

Northumbria Research Link

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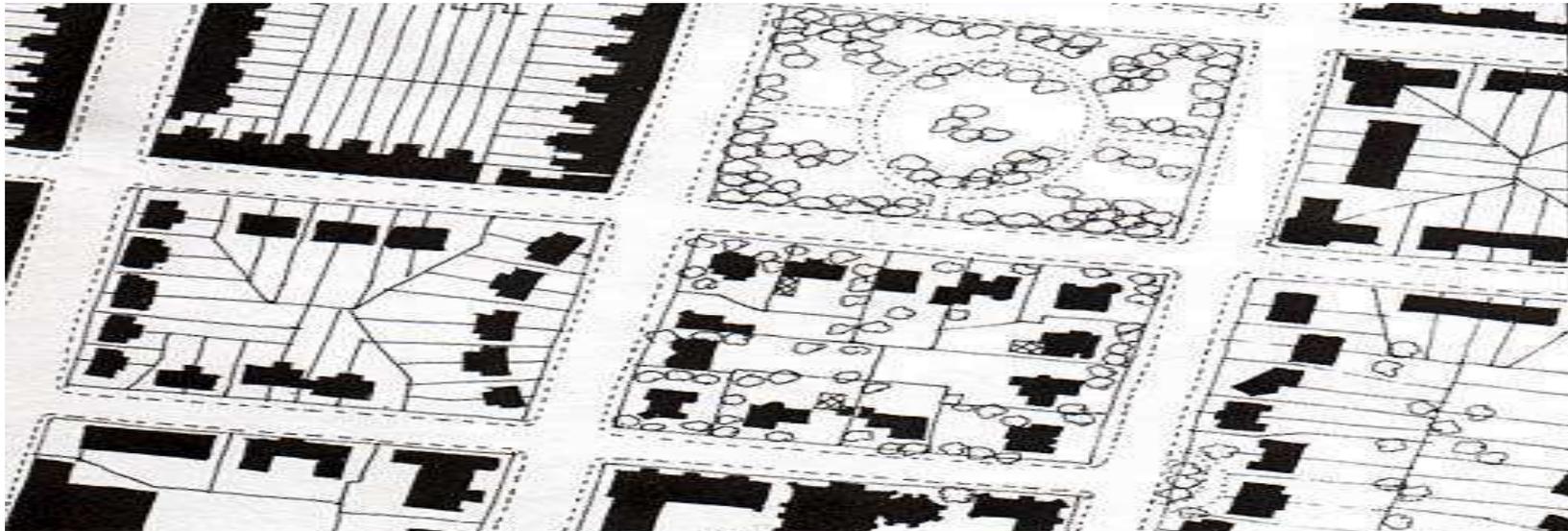
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Creative Town Planning: Changing National Policy

The design message in the proposed
National Planning Policy Framework



The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2012 - all existing national planning policy is deleted and replaced with the single document NPPF (may be statutory)
- Part of the Localism agenda (Localism Bill 2010)– less top down and more community planning
- NPPF will send key messages to LPAs and communities and will cover all aspects of planning, not just urban design

Urban Design in Planning

- It is about the relationship between buildings and spaces between buildings – the context
- It is not all subjective! Key UD principles exist as well as a confusing array of policy and guidance documents at all government levels and other bodies.
- Good design outcomes in planning take time to negotiate – conflict with speed agenda and minimizing state intervention.

Urban design qualities

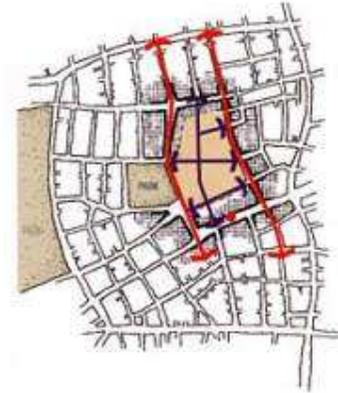
- | **Permeability** move and connect
- | **Vitality** exciting places
- | **Variety** diversity 'the spice of life'
- | **Legibility** where am I? How do I get there?
- | **Robustness** change and adapt as required

Good qualities in urban design are achieved
through **urban design principles**

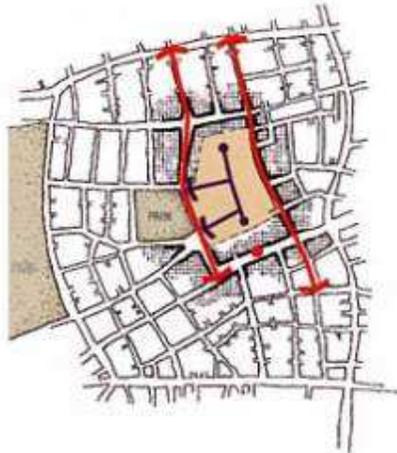
Permeability



Consider how best the site can be connected with nearby main routes and public transport facilities



A more pedestrian-friendly approach that integrates with the surrounding community links existing and proposed streets, and provides direct links to bus stops

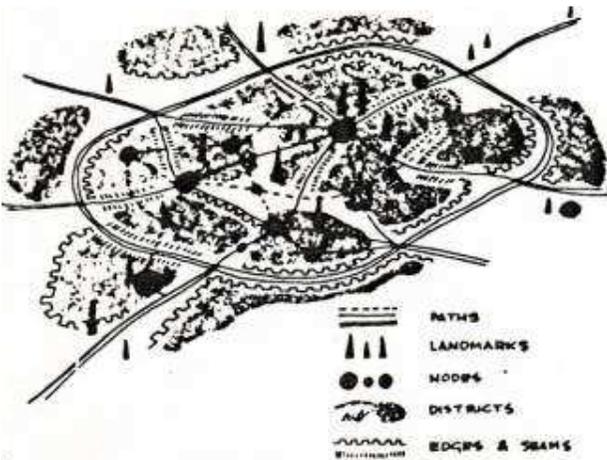
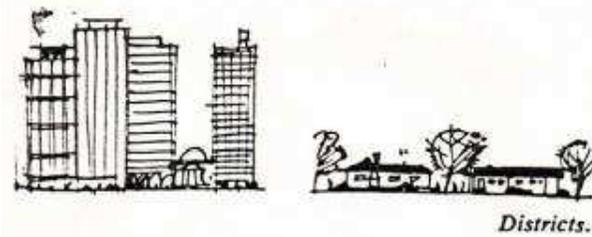
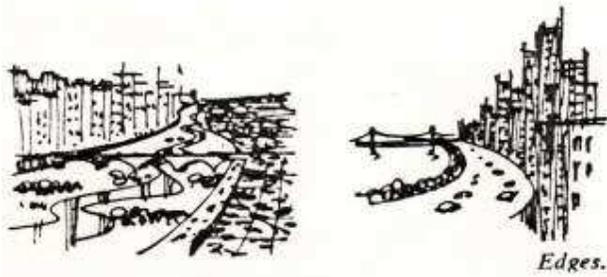


The typical cul-de-sac response creates an introverted layout, which fails to integrate with the surroundings

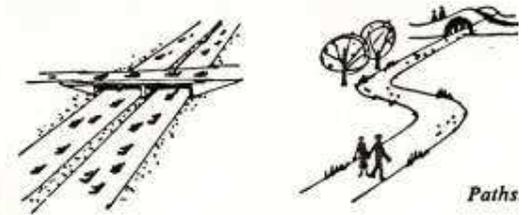
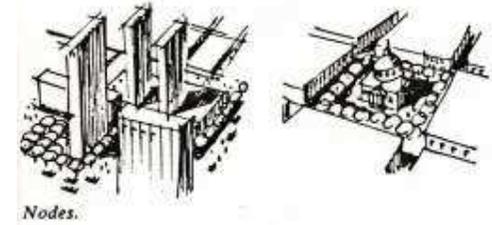
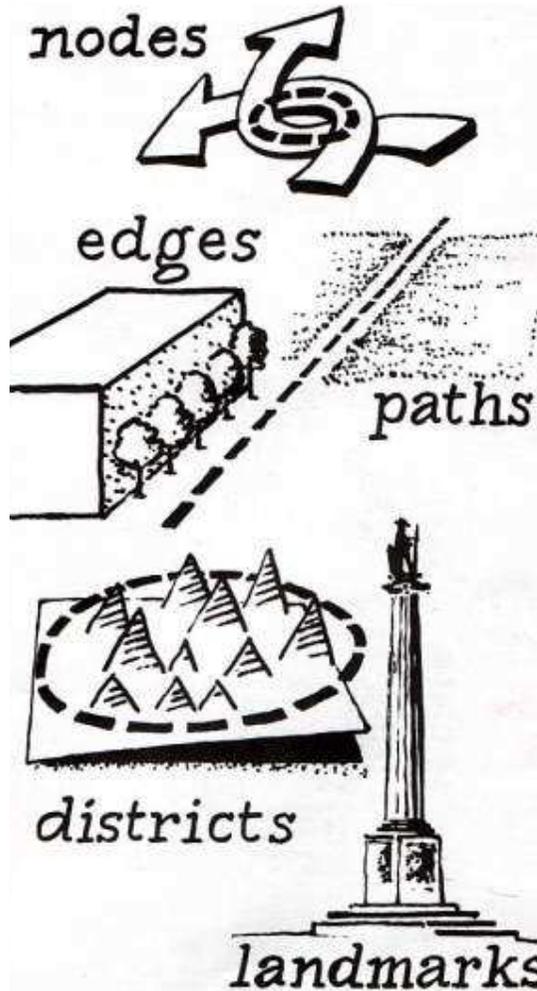


This street pattern then forms the basis for perimeter blocks, which ensure that buildings contribute positively to the public realm

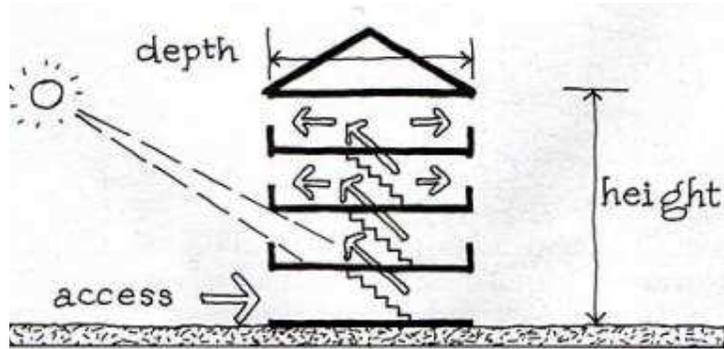
Legibility



Representing the form of a city with abstract symbols.



Robustness



Open space can accommodate many activities



Above: Former market hall is now a museum
Below: Interior provides space for exhibits



The key research questions

- How can the NPPF help LPAs and communities in making good design decisions (in planning applications and in local and neighbourhood plans)?
- How prescriptive should it be?
- An independent assessor will assess the neighbourhood plans against tests in the NPPF – what urban design tests should these be?
- Can different levels of tests be set out as a hierarchy or route map or set of priorities?

The literature

- Government policy and guidance on urban design
- Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) research
- Journals: *Urban Design and Planning*, *Journal of Urban Design*, *Urban Design Quarterly*, *Urban Design International*
- The localism agenda – government reports and news items in planning press
- Planning theory – collaboration vs rationalism

The Primary Data

- Initial e mail contact to membership of the national network for UD experts – the urban design group (practitioners and academics)
- 20 expressions of interest in the research - these followed up with detailed questionnaire inviting written feedback or telephone discussion – 15 detailed responses – mostly written
- 10 key national voluntary organisations that relate to planning were contacted by e mail with a simpler set of questions - 9 responses, most written

The findings to date

- All agree the NPPF is an opportunity to make better sense of urban design policy and guidance and send a simple strong message
- Most want key *urban design principles* set out in NPPF in dedicated urban design section. Some want these to be used as *tests for neighbourhood and local plans*
- The *Bentley* principles, used in different ways in various documents since the 1980's were most often referred to: *legibility, permeability, robustness etc*
- Less certainty on level of detail in NPPF and what UD documents should be referred to and given what priority. Some degree of prescription favoured (in line with rationalism, creates more order/fairness in public interest) but collaboration at local level needed too
- Some consensus on hierarchy/priority/route map

Priorities for Urban Design in the NPPF (prescriptive)

1. Definition of sustainable development should mention quality design
2. Character statement/townscape analysis for each local area as main urban design test for assessors of Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans
3. Each plan to make a statement on local distinctiveness of their area – a test for assessors of plans
4. Each plan to mention key urban design principles – also a test for assessors of plans
5. Negotiation on planning applications to improve design outcome to take priority over speed deadline where necessary
6. All major planning applications should be subject to design review by expert panel, with panel using a recognised set of criteria