

# HEALTHY CITIES: DESIGN MATTERS

# regen 2015 LIVERPOOL

Amy Casey | Ribbon Walls (detail)



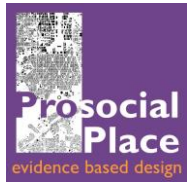
We face a public health crisis with greater awareness of the health impacts of urban environments than ever before. In the wake of Marmot we also have greater social responsibility and can no longer turn our backs on these issues.

Successful places are not simply about building, or growth or spending. The issues are complex, demanding design thinking that is appreciative of the impacts of place on behaviour.

We must now underpin our common sense with a common wisdom.

# Healthy Cities: Design Matters

talk transcript



**Graham Marshall** BA(Hons) | PGDipLA | MAUD | CMLI

Graham worked for several leading London design practices for over a decade before joining **Liverpool Vision** as a founding director in 1999. He was responsible for the creation and successful delivery of the City Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework, winning many awards for this work.

Establishing **Maxim Urban Design** in 2004, Graham turned his focus to towns and communities, acting primarily as a design advisor to public clients. At the same time, he was an Urban Design Advisor to the London Development Agency, and an active member of several regional Design Review Panels. He is a Built Environment Expert with Design Council CABE, acting in an enabling capacity and is a trained member of their current Active By Design Programme.

In 2013, Graham established the Prosocial Place Programme, partnering with academics in Liverpool and Middlesex Universities to address the issues of 'harsh environments' and their effects on communities through an integrated evidence base approach to urban planning, design, development and management. He has transformed Maxim into a social enterprise, **Prosocial Place**, to implement this action research.

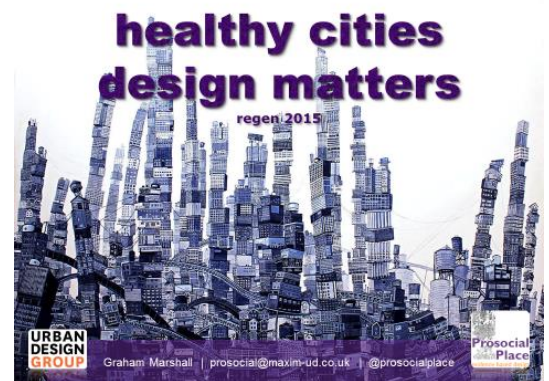


## Slide 1 - Cover Slide

Today I am going to discuss the importance of health to the success of any urban economy and the role that design plays in that.

Churchill understood the importance of this when he said: **“We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”** His statement was a call to arms to rebuild our cities and thus our communities following the blitz on London.

In hindsight, our post war regeneration has not shaped us well....perhaps it has led to a public health crisis. In my talk today I will argue that people make a city, not buildings....and when people are healthy the city is viable.

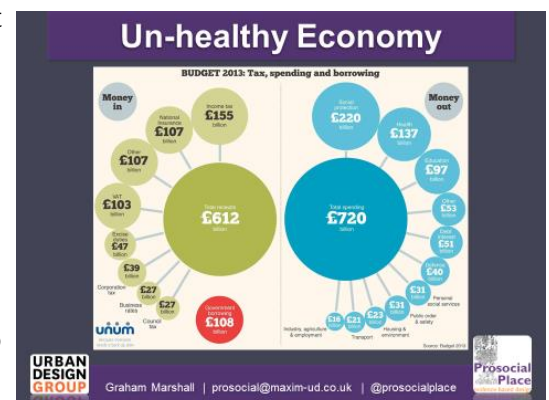


## Slide 2 – Un-healthy Economy

We all know that our economy is in an unhealthy condition and that it is any government's task to address the immediate issues. But it is also important to understand and address the long term issues too.

We have a public health crisis clearly reflected in the health and welfare spend on the right....but what this crisis also does is suppress the potential growth on the left.

Just reducing spend on the right does not address the issues. It does not make people less dependent on the state. It does not help them to contribute positively to the economy. It might make things worse.



## Slide 3 – Un-healthy Communities

The world-wide recession has not caused this public health crisis in Britain. It has just brought its unsustainable cost into the light.

The outcome of this is cross party support for strategies to address the issues culminating in the Dept of Health's report: **No Health Without Mental Health.**

This is a very important 'statement' that I would ask you to consider. With better mental wellbeing all people thrive and are more resilient.

A recent study has added to the body of evidence on mental wellbeing that makes a connection to design....loneliness and social isolation. Not only is it a killer in its own right, its impact can promote those better known issues of obesity, substance abuse etc.

## Slide 4 – The “Urban Penalty”

The link between urban environments and mental wellbeing was made by social scientist in the 1930's. Known as the 'urbanicity effect', it's process is not yet fully understood. However, its outcomes are measurable and are referred to as the 'urban penalty'.

In Liverpool the effects are greater than other urban areas despite access to the greatest amount of urban greenspace in the country and potentially high levels of vitamin D3 via high sunshine levels – 'potentially' because you have to go outside to get the benefit and ironically Liverpool communities have the lowest levels.

It is clear that isolation is a key issue in Liverpool and perhaps the creation of harsh environments has a lot to do with this.

## Slide 5 – The Dynamics of Place

We modify our environments to suit our needs and to reduce uncertainty over resources – hence our economic preoccupations. The outcome is urbanisation which is only possible because we are highly intelligent social animals.

Looking at our habitat as 5 key capitals we see that when individuals, communities and built infrastructure are disconnected, environmental capital becomes 'toxic'. We respond to these environments by adapting our behaviours - 'future-discounting' our health, education and relationships. These are good strategies for survival though some may not like them – eg teenage pregnancies.

This impacts upon economic capital in predictable ways. The cost of managing this scenario becomes unsustainable with the knock-on effect of being unattractive to investment. A vicious downward spiral is established. **Importantly**, health seems to be the biggest casualty in what we can call **harsh** environments.

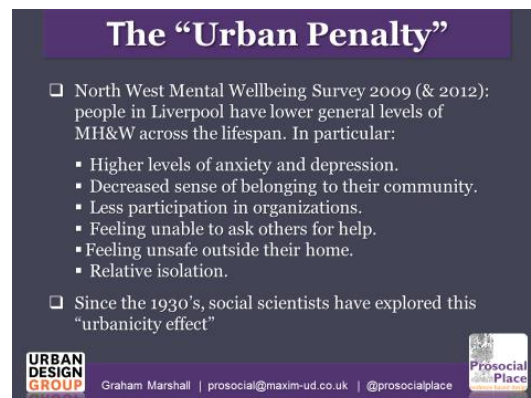


**Un-healthy Communities**

- Healthy Lives, Healthy People: our strategy for public health in England Department of Health
  - “Mental health problems are extremely common: one in six adults will have a mental health problem.... Recent estimates put the full cost at around £77 billion, mostly due to lost productivity.”
  - No Health Without Mental Health
  - “Loneliness and social isolation are just as much a threat to longevity as obesity. The effect occurs even for people who like to be alone. Lack of relationships is a bigger health risk for people under age 65.”

Hub: Lunnard et al 2015

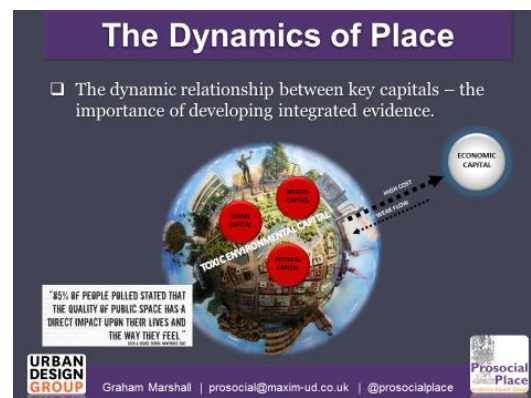
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**The “Urban Penalty”**


- North West Mental Wellbeing Survey 2009 (& 2012): people in Liverpool have lower general levels of MH&W across the lifespan. In particular:
  - Higher levels of anxiety and depression.
  - Decreased sense of belonging to their community.
  - Less participation in organizations.
  - Feeling unable to ask others for help.
  - Feeling unsafe outside their home.
  - Relative isolation.
- Since the 1930's, social scientists have explored this "urbanicity effect"

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**The Dynamics of Place**

- The dynamic relationship between key capitals – the importance of developing integrated evidence.



“85% OF PEOPLE POLLED STATED THAT THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SPACE HAS A DIRECT IMPACT UPON THEIR LIVES AND THE WAY THEY FEEL.”

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## Slide 6 – Creating Healthy Cities

When we bring the capitals together we have an opportunity to create a benign environment in which we can begin to cooperate and thrive. We reduce the harshness of the environment and our behaviours change.

Places become low cost and attractive to investment, setting in train a virtuous process. This is an evolutionary approach to placemaking, with a strong evidence base grounded in evolutionary psychology.

**Importantly**, it is about our human ecology.

## Slide 7 – Design Quality

If we are creating harsh environments on such a scale that it makes us sick and economically unsustainable, we need to look at the mechanism that we employ.

We intuitively recognise good places by our evolutionary responses. But we seem incapable of translating that knowledge into action.

The National Planning Policy Framework and its guidance documents talk about “well designed” places, but without a clear definition this is a meaningless phrase open to universal interpretation.

It also primarily applies to new design – not the ongoing maintenance of existing places where the majority of people live. We have already built 85% of the building we will have in 2050 – it is therefore essential that we develop better mechanisms for managing these places.

## Slide 8 – Designing the City

Design is an interesting word. To many it is an add-on, a luxury a non-essential in a recession.

The reality is that any decision leading to action that effects a physical change is a design - for better or worse. Place management is the biggest design activity there is in cities – particularly traffic management. Movement is the primary form giving activity of any city – it can bring a place to life or kill it.

In the New York example, design started out with a port dictated by the needs of shipping (movement) and defence. A design decision was then taken to develop a gridded city (movement) – but the development evolved and continues to evolve with input of a million hands and minds. How it evolves is a matter of response and behaviour.

Hurricane Sandy forced a new defensive design intervention and changed behaviour. The waterfront had to be looked at differently and it will be used differently. The proposed park is movement based.



**Creating Healthy Cities**

- When the key capitals are brought together, we create the prospect for connection and cooperation – the basis of social evolution.

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**Design Quality**

- “Well designed places are successful and valued. They exhibit qualities that benefit users and the wider area. Well designed new or changing places should:
  - be functional
  - support mixed uses and tenures
  - include successful public spaces
  - be adaptable and resilient
  - have a distinctive character
  - be attractive
  - encourage ease of movement.”

(NPPF Planning Practice Guidance: Para 015)

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**Designing the City**

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## Slide 9 – Testing the City

When Sandy struck in 2012, it was one in a long history of natural disasters. Social scientists have studied the impact of these disasters on population and have found that people living in what are termed prosocial communities are more likely to survive – they are a matter of life or death.

People lookout for each other. They are not afraid to leave their homes to look after friends because of looters because they know that other people will be looking out for them.

Intuitively we know that the out-of-town mall will not produce a prosocial environment – and the sign says it all.

## Slide 10 – Design Interventions

But we do not need to spend more money to make better places – we need to spend what we do more effectively and with clear purpose.

The ‘intervention’ in the slide illustrates a multi-million traffic scheme in Bristol outside the main station, completed only a few years ago. It created an inhospitable environment at a major gateway for citizens and had a negative effect on investment in the surrounding property. It created a barrier.

This scheme is now being redesigned to create a more balanced and integrated environment – I do not know if this is yet good enough but it illustrates the point that poor design leadership is expensive.

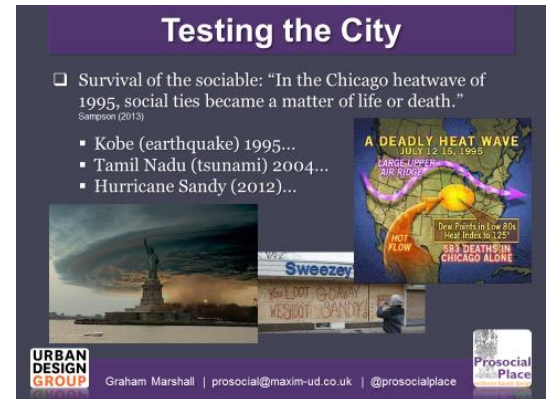
## Slide 11 – Healthy Places – Making Policy

So if we return to the idea that existing places are making us sick and that they will make up more than 85% of our environments in 2050, we need to start regenerating them and designing the new 15% appropriately.

Public health is now in crisis and cross party committees in government are addressing the issues as a matter of urgency. Policies in public health are highlighting the importance of place and a massive body of research evidence from social scientists is available for us to bring meaning to those policies.

A key public health policy idea that complements place making is the 5 Ways to Wellbeing - providing an **outcomes based agenda** to underpin place design and management.

The outcomes are focussed on mental wellbeing and the development of social skills, which in turn impact positively on other aspects of our lives.



**Testing the City**

- Survival of the sociable: "In the Chicago heatwave of 1995, social ties became a matter of life or death." (Sampson 2013)
- Kobe (earthquake) 1995...
- Tamil Nadu (tsunami) 2004...
- Hurricane Sandy (2012)...

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**Design Interventions**

- We have already built 85% of the buildings that will exist in 2050. To address our public health crisis, improving existing places becomes paramount.

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**Healthy Place-Making Policy**

CONNECT Give TAKE NOTICE KEEP LEARNING BE ACTIVE

- The NEF report (2008) identified that people reporting higher levels of wellbeing tend to be:
  - more involved in social and civic life
  - more likely to behave sustainably
  - have better family and social relationships at home
  - more productive at work

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## Slide 12 – “Well-Design”

This is what we might call “**Well-Design**” which has more meaning than the architecturally focussed “*well-designed*”.

It is a holistic approach that we have seen taking shape in Bristol. Organisations like Design Council CABE and Living Streets are developing programmes and strategies to create safe, active and connected environments.

Poynton has illustrated that a single junction redesign can bring a town back to life. People’s response to this new environment changes behaviours. Take a look at Poynton Regenerated on Youtube.

And that is an important point. The fabric of an area must be capable of supporting prosocial behaviour and promoting behaviour change. We need to evolve our cities, mindful that we all think differently depending upon our environment and the cultures it has shaped.

## Slide13 – Is this Well-Design

We face a public health crisis with greater awareness of the health impacts of urban environments than ever before. In the wake of the Marmot report we also have greater social responsibility and can no longer turn our backs on these issues.

These families in the 1960’s protested for better Homes not Hovels. They got better homes but they didn’t always get better neighbourhoods – the evidence say’s not.

Successful places are not simply about building, or growth or spending. The issues are complex, demanding design thinking that is appreciative of the impacts of place on behaviour.

**We must now underpin our common sense with a common wisdom.**

