
 Editorial


Lynne Hancock – Editor

Welcome to the Christmas 2008 edition of Urban Scrawl. This edition is all about urban design, and because urban design is all about collaboration, we are delighted to include pieces both from our own team and from 'outside': from one of our Beca engineers with a not-so-secret passion for public art; and from one of our highly valued clients.

Since I came to New Zealand six months ago to develop and lead Beca's urban design business, I've met with many colleagues and clients around the country to find out what they are looking for from us, and to talk about what we can offer. Among the questions I've been asked are: What is urban design? How does it fit within Beca? And how does it add value?

The Value of Urban Design

Urban design has value in several ways. It's not only about cost savings and project efficiencies – although I would argue that it can achieve those – but about the contribution it makes to project outcomes and by extension the contribution it makes to our built environment. Aspects such as functionality, accessibility, equity, social sustainability, valuing natural heritage and residential amenity are not outside people's thinking even if they are not used to naming them urban design considerations. The most important thing, I think, is that people understand when they have a poor environment and when they have a good one. Our parents, children, families and friends are all part of the communities that our urban design projects aim to serve. Good urban form has been described as

the "glue for a community", supporting interaction and involvement, shared activities and a sense of belonging. So in our work the outcome is not just the successful conclusion of a project but the long term outcome for the built environment, and for how we interact with it.

Across all our disciplines is the possibility to plan, design, engineer, build and manage places our parents and our children can use and enjoy using. Where urban design sits, and where it can add value, is – everywhere and at any stage in a project. Urban design is a process for bringing all the pieces together and working with project teams to consciously improve the quality of our infrastructure, towns and districts, way beyond the spatial or temporal boundaries of the project.

I prefer to talk about a process or an approach when discussing what urban design is. It's an approach that takes its cues from the particular place, that takes environmental responsibility seriously, and that tries to make a positive difference to people's experience. And it is about inspiring and supporting others – colleagues and clients alike – to deliver that kind of value, to make a contribution to individuals and communities.

I think all of us – planners, architects, engineers, designers, developers and councils – can engage in projects, processes and conversations that are value-focussed. That by doing so we tap into what's possible. And that doing so is enormously valuable to us as individual professionals, as teams, and as part of our wider communities.

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Planning and Designing tomorrow's Auckland

We talked with Penny Pirrit, Group Manager City Planning, Auckland City Council

Penny Pirrit has been a planner all her life - and she loves it. She is equally passionate about Auckland. In fact she has worked with Auckland City Council for most of her career, and has remained committed to the city because, in its continual change, she sees a constant challenge. Penny has, in the past, lectured in planning for Auckland University and was part of the working group that developed the NZ Urban Design Protocol. Now Group Manager, City Planning, she is responsible for the delivery of the new District Plan. Beca's planners and urban designers have been fortunate to work with Penny and her planning team over the last year to help deliver the Future Planning Framework that is a key stepping stone to the District Plan. The Framework will be released to the public in March next year for consultation.

We talked to Penny about the work Auckland City Council is doing, her views on planning and urban design, and her hopes for the future of the city and its people.

What's good about your job as Group Manager?

I'm leading a really exciting process, a new approach to District Plan review for Auckland city. We're aiming for the Future Planning Framework to give people a good snapshot of the future for their neighbourhoods and for the city as a whole, and importantly, we want the whole process to be less complex and more outcome-based.

Tell us about the background to the Council's Future Planning Framework

During my career I'd been through the old Town and Country Planning Act system, and then through the introduction of the RMA. With the RMA we all launched into doing District Plans in a way that threw out the bones of the town planning - the integrated approach to planning for a city - because we were excited about the new effects-based approach. What we lost along the way was the reason we were doing things, and because of that we didn't get the great outcomes we wanted.

The lesson for me was that we need to go back to that integrated planning approach. This means not thinking of the effect to manage but the outcome to achieve - and then working out how achieve it, whether by a rule, a bylaw, education or advocacy. The District Plan is not the only mechanism available, and we should use other ways if they're appropriate. So, when it came to review the District Plan for the isthmus, we didn't want to jump into just fixing it up, leaving the form and structure as it is - we saw that as an opportunity to do better.

So what are some other ways to do better?

To me planning the future of a city is a huge privilege that we as planners must not take lightly. The policies and rules we impose in our district plans affect people's daily lives. We therefore need to understand our communities - both our resident and our business communities. Often due to time and resource constraints we don't do enough work with the community on understanding the urban environment and what makes a city work well for them. Spend time up front with people; go out to them with outcomes that are easy to understand. This will be an iterative process and it can sound cumbersome, but it's also an opportunity to educate as well as listen, to get communities to understand that there may be trade-offs in shaping the city. If there is acknowledgment that the community engagement process has been thorough then even if you don't get consensus from people, you have a better chance that they understand the decisions that come out of it. One of the benefits of this should be that the time spent up front translates to fewer barriers later on.

What sort of barriers are we talking about?

The right to appeal plan changes is one. Here's an example: Say a masterplan was developed for an area and there was strong community involvement, with Council setting out clearly why it wanted certain things for the site. People involved in the process understood and supported the final master plan. The resulting plan change was designed to implement that master plan. Of course, the plan change should go through the normal process of submissions and a hearing. The councillors on the hearing panel then make a decision - which is the correct approach as they have been elected by the community to make policy for their area. But then, why should a few individuals have the right to question that? The current appeal process can drag on for years, causing more work for both applicants and council staff, and often not exactly achieving the outcome originally sought by the plan change. My personal view is that no appeal rights should exist for plan changes or district plan reviews as long as appropriate community engagement has occurred upfront of the process. If the community doesn't like the outcome they can use the three-yearly election cycle to express their views.

Continued

Because of the tight timeframes, we wouldn't have been where we are today without the help and support of Beca's team

And as you've said, that's often not the end of it – so what is it about Auckland's approach to planning that might make a difference?

We're using the Future Planning Framework as a step along the way, something to demystify the planning process. It will use language people can understand, and it will have a mixture of words and pictures to help convey the outcomes we're proposing. We think the visual expression of the planning is very important.

Is that where you see urban design supporting planning?

I sometimes think that urban design is not so much different from planning, just that it has refreshed some of the more traditional aspects of planning such as the structure/layout of areas. In doing so it has focussed more on visual and spatial methods of explaining outcomes. It does also get in closer – sometimes planning can be more generic in its approach where urban design will consider the specifics of the place. So they are probably complementary.

You're using a number of urban designers on the Future Planning Framework team. How else does urban design fit within Council?

Urban design in Council probably dates back to around 1999. Our first growth strategy "Growing our city through Liveable Communities" had an urban design companion document, and in early 2000 we introduced a number of plan changes which required new development to

be assessed against urban design criteria. Our Urban Design panel was set up in 2003, and of course Ludo Campbell-Reid came to Auckland as our urban design champion in 2006. We have urban designers involved in strategy as well as in assessment. It's part of our desire to keep lifting our game in terms of planning the city's future.

Is lifting the game part of the constant change you talked about in Auckland?

It ought to be! We haven't been helped by the Building Act, which in the past set very basic standards, and in some cases no standards at all (for example the lack of minimum apartment sizes); so our plans have to work harder. We are aiming for quality development and we expect developers and their designers to do the same, not to tell us that the District Plan 'made' them do a poor development.

If we can all lift our game, what sort of city do you envisage? What's your great hope for Auckland?

That we embrace being an urban environment. I think we don't quite understand the benefits of compact cities, that they can support and enrich people's lives. We're all time poor – how much better if we don't have to travel long distances between home, work, the shops? Young people would benefit the most – and they should have the opportunity to have all the great things Auckland can offer. We're hoping that through the Future Planning Framework and the new District Plan that we can paint a picture for people of some of those benefits, and that the city keeps on changing for the better.



Bigger, Better, Bolder Biennial

Thanks to the omnipresent Venice Biennale the term “Biennale” (or “Biennial” if you are English-speaking) has now become synonymous with a host of international contemporary-art exhibitions occurring every two years. Although conceived in another era, the biennial has continued to flourish. Today almost every modern city in the world holds one.

Many biennials sprung from the need to promote a developing city, but other quite specific motivations also exist. The Johannesburg Biennial was inaugurated as an action toward reintegration; Germany’s Documenta in 1955, intended to reconcile German public life while the Taipei Biennial formed a symbol of a new growing economy. However, it is generally understood that the staging of a biennial denotes a cultured place, often with aspirations to build an international profile.

Sunday 9 November marked the final day of the six week outdoor exhibition of the SCAPE 2008 Christchurch Biennial, New Zealand’s very own contemporary biennial of art in public space. The theme for SCAPE 2008 was Wandering Lines: Towards a New Culture of Space, with 25 works from artists from 15 countries. For the second time SCAPE was co-presented by the Art & Industry Biennial Trust and Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

Organisers of SCAPE, the Art & Industry Biennial Trust, who this year celebrate their 10 year anniversary say SCAPE evolved from a desire to enable new “art in public space” for Christchurch and to connect an international art community to our city. SCAPE is now the largest producer of new contemporary artwork in New Zealand and plays a unique role engaging the public in contemporary art through partnerships between art and industry.

An important milestone, the fifth SCAPE Christchurch Biennial was met by a bigger, better and bolder SCAPE Biennial. Along with the international entries SCAPE 2008 saw stunning artworks by local and national New Zealand artists.

Endeavour, by Japanese artist Tatzu Oozu saw thousands of visitors clambering up its exterior staircase to see exactly where the Captain James Cook statue in Victoria Square had disappeared. Although more than 210 years since Cook landed in and made his mark on New Zealand, when Bob Blyth, Deputy Chair of Christchurch’s Art & Industry Biennial Trust and Project Director of Beca, asked a number of locals where his marble statue was located, most didn’t know. Just as well, then, that Oozu’s artwork focused on the famous explorer.

“Oozu’s work in Victoria Square offered a contemporary take on an historical sculpture,” says Bob. “By changing the context and placing James Cook in a familiar domestic environment, Oozu let Christchurch see Cook the man. We were

able to get a new perspective through the physical intimacy with this significant public figure. Equally importantly, it put him in the spotlight and reminded us where and who he is.”

Oozu’s work centering on the Cook statue is similar to work he has done with famous statues in other parts of the world, including Queen Victoria in Liverpool England.

With full-time invigilators (often moonlighting as James Cook history teachers), the visitor experience was memorable, especially to tourists who described the sculpture as, “Excellent modern use of a classic”, “truly amazing!, WOW! I had no idea what to expect- very impressive”, “Up close and personal, great opportunity!”

Endeavour is typical of the kind of complex project SCAPE achieves - with an artist, designer, contractor and supplier coming together to realise the artist’s vision. Beca filled the role of ‘designer’.

When Tatzu first met with the design team at Beca earlier this year it became apparent that the resources needed for his project were considerable.

Once Beca had resolved the detailed engineering required to make a temporary four metre high structure to “house” the Cook statue they worked with local contractors, Fletcher Construction to finalise the construction detail.

Marc Mendonça, Executive at Fletcher pointed out that although the artwork was only on display for 6 weeks, “the structure needed to comply with current building regulations and while temporary, had all the detail you would find in a regular building – bar perhaps, the understated exterior cladding.”

The interior – which had all the items one would expect to find in a typical Kiwi home (including the shower of course) were supplied locally by sponsors - perfect for furnishing Cook’s short-term home in a contemporary way.

At the corner of Colombo and High Streets is the Trust’s seventh permanent artwork, Flour Power by New Zealand artist Regan Gentry. Gentry’s 13-metre high contribution to SCAPE 2008 was made possible by the Christchurch City Council’s recently reinstated Public Art Fund and substantial donations from Adrienne, Lady Stewart and the Estate of the late Sir Robertson Stewart.

Beca was involved in the reviewing of the structural design and the consenting process, using our engineers to work with the artist. Bob Blyth believes that engineers and artists have more in common than many people believe.

“Both are creative thinkers who bring to life what exists in their imagination. And in many cases, their professions intersect, as they have done for SCAPE”.

Public Art

Biennial SCAPE Festival transforms Christchurch once again, with Beca providing structural and engineering advice to showcase some superb artworks



Bob Blyth with Endeavour by Tatzu Oozu



Erecting Flour Power, Regan Gentry
Photo: Fletcher Construction

Making changes to everyday spaces

Working with Manukau City Council and local businesses to improve their spaces

Beca has been working with the Economic Development section of Manukau City Council to deliver improvements to town centres through the BID (Business Improvement District) model.

BID's are defined areas within Manukau where businesses have established a local association and work together, with support from the council, to improve their area and attract new business and customers. The local business associations receive additional funding, generated through targeted rates, for programmes which range from security improvements, maintenance, lighting improvements, signage and graffiti control to events and streetscape initiatives.



One of the highlights has been work at Dawson Road, Otara. This is a privately owned shopping centre owned under a body corporate structure built in the 1980s, with a "the car is king" philosophy. A series of shops are arranged at the rear of the property with a large carpark on the street frontage. Pedestrian access from the street was shared with the vehicle access; and pedestrians had to dodge cars to enter the shopping area.

Our work involved discussions with the shop owners to identify a series of priorities for improvement. The result was improved road marking, signage and landscaping as well as providing separate pedestrian access to increase the legibility of the space. These improvements do not rely on highly specified materials but look at the way the spaces function and, through redesign, provide greater primacy and recognition to the rights of the pedestrian.

The previous situation has been greatly improved with a clear pedestrian path, making walking to the shops a much safer and more accessible option.

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Urban Design: where planning and architecture meet

Young urban designer Hweinee Choo talks about what urban design means to her



Urban design is an area of study that is often seen as an extension of either planning or architecture. As a person 'equipped' with both architecture and planning training, I have often been told that my combination of skills will find a perfect home in urban design. In many ways this is true - the technical skills I have gained from both academic fields have equipped me with a fabulous basis for understanding both the planning issues involved, and providing me with the graphic skills and spatial design understanding that is useful in urban design.

If asked a couple of months ago to describe what urban design is, I would have answered something along the lines of "urban design is about designing a city rather than a building". If asked the same question now, after my short couple of months here, I think that description is grossly inadequate. Urban design can be the above, but it is also about visioning, facilitating, connecting and balancing.

- **Visioning:** designing 'time-withstanding' spaces and their connections for now and the future

- **Facilitating:** finding a compromise between designers, planners, engineers and the public
- **Connecting:** forming a sustainable relationship between people and the environment; and
- **Balancing:** getting some kind of equilibrium between needs and wants, the urgent and the 'nice to have'.

Without doubt, my views on urban design will continue to evolve but for now I see it as the area where planning and architecture meet. At the same time, it is a field in its own right with its own roles and functions.

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New team member

Our national team now includes Jeremy Cooke, Senior Landscape Architect, who is based in Christchurch. Jeremy brings many years' experience in landscape and urban design, and a very welcome presence to the South Island.

Urban Design in Practice: The Waterview Connection

Working with NZTA on the largest infrastructure project in New Zealand



The Beca urban design team is involved in a number of infrastructure projects across the country. By far the highest profile project is the Auckland Waterview Connection, a project for the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA).

The Waterview Connection will provide a 4.5km extension of State Highway 20 connecting the northern end of the Mount Roskill Extension with State Highway 16 at Waterview. Approximately 3.2km of the route will be accommodated in deep tunnels. The Waterview Connection is planned to contribute to the region's economic growth by enabling people and goods to be moved more efficiently. At a local level, the Waterview Connection is intended to take business freight and through traffic off local roads, freeing them up for improved public transport services and reducing 'rat running' on residential streets.

The Urban Design Framework is one of many documents that will be submitted in support of the Notice of Requirement and Resource Consent.

The Framework has a broad scope which aims to facilitate the alignment of NZTA, Auckland City Council, Auckland Regional Council and ARTA's planning, transport and urban design initiatives in the areas surrounding the project.

The Urban Design Framework is the result of intensive collaboration between NZTA's project team and stakeholders involved in the Urban Design Working Party. Drawing on the wider project team for technical inputs, the Working Party is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency forum which has provided an invaluable sounding board for the preparation of the Framework.

The construction of the Waterview Connection requires sizeable areas of land at either end of the tunnel around the portal areas. The Framework presents high level urban design concepts for the two portal areas, taking into consideration Auckland City and Auckland Regional Councils' strategic plans for both these areas and in particular, their aspirations for growth and land use intensification. Other key considerations include the future expansion of the Avondale Southdown rail line and potential provision of a railway station within proximity of the southern tunnel portal. The presence of Oakley Creek, Waterview Park, Waterview Primary School, archaeological sites and an extensive network of green spaces near the portals have also informed the proposals.

The first phase of urban design work on the Waterview Connection is coming to an end. There is however plenty still to do to deliver the detailed design on what could be one of Auckland City's most significant landmarks for the 21st Century. The Beca urban design team will certainly be keeping a close eye on this exciting project!

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