



PLACE-MAKING AND THE FLIGHT BACK TO CITIES

Leaders from the Yorkshire commercial property industry met at the offices of CJCT Studios in Leeds to discuss the important of place-making in urban developments

ATTENDEES

Tony Hall studio director, CJCT Studios
David Smith associate, Indigo Planning
Rosemary Edwards head of residential development, Shulmans
Helen Tipping senior landscape architect, Mott MacDonald
Martin Farrington director of city development, Leeds City Council
Julian D'Arcy principal, Foundation Real Estate
David Wells regional director for Yorkshire, Muse Developments
Chris Sands creative director, The Piece Hall
Ed Ellerington national acquisitions director, Grainger
James Wilson partner, residential investment and development, Allsop

Place-making is becoming important in commercial property development in the context of the flight back to city centres for work and living. Creating a sense of place, with a mix of uses, attractive public

realm and preserving heritage goes hand in hand with the physical buildings and good transport links.

Place-making has been the main focus of the South Bank development in Leeds: "It's recognising how you bring the components together so it's not just about the individual buildings and the architecture," says Martin Farrington, director of city development at Leeds City Council. "It's about the uses and the places in between. So you've got components there [on the South Bank] about education, sustainable heating, looking after the heritage, enhancing the waterfront – a series of elements that go together to create that opportunity."

USE PUBLIC REALM TO CREATE VIBRANT SPACES

Investment in public realm and green space can have a transformative effect on city centre development – it's in abundance in Hull, to coincide with being the UK City of Culture 2017. The council invested £25m into an 18-month programme.

Place-making has had a positive effect in cities such as Wakefield and Sheffield too. David Wells says: "The public realm in Sheffield all around the Heart of the City and the run-up from the station – what a difference that investment made. They knocked down the old 'wedding cake' and the 'egg box', and it's made a huge difference to what they've achieved with residential, offices, the casino and car park. That's really how I think investment in the place can make a difference."

The changing nature of retail should also be factored into place-making. David Smith, associate at Indigo Planning, says: "Towns and city centres aren't all about retail anymore because people shop online. It's working with the council to strike a balance and making sure you have streets full of cafes and restaurants, and it's a nice place where people enjoy going."

The geography of a city can help or hinder development. In Leeds the river and canal have been the most under-developed parts of the city, which are only now starting to be used to their advantage. Tony Hall, studio

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director at CJCT Studios, says: "The rivers and canals in Leeds make fantastic features around which to develop. We've done Riverside East – the bridge that came forward and that connected with the canal path at the back of the station – and then Granary Wharf came forward. With all these things, the geography of land really helps."

PRESERVE CULTURE TO CREATE IDENTITY

Heritage and culture can give a city a sense of identity. One of the biggest projects in Yorkshire is the reopening of the 238-year-old Piece Hall in Halifax, following a £19m renovation and restoration. With the courtyard and colonnades it has been likened to a St Mark's Square in the middle of Yorkshire.

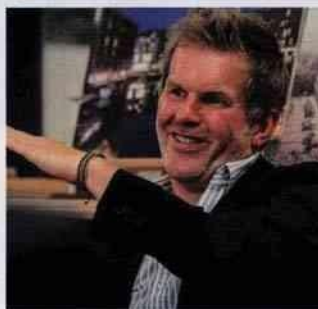
Not only is the mix of shops, leisure facilities and heritage uses important for the project, so is the desire to create something different. Chris Sands, creative director at The Piece Hall, says: "We've been really careful in who we take on. An American food and beverage company wanted to take a huge part, which wouldn't fit in with what we're trying to create, so we're playing the long game. It's Yorkshire, it's independent and it's got to add some value to the place."

After many years of out-of-town office development there has been a trend to rebuild the supply of grade A city centre offices, creating entire business districts and attracting some big occupiers. Law firm Shulmans recently moved to the MEPC offices at Wellington Place in Leeds. Rosemary Edwards, head of residential development, says place-making matters for workers and the benefits can be seen with the wide open spaces and bars around Wellington Place.

"We've seen the benefits of what MEPC has been doing there in trying to create a community among workers. It's not only working for Wellington Place, it's drawing others in as well," she says. "It's become a thoroughfare and I hear lots of people saying they've come to the restaurant from elsewhere in town. If you are there on a sunny Friday night it's heaving with people. That's great and has happened in a relatively short space of time. And it's nicely done; the landscaping stuff just looks good."

Getting the balance of uses right is another challenge. Helen Tipping, senior landscape architect at Mott MacDonald, says: "Mixed use adds to the vitality of a place because it means people use it all times of the day. That's absolutely key to the success."

Creating a sense of identity or even 'brand' can help develop further attachment to a city



and that's one reason Leeds is bidding to be European Capital of Culture for 2023. Farington says: "Win or lose, it will be a useful exercise to go through to ensure that as the city grows and develops on the West End, the South Bank and the East Street corridor we capture the culture of the city and the place and use the bid as a way of galvanising the city behind that."

HOW PRS IS DRIVING THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY

The growing number of people moving back into city centres to live, particularly with private rented sector (PRS) schemes and student accommodation, makes place-making a vital part of planning.

One of them is Monk Bridge, a New York Highline-inspired £95m mixed-use development off Whitehall Road in Leeds. The Victorian viaduct will be turned into 307 PRS apartments. Julian D'Arcy, principal at developer Foundation Real Estate, says: "Creating communities is what it's all about, as well as having spaces for people to meet and recreational space. One of the issues in the past, having been in that market, is that when the last units are sold the developer walks away, they have no future interest. With PRS it's an integral part of the strategy to create public spaces and maintain them."

James Wilson, partner for residential investment and development at Allisop, adds: "It's creating a place for someone to come and live, but from an investment point of view it's no longer just build a block of flats. They are developing an investment they have got to justify to investors, and by doing that and creating a place where people want to live in the long run then they'll be able to that."

Grainger is about to start on its PRS development of 242 residential units and amenities at the former Yorkshire Post site in Leeds. Ed Ellerington, national acquisitions director at Grainger, says the strategy is to spread its PRS development of between 750 to 1,000 units in Leeds across the city centre and slightly further out to more family-friendly locations. He says that while there is a trend back to city living among younger workers, he doesn't yet see families doing that.

He explains: "It's something we looked at quite heavily and we talked about the idea of having three and four beds on that site. But you end up with three sharers in those buildings, not families. The key is then trying to find that one stage out where you've got more greenery. We're not necessarily talking about housebuilder boxes, it's more maisonette townhouses that can still be quite dense but offer more for a family – within five or ten minutes of the city centre, near to transport links. In our mind that's one of the key parts of PRS: it shouldn't be just about the young 20-to-24 year olds."

Edwards, however, highlights Citu's plans for the Climate Innovation District on the South Bank as an example of a city centre development where families will want to live. She says: "Citu thinks it will be a site where families will want to live because of the schools and the infrastructure around about and that's very much a part of how they are going to be selling the scheme. You can move from a two-bed apartment to a four-bedroom house within the same area. It remains to be seen whether that will work."