Editorial

As we approach the millennium the place of urban design as a professional discipline in the development of towns, cities and edge settlements is publicly supported by all the parent disciplines. In the UK we now have an Urban Design Alliance of planners, architects and surveyors who have collectively acknowledged its importance and selected urban design projects for exhibition and endorsement. At the same time it is clear that participatory urban design is often absent from many interventions. Development-led projects which lack wide-ranging local support are unlikely to further the fundamental understanding and appreciation of the contribution of urban design.

Currently, the global city/edge city brigade of urban planning and design are prepared to accommodate new forms in the name of progress, whilst denying any need to consider the values of the walkable mixed-use city at the extra-urban fringes. Technological developments in the next millennium will not remove the need for urban designers to engage in the facilitation of face-to-face human exchange, and a recognition of the importance of continuity, as well as change, informed by the study of the evolution and development of existing places.

Papers in this issue are varied in scope, scale, content and culture. The contributors are from New Zealand, Chile, Italy and the UK. They all use case studies to present current issues in contemporary urban design practice.

In the opening paper Mike Biddulph reviews three of the 21 case studies selected to participate in the former Department of the Environment's Urban Design Campaign launched in 1995. The campaign followed the 'Quality in Town and Country' initiative promoted by the former Secretary of State, John Gummer, and explored how urban design issues could be more effectively accommodated in the planning, design and development process. Biddulph argues that much

of the previous discussion of the campaign has been largely descriptive and that no real attempt has been made to evaluate the case studies or to draw lessons from the individual or collective experience. From his analysis of three of the projects – Chester, Stoke-on-Trent and Ashton-under-Lyne – he identifies seven general lessons. He concludes that a single, well-resourced experiment could facilitate local frameworks for the inclusion of urban design issues and problems, but that it could not provide the conditions necessary for the widespread acceptance of urban design as an automatic and essential part of the design and development process.

In the following paper Ivan Cartes provides another example of a major initiative for positively transforming local urban areas; in this case using public art in the city of Concepcion, Chile. Cartes argues against viewing public art merely as an object to be placed or even imposed in public space, but for its use as part of a local participatory process of environmental improvement in inner city neighbourhoods. He concludes that artistic interventions in public space can provide a powerful tool for small area regeneration. Success is dependent upon an appropriate scale of intervention, reinforced by the urban design of the space itself, with local support gained through extensive participation.

In their paper 'Edge Paris : urban grunge', Clinton Bird and Diane Brand compare the urban structuring devices of the centre of Paris with those used to lay out the satellite new towns on its periphery. The urban components of landscape, urban structure, public space, block type, building type and façade are identified and compared in the two contexts. Whereas consistent and well-established urban structuring devices characterize the centre, those used at the edge are more varied. However, the authors question the claims of recent edge city theorists that contemporary development at the urban

edge is a new 'generic' city form, indistinguishable from one location to the next and unconnected to the forms and structure of the historic city. Bird and Brand argue through their analysis of the case studies that pieces of edge Paris have a strong family resemblance to the parent city via their dependency on 'traditional' structuring devices. As a result they contend that many of the satellite new towns of Paris avoid the banality of the 'generic' edge city that is so characteristic of cities elsewhere in Europe and North America.

The final paper in this issue is at the other end of the scale from the urban structuring of Paris. The paper by Tom Porter and Giovanni Brini discusses a single structure in a single small city. Oxford's miniature 'Crystal Palace' is a reminder

of the last time that Britannia was widely conceived as cool with the showcase of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The structure of the old London and North Western Railway Station is the last surviving example of this extreme phase of Victorian high technology, which has an echo in this century in the public wrangles over the UK's Millennium Dome. The preservation of the station building in its original location would provide the opportunity to restore a building of national and local popular significance, whilst retaining and developing its importance for the urban continuity of Oxford.

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