

Local
Authority

Design
Champions



cabe

Background

It is now widely accepted across local government that good design in buildings and public spaces both enhances existing high quality built environments and contributes to the regeneration of run-down areas. These social and economic benefits come from an integrated approach to the built environment, which values both heritage and new development, and recognises how the two can best compliment each other.

Why Design Champions are important

Design isn't just for high profile projects. It should be an integral part of 'everyday' interventions. For example, each new school building, road maintenance or parks project should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the quality of the built environment, by going for a quality outcome.

Delivering design quality requires strong local leadership. CABE has campaigned for every organisation with a responsibility for managing and delivering the built environment to appoint a Champion. Specifically in relation to local government, we believe that the appointment of elected members as Design Champions can help to focus minds and ensure that design issues, in both urban and rural areas, are placed firmly on the agenda of the local authority.

The role of Champions

The key purpose of a Design Champion should be to:

- 1** Ensure the local authority provides a vision for how they see the quality of their built environment improving. This will require an overview of the host of responsibilities the local authority has, for example via planning, conservation, the procurement of new buildings and the management of streets and green spaces.
- 2** Promote an integrated approach to 'place-making', ensuring that the various departments within the local authority are working in a coordinated fashion to deliver the vision for their area. For example ensuring that highways departments are working within the framework of any local area appraisals and historic environment policies, understanding how their interventions can enhance the local environment.

Overleaf is a short statement providing an outline person specification and key responsibilities of a design. This is not meant to be prescriptive and authorities should be free to tailor the role to suit local problems and conditions.

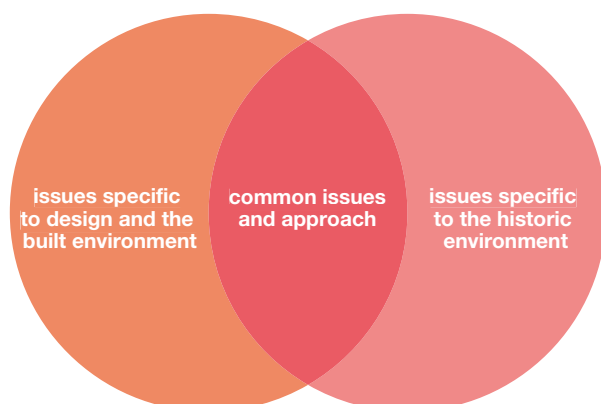
There is a strong interrelationship between the historic environment and the quality of design of new buildings and public spaces. There may therefore be scope for the Design Champion to be the same person as the Heritage Champion. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by proposals for new development in historic areas, both in new buildings and additions to public space.

Further advice is available from English Heritage T 020 7973 3279 heritagechampions@english-heritage.org.uk or CABE T 020 7960 2435 enquiries@cabe.org.uk.

design and heritage champion

design champion

heritage champion



Quick wins

There are a series of actions you can put in place quickly to drive forward achievements relating to the historic environment and design quality.

Officer Skills Audit

Does your local authority have the skills to consider design effectively? You can ensure an audit is undertaken to gauge the Urban Design/Architectural skills at officer level in the Planning, Building Procurement and Highways Departments.

Do you need to implement a training or recruitment policy?

Member training

Ensure members have the chance to see best practice in the built environment, not only in your own area, but across the country.

Have members of the planning committee undertaken Urban Design Training?

Guidance Audit

Does your planning department have the relevant policies in place to ensure that design and conservation issues are addressed? The ODPM report *By Design* gives good advice in this area.

Do you have a vision?

Successful local authorities have developed a strong, shared vision for specific priority areas. Do you have a clear vision that departments are working to deliver?

Design Quality Indicators

Are you using Design Quality Indicators on all your procurement projects? See www.dqi.org.uk for more details.

Set up a design and conservation panel

A significant number of local authorities have set up a panel of outside experts to review the quality of major planning proposals. Further details of this process are given in CABE's report *Better Civic Buildings and Spaces*.

Community Satisfaction

What do the local communities your authority serves see as the priorities for action? The Urban Design Alliance's Placecheck is one of a number of tools you can use to gauge what local people think of their area.

Break down the barriers

Ensure that departments are working together and sharing best practice. Are your highways engineers talking to your urban designers and conservation officers?

Do we need to change the organisational structures to ensure more integrated working to deliver a shared vision for an area?

Parks

Do you have a green spaces strategy in place? CABE Space provides guidance on providing executive strategies. www.cabespace.org.uk

Person Specification

Job titles

Local Authority Design Champion

Key role

Promoting and campaigning for good design in the execution of all of the local authorities' roles.

You should be:

- a councillor, preferably at Cabinet Level with responsibilities that may include planning, heritage, parks and highways services. You will have technical support from competent, senior, officers
- well respected, a good communicator and able to promote the benefits of (and need for) good design to a wide variety of audiences, both internally and externally. You should be able to persuade colleagues both within the Authority and in the wider community of the benefits that quality in the built environment offers for everyone in the community
- a consensus builder, able to bring together the various stakeholders, both within the local authority and the wider community
- able to see the bigger picture and help develop a vision

You should have:

- a commitment and passion for design. While a working knowledge of architectural, planning and heritage and conservation issues would be an advantage, it is by no means essential. Professional skills within your authority will compliment your enthusiasm for the subject
- an understanding of the workings of all departments within your authority and an appreciation of the role that each can play in delivering the aims of Design Champions



Duties of the role

The key objective for the elected members nominated to act as Design Champions will be to work to ensure that historic environment and design issues play a central role in the development of all the local authority's policies and strategies.

General

- Providing a highly visible point of contact for external organisations
- Leading from the front and generating enthusiasm for good design
- Working with local authority staff and members to ensure that the authority's key policies take proper account of built environment issues; both new design and historic environment issues
- Promoting the value of good design as a catalyst for urban and rural regeneration and neighbourhood renewal
- Ensuring that all relevant staff and members within the authority are aware of the available external expertise and advice on design available from bodies such as CABE, English Heritage and regional Architecture Centres
- Joining up departments and combating organisational silos

Planning

- Ensuring that the authority pays due regard to good design in all its planning functions. This will include the promotion of positive, proactive planning to deliver and protect good design
- Ensuring that design issues are given due consideration in development proposals and any conflict is satisfactorily resolved
- Ensuring sufficient design and conservation skills, both at officer and member level
- Promoting where appropriate supplementary planning guidance on design issues

Building procurement

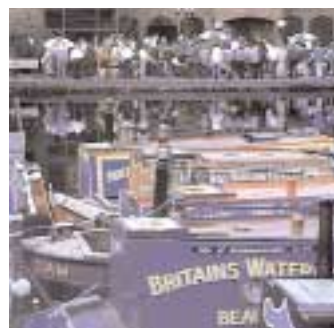
- Ensuring that all capital and maintenance investment by the local authority delivers a well-designed fit for purpose product that enhances and respects its context. A building should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a place

Highways

- Ensuring highways functions are integrated into the wider urban design objectives of the local authority

As already indicated, CABE are keen not to impose a 'one size fits all' model on every local authority. For example, local circumstances, should instead be allowed to dictate whether there should be a Heritage and a Design Champion, or whether one person could undertake both roles. It may even be that circumstances change over time, together with the need for one or two Champions.

All images courtesy of Urban Initiatives and Mark Ellis except far left courtesy of Building for Life



Further reading

The following can be ordered free from the CABE website

- Better Civic Buildings and Spaces
- Building in Context: New Developments in Historic Areas
- Shifting Sands
- Councillor's Guide to Urban Design
- Local Leadership for Better Public Places



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