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“New public spaces linked to development can act as drivers, rather than residuals of built form.”

From Placemaking Issues - Office:  
Context + Layout: Consider the quality of new public spaces as part of development

**Text: Placemaking Issues - Office**

This page compiles the Placemaking issues text which appears on the main site, as one downloadable piece. The issues identified have been drawn from project reviews carried out by A+DS, and which we hope can provide positive direction to future projects.

The following text includes points specific to **Office**, while Key Placemaking Issues, which refer to all project types, can be downloaded separately.

The intention is that the piece below develops over time, and becomes populated with examples of good practice as these emerge in order to form a live and expanding resource. If you are aware of examples of where things referred to have been done well we would be pleased to hear from you at [design.forum@ads.org.uk](mailto:design.forum@ads.org.uk)

**INTRODUCTION**

New office development can take a variety of sizes and forms – whether a single building in the heart of a city centre, as part of a mixed use development or business park, or a refurbished building in a conservation area. This building type frequently needs to accommodate the desire for in-built flexibility, as well as satisfying other client and user requirements around extent of day lighting, number of and distance to building cores.

Whatever the location, commercial buildings have an important part to play in the make-up of our towns and cities and in contributing to the placemaking and sustainability agendas, and the revolution from cellular to open plan space has had a marked effect on our the use or otherwise of our existing building stock.

**PROCESS**

**Demonstrate a high level of ambition for strategic sites**

Large prominent office buildings in key locations have the potential to form an impression on the image of a place,

potentially announcing a gateway into a town or city – particularly if located on a prominent corner. A high level of ambition should be sought from all parties on prestigious and prominent sites in order to encourage the creation of high quality landmark buildings in such locations.

### **Different procurement routes can affect a quality outcome**

Different types of building procurements, such as traditional vs. design and build, will give varying degrees of design control throughout a building contract and on such aspects as material selection and the quality of detailing, and therefore may have a bearing on the quality of the outcome. The long term, as well as the immediate, implications of different procurement routes should be considered.

## **STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

### **A Local Authority led overall vision for an area**

Councils lead role in developing an overall vision for an area and establishing guidance for individual development coming forward, for example in determining acceptable heights for buildings in an area, or in identifying situations where height might be exceeded, provide certainty for developers in advance of their acquiring sites. This is critical for setting a high quality context for development of future buildings.

Local Authority requirements on issues such as inclusion of mixed-use, how the area will be activated day and night and at weekends, connectivity, transport, parking, road infrastructure and landscape design will all help create certainty for current propositions and maintain the value of future adjacent development sites.

### **Working together on public realm integration**

Early engagement between Project Teams and Local Authorities can facilitate the best possible solution for a site and city/townscape, and in addressing potential improvements to site boundaries and surrounding streets, so that the full potential of existing and new public realm can be realised. Councils can play a critical role in establishing, and giving cohesion to, a joined up vision for a place and in facilitation between various stakeholders.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Optimise building design to minimise energy requirements**

The overall form, scale and orientation of the building should be considered as part of developing a sustainable energy strategy for a project.

There are advantages in utilising modelling techniques, such as daylight modelling, ventilation and environmental impact studies, to help explore optimum configuration of buildings and quality of internal and external spaces, and to demonstrate the overall performance of a building and how it would impact on surrounding areas. The use of floor plates which provide the opportunity for passive ventilation can reduce requirements for large roof top plant, allowing the height of the building to be reduced and for the uppermost floor of the building to be reserved for a more appropriate function, for example roof terraces or prestigious and high value floor space.

### **Reuse of existing buildings**

The demand for reconfigurable floor space has tended to mitigate against the reuse of existing buildings, however the embodied energy within existing structures makes their reuse an inherently sustainable approach.

Re-imagining the configuration of existing fabric may also allow utilisation of project budget to improving the quality of public realm and entrances, and potentially reduce both timescale of construction and inner city traffic disruption, whilst retaining an established sense of place.

### **Sustainable transport and parking**

The proximity of new development to public transport links, whether in a city or town centre or otherwise, should have a bearing on the amount of parking required by both Local Authority and tenant. The quality of pedestrian and public transport links and the nature of pedestrian experience to and from the development, are however critical if these are to be well used.

## CONTEXT + LAYOUT

### **Contextual analysis should inform the design process**

As with any building project, contextual analysis of adjacent buildings and spaces, existing and proposed, will inform a programme for what is achievable on the site. Evidencing how the outcome of this analysis has informed a design which responds positively to the surrounding context, will assist in the joint understanding of a unified vision, and demonstrate how the project fulfils potential for placemaking in the built fabric.

### **Incorporate mixed use to activate the building frontage and streets**

The creation of a high quality pedestrian environment around the base of the building is key to ensuring a successful insertion into a city or town centre and to contributing positively to the surrounding area. The introduction of uses such as café and retail at ground floor level can be encouraged wherever possible to help activate the public realm and the frontage of the buildings that address them, and to create spaces that are active and inviting both day and night. Potential for including roof top activity, such as restaurants or bars, might also be considered.

### **Consider the quality of new public spaces as part of development**

New public spaces linked to development can act as drivers, rather than residuals of built form. The design, quality and scale of such spaces are important, particularly where large buildings and/or groups of buildings are involved and achieving a high quality built environment can improve value of locations now and in the future.

Successful handling of such aspects as: climatic considerations – daylighting, shading and wind modelling; selection of appropriate trees, materials and other landscape elements; and the incorporation of initiatives such as art works and/or a lighting design strategy, are key to the enjoyment of external public spaces around the building and need careful consideration to ensure their long term design quality.

### **Consider the wider area beyond the site**

The vision for the project should encompass a wider area outside the site boundary. Conceiving development within fiscal boundaries can limit potential and lead to separation of elements, rather than integrating a new building into its context. A coherent design for the whole area might generate a unified presence greater than the sum of its parts, and elevate the importance a project and hence also its potential for commercial success.

### **Define public and private spaces and thresholds**

A clear definition of public and private space, how people move through and around the building, and how a relationship is formed between inside and out can usefully be considered as part of a wider public realm strategy. An aspiration towards an open and transparent building, and a creative resolution of control of access, may allow buildings to contribute to an active public realm while saying something positive about the approachability of the tenant corporations.

### **Designing in historic context**

In historic contexts the quality of architecture will be especially critical to the success of the project, particularly where the setting of adjacent listed buildings can be affected. Care and attention must be taken to ensure that the design sits comfortably with the neighbouring buildings and within the wider urban and historic fabric. Opportunities for contemporary interventions that contribute positively, enhance and acknowledge – but are not intimidated by – their historic environment, are encouraged.

## BUILT FORM

### **Scale should be complimentary with the surrounding streetscape**

There is the potential for the volume of buildings to be driven by programmatic requirements, rather than a specific response to place, with the resultant scale and mass unconvincing in its location. Buildings within an urban context should convey a presence that is appropriate to the scale of the town or city and to that of the individual street level or office user.

### **Consider the impact of tall buildings on the wider context**

Large scale commercial blocks and buildings of substantial height can impact on the city skyline and distant views and should be considered as part of a wider strategy. Where tall building elements are proposed consideration should be given to:

- relative proportions of components and potential impact on the city skyline and distant views
- potential for overshadowing by large interventions
- daylight/sunlight penetration to public spaces and atria
- stepping down of buildings heights across development to break down monolithic forms
- potential domination of a building's summit by roof top plant

### **Form, appearance, fenestration and materials**

Office blocks can often be designed as object buildings, with even facades on all four sides; however a differentiation in approach might help to make particular components, such as atria, more prominent. The detailing and selection of materials on a façade can be critical to the success of the project. Particular care will be required in specification of components that may feature prominently on the skyline or in a city or town centre.

New additions to existing buildings should be detailed carefully and addressed in a homogenous manner considering appropriate massing, scale and materials to respect and compliment the character of existing buildings and parts being retained.

## Image credits

Image 1: Image: A+DS



Image 2: A+DS



The above is extracted from the Architecture and Design Scotland website Àite. Content should be read in the context described within the main website: [www.ads.org.uk/designforum/aite](http://www.ads.org.uk/designforum/aite)

### Architecture and Design Scotland (A+DS)

Bakehouse Close,  
146 Canongate,  
Edinburgh  
EH8 8DD

Level 2,  
The Lighthouse,  
11 Mitchell Lane,  
Glasgow  
G1 3NU

[designforum@ads.org.uk](mailto:designforum@ads.org.uk)