

# Making Better Places - Where Next?

A special event to celebrate the passions, achievements and memory of Steve Tiesdell.

The purpose of the seminar was to celebrate the life and achievements of Dr. Steve Tiesdell and reflect on placemaking, where we are at with agenda, and where we are going. This newsletter provides a summary of the proceedings. Hyperlinks are embedded with links to a podcast, presentations, and photographs from the event, as well as further information about the Steve Tiesdell Endowment Fund and the Steve Tiesdell Legacy session at the forthcoming International Urban Design Conference.



## Steve Tiesdell - some personal reflections from former colleagues [View Presentation](#)

Kevin Murray opened and spoke about his time working with Steve, particularly the early years of their careers at Tibbalds. Here Steve first came across the notion of 'primacy of place', which really resonated with him.

Mick Timpson recalled one of the architectural projects that Steve worked on during his time at Tibbalds, the Croydon Central Library, still the UK's third most popular library. It was clear that Steve's interest was in the bigger scale urban design and placemaking agenda. He made the move into academia shortly after, where Tanner Oc spoke of Steve's skill as an informed and passionate academic.

Many referred to Steve's intelligence, cutting wit, and his extensive knowledge of books and literature. Kevin recalled an occasion on a coach journey where, mimicking George Best's infamous appearance on the Wogan show, Steve performed a soliloquy of drunken anecdotes which left the entire coach in tears of laughter. The comparison with George Best did not always translate straight to the football pitch. However, Steve was a keen sportsman and had excelled in cricket, athletics and rugby, making use of his fitness and speed.

He spent many of his holidays building up his direct personal knowledge of design issues across the world. His extensive travel was evidenced by the world map in his office, which was covered with pins signifying his recent and planned trips.

Many people have remarked on how much they enjoyed their lively discussions with Steve about academic matters, politics, culture or sport (but not jazz, apparently). Steve was always keen to continue conversations outside the lecture theatre in a pub or Indian restaurant.

Kevin also spoke of Glasgow as the place where Steve really enjoyed himself, feeling very at home in the Merchant City. He explored and celebrated the city in his whacky, animated lectures, and also through his civic contribution to the Design Panel and numerous local projects.

## Steve's passion as a communicator [View presentation](#)

Professor David Adams & Georgiana Varna

With an unforgettable style of lecturing and using illustrated PowerPoints of up to 200 slides, Steve was a legend of the lecture theatre.

Drawing on some of Steve's PowerPoints, David's presentation demonstrated how much thought and effort he put into communication. After introducing the presentation David moved through the slides silently and asked the audience to imagine Steve performing the lecture himself.

Steve worked with the principle that "A picture is worth a thousand words"; he loved diagrams and loved constructing them from scratch, he also liked to construct sequences of photographs to make his point – always throwing in a few surprises!

Steve also used old photographs to put recent and current development proposals in their historical context, as well as introducing celebrities, politicians and even himself to personify his ideas.

Georgiana complemented Steve as a skilled and passionate mentor who was able to show her how to really look at, and experience, a city, as well as improving her confidence in writing and presenting (and instilling in her that you can never have too many slides!).

## In the footsteps of a teacher [View presentation](#)

Dr. Ombretta Romice

During her presentation Ombretta expressed a proudness to share similar interests with Steve which gave her an insight into his approach as a teacher. One of those interests was in the study of Environmental Psychology, an interest, she joked, that she knew no one else to possess.

Supplemented by quotes gathered from some of his students Ombretta talked about what she had learnt from Steve as a teacher – 'tips from a great one'. Of the many lessons she suggested that the real appeal of Steve's work was his emphasis on the complexity of the urban experience, and the message that urbanism and urban design is relevant to everyone, tangible, important "An importance which was not arrogantly claimed but naturally fundamental".

Ombretta highlighted Steve's understanding of places in relation to people and the powerful role of urban design on quality of life which meant that he demanded inquisitiveness, curiosity and effort towards good design.

“Steve believed in humanity and architecture, urban design and planning...he was adamant that people and their experience are essential to successful places.



Dr. Steve Tiesdell  
(1964 - 2011)

[View pictures from the event](#)

# “He had a rather Royal Shakespeare Company approach to delivering lectures (more Hamlet than Jan Gehl!)”

## Placemaking in Practice: Learning from International Exemplars View presentation

### George Weeks

George was in the team at Glasgow University alongside Steve that looked in detail at eight case studies in the rest of the UK and Europe to draw out the lessons for Scotland, and to answer the key question: *What really matters in the delivery of high quality places?*

The research took place over 4 months and Steve and George travelled to each place to evaluate it. The resulting publication ‘Delivering Better Places’ identified many lessons, grouped under three headings:

1. Ensure Good Leadership
2. Co-ordinate Delivery
3. Invest in Good Stewardship over time

George concluded with the key message from the report: “If Scotland wishes to create better places more often than before, politicians & those charged with delivery need to engage with market essentials by re-thinking public-sector commitment and investment to place quality”.

## How to create Place Promoters View presentation

### Diarmaid Lawlor

Diarmaid’s presentation built upon Steve’s contribution to ‘Delivering Better Places’. The major theme of this research concerns re-thinking the public sector’s commitment and investment to place quality: to exercise leadership in a way that ensures fairness and enables opportunities for all.

This is particularly relevant in challenging times of meeting increasing demand for public services with constrained budgets. The importance of ‘place’ is increasingly recognised as being at the heart of a “new paradigm for scratchy recovery”, and central to this is a need for leadership built on trust. This form of leadership is visionary about how we get the places we want; develops abilities regarding understanding people and their motivations; and tackles capacities in relation to governance and powers to shape the market.

Steve’s desire to understand how better places are made, how power is shared, and how we are all actors making a contribution was summed up in a final quote: “we are not creatures of circumstance; we are the creators of circumstance”.

## Whither Design Review? View presentation

### Professor John Punter

John Punter presented a longitudinal reflection on design review as a process that informs change in the built environment. Central to the presentation were questions about purpose, accountability and transparency: what is the value of design review, and to whom? John’s analysis showed a difference in the actual and perceived impacts of design review. One tabular analysis showing impacts on projects and appeals in England, Scotland and Wales, displayed wide variations. The CABE analysis suggested an ‘impact’ on about 90% of projects. John questioned how significant these impacts were, how they were measured, and how valid is the score? Punter, an advocate of design quality and a key figure in design review over time, was using the presentation to question how we achieve quality, and how this will be achieved in changing future contexts. He pointed to the need for engagement, briefing, relationship building, support, training and influence, referencing the emerging change in the processes by A+DS, in terms of establishing a Design Forum.

## Workshop - How do we take Steve’s legacy forward? View workshop summary note

Are we at a ‘cusp in time’ in terms of placemaking? There have been huge advances internationally but is placemaking being overridden by market economics, where any investment ‘must be good’? Has there been a movement against planning, design, sense of place, and professional knowledge & competence (to Wikipedia world of no rules)? Three groups explored the question “*What do we need to do to ensure robust, liveable places, which are comfortable for all?*” from different perspectives:

### Group 1: from the perspective of place and design as a dimension of public policy - whether national or local

- Content – looking for a vision; whole place planning
- Process – scale/relationships; between strategic and local; collaboration – team building and engagement
- Capacity – develop skills; build relationships to implement; translate from professional to non-professional jargon

### Group 2: from the point of view of practitioner skills and place leadership

- Not issue-by-issue but ‘on the ground’ (i.e. place based; town teams)
- Key role for Design Review – more strategic and upstream in the process – think of as long term action (instead of evaluating over the short term)
- How can professional’s best help communities? E.g. Planning Aid for Scotland – mainstream this more effectively
- Embed placemaking agenda in schools – get kids aware of their place/s and how they change

### Group 3: from the point of view of communities, their governance and stewardship

- Places are complex and diverse, but ‘hang together’ – create a good ordinary, that affects and can enable everyone’s lives
- Urban Design is not just for urban designers – places are for people
- Demystify place making – Steve was a good teacher; importance of straight talking
- The value of learning – learn from travel/site visits; the importance of self-learning (expand personal boundaries)

## Epilogue - Ian Tiesdell

Ian expressed his gratitude to everyone who had attended the lecture and made a special public thank you to David Adams for the care and assistance he was able to give to Steve during the most difficult periods of his illness.

## Endowment Fund & Further Lecture

The Steve Tiesdell Student Endowment Fund has been set up in Steve’s memory to help establish a permanent Student prize for the best Masters Student in Urban Studies and to provide other appropriate forms of student support.

There will also be a 2nd lecture held in Steve’s memory at the International Urban Design Conference which is being held at the University of Nottingham on 2-3 April 2012

## Download Links

Podcast: <http://goo.gl/PyKpW>

Presentations: <http://goo.gl/jmd8O>

Photographs: <http://goo.gl/LBzpzH>

Endowment Fund: <http://goo.gl/x2Shr>

International Urban Design

Conference: <http://goo.gl/skxtf>