

A FRESH APPROACH TO BUILDING A COMMUNITY – PUTTING LIFE FIRST

‘Put life first in the design process’. It sounds quite obvious, but in reality this happens very rarely in planning. Very often it is incidental factors which make the greatest mark on the physical environment that is intended for habitation.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Regulations, standards, market forces and so-called common practice, which in isolation make sense, also often produce a negative result when put together in one single environment. Things like standard floor plans, spatial standards, fire-regulations, vehicle turning circles, traffic regulations, parking requirements, can all have a huge impact on the everyday life of the people who would live there in the years to come. Many planning tools are more about risk avoidance rather than improving quality of life. The sound principles of individual standards need to be applied in a manner that makes sense when applied together as a whole.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Aspects of everyday life such as children walking to school, knowing your neighbours, sitting in the sun, enjoying the wild aspects of nature, having enough

potential customers passing by your shop front, are seldom considered important priorities. However, these issues can have a huge impact on social sustainability in terms of vital social networking, health and well-being, economy and employment.

Sustainable means sustaining peoples’ lives, helping people ‘get by’ as well as ‘getting on’. Before writing any brief for buildings or even public spaces, it is essential to understand the needs for a dynamic, living community, not just dwelling, but social interaction and many different, essential activities, leisure and recreation, work and play.

HUMAN SCALE

The design of a new settlement would be based on the essential characteristics of people. The scale of the place would relate to the size of the body and respond to the senses. The design speed would be walking speed. The place would also respond to the basic social nature of people.

NATURAL SUSTAINABILITY

To be a sustainable place, the design must acknowledge the importance of the natural environment,

respecting the many forms of flora and fauna, as well as recognising that living along side these has a huge benefit of well-being for the community.

ETHOS

To be socially sustainable, there would be a strong community ethos, including and supporting the needs of individuals and families, as well as the many micro-social-networks that exist within a well-functioning society.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

To be economically sustainable, all aspects of affordability (purchase or rental cost, as well as running and maintenance) of homes and business premises would be considered to ensure accessibility, employment and potential for innovation, growth and change.

INCLUSIVE

The challenge of building a new community is to be inclusive to all kinds of people and their activities by providing a strong framework, robust to the growth and change which are an essential part of life.





A street designed for people and public life



A street engineered for cars and speed, unsafe and unattractive for people



Built-form which promotes human interaction



Built-form which doesn't promote human interaction



A small-scale, multi-functional solution



A large-scale, mono-functional solution



Buildings which respond to their natural environment



Buildings which do not respond to their natural surroundings