

UNIVERCITIES Partnerships for Place-Making

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Good afternoon,
My name is Pam Alexander and I am the Chief Executive of the South East England Development Agency.

One aim of this session is to consider the Academy's idea of networking through "urban laboratories", 'UniverCities' which Sarah will explain later. It's people that make space become place: we do know a lot of what works – so why don't we do it? How can we share our skills better?

Let me introduce my fellow panellists:

Dr Conor Skehan, *School of Spatial Planning, Dublin; Managing Director of CAAS Environmental Services LTd and Environmental Impact Services Ltd.* - Conor specialises in the prediction and evaluation of the impacts of large-scale projects. Successful places need to be sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms. And designing a low carbon future will require partnership working across administrative, institutional and sectoral boundaries.

Professor John Worthington of *DEGW* who is also an Academician; visting Professor at the University of Sheffield and Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg; Chairman of CABI's Building Futures; Deputy Chairman for Regeneration through Heritage and Trustee of the Urban Design Group. - John is known for adapting urban and space planning techniques to meet the needs of the knowledge economy. With people becoming more mobile space is more fluid and needs to adapt to change – flexibility and adaptability of space is key. "Design for Change" is DEGW's focus when working with their clients to use space more productively over time.

Sarah Chaplin is *Professor of Architecture and Spatial Culture at Kingston University's School of Architecture and Landscape; Director of design consultancy Evolver; Advisor and Judge for RIBA President's Medals for Dissertation and the Academy of Urbanism's Director of Education.* She is going to tell us about this exciting project: *UniverCities*. Sarah says: "Good urbanism can be the result of effective long-term planning [...] and it can also be the product of piecemeal, informal development [...]." So we may hear about both approaches.

This is how it will work:

Each of us will give a short presentation (about 10 mins max) outlining some hopefully thought-provoking issues. After that I will open the discussion to the floor – so get your questions ready to challenge us!

OUTLINE

As an RDA, SEEDA takes a broad view of placemaking: economic, environmental & social and deploy a comprehensive toolbox for place not projects; applying principles not rules.

I'd like to introduce just 3 perspectives on our debate:

1. The impact of globalisation on what makes an economically successful place today & tomorrow – opposite of all the same – distinctiveness essential to success – USP:
2. Quality of life as a competitive advantage – creating attractive environments as places of choice for talented people, successful businesses and just hanging about: 'Places to Grow' – planning for people – theatre not real estate
3. Collaboration for success – between professionals; with communities. Delighting the customer as citizen, not just as consumer! Out of our silos and our expertise to create "ordinary distinction" not iconic, isolated exclamations.

1. THE WORLD IS A GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

Collaboration is about people. The emerging economies are truly changing the world. The challenge is their brains – not their brawn.

People and businesses are increasingly mobile at a global scale. The choice of location is becoming more critical as firms become more knowledge-intensive and yet more mobile. Creating places to provide a world class offer is an investment in high performance for all. Only by adapting our planning techniques to become truly place-making tools will we succeed in attracting international and domestic talent and businesses to locate in the UK. This is why good urban design is becoming so important to economic development and to prosperity.

It is 'the economy, stupid' – and that is a great opportunity because it means government – as with the environment, and civil unrest – cannot afford not to care about place.

SOUTH EAST REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

In the South East we have responded to these new drivers by identifying three key challenges:

1. Global Competitiveness – attracting globally mobile talent and companies and R&D; exporting leading expertise; learning from the best
2. Smart Growth – investing in potential for smarter places; smarter people; smarter businesses; this is about creating value where now there is only potential – not just economic but social and environmental capital too
3. Sustainable Prosperity – Investing in the quality of life that is a key source of the South East's competitive advantage; sustainable places, sustainable communities = sustainable economic growth. This is the only way to address Nimby's who are comfortable in their prosperity and have the illusion they can pull up the drawbridge. Government

diktat won't work – even with a national plan – unless people feel their community will benefit from development or growth.

2. PLACES OF CHOICE - QUALITY OF LIFE

People and businesses are increasingly 'footloose' in where they choose to invest their time and their capital. And this is not only because of a higher mobility of people and capital but also because of the loss of distinctiveness leading to a virtual interchangeability of spaces.

Creating places of choice plays a critical role in economic success. We need to create inspirational places providing distinctive offers to their communities. Designing towns and cities that people choose to live in will attract and retain skilled workforce. And this is about **investing in the quality of life**. I want to live and work here.

So what are the key elements of places of choice? I think they are:

- **Places for People** – for places to be well-used and well-loved, they must be safe, comfortable, varied and attractive. They also need to be distinctive, and offer variety, choice and fun. Vibrant places offer opportunities for meeting people, playing in the street and watching the world go by.
- **Enrich the Existing** – new developments should enrich the qualities of existing urban places. This means encouraging a distinctive response that arises from and complements its setting. This applies at every scale – the region, the city, the town, the neighbourhood, and the street.
- **Make Connections** – places need to be easy to get to and be integrated physically and visually with their surroundings. This requires attention to how to get around by foot, bicycle, public transport and the car – and in that order!

PLACES TO GROW

And creating these quality places goes beyond physical solutions of place and space, let alone buildings. We need people to engage with their community and we need skills and jobs to go alongside housing – otherwise we just design dormitories.

So for me and for RDAs thinking out of the silo does mean linking people and place, and learning from both.

I would like to describe briefly 2 examples of skills-led regeneration, each creating places to grow: The Universities at Medway and University College Hastings have harnessed the resources of further and higher education to create new opportunities for learning and skills development at the heart of newly regenerating towns. They have created new places of very different character - one new in historic Hastings; one in historic maritime buildings at Chatham – both in areas which young people had to leave to learn. So now they are escalators of skills for traditional communities, leading aspirations as well as learning.

UNIVERCITY CENTRE HASTINGS

In Hastings “education-led regeneration” is at the heart of a series of strategic mixed use investments.

Hastings was in economic decline - seriously underperforming on all major indices: in 2000 of the 16 wards in Hastings, five were among the 10% most deprived in England; weekly earnings £100 below national average; poor educational attainment - just 43% GCSE A-C; 23% households on housing benefit; 10% of properties unfit and teenage pregnancies 50% higher again than national average. No skills, no opportunities – no options?

The new University Centre Hastings (UCH) had 700 full time students by 2006. UCH is delivering flexible education programmes to help local people increase their skills and get well paid jobs. Managed by the University of Brighton, it is the UK's first 'University Centre' - a facility offering a range of foundation and higher level courses validated through the University of Brighton, Hastings College of Arts and Technology, the University of Sussex and the Open University: an escalator of skills for young people in one of the most deprived communities in England.

In Hastings skills have to be nurtured before we can attract better jobs. A new FE college on Station Plaza will lead to the heart of Priory Quarter – a £72 million investment in flats, a primary healthcare centre, offices and shops. As the RDA we are already developing local sectors with growth potential, such as media industries and Broadband infrastructure. The Creative Media Centre [shown on the left], opened in April 2004 and now houses 60 creative, design and media companies – many looking to the new UCH for student exchanges and new employees.

So education first, then jobs and only then the 7,500 new homes [including 650 for the Millennium Community in the Ore Valley to be delivered by 2012/13] promised to Government in exchange for the initial investment.

UNIVERCITIES AT MEDWAY

A second approach to the same model of bringing the unis to the people is the multi university campus at Chatham Maritime in Medway in the Thames Gateway. Universities at Medway is a partnership between the Universities of Kent, Greenwich, Canterbury Christ Church University and Mid-Kent College.

In Chatham the closure of the navel base 20 years ago had a heavy economic impact with the loss of 14,000 jobs. But the dockyard was also the heart of the community for 400 years. Its closure was a devastating blow to the sense of place and sense of purpose of local people. So one of the objectives of SEEDA's work at Chatham Maritime has been to contribute towards rebuilding that identity and pride amongst local communities.

[SKIP if nec: The new university campus provided an excellent opportunity to build on historic assets whilst creating a new community on St Mary's Island, with currently 1,000 new homes eventually rising to about 3,000, and new offices and leisure activities at Chatham Maritime.

Buildings, such as the Drill Hall constructed in 1903, are complemented by state-of-the-art buildings to provide an attractive and historic university campus which enables local people to study while living at home and also attracts a large number of foreign students who have chosen to study in the South East of England.

The catalyst was the conservation and regeneration of the historic dockyard, but it has led to more jobs and business opportunities, and to better education opportunities. Chatham and the Medway towns are now at the heart of growth in the Thames Gateway – unthinkable 20 years ago.]

3. MAKING IT HAPPEN – POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS

In both Hastings and Medway no single agency would have been able to create the impact that has been possible in partnership. The leaders of Hastings, Rother and East Sussex, the 3 Local Authorities driving that 5 Point Plan, had never sat down together before.

Powerful partnerships are key to successful place-making. Building on local knowledge and regional strengths is vital and the key is to make it add up to more than the sum of its parts. The concept of UniverCities can help us to take these partnerships & networks and create something new. Sarah will tell us more about that.

CREATING QUALITY PLACES

But professionals do not make places – the people who use them do.

We have to engage people in the planning process of course. But ownership of place goes well beyond having a say during the planning phase. Successful urban space needs are about day-to-day-life. And this means achieving a balance of planned and unplanned development. Unplanned development contributes to a key strength of good urban design and economic development, namely adaptability to change.

Heroic planners of the future facilitate workshops, to help people to express and visualise their ideas about space is what we need. Negotiating place and learning from communities is what will bring quality to our urban environment, and has been very successful here in Aylesham & Betteshanger in the Kent Coalfields and Queenborough & Rushenden on the Isle of Sheppey.

So my challenge to our discussion of the concept of 'UniverCities' is this question: How will the Academy's new network of urban laboratories reach out from Universities to engage with the people who must really 'own' places?

EXCITING YOUNG PEOPLE

I think we need to start with young people.

The ambitions we have today will be delivered over 10 – 20 years and so we need to inspire the creative minds of young people to develop a passion and respect for places. Planning for Real and Enquiry by Design can bridge the generations too.

In Queenborough and Rushenden on the Isle of Sheppey we have been engaging the local community using the Enquiry by Design approach. A model built by local school children was a major success of this process, inspiring the debate about future opportunities and making it impossible for Ministers to take away the funding after they had met the children.

Successful engagement is not an optional extra; it is crucial to delivery – if a scheme doesn't have the support of local people it will be much more difficult to deliver AND to get through planning.

Place-based learning will deliver bottom-up solutions. We need to get it right for people who live and work there. Through Design Champions programmes local Councillors are being engaged in all issues we discussed today.

PROMOTING PRIDE IN PLACE

We have developed South East Excellence to:

- Expand the knowledge and skills base by identifying and showcasing best practice, signposting toolkits and guidance;
- Establish strong cross-disciplinary learning networks;
- Promote pride in place – for example through innovative techniques for consulting stakeholders in projects that involve significant physical change; and to
- Excite young people in designing places for the future

It provides a focal point for all those involved in both the learning and teaching of place-making skills.

Working with the Academy of Urbanism, South East Excellence encourages collaboration between Higher Education Institutes in the region to identify specific challenges a place is facing and to offer and work on solutions.

Project-based training is offered in partnership with the region's 3 Architecture & Built Environment Centres (ABECs) in Kent, the Solent area and Milton Keynes-South Midlands, Universities [*] and local authorities in these areas. Practical project experience will be offered to students, contributing to their employment readiness but also to facilitate knowledge exchange between the region's HEIs and practitioners.

MAKE IT YOUR PLACE!

And we must inspire people to care about their place, beyond its 'brand'.

Changing perspectives:

- From consumer to citizen.
- From planning to facilitating.
- From building to negotiating place.

Shared understanding and caring for urban quality of life matters more than formal plans for even the best can only deal with the physical.