



DESIGN REVIEWED

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A review of some of the most significant building projects seen by CABE's expert design panel



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Introduction

Contents

- 4 **Masterplanning**
- 5 **Arts and community buildings**
- 6 **Building tall**
- 7 **Public space**
- 8 **Public buildings and PFI**
- 9 **Building in context**
- 10 **Residential development**
- 11 **Urban retail**
- 12 **Design Review**
- 13 **Minding the gap**
- 14 **Broad Marsh**
- 15 **Living with CABE**
- 16 **Design Review Q&As**
- 18 **CABE programmes**
- 19 **Bibliography and further information**

CABE was established in 1999 to be the nation's champion for better places, working to promote high standards in architecture and urban design everywhere. CABE's Design Review programme is a key part of achieving this; we provide independent expert advice on the quality of designs for selected projects.

The Design Review programme currently offers advice on around 500 projects a year. Advice is offered both through meetings of the Design Review Committee, which take place every month, and through the staff team in consultation with myself as Chair of the committee, and often in consultation with committee members as well. We work closely with planning authorities and English Heritage in formulating our advice. Our work is most effective when we engage with projects at an early stage, before a planning application is submitted.

The schemes we see vary greatly in type and size. There are large scale urban masterplans and high profile cases such as tall office towers, but also smaller projects raising more local issues, engineering structures and landscape design schemes. We also occasionally focus effort on particular building types – hospitals, schools and police stations are some of the building types to which a whole Committee session has been devoted. In these cases, our comments have helped public sector clients make design a key consideration in the procurement process.

In the following pages we look back at some of the most noteworthy projects on which we have advised. The aim is to give a flavour of the type of schemes we review, and the kinds of issues that arise when we deal with them. The examples we have included are schemes which are in the public domain and generally not yet built. We have opted to take a positive approach by including only those schemes that have something to recommend them.

We have included some features that give a customer's view of working with CABE, and at the end of the publication we explain in greater depth how the programme works and how to contact us. We hope you find this a useful summary of what we do and how to work with us.

Paul Finch

Chairman of CABE Design Review Committee

Cover from top Nottingham Broad Marsh – aerial image Westfield Design Group/Hayes Davidson; Heron Tower, Kohn Pederson Fox Associates/Hayes Davidson; The Turner Centre, Snøhetta as/Kent County Council; Health and Safety Executive Building, Cartwright Pickard Architects/Kajima **Opposite** Design Review Committee in progress, photo by Grant Govier

Masterplanning

The importance of guiding the development of large areas over a long period of time is increasingly being recognised. CABE has recently seen a number of thoughtful and rational masterplans dealing with a wide range of urban situations.

> The urban structure and street pattern of Bury St Edmunds have changed little since the Middle Ages. In this historic context, a masterplan by Michael Hopkins and Partners for the town's **Cattle Market** site promises to knit in new retail and residential space, as well as a new public building, in a development sensitive to the existing core. One reason the masterplan is convincing is that it recognises the importance of seeking linkages beyond the application site. The progress made so far has been helped by strong collaboration between the local authority, both as landowner and planning authority, the developer and the architect.

> In London, two massive development areas – both among the biggest in Europe in the last few decades – are in the early stages of design. They both seek to bring neglected brownfield land back into productive use through high quality mixed-use development. The first, **King's Cross Central** (the largely derelict railway land behind King's Cross mainline station), has been a long-standing and notorious problem area. The evolving masterplan by Allies and Morrison and Porphyrios Associates is very encouraging, not least for the way it aims to exploit the potential of factors such as level changes across the site, instead of regarding them as problems.

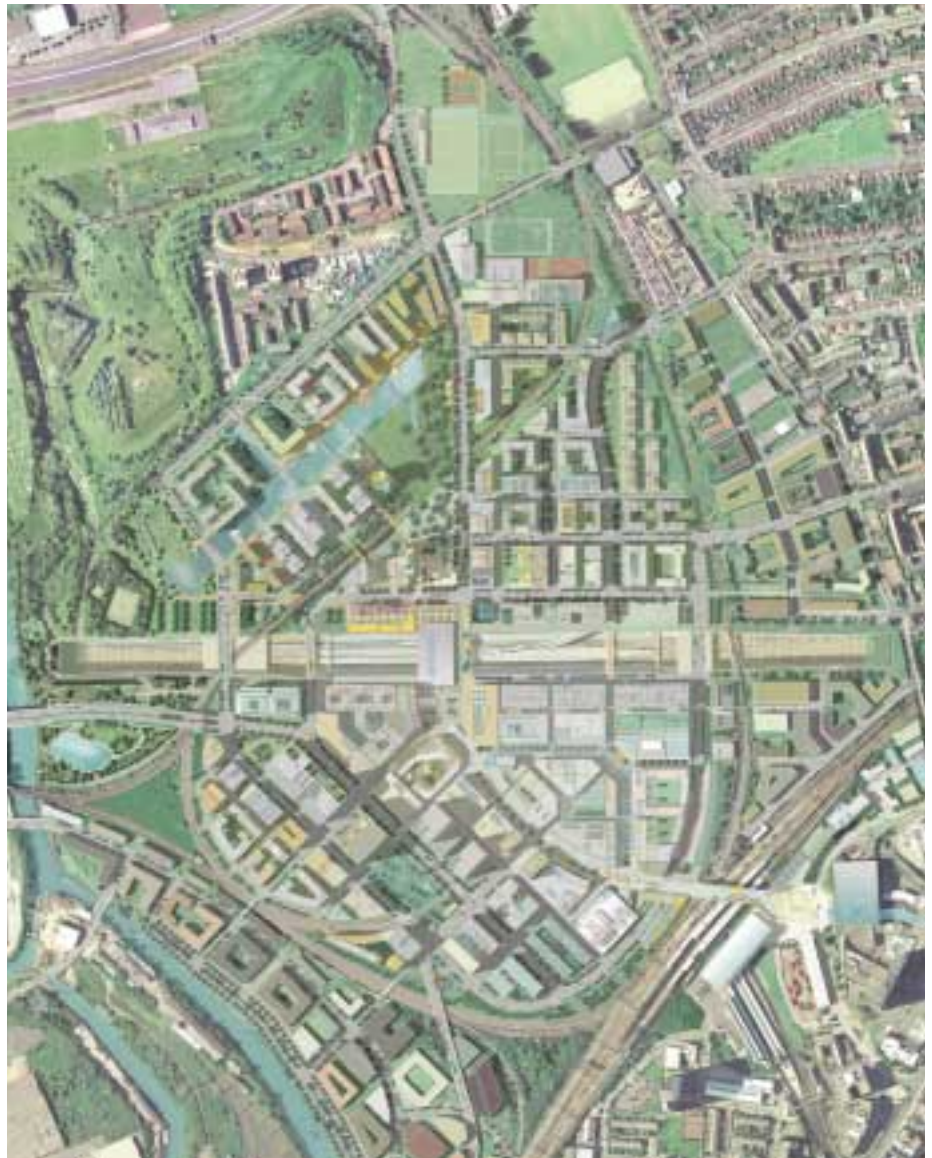
> The second scheme is **Stratford City** in the East End, and again we see the potential for this scheme to be a well-considered and thoughtful development. A mixed-use scheme to be built on the 60 hectare site of the old Stratford Rail Freight Yards, this masterplan by Arup Associates, with Fletcher Priest Architects and West 8, gives serious thought to connecting what has been a relatively cut off site with surrounding areas.

> In east Manchester, a masterplan for the Cardroom area offers a bold vision for the way we could help failing urban areas to become desirable places to live and work. The **New Islington** scheme, designed by Alsop Architects and backed by Urban Splash and English Partnerships, aims to link the community back into the city centre of Manchester and sets out some interesting ideas about sustainability, particularly in terms of energy consumption.

> Birmingham is continuing its transformation into a dynamic and forward-looking city, and much of what has been achieved is due to the city council's determination to alleviate the worst excesses of post-war highways planning. **The Masshouse** masterplan by Edward Cullinan architects, for example, occupies a site released by the removal of an elevated highway. The masterplan is unusually strong and definite in terms of the architectural vision it proposes; key points like the height of the buildings and provision of plant and roof gardens are fixed, and individual architects will design buildings

within this framework. We think this strong masterplan is appropriate in this case, being based on fundamentally sound principles such as proposing an appropriate scale for the buildings, and building forms which reinforce the topography. A continuing role for the masterplanners will be important in ensuring that the detailed design reaches its full potential.

'Birmingham is continuing its transformation into a dynamic and forward-looking city'



Arts and community buildings

> The **Wellington Place** masterplan, by Carey Jones, is for a key site in a developing area of Leeds, to the west of the city centre. This scheme has developed a series of clear workable principles regarding historic structures on the site, routes, public spaces, grain and site edges, helping to provide logic and a clear hierarchy, and resulting in a convincing masterplan. As ever, the overall success of the masterplan will be dependent on the choice of architects, the use of high quality materials and appropriate detailing.

> In **Bury**, a promising masterplan by URBED is being put forward for the town centre. The scheme is based on a careful consideration of the widest possible context and therefore avoids an approach that works well for retailing but has little to do with the nature of the town as a whole. It seems to us to stand a good chance of achieving its admirable aims – the creation of a more rounded town centre and closer integration of the town centre with surrounding neighbourhoods.



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01 Stratford City, Arup Associates/Fletcher Priest Architects/West 8 02 New Islington, Urban Splash and Alsop Architects

CABE is publishing two documents about masterplanning in 2004. **Design Reviewed – Masterplans** will draw together the key lessons learnt from reviewing masterplans, and **Creating Excellent Masterplans** will provide a guide for clients.



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New arts and community buildings can be a springboard for revitalising an area. A number of exciting examples have recently been considered by CABE, the best of which derive from a clear brief, and invest time and effort in achieving high quality design.

> In Leicester, a new **Performing Arts Centre** is planned to replace the existing Haymarket Theatre and to accommodate the live works of the Phoenix Arts Centre. The new building is designed by the US-based Rafael Viñoly Architects. The practice is perhaps best known here as part of the THINK consortium whose design for two open latticework towers was runner up in the competition for the rebuilding of the World Trade Centre site in New York. The concept behind their design for the Leicester centre is to 'turn the theatre inside out' and bring the city into the building. We strongly support this exciting and dynamic project, and we congratulate Leicester City Council for their ambition and approach to the scheme.

> The **Turner Centre** in Margate is intended to house exhibitions of Turner's paintings, as well as temporary exhibitions. The competition winning design by Shohetta and Spence will be located off the pier, and it promises to be an original and striking

landmark building. Although a relatively small project, it is nonetheless complex. There will be many technical difficulties associated with building in the sea, and with the unusual form of the building. With the project in the hands of a committed client and an experienced design team, we are confident these difficulties will be overcome.

> As the joint CABE and English Heritage publication '**Shifting Sands**' demonstrated, high quality new architecture can help to boost the image and fortunes of seaside towns. In Cromer in Norfolk, a planned new building, designed by Purcell Miller Tritton, housing a **RNLI Museum** and café would, we believe, make a positive contribution to the regeneration of the town's seafront. Although we thought there were significant ways in which the design could be improved, mainly to do with making the building simpler, we broadly support the proposals in terms of height, massing and style.



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01 The Turner Centre, Margate, Shohetta as/Kent County Council 02 Performing Arts Centre, Leicester, Rafael Viñoly Architects

Building tall

Tall building proposals continue to come forward in larger numbers than at any time since the 1960s. There is no doubt that mistakes were made then – and we all want to avoid repeating those – but CABE also believes that first-class tall buildings have the potential to make a positive contribution to city life.



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> The most high profile tall building seen by CABE recently is Renzo Piano's design for **London Bridge Tower**, also known as the 'shard of glass'. This dramatic building, which includes offices, a hotel and residential accommodation, would be the tallest in Europe. The fact that it would appear prominently in certain views of St Paul's Cathedral has generated some strong opposition, but the proposal was recently given approval after a planning inquiry. In CABE's view, the architecture of the scheme is world class and worthy of the prominence it would have on the London skyline, but we were less convinced by the proposals for the public realm aspects of the scheme. These considerations formed the basis of the evidence we gave at the public inquiry into the scheme in 2003.

'In CABE's view, the architecture of London Bridge Tower is world class'

> A number of elegant office towers have been proposed for other sites in London. The **Minerva Building**, in the City of London, is designed by Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners. One of the key issues in considering this scheme was how it would be viewed in a wide range of situations, particularly as it would appear in some views of the Tower of London. Photorealistic images provided by the architects – something we recommend are produced for all major tall building proposals – convinced us that the tower would make a striking and attractive addition to the skyline.

> In Canary Wharf, Richard Rogers Partnership have designed a proposal at **Riverside South**, consisting of two towers of office accommodation linked by a smaller building. It holds out the promise, in our view, of some of the best architecture yet seen in the Canary Wharf development. Importantly, it also promises to provide a high quality public realm.

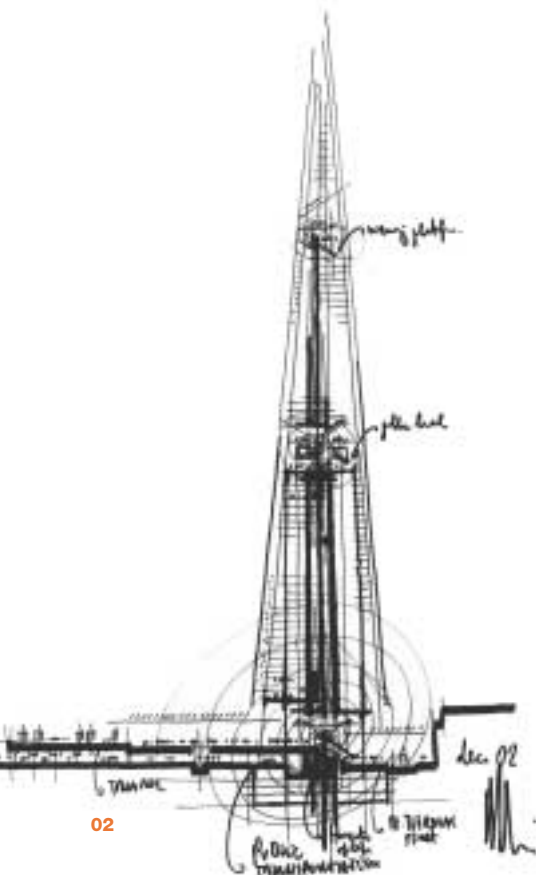
> Proposals for residential towers are experiencing something of a renaissance. The **Vauxhall Tower** proposal in Lambeth would be the tallest residential building in the UK. The prominence of the site means that

any tall structure here will be seen by millions of people and therefore its external appearance needs to be of a high standard. It also needs to offer benefits to the public realm which reflect its size and prominence. After dialogue with the architects, Broadway Malyan, we concluded that the scheme had developed to the point of successfully addressing our concerns.

> In Newcastle, we were happy to support a scheme for a residential tower at **Quayside** (Stephenson Bell), which also offers a welcome public amenity in the form of a restaurant. As with other tall and prominent buildings, the quality of materials and detailing will be an important factor in the success and enduring appearance of this proposal. In such cases, we recommend that the local authority satisfy itself that it has enough information to assess these issues before issuing a consent, and that they insist on appropriately strict planning conditions as part of any consent.



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Public space

> As the Quayside scheme suggests, tall buildings proposals have not been confined to London. In Manchester, for example, an impressive scheme for the **Hilton Hotel** (Ian Simpson Architects) would be the tallest building in the city. It includes residential units as well as a hotel, and the way the separation between these elements has been handled gives the project a distinctive but coherent form. In the Spinningfields area, the new **Civil Justice Centre** (by Denton Corker Marshall) shows the public sector proposing to build high, and this scheme is discussed in more detail in the 'Public Buildings' section. We think both these well-considered proposals will be welcome additions to Manchester's increasingly rich skyline.

01 The Minerva Building, Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners Limited, ©smoother **02** London Bridge Tower, sketch by Renzo Piano **03** Beetham Hilton Tower, Ian Simpson Architects ©Uniform Communications Ltd **04** Renzo Piano Building Workshop, image by Hayes Davidson, photo by John McLean **05** Riverside South, Richard Rogers Partnership, image by Miller Hare ©Canary Wharf Group plc

CABE ventured into space in the summer of 2003 with the launch of a new unit dedicated to bringing excellence to the design, management and maintenance of parks and public space in our towns and cities. CABE Space works with local authorities and other bodies responsible for public space to help them provide a better service.

Public space is often a key consideration in schemes seen by Design Review. Most involve public space in some form or other, whether it is in the guise of a 'traditional' square or something less defined. In the best schemes, it is usually clear that the design of public space has been an important factor in the development of the overall scheme from an early stage in the design process, and a landscape architect is usually an integral part of the team.



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> As mentioned in the section about tall buildings, public space is one of the most important aspects associated with tower proposals. Tall buildings need an appropriate setting at ground level, and should contribute positively to life at street level. The provision of public space was an important factor in forming our views about **Riverside South** and **London Bridge Tower**, for example.

> Public space provision is inevitably an important aspect of masterplans like those at **King's Cross Central** and **Stratford City**, and we have been encouraged by the early thought given to this in both these particular schemes. Similarly, the best retail schemes, like **Princesshay** in Exeter, pay attention to public space issues from an early stage, including how the wider public realm works – creating links beyond the application site, using suitable materials, and maintaining and managing public areas in an appropriate way.

01 Princesshay, image Panter Hudspith Architects, scheme architects Chapman Taylor Architects, Panter Hudspith Architects, Wilkinson Eyre Architects, Livingston Eyre Associates



So how should we assess these important and complex proposals?

CABE and English Heritage have produced a document, **Guidance on Tall Buildings**, which provides advice on dealing with tall buildings in the planning process and sets out how CABE and English Heritage will evaluate such proposals.



Local Government Design Survey

At the end of last year, CABE undertook a review of the design skills available across local authority planning departments, an exercise we first conducted in 2001. We found that:

- the number of design champions has more than doubled since 2001 – 43% of authorities now have a named officer or member charged with the responsibility of raising the profile of design within their authority
- almost double the number of authorities – 59% compared to 32% – are running design awards schemes in 2003 compared to 2001
- there has, however, been no significant improvement in the number of local authorities using professionally trained designers to assess applications since the 2001 survey, and a decline in the number using trained architects

The full survey results are available on CABE's website at www.cabe.org.uk

Public buildings and PFI

The largest programme of public sector building for a generation is currently under way. Many of these buildings are likely to be the most significant developments in their locality for some time. It's clearly crucial to get PFI right.

All PFI buildings should be like the best examples – functional, easy and pleasant to use for visitors and staff alike, and, where appropriate, with architecture of a quality that reflects the civic status of the building.

> Perhaps the most crucial ingredient for a good PFI building is the client's commitment to design quality from the very beginning of the process. The new headquarters for the **Health and Safety Executive**, designed by Cartwright Pickard architects for a site in Bootle, Merseyside, is a good example of this. Importantly, the first key competition stage was solely a design competition, with no costs or prices required. The HSE's approach was driven by the belief that a high quality building will assist in attracting high calibre staff and retaining employees. This approach has produced a PFI scheme of high design quality, and we see no reason why it will not achieve the HSE's objectives.

> **The Civil Justice Centre** in the Spinningfields area of Manchester (already mentioned as an example of a tall building) is one of the most striking recent designs for a public building. The proposal, by Denton Corker Marshall, was the winner of a design competition run in parallel with a separate process to select a developer. The 50 courtroom complex (the largest to be built since the Law Courts in London's Strand) is broken into three linear elements of different heights, including a dramatic central element of projecting glass boxes which houses the courtrooms and offices. This is a case of high quality architecture reflecting the civic status of the building.

> In the same city, the PFI process to restructure the Manchester Hospital site includes plans to bring the **Manchester children's hospital** to the site. The NHS Trust ensured that design criteria were given appropriate weighting throughout the PFI process, and the development of a detailed design evaluation process for selecting the preferred bidder was a major factor in this. In the resulting scheme, by Anshen Dyer, there is an evident focus on the ease of understanding for patients and visitors, reflected in features such as a generous atrium space, open gallery walkways and a simple approach to way finding.



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01 Manchester children's hospital, Anshen Dyer Architects image by Future Reality 02 Manchester Civil Justice Centre, Denton Corker Marshall 03 Health and Safety Executive, Cartwright Pickard Architects/Kajima



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Creating Excellent Buildings – a guide for clients A step-by-step guide to commissioning great buildings from briefing through design and construction to occupation.

Building in context

Designing for a site in an historic area is particularly challenging. A number of different approaches can be successful, but the intrinsic quality of the architecture is always vital.



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> Designing a scheme which is mindful of its context doesn't necessarily mean designing a scheme which doffs its cap. A good example of this is the scheme for **Potters Fields**, a site by the Thames in Southwark. There can't be many undeveloped sites in London as prominent as Potters Fields. Nor can there be many sites anywhere that are surrounded by heritage of such importance. The site is opposite the World Heritage Site of the Tower of London, adjacent to the Grade I listed Tower Bridge, to the north of the Grade II listed Lambeth College buildings, and in between the very different urban grains of historic Shad Thames and the More London Bridge commercial scheme. We took the view that a scheme on this site needed to be strong enough and individual enough to hold its own. This is exactly what we consider Ian Ritchie Architects' proposal for the site has managed to do. The scheme proposes

a series of largely residential tapering mini-towers. It seems to us that this highly original scheme successfully mediates between the differing urban grains of the area. We also applaud the fact that a major volume housebuilder – Berkeley Homes – has been willing to appoint an architect recognised for his originality and depth of thought, and support such an innovative approach to Thames-side residential development.

> On a much smaller scale, but in a similarly sensitive location, we considered a scheme by Eric Parry Architects for development at **St Martin in the Fields** church on Trafalgar Square. St Martin's is probably the most famous parish church in the world. It lies in a uniquely prominent position in the centre of the capital, and its architectural style has been much imitated abroad. The church runs an admirable programme of social care work, and this scheme proposes new accommodation (largely underground) to cater for this and other uses. The scheme would involve a new entrance pavilion and lightwell in the middle of Church Path, which runs to the north of the church, with the pavilion giving access to the new accommodation below. As with Potters Fields, the approach aims to create distinctive but appropriate forms for the new structures, and we were full of admiration for what is a clear and elegant scheme.

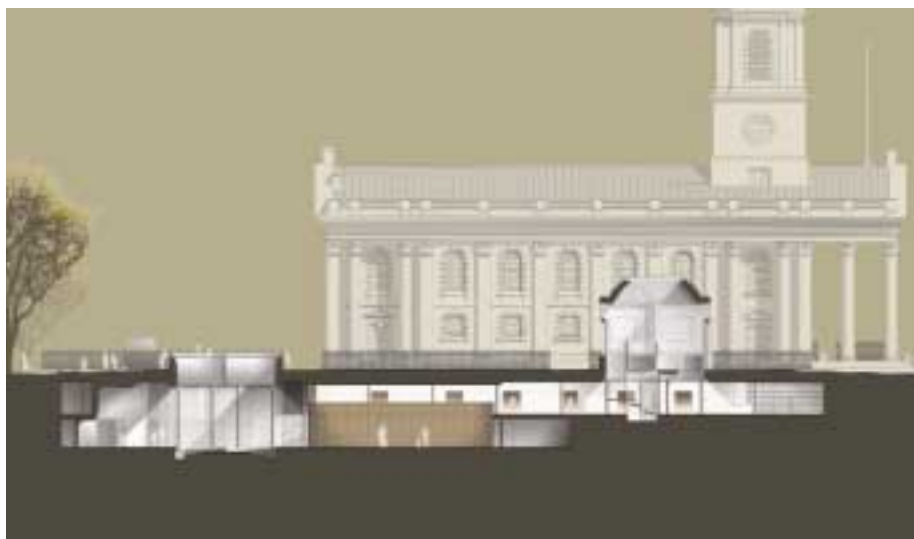
> In Buckinghamshire, we were happy to support a residential scheme in the grounds of the historic **Cliveden Estate**. Although this is a large scheme, the architects (ECD Architects) have opted for an approach which has ensured that it will have no visual impact on the historic estate. On its own terms, the scheme is a good example of intelligent residential planning. The layout is evidently based on clear principles in terms of orientation, house types and landscape, creating a seemingly natural hierarchy of public to private spaces.

'St Martin's is probably the most famous parish church in the world'



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01 Potters Field, Ian Ritchie Architects, image by Robert Hinton and Partners 02 and 03 St Martin-in-the-Fields, Eric Parry Architects Ltd, model photo by Andrew Putler



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Further examples of good architecture built in sensitive locations are highlighted in the joint CABE and English Heritage publication, **Building in Context**.

Residential development

With an estimated 3.8 million more homes required over the next 25 years, the pressure is on to step up the pace of residential building. But we need better, as well as more, homes and the challenge is to make sure that these homes are built to high design standards.

The aim should be, in most cases, to avoid low density, 'anywhere' residential environments and to produce attractive, sustainable and inclusive places, in line with the revised PPG3 and companion guide, '**Better Places to Live**'. We have seen a number of high quality housing schemes which promise to do this.

> In Cambridge, we considered an imaginative residential masterplan for the **Brooklands Avenue** site – known as Accordia – by Feilden Clegg Bradley. It is unusual in being a 'green brownfield' site which was previously developed but now has mature trees and landscaping. Several aspects of this scheme make it much more promising than the average housing scheme. For instance, the masterplan is founded on a clear landscaping proposal and several skilled architectural practices were used to work on the detailed design of the dwellings. The layout of many residential schemes has been hampered

by an inflexible and unimaginative application of highway regulations, so we found it refreshing that a clear and carefully considered street layout had been achieved after close co-operation with the county council highway engineer.

> Many of the most interesting and forward thinking housing schemes we see are promoted by housing associations. The redevelopment of the **King's Crescent** estate in Hackney, by Peabody, is a case in point. The process itself has been innovative, with Arup Associates and West 8 leading the masterplanning process, and several other architectural firms working on the detailed design of specific parts of the project. The emerging scheme is thoughtful and promises to be architecturally rich.

> In Chester, the **Tower Wharf** scheme (by Halliday Clark) proposes a mixture of uses and housing types on a brownfield site next



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to a canal, to the north west of the city centre. This scheme seems to us to offer straightforward, good quality new housing, laid out in a logical way. We were pleased to see the refreshingly positive approach to the social housing, which is indistinguishable from the private housing in both its design and location.

CABE will be publishing a 'lessons learnt' guide on high-density urban residential schemes later this year, **Design Reviewed – Urban Housing**.

01 Brooklands Avenue site – Accordia, Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects LLP/Countryside Residential plc. Scheme architects Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects/ Alison Brooks Architects/Maccreanor Lavington. Image by Architecture in Motion 02 King's Crescent Regeneration, West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture



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CABE is concerned about 'dumbing down' i.e. instances where what is actually built after the granting of a planning consent is of a lower design quality than was expected. We have produced a guide, **Protecting Design Quality in Planning**, which focuses on the tools and techniques that planners can use to protect design quality.

Urban retail

Town centre retail schemes should contribute positively to permeability, legibility and the quality of the townscape. Monolithic structures, internalised malls, and uninspired 'anywhere' architecture may have been the norm for shopping centres built in the last 40 or so years, but there are welcome signs of change.

Promoters of town centre retail schemes are increasingly recognising the importance of urban design and high quality architecture. An important point was reached when the British Council for Shopping Centres, the industry's own representative body, published its report 'Urban Design for Retail Environments' in January 2002, which highlighted the importance of these issues.

> One of the more promising city centre retail schemes we have seen in recent years is the **Princesshay** development in Exeter. We believe that the architecture of large-scale schemes such as this benefits from the involvement of different architects designing different parts of the scheme, and in this case Chapman Taylor, Panter Hudspith, Wilkinson Eyre and landscape architects Livingstone Eyre were all involved in the design. The resulting architecture is varied and rich, but avoids incoherence. This scheme is also notable for the way it looks beyond its boundaries to integrate with its surroundings, and the way it offers a truly mixed-use proposition, with a residential component integrated with the retail and

commercial space. This should help to ensure that this part of the city is active and well used at different times of the day. Overall, this scheme moves the retail centre away from an introspective and mono-use approach and towards the shopping centre as a city quarter.

> In Nottingham, the extension of the **Broad Marsh** centre (by Westfield Shoppingtowns) is a hugely significant proposal which has improved considerably following dialogue between CABE, the architects, the local authority and English Heritage. The article by Adrian Jones of Nottingham City Council on page 14 of this document gives a customer's view of working with CABE on this project.

> The other major city centre retail scheme seen this year was the **Broadmead** scheme in Bristol, by Chapman Taylor. This seems to us, in several ways, to promise a considerable improvement over both the existing centre, and many recent examples of retail developments. The scheme offers a mix of uses across the site, varied and



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visually interesting architecture, and the car park is being treated as a distinct design exercise (by Wilkinson Eyre), which we think can only help in reaching a well-considered solution for what is always a difficult aspect of any large retail scheme.

CABE will be publishing a report on the lessons learnt from reviewing retail schemes later this year, **Design Reviewed – Town Centre Retail**.

01 Broadmead, view of North Street from Horsefair, Chapman Taylor Architects 02 Broad Marsh, public space, Westfield Design Group/Angus Pond Associates/Iain Mackay



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01 Fourth Grace, Liverpool, Alsop Architects

02 King Alfred Development, Brighton and Hove, CZWG Architects

Watch this space...

CABE expects to be offering formal comments on these significant schemes in the near future.

Olympics masterplan – London

The Lea Valley area of London will be the location for the Olympics if London's bid to host the 2012 games is successful. Two versions of this masterplan are being prepared so that development can take place whatever the result of the Olympic bid.

Fourth Grace – Liverpool

This proposed addition to the world famous Three Graces on Liverpool waterfront is designed by Alsop Architects. Details of the uses it will contain are to be finalised.

King Alfred Development – Brighton and Hove

Frank Gehry (designer of Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum) and Piers Gough are collaborating on this scheme in Brighton and Hove which proposes four residential towers and a leisure centre.

Design Review



The Government's guidance note PPG1 (1997) advises that 'good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere' and that 'local planning authorities should reject poor designs'.

Agreeing about design quality can be one of the more difficult parts of negotiating a planning application. Where do you start?

The principal purpose of CABI's Design Review programme is to offer expert advice on this subject, and its publication 'Design Review' sets out a clear and objective method for evaluating projects. While it is inherent in any such process that it relies on professional judgement and is not based on a 'tick-box' mentality, that does not mean, for the most part, that it is a subjective or intuitive process. In particular, those making judgements need to bear in mind the distinction between 'do I like it?' (which is not the point) and 'is it any good?' (which may be quite a different thing).

Proceeding from the general to the particular, the document suggests a progressively more focussed sequence of stages, each of which in turn needs to be carried out successfully if any resulting design is to be a success. At each stage, there are key questions that can be asked. Set out below are the stages and some of the most important questions:

The client, the design team and procurement

- Is the client committed to a high quality outcome?
- Does the design team have the skills needed for this project?

The brief

- Is there a clear brief and does it set clear aims and objectives?
- Is it realistic in relation to the site and to the budget available?

Understanding the context (the analysis)

- Is there evidence that the site's context has been investigated and understood?
- Does the analysis deal with patterns of movement as well as physical characteristics?

The project in its context (the proposal which results from the analysis)

- Does the design flow from the analysis?
- Does the project make a positive contribution to the public realm?

Planning the site

- Does the site planning make sense in relation to neighbouring sites?
- Is landscape design an integral part of the design thinking?
- Are roads, parking and so on dealt with as part of an overall idea about landscape design?

What makes a good project (the architecture)

- Will the designs meet the functional requirements of the brief?
- Can a visitor find the front door?
- Do the plans, sections and elevations visibly relate to each other and to consistent design ideas?
- Have the building's structure and energy strategy been thought about from the start?
- Will the building be easy to extend or adapt?
- Will it age gracefully; can one imagine it becoming a cherished part of its setting?

Some alarm bells

Finally, the document sets out some 'alarm bells', key indicators that something has gone wrong at some or all of the above stages, for example:

- Lack of a clear brief
- Contradictory aims and objectives
- Adequate context analysis, but no evidence of it informing the design
- A mean and obstructive approach to the public realm
- Lack of clarity about what is private and what is public
- No effort to show an approach to landscape design
- Illustrative material which leaves you with no clear idea of what the project will look like
- No effort to illustrate the project in its context

'Design Review' is available free in printed form by post from CABI (see Bibliography) and can also be downloaded from the CABI website.

Minding the gap

Paul Finch looks back over his four years as Chairman of the Design Review Committee.

Chairing CABE's Design Review Committee for the past four years has been an immense privilege. Listening to the views of the two dozen assorted professionals who give their time to reviewing schemes has been an education not only in respect of the importance of constructive criticism, but also in how architects develop and present their ideas. What lessons, if any, might be drawn from that four-year experience?

For me, there is a helpful pointer to whether a proposal is robust or clueless, and that is the extent to which the designs on the boards support the stated aspirations of the client and the architect, and the way in which the designs reinforce or dilute the design intention. To some extent this is about the choice of design team. The more ambitious the project, the more one expects to see a team which is evidently capable of producing the goods. This does not mean that everyone needs to have designed lots of a particular building type in the past; what it does mean is that an inexperienced client needs consultants who can fill the experience gap. A serial client, on the other hand, need feel few qualms about a design team which has never attempted a particular building type before, but may bring something special and new to the project. The client provides the experience.

The next question is whether the resources being devoted to the project look appropriate. By and large, you get what you pay for in construction, as in other things. If you want an expensive building, ask for marble and bronze. If you are tight on budget, go for brick; in either case, the design can enhance or diminish the perceived value of the materials. The dumbest thing a client can do is to assume that it is a smart idea to try to get design on the cheap – all it means is that you will get diminished design brain-power. If you are tight on budget, you need more design ingenuity to get a great result. This does not mean cheese-paring on fees or using lower-quality design teams.

So much for the client – what about the architects? They too can let themselves down by telling a wonderful story about a design which, on examination, proves to

be a letdown. This is generally because over-elaborate intentions cannot then be matched because of the real nature of the programme, or the limits of cost and/or client aspiration. As the architect-turned-developer Roger Zogolovitch has sagely observed, better to give a client the architectural equivalent of the best kipper they have ever tasted, rather than third-rate lobster thermidor. In other words, inappropriate architectural ambition can be an enemy of a first-rate answer to the real programme.

Good schemes by good architects are almost inevitably examples of architectural narratives which reinforce the fundamental principles of the design in relation to programme. Things are as they are because that is what they need to be, not because of arbitrary or whimsical choices. The detail contributes and relates to the whole. The elevation relates to the building's organisation. The section relates clearly to the plan. The parts relate harmoniously to the whole, and the whole relates to the context. And when this happens, you can admire the skill with which a project has been designed, even if the particular design style leaves you cold. In other words, you can apply objective criteria to the success or otherwise of particular proposals, well set out in 'Design Review', the CABE publication which encapsulates the way in which the Design Review Committee has interrogated designs over its brief history. Of course there is room for disagreement, but by and large our committee meetings have been remarkably consistent in their assessments of the merits or otherwise of the widest variety of architectural propositions.

Disparities between the claims made for schemes and the reality of the material presented are not confined to poor designs and poor architects. Good schemes by good architects can be capable of improvement in design evolution. Moreover, having observed both schemes at Design Review Committee and competition presentations, it is true that there can be a disparity between the quality of thinking that has gone into a proposal, and the skill with which it is conveyed. Sometimes it is apparent that all the lateral thinking and

energy has gone into the architecture, and very little into how that is conveyed to a committee or judging panel.

The lesson, whether in relation to design or to presentation, is that discrepancies, disparities and at worst contradictions (why does the plan show one thing but the section another?) are indications of design brain-power operating at the wrong frequency. The best way to check if this is so is, of course, to conduct the pre-emptive crit in the privacy of the design office. And early enough to be able to do something about the gaps that may emerge.

'...better to give a client the architectural equivalent of the best kipper they have ever tasted, rather than third-rate lobster thermidor'



Design Review in progress, photos by Grant Govier

The local authority view

Nottingham Broad Marsh Centre

Adrian Jones of Nottingham City Council describes his experiences of working with the Design Review Committee on the redevelopment of a city-centre shopping complex.

Nottingham has some outstanding buildings from the 1960s and 70s – the Playhouse, Horizon factory, Boots SOM offices for example, but that era is most associated with the insensitivity and crassness of buildings like the Broad Marsh shopping centre. The centre was built as a mega structure, incorporating the inner ring road, and it obliterated the street pattern and ground levels of the southern part of the city centre and destroyed the main north-south axis to the Midland Station and Trent Bridge. It is completely disorientating, as all visitors arriving from the station know.

The city council sees its redevelopment as fundamental to our planning, transport and economic development strategy. In 2000 the Australian company Westfield bought the shopping centre and we began planning an ambitious redevelopment. Clearly this time we had to get it right, and urban design was top of the agenda. I knew Jon Rouse from his work with the Urban Task Force. He had already identified Broad Marsh as being of national significance and he asked Peter Stewart, Director of Design Review, to work with us on developing the project. Peter was quick to take the initiative and came to Nottingham for the first of many

useful meetings involving the planners, architects, developers, English Heritage and other parties.

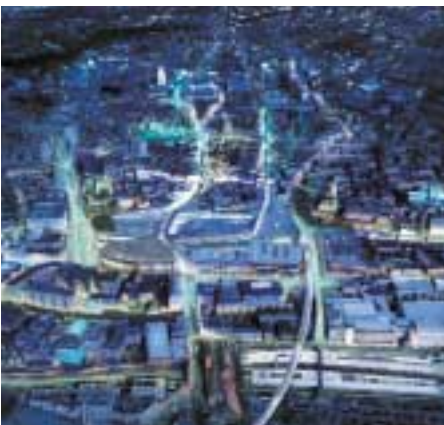
What impressed me was the very practical and informal way that Peter approached the problems – interestingly his unstuffy approach fitted well with the surprisingly stereotypical ‘g’day’ culture of our Australian developers! Peter clearly saw his role as problem resolution, not giving academic lectures, which, frankly, had been our experience with the Royal Fine Art Commission. There was a strong emphasis on the urban design framework – scale, massing, creating new streets and urban blocks, the relationship of buildings to the street. CABI did not try to design the buildings for the architects, but from the outset recommended that for a scheme of this scale a number of different practices should be involved. This was one of the most important outcomes of CABI’s involvement.

The scheme was considered twice at the CABI Design Review Committee, chaired by Paul Finch, first at a relatively early stage and then when a planning application had been made. Again meetings were very informal

and friendly. I was impressed by their grasp of the extremely complex issues. There was a bit of fundamentalist posturing about how awful shopping centres are. It was perhaps unfortunate that few of the Committee members who commented on the initial drawings were at the second discussion, other than Paul and Peter. However I felt that generally the Committee gave good, practical insights and advice. My provincial hackles were raised by one panel member who announced, with what seemed to be evident satisfaction, that she had never been to Nottingham. Other than that I didn’t feel we were being patronised despite the fact that many of the panel members are based in London.

So how was it for me? Pretty good really! I think there has been real added value from CABI’s involvement. They rightly have high expectations, but also have their feet very firmly on the ground. They are about doing things – not getting in the way. And for developers and planners who want to get things done, this is very refreshing.

Adrian Jones is Assistant Director of Planning and Transport at Nottingham City Council



01

01 Nottingham Broad Marsh Centre – aerial image
Westfield Design Group/Hayes Davidson 02
Nottingham Broad Marsh Centre – internal street
Westfield Design Group/Hayes Davidson



02

The planning consultant's view

Living with CABE

Not all schemes receive a positive initial response from Design Review. Town planner **Iain Painting** explains what happened next when a residential scheme received an objection from CABE.

Receiving an objection from CABE the same evening that your client's planning application is to be reported favourably to the planning committee is not the most welcome or timely of interventions. However, 12 months on and Bellway were back at committee, with a new scheme, supported by CABE, which delivered an uplift in residential dwellings and significantly created one of the first redevelopment projects in the UK to utilise the Government's relaxation on Stamp Duty for homes in deprived areas.

The site of the former **Hither Green Hospital** comprised 8.9 hectares in south east London. Occupying the crest of a hill, the prominence of the site is increased by a water tower, typical of many Victorian Hospital complexes. The original Victorian buildings comprised large two storey ward blocks, together with smaller, more domestic scale ancillary buildings, such as the mortuary and gatekeeper's house. Some later additions had been made but the prevailing character was one of large, imposing buildings set within a landscape of mature trees.

Bellway had already built out some 150 dwellings under an earlier permission and the original proposals sought to extend this same approach to the remainder of the site.

The desire to retain as many of the trees as possible, together with the requirement to retain the water tower, resulted in a constraint-led scheme. The emphasis was upon creating a development that would blend with the original setting, even in the requirement to reuse materials from the original ward blocks. The scheme complied with policy and would have resulted in some 200 units, some office and live work accommodation, a health centre and leisure use.

CABE sought a new approach to the regeneration of the site.

Response

The immediate response was to seek the withdrawal of the application from committee. Beyond that, Bellway had two principal options: proceed to appeal with

a scheme that complied with policy and replicated that which had already been built and successfully occupied, or critically review their position and explore the opportunity for an enhanced scheme. Balanced against these options were the commercial imperatives, including that of time delay.

Dialogue not objection

The answer lay in how the CABE response was viewed. Was it an objection and a conflicting position? Or did it offer the opportunity for constructive dialogue with members, officers and residents, to see whether a revised approach could be developed?

The success of the latter approach required the commitment of resources by both the local authority and CABE. These were assured and Bellway put forward a proposal to review the design and land use approach to the remainder of the site. The first stage was to prepare a revised brief for architects. This was agreed with officers and CABE and three architects were invited to prepare a conceptual response. The emphasis was on challenging the assumptions that underlay the original approach.

The responses were reviewed by CABE, the local authority, and Bellway and their consultant team. Following clarification, PRP Architects were selected to take forward their proposals to form the basis of a revised planning application. A series of meetings were held with members and residents and a newsletter distributed in the local area.

The planning application was accompanied by a Design Framework, setting out the analysis and rationale, and explaining the interplay of layout, massing, land use and landscape strategy.

The result

The result? A regeneration scheme that delivers community renaissance and affordable homes. The scheme challenges the perceptions of many: what was the marketability of the product, do you design a scheme around existing constraints or do you seek to create a new urban form and



01

a new landscape setting? Should you seek to replicate suburban Victorian London or take the opportunity to add something new to the prevailing urban character?

CABE enabled the critical review of the design approach. The positive response of officers gave Bellway comfort that a positive and expeditious outcome would be arrived at. All parties had to commit to the process and be open-minded. The rigour of the design review offered by CABE also enabled officers to recommend to members a different approach to that based upon constraints and replication and existing policy.

'...emphasis needs to be placed upon challenge and review'

The planning system is often obsessed with identifying and eliminating harm. The result can be a harmless scheme. If the new urban agenda is to deliver better towns and cities, the emphasis needs to be placed upon challenge and review. CABE should not of course be involved in each and every scheme of local importance. However, the approach can be replicated with a proactive client, officers and members and engagement with residents.

Iain Painting is a partner at Barton Willmore

Site Hither Green Hospital, London SE13
Client Bellway Homes Ltd (South East Division)
LPA London Borough of Lewisham
Architects PRP Architects Ltd
Landscape EPCAD
Ecology EPCAD
Highways Boreham Consulting
Arboricultural Simon Jones Associates
Town Planners Barton Willmore

01 Hither Green Hospital site, PRP Architects, image by Design Hive

Everything you always wanted to know about CABE's Design Review programme (and wondered who to ask)

CABE's Director of Design Review, **Peter Stewart**, sets out some basic facts about what CABE's Design Review programme does, and how it does it. The aim is to answer 'frequently asked questions' and at the same time to deal with some misconceptions.



What is the Design Review programme?

CABE's Design Review programme offers free advice to planning authorities and others on the design of selected development projects in England. It is interested not only in big and strategic projects, but also those which have a significant impact at a more local level, or, for example, set standards for future development. The aim of the Design Review programme's work is the same as that of the whole of CABE – to help create buildings and public places which work better, feel better, look better and are better (regardless of their style).

What else does CABE do?

The Design Review programme is just one part of CABE's work. CABE's other activities encompass: advice to clients on procurement and other matters through its enabling programme; work with regional and national partners in the pursuit of excellence in the built environment; research and media campaigns; CABE Space, and CABE Education. More on all of these can be found on CABE's website www.cabe.org.uk.

How does the Design Review Committee operate?

Each year CABE comments formally on around 100 major projects through its Design Review Committee meetings, which take place 12 times a year. At any given meeting, projects are reviewed by six to eight committee members (from a panel of 24), together with members of the Commission itself. The Committee is chaired by CABE Commissioner Paul Finch. Committee members are distinguished practitioners in a range of disciplines: architects, landscape architects, artists, engineers, urbanists, property developers and others.

About seven or eight projects are reviewed at each meeting, most of which are presented by the design team and their clients, with the planning authority and English Heritage also being invited to attend and give their views. Before a project is seen by the Committee, there will usually have

been an informal meeting with CABE staff to discuss the project, and a site visit. The Committee's views on a project are issued after the meeting in the form of a letter. If a scheme seen by the Committee has not been submitted for planning permission, the Committee's views are not made public at this stage. Where a planning application has been submitted, the Committee's views are posted on our website and made available to those who ask for them.

Do you look at other projects outside the committee process?

Yes – CABE advises on several hundred projects every year in this way. Schemes which cannot be seen by the Committee are delegated for comment by CABE professional staff in consultation with the committee chairman and Committee members. In many cases we will meet applicants and/or planning authorities to discuss projects. CABE Design Review staff, although all based in London, frequently travel to visit sites and attend meetings all over England.

We also carry out thematic design audits of particular types of development. This year we are publishing reports on lessons learnt from our reviews of masterplans, of retail projects and of high-density housing projects.

What kinds of projects does the Design Review programme comment on?

The criteria for consulting CABE are set out in a letter from DETR to planning authorities dated 15 May 2001. Broadly speaking, they cover projects which are significant in some way: in themselves (e.g. major public buildings); because of their sites (e.g. affecting a World Heritage site); others such as those which are out of the ordinary in some way, (e.g. raising design issues such that the planning authority is likely to benefit from independent advice); but also more everyday projects seen as important to everyday life, or to raising the quality of life in a neighbourhood. We are not just concerned



with large metropolitan projects. We review public space, landscape and infrastructure proposals as well as building projects.

An important part of CABE's remit is to scrutinise the quality of projects in the public sector, in particular those procured through the Private Finance Initiative, and of projects involving public money. For this reason, the Government is particularly interested to see CABE consulted about such projects.

How do I get CABE involved?

CABE may be made aware of projects through a formal consultation by a planning authority, after a planning application has been submitted. However, we strongly encourage pre-application discussion, and most projects seen by our Committee are reviewed before an application is submitted. We are equally happy to be approached by the local authority, or directly by the developer or client or their consultants. Increasingly, we are approached directly by applicants at the early stages of a project; and we ask planning authorities to encourage this. Our goal is a productive, collaborative three-way discussion between applicant, planning authority and CABE.

CABE's advice is more likely to concern broad issues of design strategy rather than, say, the details of the elevations, and is therefore likely to be of most value at an early stage while design ideas are still fluid. The fact that pre-planning consultation is confidential allows any reservations to be aired privately and overcome before a project goes public.

CABE's Design Review programme has a finite capacity and it is not able to offer advice on all of the projects about which it is consulted. But we prioritise cases where there is a direct and explicit approach from applicant or planning authority which makes clear that our advice is actively being sought.

We welcome an informal initial approach to discuss CABE involvement in a project.

We can be contacted by e-mail, telephone or by post – contact details are at the end of this document.

What are the strengths of the Design Review programme?

- 1 It has wide experience of comparable projects across England.
- 2 It has access to the considerable expertise of Committee members and CABE Commissioners.
- 3 It encourages early consultation and active collaboration between the various parties involved in bringing forward projects.
- 4 It has no axe to grind – its advice is impartial, independent and authoritative.

How are designs evaluated?

The CABE publication 'Design Review' explains how projects are evaluated. A printed version is available free on request from CABE, or it can be downloaded from the website.

Projects are evaluated, as architecture and as urban design, in the round. They are considered in their wider physical, as well as economic and social context. We do not just look at what goes on inside the 'red line', or just at building proposals as objects divorced from their contexts; in fact we are strongly critical of projects which appear to take this approach.

Do CABE's views about projects take into account national and local planning policies and guidance, planning and development briefs and so on?

Matters of this kind are relevant to us, and it is helpful to have them brought to our attention when we consider schemes, but we are not primarily concerned with evaluating projects against criteria of this kind – that is the job of the planning authority, and it would serve no useful purpose for CABE to try to replicate that function.

Is your main concern what the project looks like?

No, that is not our main concern. We think about projects in the round. Projects should look good but they should also work well for their users; they should be durable and sustainable; they should work in terms of urban design as well as architecture, and they should relate successfully to their immediate and wider context (which is not at all the same thing, in our view, as 'fitting in').

Do you take account of the views of local residents, local interest groups etc?

Where such views are drawn to our attention we take account of them. For example, if a scheme is controversial locally we will tell our committee members this. But as a consultee and advisory body we do not see it primarily as our job to assimilate other views that are being expressed about projects – this is properly a task for the planning authority.

Do you always carry out a site visit?

We visit the sites for the majority of the cases on which we comment, although it is not possible in every case. In some cases we will have knowledge of sites already. Where we have not been able to visit the site we will say so. In such cases, we will not comment unless we feel that we have an adequate understanding of the site through the material provided to explain the project, and if we think that material is inadequate we will say so.



Design Review in progress, photos by Grant Govier

CABE programmes

CABE works through a range of other programmes to achieve better buildings and places.

Enabling

The Enabling team of staff and panel of expert Enablers provide support and advice to clients during the early stages of projects. Enabling work with a wide range of public sector clients delivering new health, arts, education and civic buildings, as well as working on housing and urban design. As well as working on selected projects, the programme disseminates best practice to client organisations.

Learning and Development

Learning and Development incorporates a number of programmes that aim to inform, raise aspirations and help people participate in change.

The Regional programme – this includes a network of regional representatives, working with Regional Development Agencies, local authorities and other key agencies across the country. The programme supports a national network of Architecture and Built Environment Centres.

CABE Education – a charitable trust which works to inject architecture and the built environment into formal and informal learning, with the aim of inspiring tomorrow's generations to get involved in shaping places and neighbourhoods.

CABE Skills – this programme is devoted to increasing the urban development skills of anyone involved in shaping England's built environment including professionals and councillors. The Skills unit will also work to increase diversity within the built environment professions.

CABE Space

CABE Space aims to bring excellence to the design and management of public spaces in our towns and cities through five linked programmes:

Enabling and Delivery – helping local authorities to develop strategic approaches to the delivery of high quality public space.

Standards and Best Practice – providing the measures and exemplars necessary to inspire improvement to more of our parks and squares.

Policy and Research – demonstrating the economic, environmental and social value of urban space.

Campaigns and Advocacy – raising the public and professional awareness of the importance of quality parks and spaces.

Professional Skills – improving skill levels and training within the professions responsible for the design and management and maintenance of public space.

Policy and Communications

Our policy and research programme incorporates a number of programmes which provide the arguments and evidence with which we seek to bring about change in the way we finance, design and manage the built environment.

The Partnerships policy team influences and supports best practice across industry and the public and private sectors, forging relationships with the key organisations that shape England's built environment.

The Sustainable Communities team focuses on housing and regeneration, including managing CABE's involvement in the Building for Life campaign.

The Research team works with academics and experts across many fields to demonstrate the social and economic value of design, to promote diversity and best practice, and to forecast the future changes that will affect our built environment.

CABE's Communications team promotes our work and runs regular high-profile media campaigns that raise people's awareness of the impact that the built environment has on their lives, and foster greater public involvement in the design and care of their surroundings. Recent examples include –

Streets of Shame – which invited public nominations for England's best and worst designed streets. Grey Street in Newcastle was named as England's best designed street, and Streatham High Road as the worst.

Wasted Space? – empowering local people by enabling them to highlight land and buildings going to waste and detracting from their local environment.

Healthy Hospitals – asking patients, visitors and hospital workers to assess the way design affects their recovery, experience and performance.

Bibliography and further information

PUBLICATIONS

Building in Context

CABE/English Heritage, 2002

W www.cabe.org.uk

F English Heritage Customer Services Department

Guidance on Tall Buildings

CABE/English Heritage, 2003

W www.cabe.org.uk

Better Places to Live

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions/CABE, 2001

W www.odpm.gov.uk (under Planning guidance and advice)

P Thomas Telford

Creating Excellent Buildings:

A Guide for Clients

CABE, 2003

W www.cabe.org.uk

F CABE

Shifting Sands

CABE/English Heritage, 2003

W www.cabe.org.uk

F English Heritage Customer Services Department

Design Review

CABE, 2002

W www.cabe.org.uk

F CABE

COMING SOON

Design Reviewed – Masterplans

Design Reviewed – Urban Housing

Design Reviewed – Town Centre Retail

W www.cabe.org.uk

F CABE

KEY

W available as a pdf at this web address

F available as a free document from this address

P available to purchase from this address

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FURTHER INFORMATION

CABE digital library

CABE's digital library is a free online resource, offering excellent pictures and comprehensive information about England's best new buildings and spaces.

Visit www.cabe.org.uk/library to learn more about these projects, how they were achieved and what makes them successful.

Building for Life

Building for Life is a commitment to the quality of new homes made by three partners:

- the house-building industry, represented by the House Builders Federation
- the government, represented by CABE
- the campaigners, represented by the Civic Trust

www.buildingforlife.org.uk

explains the work of this initiative and showcases the best new house building with facts, figures and newly commissioned images.

Better Public Buildings

The Better Public Building initiative aims to improve the standard of public buildings, spaces and places in Britain. www.betterpublicbuildings.gov.uk gives examples of design excellence in new public buildings, notably those short-listed for the Prime Minister's Award for Better Public Building, and gives information about the work of the Government's Design Champions.

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