



CHANGING PLACES

For the latest in Insider's series of property leaders' forums, experts came together to discuss the connection between placemaking, public realm and healthy landscapes



ATTENDEES

Alethea Ottewell, landscape architect, HLM Architects
Mark Collins, landscape architect, HLM Architects
Shaun O'Brien, property investment and development director, The Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Kate Curtis, landscape director, Pegasus Group
Tim Axe, partner – planning, LCF Law
Scott Cardwell, assistant director for economy and development, Doncaster Council
Kathy McArdle, service director for regeneration & culture, Barnsley Council
Richard Pilgrim, project manager, Sheffield Business Improvement District
Chris Duffill, head of business, economy and growth, Kirklees Council
Dr Chris Low, chief executive, Olympic Legacy Park
Steve Davis, managing director, Grantside

OTTEWELL

Placemaking is a decision-making process that shouldn't be thought of as secondary when developments happen. It needs to be there as a lever of regeneration. Life won't go back to how it was before and we are looking at things with a fresh pair of eyes now. People want flexibility on where they work and live, what the blended approach will be and how that changes their commutes, where they want facilities to be. Policies like permitted development rights to convert commercial properties into residential in town centres can change dynamics quite quickly if you bring in more people living in town centre locations. And multiple uses of public realm keeps people in a town centre for longer too. When you build communities it is about having links between spaces for people to use at different times. This is where multi-layered active routes can play a part and the landscape can be so fundamental in terms of drainage, greenery and bio-diversity.

COLLINS

Great public realm is dynamic, it's playful and in Sheffield it draws people from the outskirts and it exemplifies what the city is to a degree. Sheffield is an example of somewhere where really great public realm has been embedded and is a real spine. The Peace Gardens is somewhere that people want to hang out in and dwell for a period of time. Green infrastructure

needs to be embedded and there should be an understanding how it is sustainable to development and green networks. There's a clear process in terms of design and embedding stakeholder and community engagement that fuels design. If you do that I don't think you can go too far wrong because you are fulfilling what the community needs.

O'BRIEN

In giving a community a sense of identity, public realm and placemaking play an integral part in this, but it's important that the heart of the community isn't lost through the process. Communities, be they city centre, town centre or more urban or rural locations have to live, work and relax in these areas for years to come and it's important that the public realm complements the identity of the community that already exists and doesn't try to change what's already there for the sake of change.

Property Leaders' Forum: Placemaking and public realm

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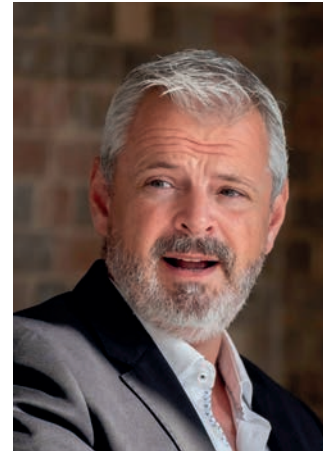
Dr Chris Low



Alethea Ottewell



Mark Collins



Steve Davis

LOW

The point about active travel is that you have to land somewhere and be able to do something when you get there. We had a US company look around the Olympic Legacy Park this week and we showed them the amazing research innovation and community spaces that are on site but the thing that really got them excited was the cycle entrance on the side of the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre because you go in and park your bike and there's a changing room and shower unit. They had seen those type of units before but usually you have to come through the main entrance of a building where you are slightly grubby. But where you land and what you do when you land is just as important as the cycle route that got you there.

DAVIS

I think it is important that places are about people and they connect emotion in people that use them whether they want to read a book, meet someone, sit in the sun, sit on a bench. It needs to be diverse in who it is attracting and not be so prescriptive in design so it can be whatever someone wants it to be. I do think that business and residential communities are key to designing great public spaces. Sometimes their views or desires are not listened to properly – some-

one else will have a vision and it is decided that's what will happen. With the scheme we have in Kelham Island we have tried to engage with the local community and bring something that the area needs. Rather than just do a pure apartment residential scheme, ours is co-living engaging with young professionals and has coworking and is raising the area, part of which has a problem with drugs and prostitution. If we give some pride to the area as somewhere people want to be and change the lighting and streetscape around the scheme, then that will also engage with the people surrounding us. Placemaking is a sum of all parts but sometimes it is done in isolation of what is around it.

McARDLE

Barnsley basically demolished all of its town centre which had been constructed in the early 1970s and we just opened The Glassworks public square last week. It was interesting to see how, after cutting the ribbon, people streamed into it and instinctively knew how to move in and occupy the space. But we had a very good study done for us and they said that about 40 per cent of our town centre retail is going to disappear in the next 20 years and some of our retail is very low level. So we are having to think hard about repurposing town centres. We have to create a new residential offer that is attractive in the town centre because a lot of it is low level apartments and we very much have to look at office accommodation because we don't have a lot of grade A or coworking space. But we are lucky because we have the lever of ownership.

CARDWELL

Covid has given a massive opportunity to master planners and strategists around reshaping town centres. There are parts of our town that we are wholesale demolishing and creating public realm to take its place and create an area for people to dwell. We have always had a planning system that is geared to delivering

economic growth and jobs. We need that but it also gives us a system that creates places where people want to live and help with an environmental agenda as well. It will be interesting how the system changes to say we won't just develop out because we need growth in this area but we need to protect our open spaces. You'll get that more in town centres. If you look at Manchester, it is massively successful in terms of the number of people that live there but that core stops at the age of 28 because there's no open space there. If you have a family, you wouldn't want to live in Manchester. So how will they deal with that?

DUFFILL

Part of this is about how the market responds to more flexible working. We see increased interest in what was called coworking space. And when we are talking about repurposing our town centres, even more importantly we are now looking for experiences. Repurposing Huddersfield and Dewsbury town centres is fundamental for us. There is potential a blurring now between private and public spaces because of working more flexibly and visiting town centres for different reasons. Ideally, we want to create public spaces where traditionally some activity once sat within buildings. And we have had to do that already

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Scott Cardwell



Tim Axe



Kathy McArdle



Chris Duffill

through the pandemic because of distancing. The funding we get from government is predicated on delivering change though we can be delivering projects but it may take quite a long time before you see a change in the market.

CURTIS

There is a swing towards multi-functionality. I can see blue-green infrastructure and biodiversity net gains becoming more important. The way we look at it is through the assets that you have to start with. If you are talking about affordability what do we have on these sites that we can already build on? I think a lot of clients are quite frightened about consultation because they feel they will get negativity and there is a worry that development is seen as a

negative. I have worked on a couple of projects recently when I thought the consultation was unbelievable and they are going into mega detail and we are talking to so many people but actually it has brought such a richness to the project that it has been brilliant and worked in the multi-functional layering of a project because you hear so many voices. And actually you realise that they aren't conflicting voices. You can cater for all these people easily. It's also about looking over the fence and connecting your site to an existing resource.

AXE

There is a tension in government policy because on the one hand you have National Planning Policy Framework and the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission where there's an emphasis on good quality design, placemaking and sustainability. On the other hand, there are a raft of town centre changes that have been brought in. So suddenly there's a Use Class E bringing together a number of town centre uses which had previously fallen within different use classes. You don't need planning permission to change within a use class

and so, as the former A1, B1 and some of the leisure and medical uses have all gone into E, you as a local authority have no control over changes between them. There are also new PD rights, notably to change the use of premises within Use Class E to dwellings (C3) and only a limited amount of control through prior notification. And then you also have new rights related to putting floors on top of buildings.

PILGRIM

We have seen disagreements with different parties about whether Pinstone Street, Sheffield, opens. Whether that is good or bad, reopening it will change the whole thoroughfare. There are big plans for connecting cycling and walking into the city centre. If there is a decision to reopen it will have a knock-on impact on what plans it replaces. There are differences of opinion. The residents' association Changing-Sheff were quite quick to respond because they would like to see it remain closed but would also like to see an electric public bus service that connects the city up. But some businesses in Surrey Street are very vocal about the need for it to reopen because they are losing trade. A difficulty you can have is ownership of property. In Fargate, Sheffield, we have some big plans around Future High Street bids but that will be two years away and the issue is now. ■



Richard Pilgrim



Shaun O'Brien



Kate Curtis