

# Creating better places

Core Connections Limited



**coreconnections**

*making the right moves*

## Urban design principles

### Creating better places

Over a decade ago Elizabeth Wrigley set up Core Connections Ltd as a consultancy to assist clients plan and design interesting and meaningful places, and in 2003 Core Connections took on several projects she started in the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit Centre Vision programme, such as Daventry's Town Centre Vision.

Elizabeth had always hoped that the new Building for Life assessment system she helped to create at The Civic Trust could last a few years. Reissued as Building for Life 12, and now 'curated' by CABE at the Design Council, it continues to be a useful checklist for developers, designers, planners and communities, to guide them through a wide range of considerations to take into account to create housing schemes that will be interesting and meaningful places.

### Cities and nature

We are a biological species and our comfort zones are known: wind, water, daylight, sunlight, darkness are all factors that we respond to emotionally.

Designers need to harness all of them to create good places.

As the proportion of the world's population living in urban environments increases and those in rural ones decrease, the design of places to help us keep nature in sight becomes more vital.

Art is another important urban design element in the city.



Art in a square in Chicago – the red colour sets off the predominately black glass materials defining the edges of this square



Poetry on the walls of terrace houses in Utrecht – note that collaboration across the owners' facades was needed to produce this effect



# Green 'Infrastructure' in urban spaces

**One mature tree in a town is worth careful planning: it will outlive its designer.**

Functions of trees in towns include:

- Shade
- Patterns created on pavements, especially in winter
- Transpiration returns water vapour back into the atmosphere
- Native species can assist wildlife to thrive
- Different seasons can be appreciated with deciduous trees
- A tree provides a focal point
- Summer shade for cyclists and walkers

Outdoor event spaces, cafes and terraces all make urban spaces more useful and offer opportunities for interaction.

Green roofs, walls, parks, allotments all offer growing spaces as well as visual interest and the importance to society of these green lungs needs to be recognised.

There is potential to integrate a more natural landscape into towns. People who care about nature and are interested in managing natural environments will join together to create such places. Regular exercise is an important requirement for health, and parks provide locations for healthy exercise and for contact with nature. One option is using disused railway lines on arches, to lift users away from traffic. The most famous of these is the High Line in New York, but one in Paris is also attractive.



Street level arches



Linear garden walk



Public spaces can use art to bring a smile to the city: Southbank London

## Land Value capture: What do we want in a 21st Century Garden City?

Looking afresh at the Garden City movement led by Ebenezer Howard, a group of founder members has set up a New Garden City Alliance, to ask the question What would a 21st Century garden city look and feel like? Is the term still important? I think it is, and at a recent Roundtable meeting in the House of Lords the New Garden City Alliance was mandated to explore this. In particular we aim to set out some minimum standards for Garden Cities, to apply in new settlements and for transforming existing urban precincts.

A key requirement is to integrate the 'invisible' architecture of the arrangements for ownership, control and funding, with the visible architecture to promote the common good. This 'invisible' element is often left out of the descriptions of the original garden city movement. It was a key element though, and is now being studied to find methods of 'capturing back' public expenditure on the essential infrastructure that enables areas to be developed. This is the extra profit from the rise in land value – additional to normal developer's earned profit from investing – to be reused locally to share with all the community, making it more self-sustaining. The community can own libraries but also cinemas; parks but also cafes; halls, pubs, shops and car parks. The funds from these will enable the cost of services to be met as communities grow, schools can be built but also workplaces and land uses can densify around transport links.

This process could call on a variety of methods for mutual ownership of land to capture and



In Bedford Park London, one of the early garden suburbs, some mature trees were kept, and new ones planted. These are now valuable assets for the environment

share its value with all residents, These models for sharing need to also be structured so as to attract investors to the places.

A Garden City is one that will seek self-reliance in energy, food and water, and most importantly will have a common shared vision.

The movement has now been started to setup the mechanisms so that an agreed definition of what a garden city is can take root and we can give new settlements the confidence to call themselves 'Garden Cities'. For details see [www.gardencities.org.uk](http://www.gardencities.org.uk) .



# Walking as a way to see the environment

Experimenting with ways to capture people's response to a place can be rewarding. Art and photography help us to see places afresh, something often achieved by taking a walkabout. On The Peckham Walkabout in 2010 Elizabeth accompanied local activists and other organisations, art college students and local artist businesses, on a discovery walk along Rye Lane.

Sketching and photographing the cityscape involves people in experiencing their environment and deciding what they value and helping them to express design aspirations. Gordon Cullen analysed spaces by 'Serial Vision': the experience of seeing the evolving views and vistas as you walk around a place, and produced his own very distinctive sketches of places, starting the art of Townscape drawing in the 1960s.

## Connecting parts of the city together

Canals provide a secret pathway through many of our towns and open places, and can help bring new connections to open up areas with new bridges and new linking pathways, for example in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

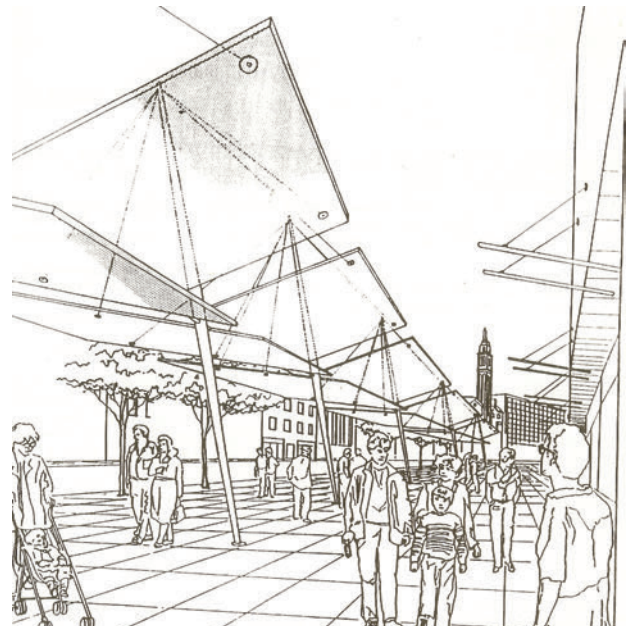


Image for unrealised project to create a new street canopy made from a teflon product. Design by Royal College of Arts students in collaboration with Elizabeth Wrigley and the late Peter Rice, one of the most imaginative and gifted structural engineers of the late 20th century

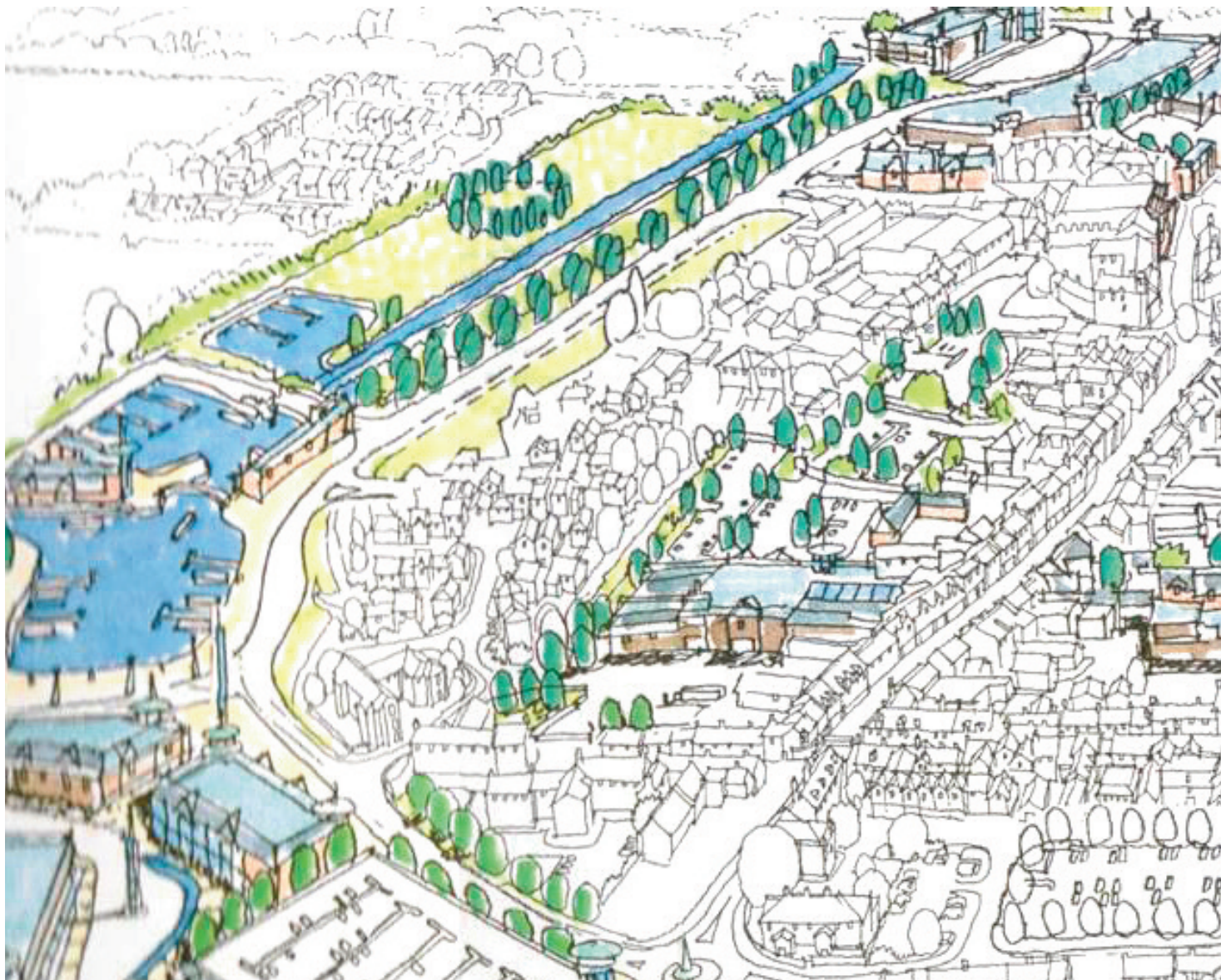


When there is nowhere to sit Photo of enterprising children sitting on a 'sculpture' mound outside the library in Peckham – taken on a community walkabout – illustrating how any space can be colonised but maybe designers do not always consider users



Photo Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park reflective bridge over canal





Elizabeth forms tailor-made teams for projects, working with architects, transport and flood risk consultants, landscape architects and site environmental engineers.

In 2003-2004, Elizabeth led a team to create a Town Centre Vision for Daventry, fully involving local businesses, local residents, schools and voluntary organisations. Prepared draft options for consultation, preferred options in more detail and a vision for the future of the town. Following the public consultation, the final plans and the last stage the Action Plan were both adopted by Daventry District Council in early summer 2004, and progress since in developing the key town centre sites here can be seen on their web site [www.daventrydc.gov.uk](http://www.daventrydc.gov.uk)





### **Core connections offers**

- Masterplans and Vision documents
- Site development briefs
- Outline Applications and development criteria
- Planning Applications and associated documents such as Daylight & Sunlight Reports, Design & Access Statements
- Community activity including initiating and responding to consultations, newsletters, blogs, websites and workshops
- Urban design advice
- Community engagement
- Framework master plans
- Neighbourhood Planning advice

*Elizabeth is on the RICS Neighbourhood Plan Examiners Panel.*



**Visit my blog:**

[www.coreconnectionsLtd.wordpress.com](http://www.coreconnectionsLtd.wordpress.com)

**Address:**

Core Connections  
38 Guildford Grove  
London  
SE10 8JT

**t:** 020 8694 6226

**e:** [liz.wigley@virgin.net](mailto:liz.wigley@virgin.net)



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