



TIME: 3-4 hrs.



MATERIAL: pens, paper and outcomes from the previous working sessions.



PEOPLE: the working team and all willing participants.

STEP G

CREATING A DESIGN BRIEF

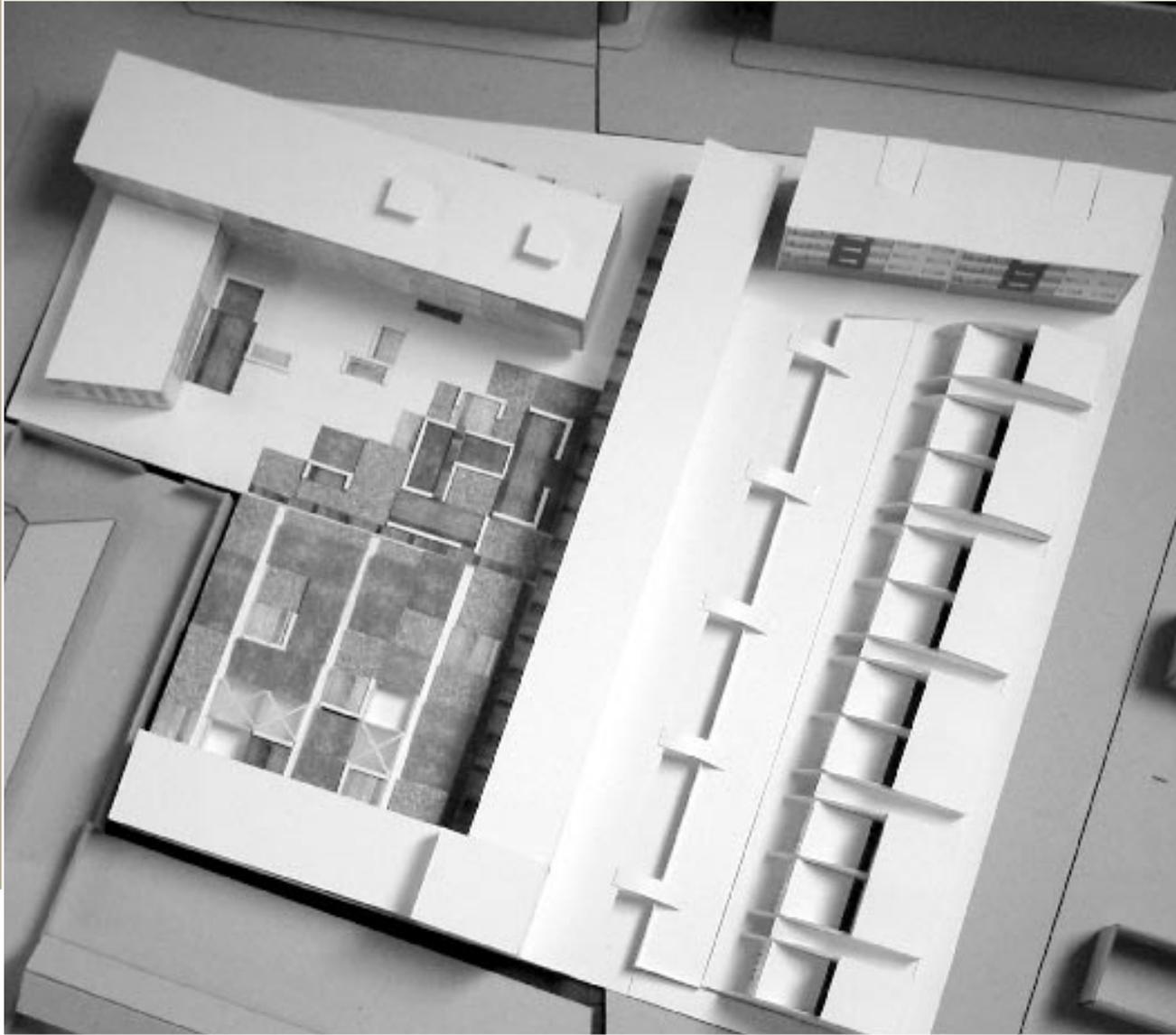


A model that students of architecture from the University of Strathclyde prepared to discuss design briefs with local residents.

WHAT IS A DESIGN BRIEF

If you are in the position to initiate the project, and have designers committed to generating design concepts for the priority areas, it is now time to write a design brief. You do this by transforming the information gathered during the previous working sessions into detailed instructions which will greatly assist the design process and, at the same time, help you to maintain control over what is being proposed and ultimately, realised.

You do possess all the ingredients to compile a brief: the list of criteria and attributes and the bar charts or radar graphs. Translating the information contained in these documents is a rather straightforward process: you need to produce a series of statements that describe actions to take and issues to be kept in mind when doing so. To that end we return to the example of the neighbourhood square.



A design for a neighbourhood square containing a public space and gardens, which was developed through one of the handbook pilot projects (project by Aileen Aiken).

NOTES TO FACILITATOR

Some of the priority areas you studied might need to be improved, but their overall function will not need to change. For others instead, you might have identified new uses and functions. In the first case, you will need to inform designers on how to improve such areas. In the second case, you will need design ideas.

In both cases - an improvement plan or a brand new design proposition - you have brought such ideas back to your community; their view is now represented by the bar charts or radar graphs.

THE PROCESS

The Action Matrix at the end of Behavioural Mapping states the following actions for the neighbourhood square:

Maintain location of square and main access from North-East.
Add better facilities for users (seating space, litter bins).
Maintain bus stop on east side of space, but move it to south corner.
Remove trees to south.
Keep dogs out, or fence areas just for dogs.
Subdivide the space in parts using vegetation
Give youths their own place to meet.

1. Main design indicators

○ As required

Translate these actions into general statements, which are a reaction to the weaknesses specified by your working team (also listed in the Action Matrix). This can now be translated into design brief statements of the following kind:

- 1 The current neighbourhood square in the area has been assessed by the community to have a good and easily accessible central location in the neighbourhood, a good overall layout and reasonably good landscaping; therefore no new location for the square is sought and the overall design features, in terms of layout and landscaping, should be retained and consolidated.
- 2 The square has, however, rather poor facilities and suggestions are sought on how these could be upgraded and/or replaced. The community is specifically keen to have better seating arrangements at the edge of the children's playing area to increase the potential of supervision. The playing area itself, and its facilities, should

be upgraded to a latest standard of design and cleanliness and suggestions for these appropriate new facilities are required (there could also be a detailed list of what the community wants to have).

- 3 The square lacks supervision specifically in the evenings because of the lack of lighting in the park. The feasibility of lights in the park should be investigated and suggestions regarding light fittings and locations are sought.
- 4 The square currently does not have clearly defined activity areas but should allow a variety of activities to take place at the same time (specific activity areas could be defined more clearly, e.g. planting area for children, jogging path, etc). Of specific importance is that currently youths do not have their own meeting place and kick about area and are therefore frequently invading areas dedicated to children. The community wishes to receive proposals where in the existing square such a facility could be located,

2. Detailed design indicators

○ As required

and how it could be secured without ugly wire mesh fencing. If planting is used to achieve security, it should not obscure supervision of the park at large. Here innovative suggestions are sought.

- 5 Trees to the south are shading a large part of the park. The trees are old and unsightly and investigations should be made whether the trees are listed or can be removed and replaced with smaller and less solid trees (perhaps birches) to maintain an edge definition, without interfering with the views from the housing south of the park. This adds to the security of the square.

Add to this as necessary.

At this point, go back to the bar charts or radar diagrams you have produced. You should have one which summarises all the properties it has/should have, and several partial graphs that describe in detail, one by one, such properties.

An example of radar diagrams can be found on page 115.

For each graph remember that the performance of the space depends on how much the polygon tends to the complete form. Ideally a complete polygon corresponds to a space containing the characteristics identified by your team and community, and fulfilling them according to the highest standard. Since perfection is hard to achieve, you can be satisfied to know what - and how - can be done to aspire to it.

You must now proceed step by step.

Take for example the radar “open space”.

The factors 1, 2 and 3, ‘appearance’ of the square, the ‘scale’ of the spaces and the ‘materials’ used

seem to be weaker than factor 4, the feeling of ‘safety’ perceived in the square. This is very useful information for the designers, and can add much detail to the general statements listed above.

Designers will be warned to take into consideration, for example, the use of new materials to influence the appearance of the space, making sure also that this improves the feeling of safety or at least does not reduce it. At the same time, intervening on the space layout and the relationships between parts of the space to improve the feeling of scale, they will be advised not to carry out changes that could affect the positive perception of ‘safety’ of the space.

An indication in the design brief about “appearance of the square” can for example read like this:

- The overall appearance of the square should be improved by introducing new and more friendly materials;
- At the same time, old and new materials should be bright, have a natural feel and soft edges, to prevent accidents and discourage vandalism;
- The scale of the square is currently too vast; there is no definition of the various parts that constitute the square, and people using it are left with a sense of unease. It is recommended that the square is broken down into different areas, using vegetation, landscaping, benches and short walls;
- At the same time, these new features must prevent the creation of hidden areas, that could in any way reduce the feeling of safety among users, from any age group.

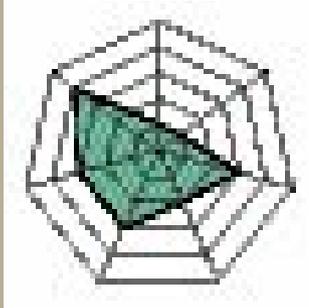
Each bar chart or radar graph can help you produce a large number of ideas, and is an extremely useful tool for designers.

Once you went through each chart/graph, and listed ideas and concerns as in the example, you have produced a fully detailed brief for a neighbourhood square. If you maintained the order of the charts/graphs, your brief will also have a structure that can be immediately submitted to the designers.

Repeat the exercise for each project identified as a priority in the neighbourhood plan.

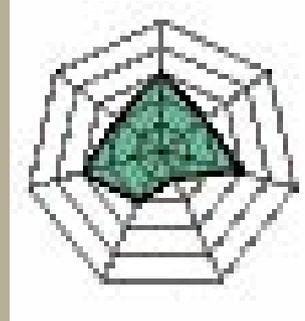
As mentioned before, even if you do not yet have the funds to implement your neighbourhood plan, you can use the detailed briefs you compiled to apply for grants or simply to bring your neighbourhood to the planning agenda of development agencies.

EXAMPLES OF RADAR DIAGRAMS



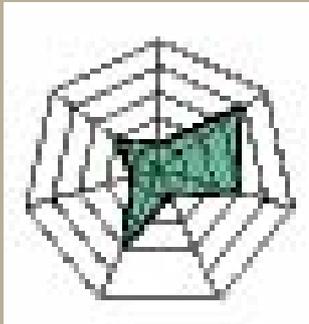
NATURE OF OPEN SPACE

- 1 Overall appearance
- 2 Integration of spaces
- 2 Variety of spaces
- 4 Origination of spaces
- 5 Upkeep and maintenance
- 6 Safety and accessibility
- 7 Utility



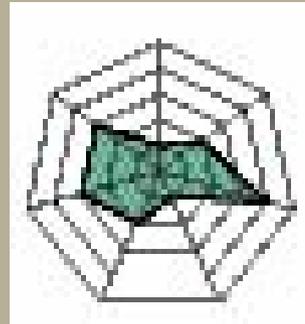
BUILDINGS AROUND

- 1 Appearance
- 2 Relationship between parts
- 3 Variety
- 4 Style/Quality
- 5 Maintenance
- 6 Safety/Security
- 7 Accessibility



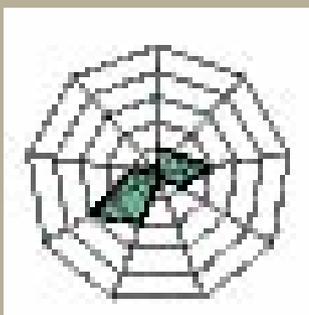
STREET SCAPING

- 1 Quality of appearance
- 2 Distribution
- 3 Variety
- 4 Style
- 5 Maintenance
- 6 Safety
- 7 Accessibility/Useability



ACTIVITIES

- 1 Liveness
- 2 Co-existence of different activities
- 3 Variety of activities
- 4 Level of engagement
- 5 Management
- 6 Safety/Security
- 7 Accessibility



ATMOSPHERE

- 1 Attractive/Boring
- 2 Cheerful/Gloomy
- 3 Creative/Dull
- 4 Welcoming/Repulsive
- 5 Natural/Repulsive
- 6 Relaxing/Stressful
- 7 Free/Claustrophobic
- 8 Pleasing/Annoying
- 9 Engaging/Inhibiting

POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION

After the projects have been implemented and used for a period of time it is appropriate to conduct a Post Occupancy Evaluation

When the design gets implemented, the community can be asked to assess how well it has been implemented. What is generally called 'Post Occupancy Evaluation' is a measure of how well a space fulfils its tasks; this phase is very often neglected, on the understanding that once a space has been designed it will work.

Experience teaches us that often this is not the case; any evaluation on how well a space performs should be carried out on the basis of how well it responds to the requirements it was meant to fulfil, and how well it can adapt to changes of use.

You can use the properties (what we called 'characteristics') identified with the help of your community to find out whether the implemented outcomes of your 'neighbourhood plan' are effectively as responsive to their community as they were meant to be.

Use the Environmental Assessment forms– this time asking the whole community – again during a community conference or by mailing the Tables – to assess the performance of the spaces after their transformation. As well as collecting the community's view on the space/facility, you can also make clear the important role that participants had in the development process.

This time, the form will be filled in thinking about the transformed/new space; to process the form filling, use the same procedure described in Working Session F.

You have built, with the help of the handbook, a 'monitoring tool' that can help you assess the state of your neighbourhood and act upon it. It can help generate ideas, find ways to implement them, measure their value and acceptability, and finally have a say on how well these ideas perform in practice.