

Public Consultation and Community Involvement In Planning

A Twenty-first Century Guide
By Penny Norton and Martin Hughes
Routledge
2018 ISBN 978-1-138-68015-9
Review by Dr Nigel Moor

This is a long book dealing with a simple question. How do you engage the community in the debate about future development that is truly worthwhile and helpful. This question has challenged urban and rural planning for decades since the Skeffington report in 1969 recorded the disillusionment with planning following the post-war utopian optimism for reconstruction (the late Sir John Betjeman excepted). That question is still with us.

The book is divided into four parts; The context of consultation today, The planning process, Communications strategy and tactics and Post planning. This prompts the observation as to why such a basically simple proposition as consulting the community should become so complex. But that of course is the elephant in the room in relation to all the innovations since the 1947 Act that have sought to improve and clarify the planning system.

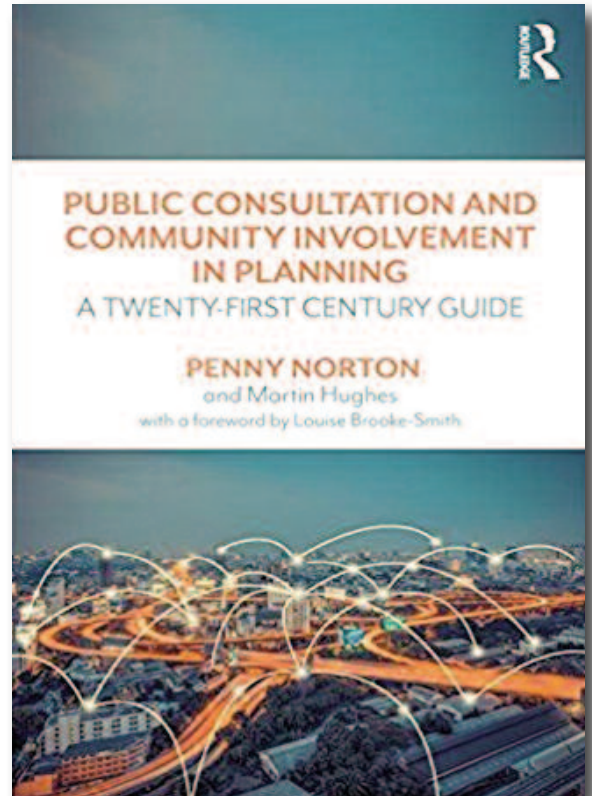
But putting my scepticism aside, the strength of this book is how it places public consultation and community involvement within the complexity of the planning system. It is unashamedly written as a text book and most practitioners will benefit from it being on their library shelves. This should guarantee sales.

The chapter on the impact of the internet on community involvement is particularly good and the author's observation "And as all demographic groups increasingly communicate online and hyperlocal websites and those of special interest groups continue to flourish, the need for developers and local authorities to have a proactive online presence will increase." demonstrates the need for practitioners to be fully aware of the techniques and strategies advocated by the author.

As a retired planner and now a county councillor much of my time is spent on working with local communities living in a series of large estates now nearing completion in my division. These new residents are now my electorate as much as those who have lived in the area for a long time.

The chapter on community involvement following construction has some useful case studies of where developers have engaged both with the new and existing residents so as to shape the new community. There is a huge problem of resource and manpower capacity within both local government and the development industry to deal with the post-

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construction issues.

The Bournville Trust at their Lightmoor Village project being built at Telford New Town have invested heavily in community engagement and there is a dedicated community advice and service facility in the village centre. This would have been a useful case study as it demonstrates the scale of the commitment necessary to make a real impact in an evolving community as opposed to it being merely a marketing exercise.

I suspect that this book with its wealth of experience and best practice will become a well leafed guide with many active in large scale development.

An important innovation is the chapter on consulting on a nationally important infrastructure project. An application for an NSIP must be accompanied by a consultation report in accordance with Section 27 of the 2008 Planning Act and this provides an extensive list of the activities that must be carried out as well as some case studies. ■



Dr Nigel Moor ran his own planning practice in London, Oxfordshire and East Anglia before it was acquired by RPS. He is now a Gloucestershire County Councillor with cabinet responsibility for Fire, Planning & Infrastructure and represents the Stow and Moreton division in the county.

The Design Companion for Planning and Placemaking

Co-author
Esther Kurland

answers the
question:
'What is the
point of this
book?'

We publish our
review in the
next issue

Back in 2012 Lord Taylor was given the unenviable task of reading through the 7,000 odd pages of national planning guidance and deciding what to keep and what to archive. When he and his team looked at *By design*, the companion design guide for PPS1, the decision was that it was well understood and so not needed any more. A slightly odd conclusion as many might think that because a guide was well understood, and presumably used if people were bothering to understand it, then it was worthy of life. But *By Design*, admittedly rather out of date by the star of this decade, was archived.

At Urban Design London we organised an open workshop, for anyone interested, to decide how the gap left could and should be filled. The 30 odd experts who came along offered draft wording on design for the new National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), most of which was eventually used on the Government's new planning National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and guidance website, launched in 2014. But there was much that could not go into the web, including examples, pictures, technical explanations etc.

This is when the idea of writing a new book about design and planning was born. DCLG was not in a position to commission such a book, and the government had no appetite to welcome new formal national guidance. But this was the era of the Big Society (remember that) where people were expected to do things that used to be someone's job, in their own time. So a group of people who felt that design was a very important part of planning, and needed up to date guidance spent the next 2 years creating the *Design Companion for Planning and Placemaking*, now published by RIBA. UDL did most of the work on the book, and compiled ideas and content from others, but the book, with over 30 people involved in its creation offers a consensus on the way design fits with planning.

The Design Companion

This is a practical book, with tips, things to consider and helpful nuggets of practical information. It references NPPF design policies and builds on the wording provided in the PPG. The book is not intended to replace national or local guidance, but to supplement it, providing illustrations and further detail on what the PPG says.

For planners, design is the thing that shapes the physical form of development. It is both a process and an outcome, and it influences the success of both planning as an activity and the quality and usefulness of places. Influencing design is an immensely complex matter. It involves the skills and actions of a wide range of people, economics and many levels of policy, guidance and process within both the public and private sectors. Design can be influenced by a wide range of strategies, delivery mechanisms, and systems of management and stewardship,



operating from the short to the long term.

Who is *The Design Companion* for ?

This book aims to help people who are involved in planning – many of them early in their careers – to understand what design is; how it fits into the planning system; and what issues arise in relation to some specific topics. It aims to be a helpful mentor for people who are not design experts and a refresher for those with design experience.

Planners often find themselves having to respond to unfamiliar situations. *The Design Companion* is intended to help them think about what issues may be relevant to a particular development proposal or policy project, and it introduces tools to help make the most of opportunities to achieve better places. It aims to help people understand and apply planning policy and guidance which relate to design issues.

Successful planning results from creative responses to challenging contexts, not from standard solutions, and hopefully *The Design Companion* is a first step in that process.

What's inside *The Design Companion* ?

This book has two parts. The first, made up of seven chapters, covers the theory and principles of good design and how these relate to planning. The first three chapters explain the link between the form of places and development proposals, the qualities of successful places and wider public policy and political objectives. The next four chapters look at the people, processes and tools involved in planning, and how these >>>

>>> relate to design.

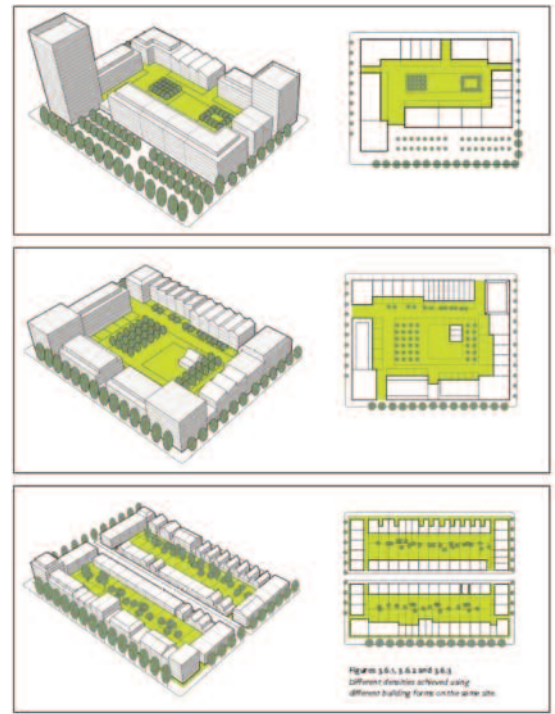
Good design is indivisible from good planning. That sentiment, included in national planning policy for many years, is at the heart of this part of the book. We explain how planning legislation, policies and processes influence how design is dealt with. We discuss who gets involved, when and how, and we explain the basic principles through which design and planning, together, can create good places that meet political objectives.

Chapters in part one include:

- What is design and how does it relate to planning?
- The characteristics of well-designed places
- Aspects of development form
- Legislation, planning and decision-making
- Who is involved
- Processes related to design
- Understanding plans and drawings

Throughout the book reference is made to the NPPF, relevant extracts of which are highlighted in each chapter. Important points to consider are also provided to highlight the most important issues planners should consider in reviewing development proposals.

Part two of *The Design Companion* picks up the concepts and principles covered in part one and applies them to ten topics that planners are likely to deal with day to day. Because each of the ten chapters in part two focus on what fundamental design principles mean for that topic, some things (such as active frontages and block layouts, for example) are touched on more



than once.

Part two design specifics include;

- Small-scale development
- Housing
- Landscape
- Environmental issues
- Historic environment
- Streets
- Public space
- Tall buildings
- Town centres and transport interchanges
- Town extensions and large-scale schemes

The most relevant section for highway engineers is the Street section whose lead author is John Dales, a director at Urban Movement. The section explains important concepts, terms and technical considerations that planners should be aware of when dealing with both the creation of new streets and alterations to existing ones.

The section covers; how decisions about streets are made, important design considerations, what planners should consider when reviewing the movement aspects of development proposals and when they should get involved. After all streets provide two essential roles enabling movement and providing access to place-based activities and the quality of the design of our streets goes a long way to determine the quality of the place itself.

Traditionally the remit of engineers, the design of streets is a highly important area for planners to get involved in, as streets have a major impact on the usability and success of places. As John notes in the book, designing streets should not be left to one professional discipline. Planners have a responsibility and remit to have a say in street design, and to help communities do the same. Hopefully the book will prove helpful to planners and placemakers across the country. ■

The Design Companion for Planning and Placemaking, RIBA Publications £30, is available from RIBA bookshops, RIBA website, Amazon and other on line bookshops.

DESIGN COMPANION FOR PLANNING AND PLACEMAKING

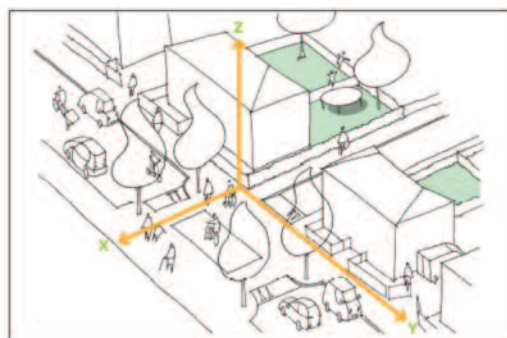


Figure 13.6
It is important to think of all four dimensions when designing a street: the X, Y and Z axes, and how people move through the space over time.

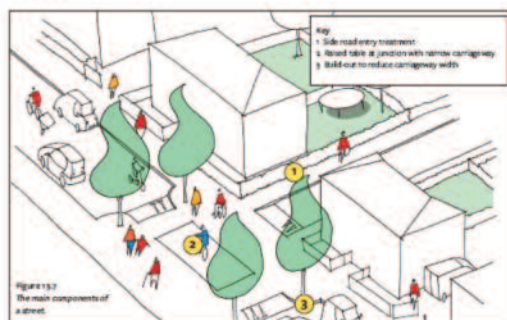
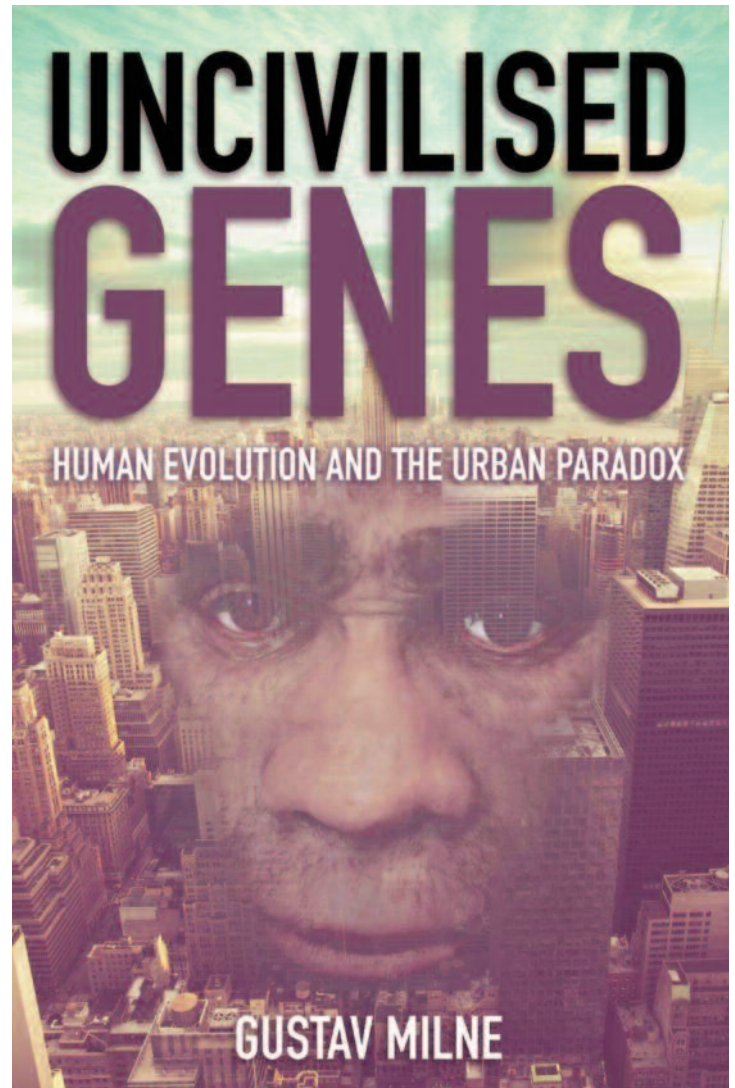
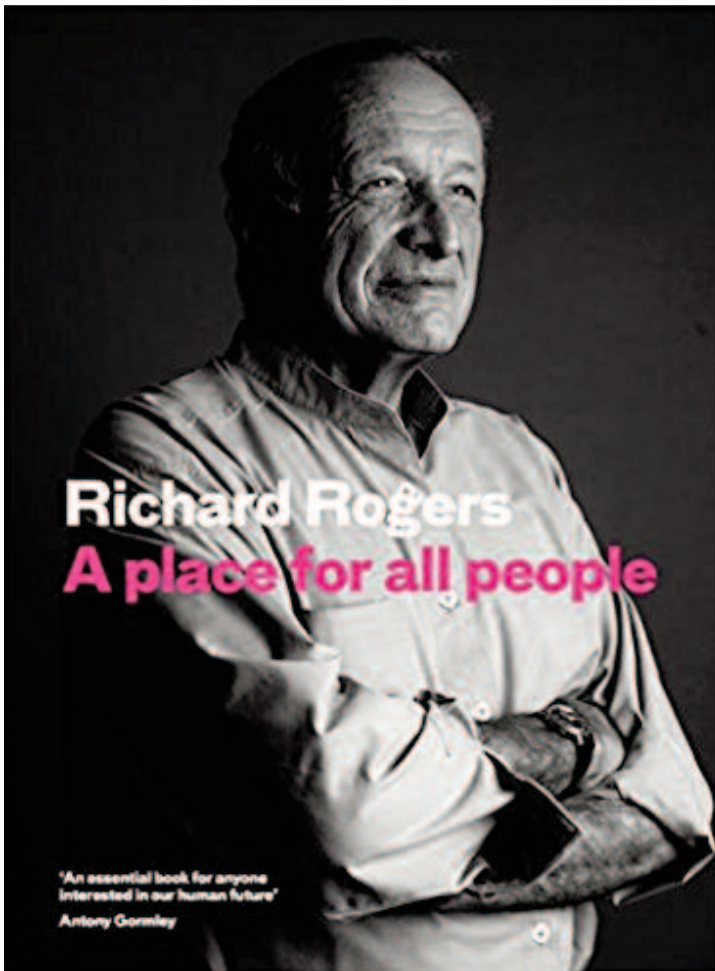


Figure 13.7
The main components of a street.

Waterfronts, public realm, human evolution, ornament and crime

These books are up for review by readers; just email your choice and your postal address to editor@planninginlondon.com and feel lucky!



An unprecedented homage to modernist architecture from the 1920s up to the present day

Ornament Is Crime is a celebration and a thought-provoking reappraisal of modernist architecture. The book proposes that modernism need no longer be confined by traditional definitions, and can be seen in both the iconic works of the modernist canon by Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius, as well as in the work of some of the best contemporary architects of the twenty-first century. This book is a visual manifesto and a celebration of the most important architectural movement in modern history.

Matt Gibberd and Albert Hill: £29.95