Interfaces between political decision making, professionals and the people who have to live with the results

10th May 2002   Sarah Boyack, MSP for Edinburgh Central

Where am I coming from ?

Emerged from HE system a town planner 18 years ago.   Managed to escape my initial professional education with little recollection of design issues.

Elected MSP 3 years ago.   As Planning Minister one of last papers cleared – approving Policy Statement on Best Practice in Urban Design " designing places".   Aim to push design up the agenda.   Reflects message about demand for better quality in developments.

At Ministerial level – Ministers can demand higher standards but not much in the toolbox to actually deliver.   Similarly, local government can demand – can set the agenda – but unless developers see design as important and the built environment professions are able to incorporate better design and imaginative ideas into development then local authorities left with a decision of either for or against – or on appropriate conditions.

Actually very frustrating to be told that even though you are in theory the final arbiter on planning decision in the country – it doesn't work like that!   If an application meets criteria and on balance should go ahead – then as a minister you can't require higher standards of design, or a change to a development that would make it more acceptable all round. As a final arbiter – the minister cannot amend the proposal.

Is good design being taken on board?
To date very difficult to see evidence at ground level on a day to day basis though smaller or medium scale proposals – more evidence in larger scale regeneration projects.   But incorporating better design – difficult to judge?

Is it that it's too early to see evidence – these things take time?

So a question to audience – do you see higher priority on design filtering through to contracts, demands from clients or from Local Authorities.   Are local authorities asking for higher standards?

Underlying themes for the conference question whether professions need to change, ask us to consider what they need to do differently and what others need to do differently.

For my generation of planners I don't remember urban design featuring as a key issue in our initial training – we were at the tail end of systems analysis.

But urban regeneration and making the world a better place were central to the agenda – with people who would be affected by development being seen as central to the process.

Spent years as a policy and regional planner – design not really high up the agenda in the 80's – could see it emerging in professional training in the 90's however.   Became an issue integrated into the theory and project management work that formed the basis for student training.

As an MSP it is something that underpins many of the complaints I get and the frustrations that constituents express to me.

Can be difficult to separate out end use from design – sometimes against the principle of the use.

Designing places SE Development Department 2001

"Six qualities

1. identity - *adding to what's there or changing it?*
2. safe and pleasant spaces -
3. ease of movement – *parking* &/*or sustainable modes*
4. a sense of welcome – *difficult to judge ?*
5. adaptability and – *more so for interiors ?*
6. good use of resources **–** *public money?*"

Paul Jowitt set all presenters three underlying questions.

Do professions need to change?

Absolutely – want to recognise that some professions have already changed – others some way to go. Conscious that can be unfair to generalise.

But experience of working with communities – still disenfranchised from the processes shaping their areas.   Want to give you some examples of good practice and somewhere there is room for improvement.

ask us to consider what they need to do differently and what others need to do differently.

It's all the professions which have an impact on our built environment.   Tend to think of planners, architects as the most important.

But surveyors, transport engineers, those designing waste services are as critical in many of the day to day changes that shape our environment.

Most recently have been watching the rollout of the new wheelie bins across the city.   Has raised huge issues of contention in local communities.

Issues in relation to amenity, noise, road safety.   How is that whole process delivered?

▪ Council decides on policy of introducing wheelie bins.
▪ Officers divide up city and a programme of implementation.
▪ Information begins to leak out.
▪ Council staff seen measuring things.
▪ If required Traffic Orders laid – time issue.

All of this can start without the community being formally informed – never mind consulted.

▪ Immediately raised suspicions and questions about motives.
▪ Is something being sneaked through.
▪ What about the practicalities?
▪ What about the detail of design?
▪ Who's in charge?
▪ What stage in the process are we?

Traffic or planning? Is it still with the Architect? When will the issue be resolved?

Q's Professionals need to ask themselves

Are you consulting or informing?
What scope do you have to change your plans?
How open would you be to changing your plans?
Can you afford to change your plans?
How are you managing expectations?

Local Planning
Local plans should be where overview set out – need to be up to date – offer the chance for local involvement and influence.   Is there supplementary design guidance, are frameworks being developed? Provide the starting point.   If they're not there or are out of date – problem.

Regulations
Conscious that many of the regulations we have surrounding development are often seen as constraints.   Tick the box or add ons won't work?
Common requirements issues to be considered:
> Conservation Areas
> Tree Preservation Orders
> Disability access,
> better energy efficiency,
> Parking standards

New ones coming along…….?

- use of renewable energy sources
- control of lighting
- waste management systems
- better efficiency of water use
- emphasis on noise
- use of recycled products.

Complex, challenging objectives – not a pick and mix.

For people who have to live with the results…No. 1 question   - How does it affect me?

Safer design – secured by design. Think about how space will be used. Will it become a skateboard park?   How will young people use space. How will older people use the space? .

Sustainable design – now securely on our agenda. But long way to go.   Very conscious that often seen as a trendy issue.   What does it mean for urban design?   Well for one thing what sort of materials are used – will they last – how well will a development be serviced and accessed.

How does it fit in more widely - access to services – employment, leisure, retail & education.

Energy use & management – innovation.   Technology changing all the time.   Come a long way to incorporate issues such as passive solar gain.   Still challenges in terms of landscaping. Using PV technology, using water features to make development more efficient.

Long term viability and maintenance
Extent to which cost effective to maintain.   Critical issue in good urban design.   If not then leads to a poor quality environment.   How well will it adapt to long term changes.   And how will it be used in the future?

- Air quality – impact of nunbers of cars
- Noise mapping – in the future

Obstacles

Cost – not enough time set aside – not enough money on the table.
Lack of vision
Not a team based approach.
Client won't spend enough cash.   Design worked up on the cheap.

At the outset
3 Qs
do the professions need to change?
          Yes
ask us to consider what they need to do differently and
          thoughts of how need to involve people and also outcomes and results
what others need to do differently.

Business community need to value design in their developments
          examples of successful developments
          Partly argument by professionals when bidding for new contracts
          Partly by those who set framework for decision making in Local Authorities and Central
          Government

          but also

Politicians

Need to take more interest in design.   Need to be more upfront that it is a priority.   Need to give
support to those promoting good design.

Good recommendation in "Designing Places"

"There should be scope for reviewing development to assess how well the planning process
worked.   Councillors should visit representative examples so that they understand the
consequences of the council's policies and their own decisions.
Planning and design guidance should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains effective."

"We need to design and plan in the expectation that social, economic and technological
conditions will change"

Could also be environmental conditions too – planning over a long term.

"Often without anyone caring, places are shaped by the innumerable decisions that together can
create the overwhelming impression that nobody cares."

Don't think that's true.   It's just the difficulty of getting it right – through what is an increasingly
complex and sometimes contradictory demands.

But important not to forget.   **People have to live with the results.**

If you/we get it wrong its difficult to fix afterwards, expensive to fix afterwards and maybe impossible to fix afterwards?

& Who's job would it be? Developer / council / residents?

Better to get it right at the outset.   Process needs to understand area, people's wishes and try and work around what the area offers – imagine potential.