

# SHAPING PLACE – CHANGING LIVES

A Placemaking Symposium for elected members and officials

**22 October 2015 at Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey**

## **MAG, DCAL and NILGA**

MAG, the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment, is appointed by the Minister and administered within the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). MAG was pleased to accept the suggestion of the Assembly's Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee to expand its work with Councils to include elected members through NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

MAG, DCAL and NILGA share interests in best practice in placemaking and several English models were acknowledged as local councils develop their preferred placemaking methods.

## **Setting the Scene**

The Deputy Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Councillor John Blair, welcomed over sixty delegates to Mossley Mill. All eleven Councils had agreed to attend. The Deputy Mayor acknowledged the presence at the Symposium of MAG member Alwyn Riddell, the architect and planner responsible for the restoration of Mossley Mill, which is an excellent example of regeneration and placemaking that demonstrates the benefits of creative collaboration.

NILGA President, Alderman Carla Lockhart, set out the importance of stewardship in placemaking, saying that Councils now have a unique opportunity to make places better - and keep them that way - and that design today includes *how we use places* as well as traditionally being thought of as *what we build*.

Community planning that genuinely involves people is what we need - all Councils are now engaged in this – the important issue is how to make it real and worthwhile for people themselves.

On behalf of NILGA, the President encouraged everyone to share experiences, now at the symposium and later on when we can keep in touch

by e-mail, meet again and work in a collegiate manner - with leadership *and* support as necessary.

The Deputy Secretary of DCAL, Cynthia Smith, provided evidence of the contribution of sports, culture and arts everywhere, with a particular emphasis on how these produce better places as the passionate communities of interest are recognised as well as the local communities.

### **Open Forum**

An Open Forum discussed the changing context since the transfer of responsibilities. The speakers acknowledged the value of understanding the changing local context. Elected members, officials and professional representatives recognised the importance of embedding design at the heart of decision making about places – at the earliest sign that change is coming - and produced several ideas that the invited speakers could respond to, including the potential for professional institutions to offer multi-disciplinary advisory panels to Councils. MAG will consider these actively with NILGA as future opportunities for collaboration.

### **Statement of Community Involvement**

MAG had responded to the draft Statement of Community Involvement published by Mid Ulster Council, whose district planning manager, Dr Chris Boomer, described many hundreds of local and special interest organisations that the Council had specifically included in its draft statement. Changes to the statement are taking place as a result of the consultation process. Dr Boomer recognised that the statement is a work in progress and identified some challenges for MAG, to which MAG will respond as soon as possible.

### **Design Council Cabe**

Clare Devine, Director of Design Council Cabe in England, described its method in which local authorities work with Cabe's Built Environment Experts (BEEs), appointing an agreed panel for the long term future of a specific town or city, entirely for public good. Clare described experiences in Oxford, London and Bournemouth and specifically encouraged us to think beyond 'multi-disciplinary' to 'interdisciplinary' activity.

## Croydon Placemaking Team

Vincent Lacovara, Team Leader Placemaking at London's largest borough, Croydon Borough Council, leads a placemaking team which is internally appointed to work directly alongside the plan-making team. The long term benefits of such an arrangement move design 'upstream' in the system to the very genesis of changes in places, where projects are devised. Vincent described 'building a better brief' as an essential part of placemaking. This accords with MAG's recommendations which now include reviews of briefing and commissioning as well as design.

## Humankind and Behaviour – The Prosocial Place Project

After lunch Graham Marshall, Co-Director of The Prosocial Place Project, University of Liverpool, began his presentation with four questions, all of which were answered around the tables using post-it notes. The question and answer session brought professionals and lay people together to provide answers to the influences of good and bad places on their lives (including our personal 'Dismalworlds' - with inspiration from Banksy).



Graham Marshall discussing local information that will inform the Prosocial Place Project



Post-it notes grouped for immediate analysis

Graham then grouped the answers, to illustrate commonalities in human understanding of natural and designed environments. Natural places scored highly but heavy urban infrastructure created some of the most unpopular places.

Graham will add this local information from the MAG Symposium to a much wider database which he is gathering for his university research project.

Graham discussed humans' interactions with places from the early behaviour of humankind to today's urban dwellers and picked up Clare's discussion with the suggestion that 'interdisciplinary' work might usefully become 'post-disciplinary'.

### **A Six Week Ward Vision**

Emily Baker is a primary school principal who was an active participant in the production of a 'six week vision' for one of the 460 Electoral Wards in the newly defined Councils – the Crumlin Ward Vision in Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. Emily's personal journey from feeling excluded from the planning of places to becoming actively involved with them was a passionate story of a new attitude that had affected not only her role as a citizen but also her professional approach to education. This was ably reflected by Council Officers in community development and planning who explained that this was a liberating experience for newly transferred officers as well as a new way of working for established professionals in community development. It is already influencing approaches to other parts of the Council area.

### **NILGA Collaboration**

During the plenary session, Dr Ken Bishop of NILGA confirmed his organisation's willingness to gather ideas from each table and formulate an expression of involvement through collaboration and 'community involvement by activities', as advocated by MAG expert advisor Marianne O'Kane Boal. NILGA will discuss the points arising from the Symposium with MAG and will then communicate directly with Councils to seek agreement on a suitable outcome.

### **Presentations Available**

Meanwhile, all the presentations from the symposium are available at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/e25iaufv7q9usri/AABfnYXCRa8vJ93eS8jDhWwna?dl=0>

**Arthur Acheson**  
**5 November 2015**

**Chair of MAG**