

Place shaping – creating liveable places



The opportunities and challenges in working with, growing and managing communities





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Contents

Introduction	1
Place shaping past and present	2
Case Study: Crathorne Estate	2
Creating liveable places	3
Case Study: Poundbury	2
The core elements of place shaping	4
Case Study: Greenstead Farm	6
Case Study: Miserden Estate	7
Garden communities	7
Success through collaboration between private and public sectors	8
Case Study: Wickham Hall	8
Contacts	9

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Introduction

Landowners are integral not just to the economy but to the places where they live and work. Rural estates have a unique ability to transform how their local communities live, work and feel. They are responsible for providing housing and workspaces, often in locations hardly touched by the public sector.

They often look after the infrastructure that creates vibrant communities, such as village halls, shops and pubs. And they manage the local environment's wildlife, landscapes and heritage which contributes to people's sense of happiness and wellbeing.

Now is a significant time for landowners. Agricultural subsidies are likely to fall for many businesses, with payments from a much smaller budget being paid for provision of public goods. There is significant demand for more housing in most places in the country, and the planning system is being revised to enable this. And the demand for leisure experiences, whether visiting a historic house or a leisure attraction, is growing. This combination makes it an ideal time to reconsider the possibilities from your property. There is increasing evidence that creating better places translates into greater profits.

This report sets out the process behind successful 'place shaping', some thoughts from experienced place shapers on how to do it, best practice, and finally considers how the private sector can work with the public sector.

We hope that this guide is useful and sparks ideas for your business. Please call our team for their expertise on place shaping and making places where people would like to live.

Place shaping can add between 5% and 55% to residential sales values. Quality community facilities are the key component within schemes. The single most important factor for people choosing an area is the provision of a good school, but it is also about combining all of the services that enable people to live better – services, convenience, design and transportation.

The most successful place-shaping schemes achieved the greatest uplift on relatively small homes, indicating that young families are willing to forego space to be part of a better scheme.

RICS and CBRE, 2016



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Place shaping past and present

The concept of place shaping, also known as place making, is not a new one. Traditional marketplaces have been engaged in place shaping for centuries, acting as hubs that bring work, retail and play together harmoniously in a community environment. Some of the great estates in London had a similar role and created places that are still admired today.

However, in the second half of the 20th century, developed areas began to move away from this concept. Post-war rebuilding and a booming economy resulted in large volumes of housing and supermarkets and a new generation of shopping centres appearing all over the UK. And in many places, the sense of community that had been fostered in previous generations by mixed-use areas was eroded.

Since the 1990s, public preferences have started to shift from spending money on goods to spending on experiences instead. This shift has been heralded by some as the saviour of the high street and, while it may or may not prove to be the case, it has reinvigorated the debate about what people demand from where they live. The internet is making shopping so easy that customers no longer have to visit the homogenous retail districts in their local town, which have no meaningful relationship with their lives or the places they love and frequent. To make retail districts relevant, they must focus on localism, curation and ever-changing cultural programmes.

Today, most people, and millennials¹ in particular, want variety in the locations in which to live, eat, work and play, so the challenge is to build and maintain successful places.

Furthermore, some of the most successful places are not in fact ‘made’, but evolve organically in response to how people behave. The role of the ‘third place’² between home and work is becoming more important.

This means place shaping, in many cases, should be a shared enterprise – communities, local authorities, landowners and businesses all have a role to play. It will become ever more important to understand the themes – digital, demographic and economic – that will shape the places of the future, allowing us to create places that work and respond to the needs of those who use them.

The process of place shaping goes far beyond bricks and mortar and architectural design. Development should no longer be ‘done to’ a place – the creation of successful small developments, villages, towns and cities is fundamentally a shared, bottom-up endeavour that creates a sense of place.

Case study

Crathorne Estate, North Yorkshire – a high-quality pub and shop help make it the sort of place where people would like to live

The estate places quality of life for its residents above all else – which made securing the perfect tenants for its pub and vacant commercial premises all the more important.

Eugene and Barbara McCoy, the pub’s new landlords, have created a very successful business, and events such as carol singing around a 26ft Christmas tree (from the estate) are helping to unite locals with paying visitors.

Five Houses Farm Shop and Kitchen have moved into some traditional buildings, where everything served in the café is made from local produce that can be bought from the shop and butcher’s counter. The shop already employs more than 30 local people.

The estate has also worked with farm tenants who have moved to a new holding to grow their farm business. This in turn has released buildings for six new homes and seven guest rooms for the pub. The inhabitants of the new homes are more likely to be attracted to the village due to the pub and café, which helps make this the sort of place where people would like to live.



1. The generation now aged 20-40.
2. This phrase was coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg.

Creating liveable places

The primary aim for all place shapers – whether for small developments, villages, towns or cities – should be to create environments that are attractive to people for living, working and spending leisure time in. Experience from around the world is that key elements to achieving this are:

- managing transport and cars well so that the places people use are largely traffic free and pedestrian- and cycle-friendly;
- having a mix of uses, so that residents and office workers are side-by-side;
- having lots of places for people to socialise and ‘be’, particularly for eating and drinking, including outdoors;
- having a programme of experiences and events that appeals to locals and visitors. Both leisure and pleasure are key elements – they create social interaction, which creates vibrancy, which in turn attracts more people.

Case study

Poundbury – one of the most famous place shaping projects in the UK

Poundbury is an urban extension to the Dorset county town of Dorchester. It challenged many of the standard principles of architecture and urban planning and instead was based on elements in The Prince of Wales’ *‘A Vision of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture’*.

Although it is high-density, it gives priority to people, rather than cars. It mixes places to work with homes, shops and leisure facilities to create a walkable community. It is large-scale – 3,000 people live and 2,000 work there – but it has been designed to feel intimate and welcoming. Many of its principles have been incorporated into the planning system.



The core elements of place shaping

The following core elements of place shaping can be used to structure thinking. Some of the examples in this section are urban, as place shaping has largely focused on urban places to date, but the principles and ideas can be applied to smaller rural places³.

1 Demand

Understanding your area and what is possible is critical. The starting point for any development or place shaping is to ensure that there is a demand – often local – for what you are producing. A prestige village development of houses, workspace and retail will not work without a large number of affluent people locally.

- Be clear on the type of experience you want to create and the type of customer that is your primary target.
- Aim for consistency between the different offers – housing, workspace, retail, leisure, public places and activities – as they all support each other to create a sense of place.

2 Good access

Being able to get to and from a place quickly and easily is important to the quality of experience.

- The experience when you arrive can have a disproportionate impact on your perception of a place – first impressions last – so think carefully about how people will ‘disembark’ and parking.
- Some of the most successful places give the impression of being car-free.
- Consider how easy and pleasant it is to get around inside the place.



‘... foster an atmosphere for people to create their own moments. Let’s ensure that every mixed-use scheme is built for music, whether it’s a speaker near a park bench, a sunken stage in a meeting area or a purpose built venue or meanwhile space.’

Shain Shapiro, PhD, Sound Diplomacy



³. *Place Shaping in Towns and Cities – A Guide*, Locum Consulting, 2009.



Hepple Estate, Northumberland – making the most of distinctive features

A walk by the estate owner past some gnarled juniper trees, a spring and a ruined building, and suddenly all of the elements fell into place for Hepple Gin.

The business is now producing a product that stands out from the competition, with five of the six botanicals used in the spirit grown on the estate.

3 Attractors

Any progressive place should be constantly thinking about how it can add to the quality and range of its attractors.

- Providing an attractive environment and cultural offer to the people who live and work there does not have to be expensive – thoughtful and creative can be very effective.
- Cultural facilities are often anchor points in places, in the same way that department stores are used to anchor shopping centres.

4 Built and natural environment

The quality and variety of spaces are often the most important factors in determining the appeal of a place – think of France’s squares and the best village greens.

- Some of the best examples of place shaping, in countries where people are found to be the most content, such as Holland and Denmark, are where places achieve a better balance between people and cars, and have high-quality open spaces and communal areas.
- Architectural details can have a major effect, such as using cobbles in ‘calmer, oasis’ areas to create a calming effect, and more formal surfaces like setts in flagship areas.

5 Eating and drinking

Eating is the activity that people most like to do on a day out, and is the main reason for going out at night.

- Getting food right is also an important attractor for tenants of workspaces.



‘Pubs have a positive, statistically significant impact on social engagement and involvement among residents – and this effect is becoming greater as other services, such as post offices and village shops, close.

Places with a pub have more community events – sports matches, charity events, social clubs – than those without or with just sports or village halls.’

**Professor Ignazio Cabras,
Northumbria University**



Cathedral Green and Queen Square, Bristol – getting the setting right can change places

While this example is in Bristol, it gives a useful blueprint for an approach that could work equally well in rural settings. Sensitive restoration of this green space and better treatment of traffic has made this one of the most popular recreational spaces in the city and a prestigious office location.

Case study

Greenstead Farm, Essex – post office, shop and cafe

The closure of the original village post office made the Butlers determined they would provide a new facility at their farm which would maintain the life of the village.

Since opening in 2007 the business has evolved and expanded. The café and post office have gone from strength-to-strength and continue to attract good business. There is plenty of car parking (including disabled bays) which the local town post office does not have. The shop stocks a small selection of convenience goods, there is a board for local advertisements which is always full and the café regularly provides 40-50 meals every lunch time.



Going Dutch? Bolsward, Holland – an attractive, sustainable small town

Bolsward has attractive spaces for people of all ages, good cycle and walking routes so people use cars less. Space for outdoor eating sustains the bars, which in turn attract people that sustain the shops.

6 Events and programmable spaces

Events attract people to places, and the best ones have a synergy with where they take place.

- Think about holding some events at times when other uses, such as office working, are not happening to benefit from both day- and night-time economies.

7 Shopping

Retail can be a core part of the experience of any place, particularly for visitors, and even for those who are not visiting a place for the shopping.

- The retail offer should complement the character and quality of the other elements of a place, such as its housing, work places and cultural activities.
- The main things that people buy on day trips are: clothes and jewellery; music, films and games; and ornaments and decorations for their houses.



‘Daytime shops can become bars and restaurants at night, streets turn into parks for recreation and leisure, and places will be re-purposed for local communities.’

Olly Chubb, Portland Design

8 Night life

Places, with some well-known examples in North America, have been able to attract people back by creating attractive places at night time. It can double the use and economy of places.

9 Resident and visitor services

High-quality telecommunications, including internet and mobile, and clear signposting make places more liveable.

Patterns of life are changing in the UK⁴.

The working environment is changing fast, with flexible working hours coupled with remote working meaning employees can work from anywhere and at any time of the day. A lot of today's jobs didn't exist 20 years ago and in 10 years' time 60% of jobs are expected to be completely new⁵. The average dinner time in the UK has moved from 5pm to 8pm.

This means that extra flexibility should be applied to opening hours for retail and leisure, and to essential services such as doctors and dentists. Late night openings should be increased.

Case study

The 21st century village – transforming the Miserden Estate into a modern, sustainable community

A state-of-the-art district biomass heating system was installed, which provides carbon-neutral heating and hot water throughout the village and has dramatically reduced its residential and business tenants' energy bills. 4G communications coverage and high-speed broadband has revolutionised life for tenants.

Garden communities

The Government is asking for bids for new garden communities – including smaller Garden Villages (1,500-10,000 homes) – either as a new settlement or a transformational development of an existing settlement.

It has described what qualities it thinks high-quality places should have:

- a A distinctive local identity**, often including attractive public realm.
- b Built with the necessary infrastructure** to allow the community to function self-sufficiently, including having capacity for future growth and to be 'future proofed' for changes in the local age profile, climate change and technological change.
- c Well-designed places**, ideally with mixed uses that include local employment, shopping, recreation and community facilities.
- d Housing that is high-quality and distinctive**, including affordable housing and a mix of tenures for all stages of life.
- e Designed and delivered with the involvement of the existing local community.**
- f Well-designed transport**, including public transport, walking, and cycling.
- g Plenty of accessible and good quality green and blue infrastructure** that promotes health, wellbeing, and quality of life, and enhances biodiversity and natural capital.
- h Arrangements to maintain community assets**, infrastructure and public realm.

Landowners interested in promoting a new Garden Community should speak to our planning team now.



⁴ See *Making places: shaping urban nightscapes* (BNPPRE, 2018) for a longer consideration of nightscapes.
⁵ World Economic Forum. *The Future of Jobs*. 2016.



Success through collaboration between private and public sectors

Collaboration between built environment practitioners, local residents, planning departments, highway authorities and public health departments is a key part of creating healthy places, but it does not happen enough⁶.

And more place shaping should be based on identifying local priorities – only a quarter of place shapers access and use local data to identify local priorities when working on place shaping projects.



‘The philosophy was to use the space (mixing restored farm buildings with new build) for commerce rather than tourism, allowing for sustainable business growth and better job opportunities in a traditional rural setting. But such place shaping can be challenging – it took 23 years of work in the planning system.’

Michael Shuttleworth, owner, Hathersage Hall Business Centre, Derbyshire

Case study

Wickham Hall, Hertfordshire – finding commercially sound new uses for redundant vernacular buildings

This mixed housing and workspace development has diversified a mainly farming business. It has also generated capital to rebuild a listed 17th century barn (called ‘enabling development’) and preserved the set of traditional buildings. It has created an upmarket and beautiful environment in which people want to work, play and shop.

A second phase of development is being considered. Letting the space is not the main challenge, it is getting planning permission.

⁶ Design Council and Social Change UK, *Healthy Placemaking*, 2018.

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