
Shock of the New

Design of New In-centre Development



Longmarket, Canterbury

7.1 INTRODUCTION

7.1.1 Historic town centres are typically characterised by development based on small to medium-sized street blocks with a fine grain of streets and pedestrian routes allowing for good accessibility throughout the centre. The street block structure reflects the historic pattern of development. The buildings, themselves, are generally adaptable and allow for a rich variety of uses at both street level and on upper floors. The pattern of land ownership is such that many small parcels of land tend to be owned by many individual land owners, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. College land ownership in Oxford and Cambridge). Consequently historic towns tend to be the result of an expression of individual identity and vitality, more so than more recent developments where the planned approach, the corporate image, the themed identity are more prevalent.

7.1.2 This is not to suggest that the historic character of towns is exclusively small scale and that larger commercial insertions are only a very recent innovation. In the Victorian period, market halls, shopping arcades, department stores and corn exchanges were all developed in an essentially mediaeval pattern of forms and uses, for the most part, enhancing the character of historic towns.

7.1.3 However, the last 30 years have seen retail changes in town centres more dramatic than at any time in their previous history. The main element in this process has been the single development shopping centre initially inspired by North American models. Although some early examples were built around open pedestrian squares, the emerging style has been, predominantly, for enclosed centres with shopping on more than one level which are closed outside normal shopping hours.

7.1.4 The process of developing a whole centre at once and their unusual multi-level, enclosed characteristics make the majority of these schemes appear separate from and alien to the existing centres onto which they are grafted. A general failure to respect the function, form or local architectural reference points of the existing centre but instead to design to some 'international shopping centre theme' has resulted in an anonymity which leaves the visitor feeling that they could be at any one of a dozen different centres. This problem has been compounded by standard retailer formats which produce seemingly identical runs of frontages in centres from one end of the country to the other.

7.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR NEW IN-CENTRE DEVELOPMENTS

7.2.1 If historic centres are to remain vital or viable they must not be allowed to stagnate but must be renewed to respond to modern needs. The challenge is to ensure that such renewal can be a positive insertion into the fabric of these towns, reflecting their character and context and contributing positively to the life and vitality of the town centre. While there can be no standard blueprint for a 'good' design since each centre will have its own particular requirements, as many of the following key design principles as possible should be considered if new development is to prove successful and enduring.



7.2.2 SCALE - the scale of the development in terms of building bulk, height and footprint (i.e. street block size) must be appropriate to the historic context in which it is located. Too big will always be too big, regardless of the quality of its detailed design and architecture. If the historic townscape cannot accommodate the proposed floor space, then consideration must be given to alternative locations for some or all of the proposed floor space. Many town centre developments have been driven beyond an acceptable scale by the need/desire for large amounts of car parking provision on-site. As alternatives emerge for town centre parking (free up commuter spaces for shoppers, better public transport, park and ride) there may be opportunities to reduce the level of on-site car parking (see also section 2 - Access and Accessibility).

7.2.3 PERMEABILITY/INTEGRATION - the development should reflect the grain of the surrounding streets and should form a natural extension of the City's street pattern and pedestrian circulation system rather than being a self-contained centre.

7.2.4 MULTI-LEVEL CENTRES - multi-level centres are often too big and difficult to assimilate into the scale and character of historic town centres. Internally, the isolation of the upper floors (i.e. the visitor has to go up then come down to leave the scheme) is incongruous to a traditional centre and is often commercially unattractive. The best developments have adopted street level solutions with accommodation over the ground floor for additional retail, residential, offices, leisure, restaurant, etc. (e.g. Canterbury, York). The use of sunken/underground multi-level schemes can be acceptable if the topography of the site and archaeological considerations allow. A good example of the contrast between the multi-level scheme and the 'linked levels' approach can be seen in Bath. The former Colonnades (the Podium), although located in the heart of the shopping area close to the Roman Baths failed to attract shoppers and therefore retailers in sufficient numbers. In contrast, Shires Yard, linking at two levels to existing streets and providing a more traditional 'street

interest' on two levels has been extremely successful even though located well off the prime pitch. A related point is the general failure of new centres often to reflect the traditional character of the historic street by creating little or no visual or functional interest above the shop level or indeed failing to provide an internal environment with the townscape attributes of the traditional street.



Innovative shopfront design

7.2.5 TRADITIONAL OPEN STREETS - these will allow the new development to be integrated into the existing framework of the town. Streets do not necessarily have to take vehicle traffic, but their scale must be carefully related to the scale of streets elsewhere in the town, to the scale of buildings framing the street and to the numbers of people likely to be using the space. The use of covered arcades can be successful, but normally only as part of a larger scheme. Open streets require external detailing and the use of robust materials - these invariably result in a more sympathetic design in the context of an historic townscape. The Lanes in Carlisle attempts to achieve an open, street like character while providing some protection from the elements.

7.2.6 24 HOUR ACCESS - will allow for a full mix of uses and to enable the development to fully contribute to the life and vitality of the town. Streets and squares within schemes should be adopted as public highway, so as to ensure their long-term maintenance and availability for public use and access.

7.2.7 MIX AND SIZE OF USES - a rich mix of uses, as well as a range of size of uses, is desirable to enable the development to reflect the existing character of the historic centre. Historic towns are characterised by such mixed uses as retail, restaurants, cafes, bars, small offices, residential, community uses and leisure uses. The creation of a large retail-only enclave would be totally alien to this character. Diversity will increase the appeal of the scheme to a broader range of users and extend its use during the day, the week and the year.



Roof top restaurant

7.2.8 INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH THE STREET - buildings should have an active interrelationship with the street with windows, doors, arcades etc. presenting the pedestrian with a stimulating and welcoming experience. In particular, some buildings/uses should be designed so that they can spill out into the public spaces. Detailed design should allow for seating areas, meeting points and small focal points at pedestrian scale. Large areas of blank frontage should be avoided.

7.2.9 SERVICING AND CAR PARKING - careful consideration needs to be given to the desirability of including large amounts of car parking within new developments in historic town centres. Generally, such provision leads to problems of scale and detailing and often to the creation of large blank facades. The demands for servicing can also be very destructive to the historic character of a town so careful consideration needs to be given to the realistic demand for space - often huge servicing yards are built which remain empty for the vast majority of the time. The entrance to such yards, particularly when underground or covered,

invariably present major design problems. Realistic consideration should be given to on-street servicing during restricted hours, particularly for smaller individual shop units as opposed to major stores. Innovative measures such as edge of town distribution depots, where large vehicles can off load onto smaller delivery vehicles, should also be considered, since an articulated lorry will often deliver only a relatively small amount of goods to one location. This would need to be accompanied by a restriction on the entry of large vehicles into the historic town centre.

7.2.10 EXISTING BUILDINGS - even relatively undistinguished buildings can help to provide a continuity and context for the new development and help integrate it into the fabric of the town centre. This is particularly so when there would otherwise be long facades of new development. Obviously poor buildings should be cleared from the site.

7.2.11 ENTRANCES - new developments should be in scale with the streetscape within which they are located. Often there is a tendency to provide over-large and over-elaborate entrances to increase the visibility of the centre. While the desire to do this may be understandable in marketing terms, it should be possible, through appropriate design devices, to signal an entrance without detriment to the adjacent townscape.



Sympathetic entrance feature



7.2.12 EXISTING GROUND LEVELS - should be respected and development should adapt to the topography of sites and not cut across creating new artificial ground levels.

7.2.13 ARCHITECTURAL STYLE - this should be subordinated to the urban design principles outlined above. Often there is too much concentration on the details of style at the expense of proper consideration of the urban design issues. This is not to say that architectural style is of no importance, but its consideration should come relatively late in the design process. The style should seek to establish a character for the scheme which provides something unique to its location. It is important to emphasise the three dimensionality of buildings in the context of style and to pay equal attention not only to all facades but also issues such as roofscape. Following from style, detailing is a further key issue and needs to take account of issues such as signage, art and the form and purpose of illumination. A related point is the need for the urban design principles and the architectural style to overcome the all too familiar visual domination of standardised multiple formats. Too often, the centre is relegated to any anonymous box into which not just corporate logos but standard shop fronts reproduced identically across the whole country are slotted - just the order changes. Retailers have been persuaded to adopt flexibility from the corporate standard when dealing with historic buildings so the need for individuality can also be justified in seeking to achieve a distinct identity for a new centre.

7.2.14 FLEXIBILITY - large, purpose-designed shopping centres tend to be inflexible in terms of their design and future use. The demands of the retail market are such that the same type of retail units are provided throughout the country. However, historic towns are characterised by the wide variety of uses in their centres and this is made possible by the relative flexibility of many historic buildings in their conversion to various uses. Building users also seem to be able to be more flexible in their requirements when dealing with historic buildings. Given the relative uncertainty

over the long-term future of the retail market, and bearing in mind possible future trends in shopping patterns, it would seem to be wise to consider the ability of such centres to **adapt** to other uses over a period of time. After all, the huge investment in such centres would be better protected if such flexibility could be built in at the design stage.

GUIDANCE

Major New Scheme

a) Establish need and impact (see 'Need and Impact' Section)

If results positive proceed to (b). If negative frame Development Plan policies to resist further development until situation changes (monitor).

b) Produce broad specification in terms of land take, locational requirements, relationship to centre.



Culver Centre, Colchester

c) Identify site.

If site identified proceed to (d).

If no site apparently available reassess requirements/locations considering:

- innovative solutions (underground scheme, conversions, development behind facade, use of unconventional buildings)
- reducing scale
- reducing parking requirement or seeking alternative solution
- review servicing requirement ('just in time', remote servicing, bulk break)
- breaking scheme up into modules



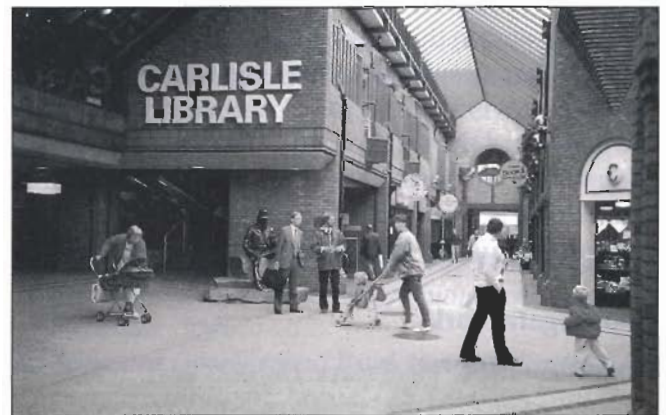
- d) Allocate site in Development Plan and support with policies stating alternative proposals will not be allowed unless their benefits outweigh those of the allocated site (to account for new sites becoming available).
- e) Prepare brief making reference to points covered earlier in this section and taking account of:
- historic, architectural and functional grain of town centres layout (streets, paths, alleys)
 - scale, vertically and horizontally
 - levels and permeability/accessibility by foot
 - complexity and diversity (uses and elements/ indoor and outdoor)
 - design and detailing
 - parking (level and management)
 - servicing (design, times etc.)
 - environmental considerations (energy, re-use of buildings, recycling, benign modes provision)
 - provision for people with disabilities
 - archaeological investigation and interpretation (if site historic) and orientation
 - controls over uses (e.g. non retail on ground floors)
- f) Package information and promote
- g) If feasible, provide benefits of a design competition, organise and select scheme.
- h) Organise public consultation and liaison with all necessary bodies then modify scheme.
- i) Nominate Project Officer from local authority to co-ordinate all Council inputs and act as main contact with developers team. Project Officer/Council Team/ Developer Team to co-operate over:
- critical path
 - legal agreements
 - operational procedures (temp. traffic orders, building regulations approval, fire safety certification)
 - additional guidance and briefs (non retail uses, signing, shopfronts)
 - management issues (parking control, opening times, events)

CASE STUDIES : CARLISLE, YORK, CANTERBURY

While considerable numbers of new shopping centres have been built in historic towns over the last 20-30 years, few of them have proved to be successful in terms of their integration into their historic setting, nor the quality of the urban design they have created. A few have achieved many of the urban design criteria set out in this document, but for one reason or another just fail to achieve the level of excellence required to act as a blueprint for other developments. Examples of such schemes are:

The Lanes, Carlisle:

Completed 1984. Floorspace 254,000 sq.ft. retail, car parking, library and residential. Architects: Building Design Partnership.



The Lanes, Carlisle

This development has an unusual history in that it was originally designed to be a scheme with open streets, and it was only when the funding institutions refused to finance the project without covered streets, that the Council consented to this amendment. A glazed roof was added to the scheme, which, while not unattractive in itself, does visually "enclose" the internal spaces and detracts from its inherent quality and sets it apart somewhat from Carlisle's traditional urban form.

However, the Council has insisted on 24 hour access and has consistently opposed the introduction of gates to the entrances to the scheme. There appears



to be little evidence of graffiti and vandalism and the scheme incorporates important pedestrian routes within the town centre.

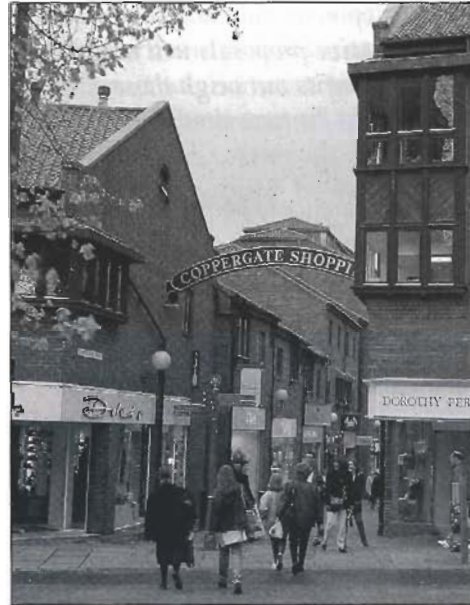
While, on paper, there appears to be a reasonable mix of uses with a library and 27 residential units, in reality it feels like a retail-dominated development. This may be because only the library is located within the scheme, the residential flats being located on the periphery and also the absence of any significant numbers of bars and restaurants or other night-time uses. At night, the development has little life or activity and makes little contribution to night-time Carlisle. One of the reasons for this may be the enclosed nature of the scheme and its subsequent loss of character and integration into the town.

Architecturally, the scheme is very contextual and sits well within the historic townscape of Carlisle. Detailing within the internal streets is as if they were external spaces with stone paving, rainwater pipes, manhole covers, etc. This is not surprising given the genesis of the scheme, and the effect is to give a robust and workmanlike character to the internal spaces that is most pleasing and helps to maintain continuity with the streets outside the development.

Coppergate, York:

Completed 1984. Floorspace 150,000 sq.ft. retail, car parking, residential and museum. Architects: Building Design Partnership.

Interestingly, Coppergate opened in the same year as the Lanes in Carlisle and is an open street-based scheme. It has a comfortably-sized central space that is well used and a number of significant buildings are retained within or immediately adjacent to the development. Good landscaping is incorporated within the square. The scheme has the benefit of a rich mix of uses, including the world famous Jorvik Centre. This undoubtedly helps to attract large numbers of people to the development, many of whom are not primarily shoppers. This helps to maintain a vibrant and busy feel to the scheme and it is well integrated into the urban form of central York.



Coppergate, York

The development includes a large amount of car parking which provides problems of scale and context for this part of the scheme, which is kept largely separate from the pedestrian environment of the retail part of the development. However, the car parking does undoubtedly help to maintain the high pedestrian flows through the scheme. Some criticism has been made of its architectural style, although its understated nature helps it to sit well within the context of York without drawing undue attention to itself. Comparison with the Lanes is illuminating as the open nature of the scheme allowing for visible roofscape, eaveslines and distant views creates a startlingly different character from that of the enclosed scheme.

Longmarket, Canterbury:

Completed 1993. Floorspace 50,000 sq.ft. retail, public open space. Architects: Building Design Partnership.

This is a much smaller scheme than those above, constituting as it does a single street block within the central core of Canterbury. In terms of scale, form and architectural detail the scheme is extremely contextual. Servicing is on-street, with the streets being pedestrian only during a core hour period. One innovation is the use of the central part of the street block as a paved space which is used for outdoor seating and catering.



The scheme is really too small to make a meaningful comparison with the schemes above, although it is feasible to imagine that a larger scheme could constitute a series of such street-block sized developments. This may also allow for a more phased form of development and introduce greater flexibility to the development process itself.

The Whitefriars, Canterbury:

Currently undergoing planning. Floorspace 310,000 sq.ft. retail, residential, library, arts facilities, church.

The proposed development at The Whitefriars in Canterbury is still in the planning stage, but the detailed planning brief that has been prepared for the site includes many of the design criteria established in this document. The proposal is for a mixed use, open street-based scheme in the form of traditional street blocks sitting within the specific urban context of Canterbury. While still in its early stages in terms of design development, this is clearly a scheme to watch.

One of the more interesting aspects of this development to date is to look at the process by which the development has progressed to its present stage. The developers first addressed the site in the late 1980s, but due to the market conditions it was not until 1994 that it was included as a proposal in the Local Plan. A Development Brief was approved in 1996 which was extremely detailed and gave precise guidance as to what form the development should take. Expressions of interest were then invited from Architects and from these nine firms were asked to present their initial ideas over a two day period. Four of these were selected to submit considered proposals and the developers ensured they retained the copyright of all the submissions. This is the stage which the scheme has currently reached. Next an Architect will be appointed to further develop the scheme, to make any alterations required to the Development Brief and submit a planning application.

There are a number of key points to remember about this process:

- 1 The sequential nature with each stage having a logical conclusion and progression to the next stage.
- 2 Close involvement between the developers and the Council throughout the process and a close rapport with Members on a non-political basis.
- 3 A Steering Group has guided the project from the early days, including Members from the three political parties, the developers, Council Officers and the developer's consultants. This Group has been the main means of progressing the scheme to avoid the potential adversarial nature of committee discussion, except where the decisions required the authority of the Committee process.
- 4 A multi-disciplinary working party will be set up by the Council to supervise implementation of any approved scheme. One should emphasise here that close control and supervision is necessary to ensure acceptable standards of implementation.

Further Reading:

1. *Approved Development Brief, The Whitefriars, Canterbury.* Canterbury City Council and Land Securities. 1996
2. *Approved Development Brief, Land at North Street, Commercial Road, Leopale Road, Guildford.* Guildford Borough Council. 1995
3. *Donaldsons' Comments on the Boots Proposal for Durham City Council.* 1995
4. *Shopfront Design, English Historic Towns Forum.* 1993
5. *Shopfronts - Alan Powers.* Chatto and Windus. 1989
6. *Making People Friendly Towns, Francis Tibbalds.* Longman. 1992
7. *Making Townscape, Anthony Tugnut and Mark Robertson.* Mitchell. 1982

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DONALDSONS



SIMONS