Design Commission

Evidence Session Four: Neighbourhoods and Housing

Tuesday 10th November, Committee Room 2A, House of Lords

10-11:30am

Witnesses

- Catherine Ward-Thompson, Director, OPENSpace Research Centre, Edinburgh University
- Alex Ely, Partner, Mae Architects
- Elanor Warwick, Head of Strategic Research, Affinity Sutton Housing Association
- Dr Nicola Dempsey, Lecturer in Landscape Planning, University of Sheffield
- Nicholas Falk, URBED

Present:

- Professor Alan Penn (Inquiry Co-Chair)
- Baroness Whitaker (Inquiry Co-Chair)

The Inquiry's Steering Group comprises:

- Alice Black
- Dr Richard Simmons
- Sarah Wigglesworth
- Jeremy Myerson
- Robin Nicholson
- Jeremy Myerson
- Daisy Froud

We are also grateful to the BRE Trust for their sponsorship of this inquiry.

Briefing Notes and Context

The debate about the extent to which, and in what ways, our behaviour is affected by the built environment is not new.

Whilst we might use emerging technology, visualising techniques and different data streams to extrapolate how behaviour might change in different environments, there is long standing discourse and disagreement as to how we should understand behaviour – or indeed, what kind of behaviour should be encouraged. This is a substantial topic, with a lot of work already in place. This Commission will aim to review and identity the best of the research already published, in addition to unpublished work that has been submitted to the Chairs as part of the evidence-gathering process.
Neighbourhoods and Housing

In our evidence sessions so far we have heard much of the interdisciplinary between different factors which affect human behaviour. It is also evident how little architects can practically seek to affect the behaviour of residents or workers in the buildings they design, because the client will too often have little appreciation of how to maintain the space once it has been handed over for use.

This gap between architectural design and ongoing management is especially evident in residential buildings and, by extension, neighbourhoods. There is increasing evidence to demonstrate the benefit of estate management and maintenance in effecting sociality – perhaps more than through the design of its bricks and mortar.

The Commission is now interested in what evidence exists from housing and neighbourhood management that could be used to support design-led policy in this area.

Questions to consider:

- To what degree does active management of housing developments lead to changes in behaviour, or how has lack of management undermined the intended or potential effect – as opposed to the design of the building?
- What factors in the built environment can be thought to have a positive impact on the behaviour of its inhabitants?
- What examples of design-led interventions in homes and communities are there?
- What has landed well with DCLG, or Local Commissioners?

Some Information about the Session

- Witnesses should come prepared to discuss their submission, as well as being able to speak extemporaneously on the points listed above.
- Printouts of submitted evidence (from called witnesses) will be made available to make reference to during the session.
- Following the session, a transcript will be prepared by the Secretariat for publication on the APDIG website (www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig). It will be circulated to witnesses beforehand to allow for correction of factual errors, or to ask for further information.

About the Design Commission

The Design Commission is an arms-length research forum to the All Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation group. The Design Commission is funded by sponsorship of its inquiries (from sources as diverse as the Design Council, AHRC, AECOM and the BRE Trust – sponsor of the current inquiry).

Recent subjects of inquiry include the importance of design in public services, on the inclusion of design thinking in government digital policy, and future democratic processes as, fundamentally, a design project.

An impact statement is available on request.