

a proper *urban* solution, with an *urban* scale. We need a clear appreciation of the urban grain and built form – what is sometimes called the morphological context. We also need to understand fully the local architectural *typology* – related to the uses and functions of the particular buildings. New proposals – whether for a large piece of urban design or an individual building – must have a positive relationship to the existing morphology – by harmonizing with it, by adapting to it or, where there are clear reasons so to do, by contrasting with it. The important thing is to take a positive design stance not just an arbitrary one.

During the 1950s and 1960s many towns and cities around the world underwent change on an unprecedented scale in terms of built development and in terms of massive highway construction. This undoubtedly resulted in considerable commercial vitality and unique levels of accessibility for motor vehicles, but it is now fairly widely recognized that it also produced physical environments that fall a long way short of current public aspirations.

Much of the problem derives from the loss of urban scale or grain. Traditionally cities were composed of blocks of buildings with streets around them. The so-called *comprehensive redevelopment* schemes of the past twenty or thirty years have tended to destroy this familiar and successful urban form and the results have been largely unsatisfactory. They have rarely produced places which are now widely recognized as being attractive.

It is a useful exercise to compare the plan forms of towns over time. Most traditional towns and cities are compact and tightly organized with a simple block layout punctuated by hard and soft open spaces. In many places this clear structure was lost, or significantly eroded, during the middle part of the twentieth century. A combination of war damage and the desire for new roads, new shopping centres and various forms of mass housing has, in many instances, led to the loss of original street patterns.

We don't have to let this happen. As vacant sites are brought into use and obsolescent buildings are redeveloped, the opportunity must be seized to use the new buildings to create proper urban streets again, with proper frontages – to make a tight-knit urban fabric where public spaces and landscape are intended, rather than just being the left-over bits that were of no use to the architect or developer. Spaces left over after planning and development has taken place are not only visually unattractive and functionally useless: they are also awkward and

expensive to maintain, with the all too frequent result that they become neglected and unkempt. There are thus functional and environmental advantages to the restoration of the street.

Of course, it is not only streets that are important. The places that make up the public realm come in many shapes, sizes and uses. They include streets, squares, public footpaths, parks and open spaces and extend, also, to riversides and seafronts. These places all belong to the wider community. It is important never to forget that they are there for their use, benefit and enjoyment. In designing and developing buildings and environments which interrelate with the public realm, it is therefore essential to ensure that this tremendous value of the public realm to the wider community is acknowledged, respected and enhanced.

One of the joys of towns and cities is their variety. Different areas have different characteristics – of activities, scale, uses and function. Some places are lively and busy. Others are quiet and secluded. There will be intricate, dense areas; open, monumental areas; soft areas; hard areas; old areas; new areas; areas of high building; areas of low building; shopping areas; commercial areas; entertainment areas; recreation areas; and so on and so on. We need to recognize this variety – to define areas of cohesive character. Often such areas will have blurred edges. They will overlap. This simply adds to the richness of the environmental character. But, great care is also required. As places, precincts or areas of special character are recognized, defined, created or developed, it is important to ensure that they are real and not contrived. It will not be an asset to the town or city if they take on a fake-believe or stage-set quality. Nor should such areas be allowed to develop simply as single-use enclaves.

All too often towns and cities simply continually re-adapt to accommodating more and more traffic and bigger and bigger buildings. What is desperately needed is a new approach to producing and looking after good urban spaces. We have actually got to address the re-structuring of our urban areas, over possibly quite long time scales, to reflect a new set of priorities in which the needs of people – as pedestrians, cyclists, the young, the old and the infirm, as well as the able-bodied – take precedence over the voracious demands of traffic and developers. The current fragmentation of urban areas in many ways mirrors the fragmentation and separation of the professions who are supposed to be looking after them – urban planners, traffic engineers, landscape architects, land surveyors and architects in particular.