MAKING THE CASE FOR PLACE

Conference Summary

Future of London’s full-day conference on 28 June shared practical insights on the value of place and placemaking; throughout, we asked how we can value place more effectively, inviting responses from cross-sector speakers and delegates. The conference was free to attend thanks to our sponsors.

AM Keynote

Margaret Newman, Principal at Arup, pointed out that placemaking is happening worldwide as cities seek to address similar issues, from the need to provide security in public spaces to the desire to encourage walking and cycling.

She shared successful placemaking schemes from New York such as the part-pedestrianisation of Times Square and NYCDOT’s Plaza programme, which allows local organisations to nominate underused streets for transformation into public open space. However, defensive architecture requirements for public safety can make places feel aggressive and disrupt movement. Creative solutions are needed to resolve this.

Identifying corridors of places and establishing connections between them is also important. To support this, NYC has adopted Legible London-style wayfinding and is expanding its networks of bike and bus rapid transit lanes.

Large-Scale Placemaking

Several large-scale developments are in progress throughout London, such as Royal Docks, Meridian Water, Old Oak and Park Royal, and housing zones. Chair Claudette Forbes, Director at CAF Consulting, reminded the audience of the importance of good placemaking in these schemes and building on experiences from previous large-scale development.

Local authorities should demand the highest quality places from their development partners, insisted Lyn Garner, Strategic Director of Regeneration, Planning & Development at LB Haringey. Strong leadership, bold thinking and robust policy sets the right tone, while long-term planning and narrative establish a vision and capture imaginations. Land assembly and control, procurement, and post-completion management strategies are also critical.

Sara Bailey, Head of Real Estate at Trowers & Hamlin, agreed on the importance of commissioning and vision, advising local authorities to correctly scope procurement and understand each party’s aim. She also recommended a flexible approach that responds to an area’s unique characteristics, rather than a one-size-fits-all solution.

Using Lendlease’s redevelopment at Elephant Park as an example, Project Director Rob Heasman advised fellow developers, third sector and other partners to come to grips with local authority priorities, while remaining open to experimentation and working beyond ‘red line’ scheme boundaries. Large sites offer many smaller areas that can host interim uses and gradually build a sense of place as wider development takes shape.
Working With Change

As London’s population climbs towards 10 million, competition for space and amenities will demand flexible places and placemaking. Lisa Taylor led a discussion on how to prepare for and manage change.

Nicola Bacon, Director at Social Life, expected that changing attitudes to work and leisure will support placemaking – but the demographic fallout from Brexit may have a different impact altogether.

Air quality and public health is also a growing concern, noted Elliot Treharne, Air Quality Manager at the GLA. Better health must be built into policy and integrated into design to deliver health places.

Using quantitative data for placemaking is a point of concern for Chris Paddock, Director at Regeneris. The planning system relies on static projections that can’t keep up with London’s pace of change – and are often based on out of date data. ‘Big data’ could complement this, but must be underpinned by the right research questions.

Becky Thomson, Associate Director Valuation UK at RICS, echoed Chris’ concerns, as valuation data for placemaking tends to be similarly static. RICS is aiming to develop guidance for unusual asset types, such as pop-ups/meanwhile uses, and hopes to improve assessment of sustainable, long-term value of place.

Valuing the Ordinary

London is home to countless extraordinary, world-renowned places, but its everyday streets and homes are the heart of the city. Jo Wilson, Head of Policy at Future of London, chaired this session about measuring the value in these ‘ordinary’ places.

Estate regeneration provides an opportunity to address built environment and social outcomes, said Richard Cherry, Group New Business Director at Countryside Properties. Integrating different uses and tenures, especially family housing, is important for social sustainability – as is offering new homes to existing tenants. At South Acton, Countryside is working with Social Life to measure impact of estate regeneration every two years.

Outside the central activities zone, high streets are home to 54% of London’s jobs – but the impact and value of the high street extends well beyond core economic functions. GLA Northwest Area Manager Louise Duggan called for local authorities to deliver meaningful growth on high streets through policy, leadership, maintenance and the GLA’s Good Growth Fund.

Dimensions of Value on the High Street
Andrew Beharrell, Senior Partner at Pollard Thomas Edwards, praised the privaté hedges lining London’s suburban semi-detached homes. Hedges support ecology, local employment, and neighbour interaction. As car dependence drops, reverting from paved gardens to planted gardens would have a positive placemaking impact.

Proposals for London

Graduates of recent Future London Leaders cohorts presented PechaKucha-style proposals for placemaking in London. Bhakti Depala, Senior Planning Officer at City of London, proposed using environmental modelling to create a more comfortable public realm for walking and cycling among tall buildings. Paul Gardner, Principal Regeneration Officer at LB Enfield, wants to see an app that would allow passers-by to see details of listed buildings, increasing awareness and use of heritage spaces at risk.

PM Keynote

Lucy Musgrave, Director at Publica, set the tone for the afternoon sessions with an exploration of leadership in placemaking. Traditionally, social problems were tackled by investing in architecture and design. Today, solutions require a holistic approach, incorporating housing, education, leisure, and other amenities. While leadership can take many forms – public sector, private sector, communities, individuals or partnerships of these – the critical aspect is assembling teams with skills and knowledge to set the right brief and integrate silos.

More London walkabout and Commonplace exercise

Taking advantage of the venue’s More London setting, Chris Richmond, Head of Property at PwC, and Nicola Mathers, Head of Networks at Future of London, took delegates on site for this breakout session. Chris shared PwC’s experiences as an occupier at More London, while Nicola explained how events animate the space.

After each talk, delegates were invited to use the Commonplace web platform to contribute to a live project to collect user experiences of the public realm around this sometimes controversial privately-owned public space. Mike Saunders, Director of Commonplace, analysed the results, comprising 71 comments from 38 contributors. Participants generally felt that More London was a well-maintained space, particularly for pedestrians, but wanted a less corporate environment with more public events and activities.

Recognising the role of SMEs in placemaking, Blossom Young, newly-promoted Head of Operations at Poplar HARCA, proposed cross-sector working to secure permanent SME workspace. Gareth James, Senior Transport Project Officer at LB Hounslow, questioned the role of increasingly trendy ‘parklets’ for placemaking. He recommended a cautious approach, allowing time to consider local context and resource to ensure success. Finally, turning to the theme of valuing place, FoL’s own Amanda Robinson suggested that inclusivity should be an indicator of a place’s success and offered traditional and emerging methods of measuring this.

Mobilising Community Assets

Responding to requests for more interactive conference elements, this year’s breakout sessions included two workshops. The first, led by Sophia de Sousa, Chief Executive of the Glass-House, outlined how stakeholders can combine their assets for placemaking projects. Participants identified a local need as well as the skills, networks and assets they can mobilise in response – with assets ranging from venues to items for donation to construction tools. Taking stock of existing assets can build community cohesion, develop skills and save money even before a scheme is underway.
Narrative in Placemaking

Rosanna Vitiello, Director of Local Legends, led the second workshop, which introduced participants to the role of narrative in placemaking: a strong narrative is a universal way to understand the world and nurture connections to places. Linking to Sophia’s call to mobilise assets, Rosanna stressed the importance of assembling a well-rounded project team with a diverse skill set as well as discovering a place’s ‘story assets’ and characteristics which capture the imagination. Participants investigated this concept in small groups using a photo of a familiar place. She finished the workshop by outlining how those story assets can be translated into design and delivery.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper initiatives

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) initiatives offer ways to transform places with quick turnaround and low costs. This session, chaired by Lisa Taylor, explored the role of LQC for placemaking and outlined how to maximise and measure benefits from such projects.

Tom Bridgman, Regeneration Delivery Lead at LB Lambeth, emphasised the importance of having a shared vision for LQC projects, which should be a means to an end, not an end in themselves. He also stressed that meanwhile projects need an exit/legacy strategy and expectation management to avoid disappointment at the project’s end.

At Sustrans, LQC community-led design schemes allow people to test new public realm configurations using removable street furniture. Senior Project Officer Maia Tarling-Hunter supported trials as a low-risk way to build community cohesion and confidence in new schemes with minimal red tape. She also highlighted benefits of trials such as increased walking and cycling and lower traffic speeds.

Finally, Paul Hocker, Director of London Play, warned of the health and social costs of childhood inactivity. Play Streets, which help residents connect with boroughs and enact one-day road closures, are one LQC way to address this. A neighbourhood-wide Play Quarter is also being tested, encouraging kids to explore and highlighting safe spaces throughout Palmer’s Green in LB Enfield.

Feedback on community-led design trials indicated people had a better understanding of how changes to the public realm could impact sense of place. Traffic modelling can’t represent things like ‘calm’ and ‘quiet’.

– Maia Tarling-Hunter, Sustrans

Procurement for Placemaking

Procurement can ensure schemes have the right delivery partners and a shared vision – but does it work as well as it could? This session, chaired by Simon Jeffery, Associate Director (Land & New Business) at Countryside Properties, considered the challenges, risks and opportunities of emerging models for procuring or commissioning placemaking schemes.

Bringing a housing association perspective, Sherine McFarlane, Head of Social and Economic

Regeneration at Genesis, shared her experiences of using commissioning and procurement to achieve social value. Monitoring and evaluation to show impact demonstrates return on investment and helps make a business case for this approach.

Anthony Peter, Senior Project Manager at Argent, described procurement as the beginning of a shared, long-term vision of a place’s design, construction, management and visitor experience. But not all frameworks need to be formal; flexibility allows projects to test ideas and adapt to changing market conditions.

Taking a more radical stance, Nik Randall, Managing Director at reForm Architects, questioned whether procurement is a help or hindrance, especially for SMEs who have innovative ideas but little capacity for procurement. He also endorsed a rethink over whether procuring through OJEU is necessary for all projects, noting EU neighbours use this far less.
Management & Maintenance

While procurement sets the stage for delivery, long-term management and maintenance are integral to ensuring ongoing success and sense of place. Jenna Goldberg, Director of London Communications Agency, chaired this session on place management strategies.

For Polly Plunket, Property Management Director at Broadgate Estates, control (i.e. management standards and relationships with occupiers and users) and intervention (e.g. public art, festivals, events) are the bedrock of place management. Doing these well – but without telling people how to use a space and allowing freedom for bottom-up interventions – connects people to places and enables community-building.

In place management, control sets the scene – but doesn’t steal it. Otherwise, we risk straying into dictating how people can use space.

– Polly Plunket, Broadgate Estates

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Place & Local Economy

Local economies shape a sense of place and vice versa. This session, chaired by Liz Gardner, Work Redbridge Manager at LB Redbridge asked how the two affect each other and what’s needed to deliver mixed-use places that balance London’s needs for housing and employment space.

Businesses and BIDs can take on more as placemakers and are often keen and successful at it, with several examples highlighted by Camden Town Unlimited BID’s Operations Director, Hasanul Hoque. CTU’s own placemaking initiatives include supporting creative industries which build a sense of place, tackling anti-social behaviour and championing streetscape projects such as the Camden High Line.

As 24-hour economies grow, so does contention with residents. Suzanne Johnson, Head of Area Regeneration at LB Haringey, sees this in Tottenham, where the council hopes to expand its night-time economy with restaurants, cinemas, performance spaces and leisure.

Expanding the Definitions

Chris Paddock, Director of Regeneris, chaired the final session of the day, bringing together emerging strategies and new considerations for building and valuing place.

In his role as Analytics Director at Telefonica, Alastair McMahon supports data-driven planning, using mobile data to understand how people move and congregate in places. He predicted a shift towards open data as well as

Ojay McDonald, Policy Manager at the Association of Town Centre Management, charted the evolution of town centre management to include broader issues such as housing, infrastructure, employment and tourism. The key is to establish holistic place management, rather than focusing on the useful but narrow ‘cleaner, greener, safer’ schemes of past decades. Business Improvement Districts are key players in this evolution.

There are also emerging models of community-driven, ‘common good’ land management. Kate Swade, Director of Shared Assets, cautioned that ‘community’ is not a single entity: a multitude of community groups will want different roles in land management. She also urged for land management to support livelihoods and offer income rather than rely on volunteering.
more individual control over how data is used, especially following General Data Protection Regulation enactment in 2018.

With culture critical to London’s character and a key mayoral priority, Sian Evans, Global Head of Operations at Sound Diplomacy, encouraged the audience to understand the placemaking value of local music-related assets, such as performance and production spaces. She suggested consulting with performers and venue operators to learn how to best support them.

Finally, on the increasingly central topic of healthy places, Public Health Consultant Lucy Saunders shared the 10 Healthy Streets indicators she developed for TfL. Before and after surveys with public realm users can be used to track progress against the 10 indicators during road changes and improvement schemes.

Closing remarks

Robert Evans, Partner at Argent, stated that good placemaking requires bold leadership and a tailored vision that recognises a place’s unique stories and assets but also looks to integrate beyond site boundaries. Local authorities can drive placemaking in several ways: procuring partners who buy into the vision and will deliver quality design and social outcomes; retaining land and assets to allow curation of occupiers and activities; and developing management strategies that avoid making inorganic, overly controlled places.

Assessing the value of placemaking is challenging: it’s simple to show value uplift, but difficult to attribute it to a specific scheme. But quantitative data alone can’t tell the whole story: it’s people who make places, and understanding social impact of a scheme throughout its lifetime is critical.

Speakers and Chairs

Paul Augarde, Director of Placemaking, Poplar HARCA
Nicola Bacon, Director, Social Life
Sara Bailey, Head of Real Estate, Trowers & Hamlins
Andrew Beharrell, Senior Partner, Pollard Thomas Edwards
Tom Bridgman, Delivery Lead, Regeneration, LB Lambeth
Richard Cherry, Group New Business Director, Countryside Properties
Sophia de Sousa, Chief Executive, The Glass-House Community Led Design
Bhakti Depala, Senior Planning Officer, City of London
Louise Duggan, North West Area Manager, GLA Regeneration
Robert Evans, Partner, Argent
Sian Evans, Head of Global Operations, Sound Diplomacy
Claudette Forbes, Director, CAF Consulting
Paul Gardner, Principal Regeneration Officer, LB Enfield
Elizabeth Gardner, Work Redbridge Manager, LB Redbridge
Lyn Garner, Strategic Director of Regeneration, Planning & Development, LB Haringey
Jenna Goldberg, Director, London Communications Agency
Rob Heasman, Project Director, Elephant & Castle, Lendlease
Paul Hocker, Director, London Play
Hasanul Hoque, Operations Director, Camden Town Unlimited
Gareth James, Senior Transport Project Officer, LB Hounslow
Simon Jeffery, Associate Director (Land & New Business), Countryside Properties
Suzanne Johnson, Head of Area Regeneration, LB Haringey
Ojay McDonald, Policy Manager, Association of Town Centre Management
Sherine McFarlane, Head of Social & Economic Regeneration, Genesis
Alastair McMahon, Analytics Director, Telefonica
Lucy Musgrave, Director, Publica
Margaret Newman, Principal, Arup
Chris Paddock, Director, Regeneris
Anthony Peter, Senior Projects Director, Argent
Polly Plunkett, Property Management Director, Broadgate Estates
Nik Randall, Managing Director, reForm Architects
Chris Richardson, Head of Property, PwC
Amanda Robinson, Research & Programme Manager, Future of London
Lucy Saunders, Public Health Specialist, TFL/ GLA
Mike Saunders, Director, Commonplace
Kate Swade, Director, Shared Assets
Maia Tarling-Hunter, Senior Project Officer, Sustrans
Lisa Taylor, Chief Executive, Future of London
Becky Thomson, Associate Director Valuation UK, RICS
Eliot Treharne, Air Quality Manager, GLA
Rosanna Vitiello, Director, Local Legends
Jo Wilson, Head of Policy, Future of London
Blossom Young, Project Manager, Poplar HARCA

More information

For conference slides, see slideshare.net/futureoflondon
To read about other events in FoL’s placemaking programme, see bit.ly/foiplacemaking
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