Mixed-Use Development: Concept and Realities

Alan Rowley, University of Reading, for the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), 1996, £14.95

This short research report is a useful addition to the surprisingly small volume of material available on this topic. While there have been a number of American publications, little more than a few magazine and journal articles have appeared in the UK until now.

The report concentrates more on design aspects of the topic than on others such as the financial,

development or institutional issues. It commences by discussing the different definitions in contemporary use, and the dangers associated with too broad a range of development projects being described as 'mixed-use', thus debasing the concept. The main part of the report presents three case studies, examining how they came to be developed and the different perspectives of their financial backers, owners and developers. Two of the examples are in London, one being Deptford High Street where small developments of shops, workshops and residential accommodation have been undertaken, and the other in Soho where a street block near the Trocadero is studied. The third case study is the Gloucester Green scheme in Oxford, developed in the late 1980s as a mix of office, retail and residential space around a market place and bus station. The report concludes with a series of findings and recommendations, some of which flow from the presented case studies, and others which are discussed with little background explanation.

There are some limitations with the report; while criticising confusing or inaccurate definitions of mixed-use, it is only halfway through the report that the author's own definition is revealed. For a report sponsored by the RICS there is surprisingly little on the financial difficulties and perceptions of mixed-use, although there are a number of interesting insights offered by quotations in the case study material. The case presented to justify encouraging mixed-use development does not really address a number of justifications offered by the government in promoting the approach, and so misses the opportunity to examine the case studies in these contexts. For example, one reason to encourage mixed-use development offered by government ministers is that it reduces crime; this is neither mentioned nor examined.

These shortcomings may well reflect the limitations imposed by the compact nature of the report. The case study material in particular is a valuable addition to a limited body of material on a topic which has been increasingly important to planning and urban design policies over the past few years.

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