

Meeting:	BNG Board
Date:	13 March 2009
Contact:	John Sparkes
Board Action:	Decision
Sensitivity/FOI:	Public

Item 10 - Value in Design Research

Summary Report: The report provides an overview of the methodology, findings and recommendations of the Value in Design Research. It highlights the unique nature of the work and identifies how it can be applied to current and future activities in order to maximise the impact of the Growth and Renewal Programme.

Recommendations:

1. BNG and partners pursue opportunities for joint working on a range of design policies and standards to provide greater consistency across the NewcastleGateshead area.
2. BNG and partners consider the Value in Design research alongside the Northern Way Residential Futures research of the Tyne and Wear City Region in recognition of the regional strategic context and promote the concept of Strategic Urban Design being developed by CABE.
3. BNG engage with the HCA and Central Government and promote the benefits of greater uniformity in standards and guidance in achieving good design.

Implications:

Financial: Identification of potential construction cost savings and efficiency gains.

Equality: Promotion of equality and diversity issues within design to the benefit of all residents within the BNG operational area.

Sustainability: Identifies a range of measures to enhance sustainability within design.

Consultation: Reported to Advisory Group 27th February 2009. To be considered by Residents Panel at early meeting.

Risk:

Strategic: While the report does not in itself raise any issues of risk, implementation of the findings, in line with the recommendations and next steps outlined in the report, may mitigate these areas of risk in the future.

Financial:

Development:

Operational:

Reputational: Medium – Failure to progress findings would undermine BNG reputation with design led partners such as CABE

Report to: BNG Board on 13th march 2009

Subject: Value in Design Research

Agenda Item: 10

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The report provides the BNG Board with an overview of the Value in Design Research undertaken in 2008 by W.A. Fairhurst and Partners with support from Hopper Howe Saddler Architects and Eljay Research. The study was commissioned by Bridging NewcastleGateshead together with five other Pathfinders with input from CABE, Places for People and Gateshead and Newcastle City Councils.

The purpose of the research was to get a full understanding of the current landscape of design standards and guidance and to identify the social, environmental and economic value arising from good design in order to influence future BNG activity and decision making. The findings were informed through primary research with developers, residents across five housing schemes in the North East with additional research with residents in East Lancashire to establish the preferences of BME communities.

2. **OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH**

The added value of this research is considered to include:

- The research provides a 'unique' evidence base for the North East (and East Lancashire) which demonstrates that good design in new developments can create economic, social and environmental value without incurring additional costs.
- It provides the partnership with the opportunity to adopt new and innovative approaches to delivering design quality and to forge better working relationships with developers.
- It provides a starting point from which to progress further areas of related work with residents and developers which will inform and influence future decision making in relation to the Review of Resources, Strategy and Funding.
- The research provides the opportunity for BNG to provide a clear leadership role in promoting and aligning design issues within City Regional, Regional and National forums and to provide a robust and coherent approach to securing design quality.

Turning to the methodology and findings of the research, crucially **Stage 1** examined ten key design documents against nine core design issues, pulling them all together to identify complementarity and conflict. While many of the design guides rely on each other for further information as well as having a specific focus on either building design or the external environment, throughout the review the most referenced documents were:

- Building for Life
- The Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH)
- Lifetime Homes
- Secured By Design

The former EP/Housing Corporation standards (Now HCA) were also identified as being of significance in the case of schemes receiving funding.

The following key messages and conclusions are drawn from Stage 1 of the research:

- There is an overwhelming amount of design guidance available to housing developers and that the continued emergence of new guidance, coupled with the evolution of Building Regulations, is creating an increasingly blurred landscape.
- Building for Life is considered to be the best platform from which to progress design as it takes a holistic approach to buildings and the public realm.
- Code for Sustainable Homes, and the influence it will have on Building Regulations, will become an increasingly influential document for those designing homes but staged changes in the Building Regulations over coming years will make implementation difficult without subsidy.
- The creation of the Homes and Community Agency provides an opportunity to provide a lead on new housing design through new standards and clear strategic direction.

Stage 2 of the research consisted of the following primary research:

- Interviews with 200 residents across six new developments in the North East.
- Interviews with 200 residents in one new build and one refurbishment scheme in East Lancashire.
- Interviews with six developers from five housebuilders.

The research with residents identified good design as an important factor influencing their quality of life and satisfaction with their home and surrounding environment. While there were some clear differences in priorities between residents of the North East and East Lancashire, primarily related to length of residence and the role of open spaces, some broad common priorities were identified which included:

- Good design in terms of appearance and space standards (including private gardens)
- Energy Efficiency and sustainability
- Maintenance of properties and public realm
- Proximity and access to schools and services
- Safety and security (houses and public realm)
- Safe Streets / Car parking Spaces and solutions
- Green spaces and landscaping

The research with the developers gave an 'industry perspective' on the role of design in shaping new developments and providing value in primarily economic terms but also in social and environmental terms. Unsurprisingly, all of the six developers were broadly satisfied with the products they were developing but there were some key messages:

- Concern that innovative solutions to highway layout and sustainable drainage were not being embraced by the public sector suggesting issues over 'adoption'.
- Reservations over the demand for Lifetime Homes.
- Cost of embedding the higher levels of the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- Scepticism of Building for Life
- Emphasis was placed on the house as opposed to the public realm (e.g. security)
- Full recognition of the need for long term maintenance solutions.

In terms of the design priorities identified by the developers these primarily focused on the 'house' as the principal sale item with a focus on the quality of the property and internal layout. The public realm did not appear to have the same priority but issues highlighted related to safe streets, car parking and landscaping.

The added value of this part of the research is the platform it provides a platform for further site specific work to balance what provides value to residents with that of developers.

Stage 3 provides the conclusions and recommendations. It identifies how best to achieve economic, environmental and social value through design and how this can be embedded in the development process. Of greatest importance is the conclusion that good design should not be considered as an optional 'add on' which is only suitable for developments of high value. Moreover, the research suggests that if a holistic approach to design is adopted then cost savings can be achieved and should not always cost more. The report identifies that value can be created both in the home and the public realm through a range of measures:

- **Achieving Value in Property Design** - Well designed houses can enhance the quality of life of those living in them in many ways - by responding to and accommodating varying lifestyles, providing a secure environment, encouraging a sense of "ownership" and by minimising running and maintenance costs. A skilled design team which responds to space standards, materials and aesthetics, energy efficiency, construction methodology and maintenance issues should bring together social, environmental and cost benefits whilst still adhering to relevant statutory, mandatory and advisory regulations.
- **Achieving Value in the Public Realm** - The role of the public realm in achieving successful residential development and place-shaping is essential to ensure that developers begin to address the communities that they are creating. Further focus and investment in improving public spaces is essential to taking design quality forward. Again, the establishment of a skilled design team which responds to place-shaping, sustainability (including ecology and biodiversity), safe pedestrian routes and innovative hard landscaping such as Home Zones can further reinforce social, environmental and economic value as well as complementing the design of properties.

The research suggests that reservations over the costs associated with creating attractive, sustainable and safe public spaces is more than often unfounded, with many innovative approaches to design actually reducing construction costs. Although there may be some financial costs associated with improved design standards the long term social, environmental and economic benefits which are core to any regeneration work carried out in Pathfinder areas can outweigh any costs incurred.

- **Achieving Value through Maintenance** - Maintaining the quality of our buildings and public realm is paramount to future proofing developments, ensuring they contribute positively to communities over a long period of time. The establishment of a new place and quality public realm requires the combination of good design, detailing, materials, and buildings. Even when these components are integrated, the potential is rarely fulfilled without appropriate management and maintenance regimes. A key future activity will be to play an integral role in addressing the need for a co-ordinated approach to the management and maintenance of the public realm and buildings within all residential developments with a focus on cost, aesthetic appearance, environmental performance, durability, longevity and frequency and manner of

maintenance required.

- **Delivering Value through the Development Process** - The research identifies various stages of the development process from project inception through to delivery and maintenance which can reduce costs and create value. Specifically, the need to articulate a vision and engage relevant stakeholders at an early stage was identified which supports the need for further Design Enabling and Visioning with partners and other stakeholders. The appointment of a committed project team and skilled design team are also highlighted together with the appointment of an appropriate development partner who shares the vision. Developing a clear masterplan and brief which reflects local and national policy and guidance is also critical together with ensuring efficient delivery and construction methods and future maintenance regimes.

3. **NEXT STEPS**

1. BNG and partners identify a range of site specific / project based design 'choices' for the home and public realm for future BNG funding.
2. Investigate new approaches to the development process that consider procurement, cost and design quality in order to capture value.
3. Identify further areas of related work, including ongoing engagement with residents and developers, to assess the impact and satisfaction with the design of new developments.
4. Embed the research findings into BNG Options Appraisal process in order to maximise the impact of the programme and consider design implementation as part of the Review of Resources.
5. Progress with local and regional partners the establishment of a Design Enabling and Visioning Service.

4. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. BNG and partners pursue opportunities for joint working on a range of design policies and standards to provide greater consistency across the NewcastleGateshead area.
2. BNG and partners consider the Value in Design research alongside the Northern Way Residential Futures research of the Tyne and Wear City Region in recognition of the regional strategic context and promote the concept of Strategic Urban Design being developed by CABI.
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