

DESIGNING DESIGN INTO PLANNING COURSES

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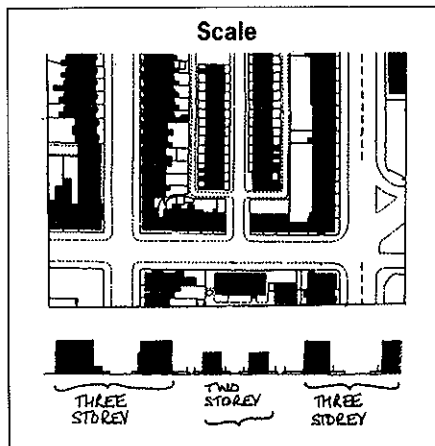
Chandler (1985) argues that "...in considering the place of design skills in town planning we are dealing with a very diffuse activity which has ramifications within broad policy formulations as much as it does within more pointed project implementation." For planners the importance of an education in urban design is reflected in the content of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) guidance on professional educational programmes.

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief overview of those guidelines and discuss how courses in the Department of Civic Design, University of Liverpool are being developed to reflect the recognised value of a design component in planning education.

In order to gain membership of the RTPI students must pass an accredited course. In order to become accredited those planning courses must explicitly or implicitly develop particular aspects of a student's knowledge, skills and values/attitudes. To educate the planner is to contribute to a definition of what planning, as a professional endeavour, should be. To read the guidelines referred to above is to establish the clear links that exist between how planners and urban designers choose to define their disciplinary concerns.

Building on that link it is possible to develop the student towards the view of Thompson (1993) when he says "...we need to become something rather more than just Planners and Architects - we need to become Urban Designers." Such a trend will encourage the built environment to be regarded as more than just a collection of disaggregated parts. An urban design education for planners can contribute to the vocabulary for such a primary objective. Through the study of urban design it is also possible for planners to challenge their own discipline's traditional concerns.

Using the RTPI's own terms the specific requirements of a planners education, as they relate to urban design, will now be presented.



A PLANNER'S KNOWLEDGE

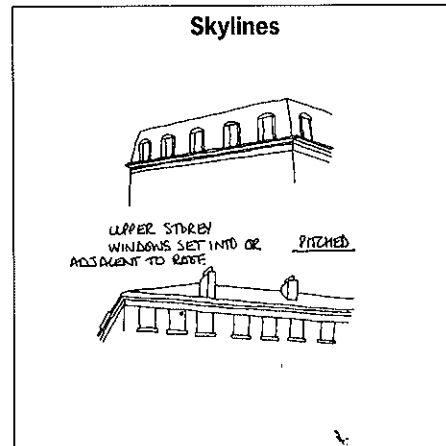
Specific knowledge in relation to the built environment must reflect "...building forms and their production, urban morphology and spatial structure; the physical, technological, sociocultural, economic and aesthetic processes and values which influence the production, location and valuing of the built environment ... the economic implications of spatial arrangements and urban structure ... the diversity of social needs, cultural values and [their relationship with] the built and natural environment; ... principles of conservation of built form ... development appraisal and valuation; development finance; marketing and management; refurbishing and conservation of buildings and neighbourhoods; evaluation principles and methods ... [and issues of and techniques for] managing open space." (RTPI 1991)

A PLANNER'S SKILLS

Specific skills include, amongst others, problem definition, research skills and data collection, quantitative analysis, design awareness and an appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of built form, the ability to identify and propose key strategies and strategic requirements, the ability to synthesise defined problems (with the application of knowledge) to form general or specific policy and development initiatives, the ability to work in a group to generate collaborative problem solving strategies, the skills to lead, and the skills to communicate verbally, graphically and in writing.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

An awareness of various values and attitudes is considered a necessary attribute of a decision maker, although the RTPI



guidelines do not explicitly regard planning as a political activity. "The requirement is that graduates demonstrate an awareness of the way value issues present themselves in practical contexts, of the positions a planner could take to these and of the ethical responsibility of the planner." (RTPI 1991)

Inherently liberal, planning education seeks to introduce the student to the issues surrounding race, gender, and disability; the role of government and public participation in a democratic society; the diversity of culture and ideology; the significant social and cultural heritage embedded in the built environment; and the ethics of professional practice and behaviour. Planning education must develop the students awareness of such issues, although it is not an explicit objective that planners possess certain values.

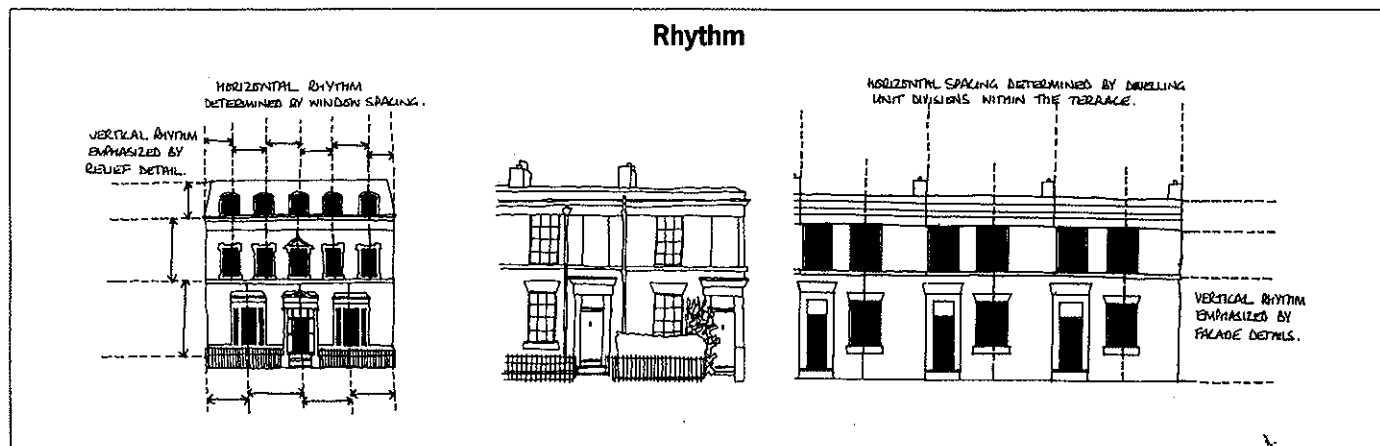
URBAN DESIGN IN PLANNING

Within such a framework of knowledge, skills and values/attitudes urban design snugly sits. All of the above requirements may be regarded as the objective of a good education in urban design. There is a built form dimension to each area that students regard as necessary for a comprehensive education.

At the Department of Civic Design, urban design has retained its status as a particular specialism to reflect the value of the knowledge and skills involved. As such students do more design work in core courses than in many other planning schools. To prepare a strategy or plan for physical development involves students addressing the range of professional expectations, whilst also considering the extent to which their own practice infringes on other professional concerns.

Without being too specific the content of lecture courses and projects are as follows:

Who Needs Urban Design Education ?



Elements of the Built Environment:

Based around the urban design commandments, specific attributes of the built environment are discussed such as accessibility, spatial interpretation, visual interpretation, land use and building diversity and spatial design and transition. Physical attributes are presented and debated to develop the student's appreciation of the design of development, and the extent to which developments contribute to the concept of the "good city" that is implicit in the design commandment.

Design Exercises:

Three design exercises are undertaken. The first tests and develops students powers of observation and visual analysis, whilst encouraging a critical awareness of the physical characteristics of the urban realm. The second involves a site planning exercise in a conservation area requiring the production of a plan and elevational treatment in response to an analysis of the character of the context (see illustrations). The third involves production of a physical development framework for an urban block within approximately two hectares.

Urban Design and Development:

Building on the vocabulary and understanding developed in Elements of the Built Environment, UDD addresses the more specific concerns of urban design.

The course discusses urban design ideas (such as responsiveness, the social logic of space, sustainability, townscape or studies by morphologists and the development and use of typology); urban design issues (such as local identity and image, or security and life in

public space); the nature of public sector intentions in development; the details of guideline and development briefing practice; techniques for encouraging public participation in the design process; the impact of institutional patronage on urban form; and strategies for physical conservation and regeneration. Importantly the "academic" lectures are supplemented by presentations from practitioners that provide a necessary bridge to justify and put the theory into context.

In addition students undertake projects that develop their design and development briefing skills, and produce a physical development framework at 1:500 for a large urban site of approximately nine hectares, including a residual valuation of their proposal and a detailed strategy for implementation, management and funding.

These courses do not seek to produce designers, it is probably true that planners cannot draw well enough! Instead the aim is to produce the critical planner who can interpret the implications of a proposed development, and will know when to intervene or not intervene to secure the physical attributes of the (semi) public realm in the public interest.

CONCLUSION

This has been a necessarily brief discussion of urban design education for planners, and the ways in which Civic Design has attempted to structure a course to meet professional expectations. Urban design remains a core discipline in planning because it is able to bridge the gaps between problem definition, analysis, policy, planning, design and development.

Many students regard urban design as the time when they apply all their knowledge to date into a scheme that they design and justify. This is positive planning. Such a view is reflected in the RTPi guidelines where many of the knowledge, skill and value/attitude components of recognised courses are also allied with those of urban design when regarded as an independent discipline. ■

References

- Chandler, W (1985) The components of design teaching in a planning context, in Town Planning Review, Vol 56(4) October, pp468-482
- Royal Town Planning Institute (1991) Guidance Note on Initial Professional Education Programmes in Planning: Content and Performance Criteria, London: RTPi
- Thompson, J (1993) Hunt Thompson Associates, in Urban Design Quarterly, January pp12-13