative' thinking may create barriers to change and innovation in design.

Regulatory economists argue that regulation is inherently costly and inefficient, but difficult to challenge because of what Peter Van Doren (2005: 45; 64) of the right wing CATO Institute calls: 'bootleggers' (special interests who gain from regulation) and 'baptists' (those who do not like the behaviour of others and want government to restrict it). Yet even the least regulated places in the developed world impose controls of some sort or other on the use of space. Houston, for example (discussed in Chapter 1) is often identified as the only major US city without zoning controls. But even there ordinances are adopted to alleviate a host of land use problems including banning nuisances, imposing off-street parking, and regulating minimum lot, density and land use requirements. In other words zoning by other means (Siegan 2005: 227).

Two questions arise from this. First, not 'if', but 'what type of', intervention should occur? Second, at what point will this be most effective? The first question will be determined by the choice of tools available and our ability to use them (and we will come back to that), but taking the second question first; here it is important to make a key conceptual distinction about the role of planning in relation to design, as opposed to private (or public) sector project design.

The when question

Varkki George (1997) makes the important distinction between first and second order design processes: "In first-order design, the designer usually has control over, is involved in, or is directly responsible for all design decisions. ... Second-order design is appropriate to a situation characterised by distributed decision-making because the design solution is specified at a more abstract level and is, therefore, applicable across a wider range of situations". He argues that most urban design falls into the second category – characterised by distributed decision-making – as opposed to architecture which is typically in the first camp

Design, in the context of planning, needs to deal with shifting and complex economic, social, political, legal and stakeholder environments, and with how places change over very long time horizons. Second-order design is particularly suited to such turbulent decision-making environments because it is more strategic in nature, specifying what is critical to define, and ignoring what is not. The governance of design should therefore be about shaping the decision-making environment within which design decision-making occurs, rather than being concerned with making all of the design decisions.

This in turn should shape an 'opportunity space' within which a creative design and development process can occur (Tiesdell and Adams 2004). In other words establishing the sorts of key parameters and constraints that are necessary for that process to thrive and deliver 'good design'. It follows that in order to be both influential and impactful on design outcomes (and despite the numerical contradiction), this second-order process needs to come before the act of project design; in other words first. This may raise alarm bells amongst those seeking to deregulate the development process (as has happened in the UK in recent years), but evidence consistently demonstrates that the increased certainty, coordination and consensus it builds actually helps to streamline the planning process (Carmona & Giordano 2013).

The how question

Onto the question of what type of intervention, in fact there is a sophisticated toolbox available as my own research on the work and impact of the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) has demonstrated (see Carmona et al 2017) (Figure 3).

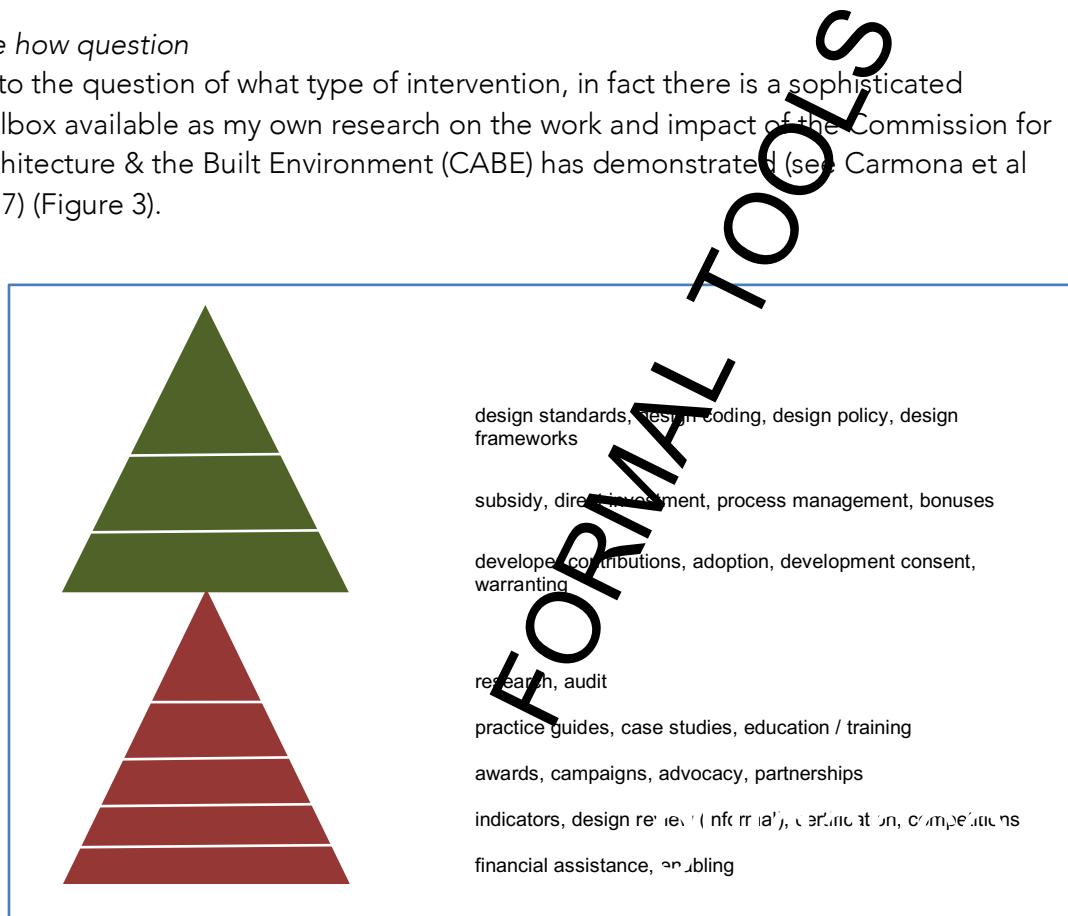


Figure 3: The design governance toolbox

Many of these tools operate outside of formal regulatory processes and within the realm of informal tools of design governance (Carmona 2017). They demonstrate the potential and opportunities available to local planning authorities (and others) to work beyond their statutory powers in order to deliver a positive opportunity space within which places can be successfully shaped. This potentially reverses a situation where planners have over-relied on their regulatory powers and have then faced confrontation and delay, instead of consensus and collaboration.

The informal tools can be classified into five categories that move from hands-off and informative to hand-on and proactive, whilst always advisory and never statutory:

- Evidence tools: gather information through focussed research about design and design processes in order to support arguments about the importance of design, underpin advice about what works and what does not, and as a means to monitor progress towards particular policy objectives or to gauge the state of the built environment. This includes large scale *audits* of particular development types (e.g. housing) or of particular locations such as those undergoing rapid change.
- Knowledge tools: articulate and disseminate knowledge about the nature of successful design, good and poor design practice, and why it matters. This can be expressed through the production of *practice guides* that focus on particular topics or issues (e.g. design for accessibility), the compilation of published *case studies* of best practice, and through *education and training* with a focus on design knowledge and skills (e.g. design training for local politicians involved in making planning decisions)
- Promotion tools: make the case for design quality in a more proactive manner by taking knowledge to key audiences and seeking to package messages in a manner that engages attention, wins over hearts and minds, and exhorts particular behaviours. Promotion initiatives include the introduction of local *design awards* (e.g. annually or bi-annually for the best developments in a municipality); *campaigning* around particular issues that undermine environmental quality (e.g. the cumulative impact of minor alterations on local character); *advocacy* work, engaging particular development partners in a more focussed fashion in order to advance clear design aspirations (e.g. within the local highways authority), and the building of more formal *partnerships* with like minded organisations (e.g. developers or housing associations)
- Evaluation tools: allow systematic and objective judgments to be made about the quality of design by parties external to, and therefore detached from, the design process or product being evaluated. These include the use of *indicators* designed to systemise and structure decision-making processes on design (e.g. the Scottish Government's Place Standard¹); *informal design review* conducted by an independent design review panel (either within or external to the local authority); the use of *external certification schemes* (e.g. Building for Life²); and the use of *design competitions* for specific high profile sites or projects.
- Assistance tools: use more proactive means to engage the public sector directly in projects or in otherwise shaping the decision-making environment within which design occurs. They include the provision of direct *financial assistance* to initiatives that act to enlarge the opportunity space for good design (e.g. providing financial support for a local architecture centre), and the use of direct *enabling* within the design process itself. This might

¹ <http://www.placestandard.scot/#/home>

² <http://www.builtforlifehomes.org/go/about>

encompass the parachuting in of external expert design assistance to advise on, for example, the briefing or commissioning processes associated with an important project, or alternatively the temporary secondment of expertise into a team to help prepare policy, guidance or to provide dedicated design expertise on a challenging planning application.

And that's not all

Whilst such informal tools can be incredibly powerful for building an informed, responsive and creative design decision-making environment, none are amongst the most powerful tools in the box. That accolade belongs instead to tools in the formal category that are established in statute and backed by formal regulatory powers. There are three categories here, each with strong place-shaping capabilities (Carmona 2017) as part of a continuum from advice through to compulsion, or from lesser to greater intervention.

- Guidance: Focuses on the 'positive' encouraging of appropriate development via the production of a range of plans and guides that give a direction for, but not an end solution to, design proposals. In other words, rather than a blueprint (as would be delivered through a fixed masterplan) they provide a trellis up which public design aspirations can grow. They include *design standards* (fixed technical and generic standards), *design coding* (three dimensional site or areas-specific codes), *design policy* (the focus of the 'Pink Book', namely flexible generic policy aspirations requiring case by case interpretation), and *design frameworks* (flexible spatial design propositions for particular areas or large sites). Of the formal guidance tools, standards and policy focus on setting out the parameters by which development will be negotiated and assessed, typically under statutory (enforceable) powers, whilst frameworks and codes are more propositional, shaping change in a more directive manner through advancing place-specific visions for change.
- Incentive: Encompasses the active enabling of development seen to be in the public interest by contributing public sector land or resources to the development process or otherwise making development more attractive to landowners and developers. The critical task is not simply to incentivise development, but to incentivise high quality development. This can be done by adding 'design strings' to any state *subsidy* for, or *direct investment* within, development; in other words making the state investment contingent on the quality of the outcomes. *Process management* of regulatory processes can also be used to encourage good design, for example by fast-tracking high quality schemes, and development *bonuses* can be offered in exchange for particular design outcomes (e.g. higher density in exchange for a high quality public realm).
- Control: Represents the ultimate sanction of the state, care of the ability to refuse permission for development via regulation and enforcement, typically involving a range of overlapping regulatory regimes (not just planning). The category encompasses the negotiation of *developer contributions*, granting

of development consents (e.g. planning permission, or listed building consents), adoption of highways and other infrastructure by the state, and the warranting of construction standards, through building control. Like other tools, control processes can be shaped in a manner that facilitates or hinders better design. Equally, if incentives are viewed as the 'carrots' for good behaviour then control might be seen as the 'stick', and as a disincentive to bad behaviours. Control is reactive in nature and often involves managing a complex bureaucracy. But whilst, in the UK, adoption and warranting typically relate to the imposition of fixed immutable standards, developer contributions and development consents involve the 'discretionary' weighing and balancing of public against private needs (including those relating to design) care of a highly skilled process of interpretation, typically against flexible policy and guidance. The key challenge when designing regulatory systems for design is to make the 'good' easy and the 'bad' arduous.

Moving to a more propositional system

Whilst the research reported twenty years ago in the 'Pink book' focussed on just one of the tools – design policy – infusing the work was a larger argument around the need for positive engagement in design, reflecting the potential for a more proactive role for the public sector in shaping places, backed by the ultimate sanction of control. After the research finished I taught for three years at the University of Nottingham where I explored some of the ideas in the book via a module that required the class to create their own design chapter for a fictitious local authority. My example of 'what not to do' came from the suburban Nottinghamshire borough in which I lived at the time and whose sole design governance tool was a single 'Policy HO7: New Housing Development' from their 1994 Local Plan. This very short policy (just 7 lines), was even shorter on substance, and open to huge interpretation with highly subjective statements such "New development should be laid out so as to provide a high quality of built environment which is in keeping with its surroundings".

There have been two iterations of the plan in the intervening years. In 2004 the policy was re-named 'E1: Good Design' and was now part of the 'Local Development Framework'. In terms of substance, it was slightly longer (14 lines) with reference to a broader range of concerns, including aspirations for better accessibility, sustainable water treatment and a high standard of architectural and landscape design. Again, little clue was given about what this might mean in the context of the borough, with catch-all (and largely meaningless) statements such as: planning permission would not be granted without "The creation or retention of a high standard of amenity for all users of the new development" still very obvious. By 2014 local plans had returned, and the single design policy was now more ambitiously entitled: Policy 10: Design and Enhancing Local Identity. Longer again (now 28 lines), the policy includes statements such as: "All new development should be designed to: make a positive contribution to the public realm and sense of place; ... permeability and legibility". But little more clue than the 1994 document about how this should shape

the nature of the borough or what sort of place that should be. The results on the ground reflect this generally low ambition (Figure 4).



Figure 4: This recent infill housing development was listed on the council's website under the title 'The future of housing design' (Amy Tang)

The case is simply representative of an approach to design that, rather than seeking to enlarge the opportunity space for good design or to advance a coherent vision for the future, instead remains too focussed on the technocratic processes of allocating sites and regulating development in a reactive manner. As one commentator has argued about contemporary British planning: "Any attempts to re-introduce 'visioning' into planning have not been taken up by the system as a modus operandi"; he asks "Is this because it is too political to draw what is to become of an area?", and concludes "we need to rediscover the power of design when we plan?" (Mallett 2013). I agree, a 'place-based' understanding of the city is almost entirely absent in our development plans yet we expend huge amounts of resources worrying about and updating policies that, in fact change very little from one decade to the next, as the Nottinghamshire example demonstrates all too clearly.

We need better tools to do the job

In the 'Pink Book' we argued:

- Design policies in development plans should be the foundation of a system of design governance
- Policies should be comprehensive and cover all the key design bases – architecture, urban design, landscape, conservation, and cut across all other policy arenas
- Policies should derive from a profound engagement with and understanding of context
- Policies should articulate a clear spatial / design vision.

Whilst I still hold to many of the book's conclusions, particularly those regarding the central position of design within the planning process, I now question whether the development plan is the right tool for the job. All the evidence suggests that we

continue to struggle to deliver development plans that do most (perhaps any) of these things. They seem incapable of the level of sophistication that we ascribed to them in the book. Instead development plans remain too static, generic, uncontextual, and lacking in inspiration or vision to be effective in driving a coherent place-based agenda forward. They are too often what one interviewee at the time of the original 'Pink Book' research called 'barristers appendices' (designed to get through the long-winded and pseudo-legal process of inspection and adoption) in a vacuum of creativity and propositional planning.

Rather than static we need flexible, site- and area-specific rather than generic, place sensitive rather than uncontextual, and directive rather than lacking in inspiration or vision. In other words, planning needs to engage with the sorts of propositional tools that suggest it has something meaningful to contribute beyond its regulatory role. And something that the communities effected (both public and business communities) can engage with and understand.

Whilst the recent introduction of neighbourhood planning in England, Place Plans in Wales, and community planning in Scotland and Northern Ireland, goes some way to engaging communities, these tools are mired in procedural complexity, and tend to add to rather than cut through the policy morass. During the 2000s, by contrast, a proliferation of tools of a more directive nature were increasingly used: urban design strategies, urban design frameworks, design briefs, spatial masterplans, design codes, design protocols, area action plans, design charters, and so forth. In reality we can narrow these down to two core and essential propositional tools of design guidance, both of which have already been introduced: design frameworks and design codes.

Propositional tool 1: the urban design framework

Urban design frameworks are particularly valuable for setting out a clear coordinating vision for an area or site, setting out key spatial relationships, movement framework, density requirements, landscape, land uses, character areas, public amenities, landmarks, parcelisation, and so forth. Crucially they are also flexible enough to accommodate change. In London these sorts of flexible frameworks (not fixed masterplans) have been pioneered by the private sector, often working in close cooperation with public authorities, as was the case at the massive King's Cross development (Bishop & Williams 2017), and are proving successful in delivering high quality development within an adaptable framework. Outside of London, some of the best frameworks have been produced by the consultancy URBED, including the 2007 Liverpool University Urban Design Framework and later its Knowledge Quarter Plan (Figure 5), and in the same year the Nottingham City Centre Urban Design Guide³.

³ <http://urbed.coop/archive/Masterplanning/all>



Figure 5: Extract from the Liverpool Knowledge Quarter, the Climax Plan (URBED)

They can be equally effective in complex historic areas of incremental change, such as the 6km Aldgate to Stratford stretch of arterial street in London that was covered by the High Street 2012 framework. From 2009, when it was produced, and in the run up to the Olympic Games, this loose framework guided a range of interventions (some successful, some less so) in the street with a particular focus on conservation, public realm improvement and the provision of cycle infrastructure.

At the same time the London Olympics Delivery Authority, and (post-games) the London Legacy Development Corporation adopted a similar flexible urban design framework in order to debate alternatives and set out a future strategy for the Olympic Park and its surroundings, and this has been very influential in guiding the radical transformation that is happening there. More recently, this has morphed into a whopping 250 page local plan, backed by 550 pages of ancillary documents, all of which replace clarity and vision for obscure policy stodge.

My own research in London's Docklands (Carmona 2009b) convinced me of the validity of these tools. In the 1980s and 1990s the area to the south of Canary Wharf (the Millennium Quarter) developed in an ad hoc and incremental manner and largely without a coordinating plan. Learning from what had worked in neighbouring Canary Wharf, although this time for an area characterised by piecemeal mixed use development and multiple complex ownerships, the London borough of Tower

Hamlets decided to address increasing pressure for substantial change through the publication of the 1999 Isle of Dogs Millennium Quarter Masterplan. Whilst called a masterplan, in fact this was a very flexible urban design framework within which a coordinating public realm was established, financial contributions agreed from the multiple competing parties, but flexibility allowed over the forms that buildings took in the light of market uncertainty. The framework was successful in helping to coordinate the massive investments that occurred during the 2000s until superseded in 2015 by the South Quay Masterplan (Figure 6).

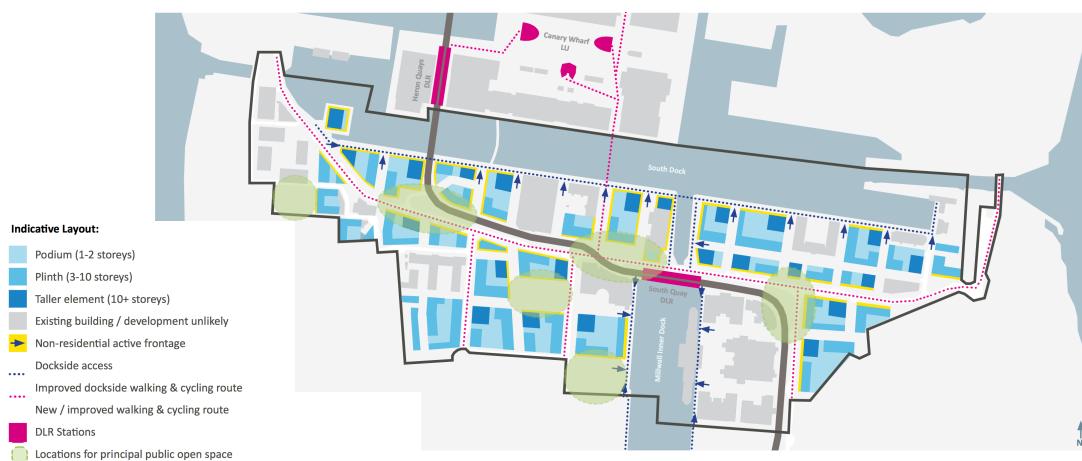


Figure 6: Extract from the South Quay Masterplan (London Borough of Tower Hamlets)

This second framework includes a range of more specific three dimensional prescriptions for the sorts of podium and tower developments that have come to dominate the area, and reflects the drive to deliver more residential development at higher densities than the earlier framework had envisaged.

Propositional tool 2. the design code

This brings us to the second key tool for a more directive and propositional planning, the design code. Design codes are:

- Design guidance for large sites or areas where specification of the whole is coded into parts
- Designed using a limited number of coded components that may be put together in different ways to generate a multitude of final outcomes.
- Usually produced to support the delivery of an urban design framework.

They are delivery (not vision-making) tools that are particularly suited to ensuring the coherent delivery of complex multi-phased schemes, which (ideally) focus on establishing and fixing the essential urbanistic components of place (Carmona 2009a), for example: plot coverage, building lines and setbacks, street widths, frontage treatments, public realm treatments, landscape components, building heights, forms and massing, and so forth (Figure 7).

BLOCK SIZES			STOREY HEIGHTS		SET BACKS		NOTES
BLOCK CODE 1	Terrace	Semi-detached		2 ½ storey	2 storey		Built form around principal square will consist of shops and flats in addition to housing. The elevational form of walls & flats should follow the regulation pattern for houses. A key feature taller than 2½ may be permitted (see key grouping 2).
BLOCK CODE 2	Terrace	Terrace	Semi-detached	2 ½ storey	2 storey		This code is used in areas where formal arrangement of buildings is required. Buildings marking the boundary of the urban park should reflect the detail of the listed building with definable space defined with walls and railings.
BLOCK CODE 3	Terrace	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	2 storey	single storey		To create a formal rhythm, units of the same size should be used to form blocks. A haphazard arrangement of different sizes will not be acceptable.
BLOCK CODE 4	Terrace	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	2 ½ storey	2 storey		The block located next to the school and community building may benefit from the inclusion of some smaller units to reflect the size & scale of these buildings.
BLOCK CODE 5	Terrace	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	2 storey			Terrace forms with some semi-detached should be the principal forms used. Some detached units may be acceptable but should be used primarily as corner plots.
BLOCK CODE 6	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	Detached	2 ½ storey	2 storey		Terrace forms with some semi-detached should be the principal forms used especially along the east-west pedestrian route to denote where it passes through the higher density urban area of the development.
BLOCK CODE 7	Terrace	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	2 storey			Semi-detached and detached units should be the principal forms used. Especially along the east-west pedestrian route to denote where it passes through the medium & low density green fringe of the development.
BLOCK CODE 8	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	Semi-detached	2 storey			Narrow fronted semi-detached & detached units should be used to define the planned avenue that runs north to south. A mix of wider & narrow fronted units on corner plots and end plots will be used to perform the diagonal links in through the lower density areas of the development.
BLOCK CODE 9	Semi-detached	Detached		2 storey			Principal forms making up the angular nature of the development fringe will consist of detached & semi-detached units with deep front gardens to allow for adequate vegetation & tree planting.

17

Figure 7: Extract from the Fairfield Park Design Code (Mid Beds District Council)

In 2004 the then British Government funded a pilot programme exploring the use and potential of design codes, work I was commissioned to evaluate. The intention of the research was to determine whether codes could help to deliver greater speed, certainty and quality in volume housebuilding and therefore help to provide an answer to the very poor quality of design in that sector. The research concluded that design codes can play a major role in delivering better quality development and a more certain design and development process. Also, if properly managed, they can provide the focus around which teams of professional advisors can integrate their activities, delivering in the process a more coordinated and consensus driven development process. Consequently – in appropriate circumstances – design codes are valuable tools to deliver a range of more sustainable processes and built developments, particularly in connection with large sites built out over many years by different development teams. The findings were captured in the practice manual: 'Preparing Design Codes'⁴.

Revisiting this work nine years later revealed some surprising results (Carmona & Giordano 2013):

- Approaching half of local planning authorities had required the submission of or actively commissioned design codes
- The use of design codes was advocated in policy in a quarter of local planning authorities (rapidly rising)
- Practice was becoming mainstreamed.

⁴ <https://matthew-carmona.com/reports-guides/>

The follow-up work confirmed that design codes improve design quality by tying down the 'must have' design parameters – the urban DNA that holds the scheme together – irrespective of whether traditional or contemporary in character (Figure 8). In so doing they ensure consistency in the delivery of key site-wide design principles between the different phases of development whilst delivering greater certainty about outcomes and certainty to developers about the process.

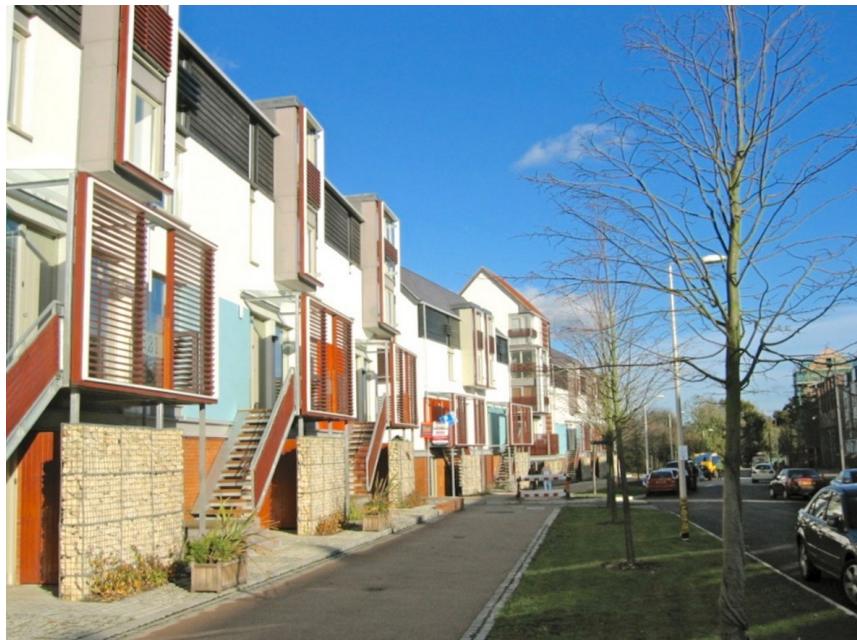


Figure 8: Newhall, Harlow, a high quality contemporary urban extension, coded by Studio REAL (Matthew Carmona)

So what does this mean for contemporary planning practice?

As I have already argued, good planning and good design are integral to one another, they are inseparable. Unfortunately, the design middle was long ago squeezed out of British planning and never made a convincing return, in any of the four home nations. Flexible urban design frameworks and design codes offer a potential to become that missing 'urban design layer' in our planning cake

Indeed, if we look internationally then some of the best international practice brings these two key tools together, for example Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm which is based on a clear but flexible urban design framework and detailed design codes to 'fix' the key design parameters at each phase. Of course it is also delivered by a public sector team with the means and capabilities to proactively engage through the full range of tools available to them (formal and informal), including: powerful incentive vested in enlightened land ownership; the use of design competitions at each phase of the development; a rigorous design review and evaluation process; and partnerships between the city and local development teams (Carmona 2010b) (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Hammarby Sjöstad, created through a skilled urban design process and now delivering long-term economic, social, health and environmental benefits to its city (Matthew Carmona)

Here at home, whilst I now question whether we placed too much faith in the development plan as a tool capable of addressing all (or perhaps any) of the potential ascribed to them at the start of this chapter, we need to remember that the 'Pink Book' came at the time when urban design was still in its prehistoric phase in the UK. Consequently there were few alternatives to planning policy across much of the country for establishing a local design agenda and development plans were too often the only game in town!

Today, with the austerity-driven withdrawal of the state at both national and local levels from proactive planning and urban design, in many places the plan is once again the only game in town. As a consequence, even if just as a back-stop, there remains an important role for design policies in development plans backed up by intelligent development management to help deliver high quality places. But we will always need to be realistic about what we can achieve through such limited means, acting alone. Back in 1966 (the year I was born) J. Hope-Wallace, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Housing & Local Government, issued a new Governmental Circular – 28/66 – about the legitimate role of design in relation to planning. Amongst other sentiments he stated that the control of design can help to eliminate bad design, but by itself will not deliver good design. This clearly remains the case today.

To achieve good design, let alone great design, we need to engage in a creative, locally responsive design process. If planning is to bring its public interest raison d'etra to that party, it needs to engage in the sorts of proactive and propositional tools which I have outlined and which suggest that it has something to say. If it does not (or cannot because of cuts and timidity) then we deserve everything we get. In

such circumstances planning will continue to be dismissed by the ill informed as simply irrelevant or as a barrier to progress. That would be profoundly wrong!

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