



# Getting the big picture right

A guide to large scale urban design

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CABE  
1 Kemble Street  
London WC2B 4AN  
T 020 7070 6700  
F 020 7070 6777  
E [enquiries@cabe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cabe.org.uk)  
[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

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# Foreword

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**Do we create better places when we design them? Or are the best places those that ‘emerge’ instead from neighbourhood level initiatives, to create a whole that is somehow more than the sum of the parts?**

At CABI we are in favour of engaged, local approaches to urban design. But people don't live their lives only in one neighbourhood these days. Increased mobility, including more car ownership, has extended that area well beyond any one boundary.

The planning system needs to respond to this change, for instance when deciding where public transport links and new urban extensions need to go; when designing large scale energy generation; when reclaiming large post-industrial sites.

But how can we design successfully at this large scale, to try to shape the bigger picture? Is urban design only a process for the neighbourhood scale, for choosing the right bollards and paving?

CABI decided to find out. Using a mix of UK best practice, international research and workshops with academics and practitioners, we examined whether there is a design approach that can work for the big picture. Over the coming decades this will include adapting to climate change, achieving sustainable economic development in a globalised market, and redressing the balance between advantaged and disadvantaged communities.

Interestingly, we found the best projects contain elements of both local level self-organisation and bigger scale design. For example, in Germany the Emscher Landschaftspark in the Ruhr succeeded in achieving environmental quality and culture-led regeneration with local action knitted into a broader strategy. Closer to home, Cambridge Futures faced up to large scale challenges, such as finding space for more housing, through a self-organising combination of local authorities, the university and private companies.

CABE has drawn on this best practice to develop new advice about large scale urban design. It is described briefly in this summary and there is a step-by-step online guide on [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

One of the most promising features of the new approach is that it uses a creative, workshop-based process to bring all interested parties together to design high-quality solutions. So this is not about micro-level interventions, hoping that they will add up to something that works at large scale. Nor is it about imposing inflexible solutions. Instead it embraces the complexities and uncertainties facing people today. It is a design process that allows people to shape the places they want.

It means operating in different ways. But there are plenty of examples of how we can design places well at a large scale. I hope that this guide will inspire others to create and develop their own good examples to add to the list.

**Richard Simmons**  
Chief executive, CABE

# Introduction

**Planners should engage in rational strategic planning “...when for the purpose of arriving at the best result the boundaries of authorities are banished from the mind.”**

Patrick Abercrombie, 1933<sup>1</sup>

One of the most dramatic changes to affect planning and urban design has been the growth of the area within which people live their lives, or what economists and planners call ‘functional spatial areas’. People now have communities of work and communities of interest and networks of friends, customers, shops, leisure facilities and suppliers which go well beyond the immediately local.

These extended areas form the scale at which economic and housing markets now operate, and correspond to the catchment areas of large retail centres, major hospitals, leisure facilities or higher education institutions. Housing and job markets do not observe local authority boundary ‘red lines’ on a map. Nor do people notice red lines when they are crossing them in the car or on the train.

Planning needs to operate across boundaries as well. To take advantage of the change from top-down regional strategies, the bigger picture has to be thought about in ways which allow people to work together to find answers to the questions which result from our way of life.

So a flexible new framework is needed to inform decisions on where best to invest limited resources for infrastructure, or where to focus the energies of private developers and public service providers. Those whose lives are directly affected have to be involved in the process.

In recent years, the statutory plan-making system in England has taken a collaborative approach to local development frameworks and core strategies, but this approach was not always taken for larger areas.

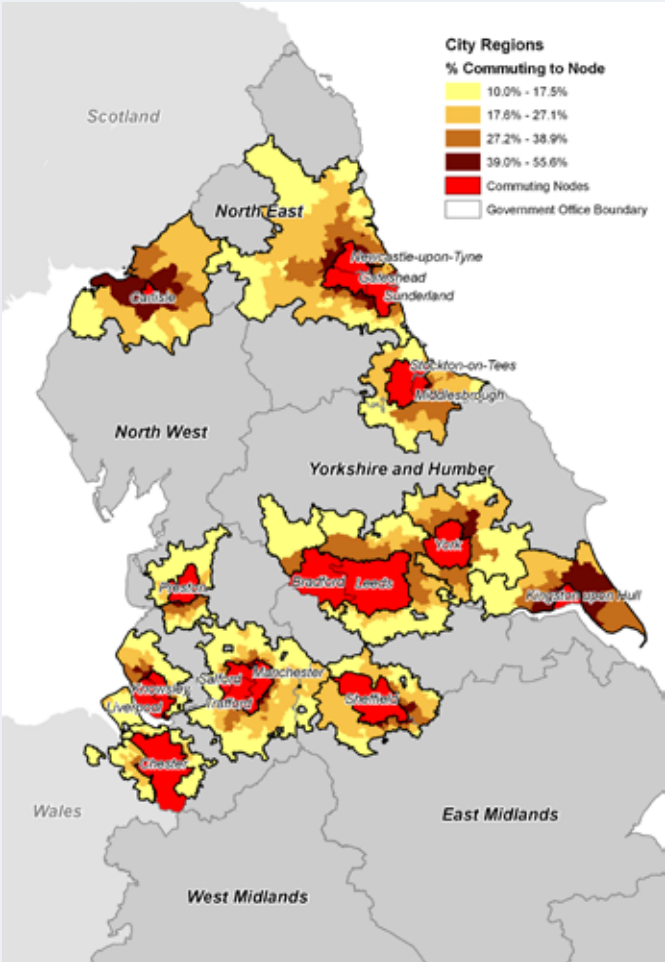
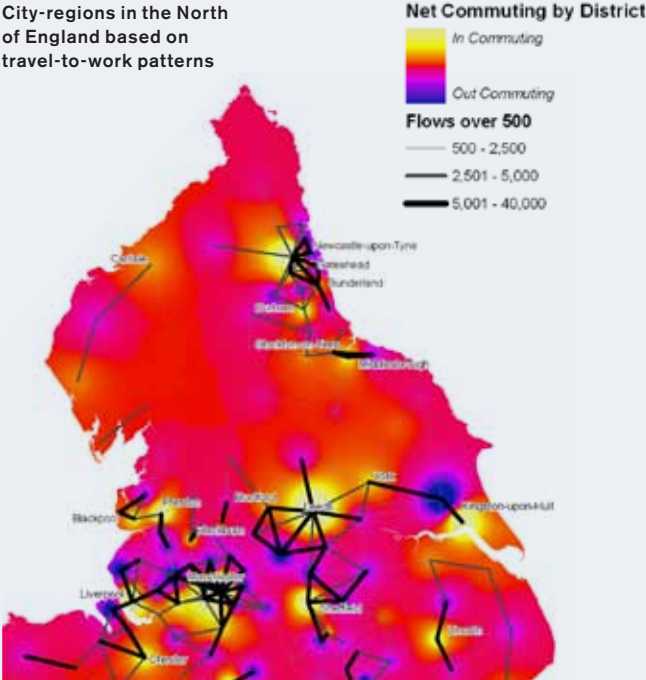
So for the past two years, CABE has been trialling a better way to design the bigger picture.

# Mapping economic links at the large scale: The Northern Connection (2008)

FURTHER INFORMATION:  
<http://cabcurl.com/dq>

The Northern Connection research programme of the University of Manchester explored the economic links between northern cities and regions, for the Northern Way, and looked at the growing importance of the key urban centres in driving growth. The study used commuting flows patterns to define spatial boundaries of 12 city-regions in the area. These are the types of areas that may benefit from adopting a collaborative urban design approach to planning for their future.

City-regions in the North of England based on travel-to-work patterns



Functional spatial clusters based on net commuting flows

# The challenges that large scale urban design tackles best

**“Successful cities and regions in this period of globalization are those with the capacity to discover their own identity, singularities and strengths.”**

Fundación Metropoli,  
2007<sup>2</sup>

**CABE has worked with many of the cross-boundary organisations set up to tackle big scale challenges, whether economic, financial or environmental.**

Our experience of these sub-regional development bodies, joint planning units and regeneration partnerships suggests that they could usefully adopt a more creative and collaborative approach to planning and delivering change.

Our research showed that their approach could be improved by focusing more on the physical aspects of a place. Indeed, one of the strengths of the new large scale urban design approach is the way that it focuses on improving the quality and distinctiveness of a place by considering social, economic and environmental performance at the same time as its physical characteristics.

## **Facilitating economic growth**

In many places goods manufacturing has been replaced with knowledge-based and service sectors, which rely heavily on access to a skilled workforce. These sectors tend to cluster into specialised centres with strong links and complementary relationships within natural economic areas. So, increasingly, competitiveness of places depends on attracting and retaining the right people, which in turn is dependent on providing a distinctive and high quality living and working environment. Economic performance is also affected by how well the physical structure of the natural wider area is designed to facilitate clustering and linkages between the economic centres within it. Where areas are failing to thrive because they are poorly connected to facilities and economic opportunities, large scale urban design will identify the most appropriate response.



### **Using financial resources efficiently**

When public budgets are tight and there is limited private finance, it is essential to address competing priorities. This means that many public services, and most large scale infrastructure, should be considered across boundaries. Whether evaluating or planning the provision of utilities, transport, higher education institutions or hospitals, there are significant efficiencies to be made through involving all parties in a timely way. This is a key benefit from using large scale urban design.

### **Achieving environmental sustainability**

Many environmental challenges – such as water management, flood prevention, increasing biodiversity and generating low carbon energy – can be addressed most effectively by cross-boundary action. These need to be dealt with alongside social and economic issues, for example managing the seemingly insatiable desire for travel and flows of people and goods whilst reducing resource use and facilitating ‘greener’ lifestyles.

**Newcastle and Gateshead:**  
joint working by the two councils  
has led to dramatic transformation  
on both sides of the river



© Stephen McLaren

### **Managing large schemes and masterplanning**

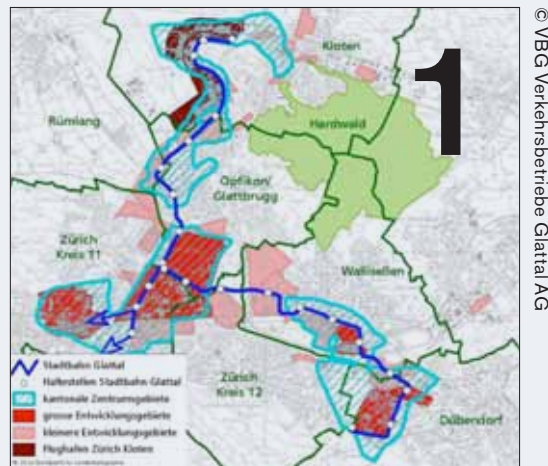
Large scale urban design can be used to instigate and orchestrate the delivery of developments like big retail and employment centres and large housing developments and transport infrastructure. It ensures each project is considered within a wider spatial, economic and social context. This approach maximises the value of investment and spreads the benefits brought about by the development across the whole area and to all sectors of the population.

## Undertaking large scale masterplanning: Glattal light railway, Zürich city region, Switzerland (since 1995)

The project focused on construction of a light railway infrastructure and the associated development between the northern edge of Zurich and the airport. The five municipalities of the Glattal region involved in the project, together with the Canton of Zurich, set up a public limited company 'VBG Verkehrsbetriebe Glattal AG' to oversee the planning, construction and operation of the light rail.

They saw the project as an opportunity to take a comprehensive approach to planning transport, public space and urban and economic development in this part of Zurich. They joined forces with private sector partners to develop a sub-regional development strategy on the back of the light railway project to stimulate investment and meet wider policy objectives. Regular monitoring of new developments within the 400m radius areas surrounding the new Glattalbahn stations indicates that so far the level of private sector investment has been 15-16 times higher than the investment made in the light rail by the public sector.

FURTHER INFORMATION:  
<http://cabeurl.com/dr>



Proposed light rail infrastructure and urban development opportunity areas in the Glattal municipalities

Glattal municipalities and the light rail route

## Using financial resources efficiently: The dynamics of global urban expansion (2006)

A study of 120 rapidly expanding cities in the developing countries for The World Bank focused on the minimum level of intervention that is required to be taken by cash-strapped city authorities to guide a spatial expansion at a massive scale and achieve:

- an anti-poverty objective: to help ensure an adequate supply of affordable land for housing the poor
- a planning objective: to lay the foundations for an effective city planning regime
- a transport objective: to introduce an efficient network of public transport and trunk infrastructure into expansion areas; and
- a financial objective: to substantially reduce the cost of putting the essential city infrastructure in place.

The project team led by Professor Shlomo Angel from New York University organised workshops with municipal officials from the planning, legal, and finance departments to investigate options and develop spatial proposals. It was found that the best way of achieving project objectives was to focus on the early introduction of an arterial grid in the expansion areas, through advance acquisition of land and laying out a system of dirt roads.



Planned transit-sensitive  
arterial grids in Milagro  
and Rio Bamba, Ecuador

© Reprinted from Cities vol 25, Shlomo Angel, An arterial grid of dirt roads, p 146–162, (2008), with permission from Elsevier

# Six distinctive features

There are a number of defining characteristics of the new large scale design approach which make it distinctive from masterplanning, local development frameworks or recent English regional and sub-regional planning.

## **It is selective in its interests**

A project based on this new approach begins with a specific problem and focuses on providing answers to that problem. Restricting the remit to issues that are of genuine cross boundary importance for a natural economic area, and cannot be tackled at any other spatial level, keeps the approach effective and efficient. This selectiveness applies not only to the scope of the project but also to its outcomes - a limited set of strategic themes and projects.

## **It is spatially led, three-dimensional and visually rich**

The new approach goes beyond land use planning – which is generally two dimensional – and deals with the physical characteristics of a place in all its complexity and in three dimensions (hence the use of urban design in the label). It results in proposals for specific projects and sites. Even though the final product – a spatial strategy – may show these proposals in a diagrammatic way, the process grounds them in the physical context of a place. Detailed examination of specific issues and proposals may be necessary to ensure viability of the strategic concept. The results are highly visual, synthesising complex ideas in a way which communicates to a full range of people.

## **It takes an integrated approach to analysis and design**

Improving the quality of ordinary places is as important as new landmark places and spaces. The new approach considers how the physical, economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects of a place all contribute to its success, and how its natural assets can be protected and capitalised on. It integrates analysis and proposals, across all boundaries and defines an overall vision. This is achieved by translating strategic themes or options into a set of manageable projects.

**“British cities have spread out economic activities and small boundaries. The danger of small boundaries is that it can lead to sub-optimal policy interventions that address only small areas where symptoms are present, rather the larger areas (markets) where problems can be best tackled.”**

Defra advisor, 2009<sup>3</sup>



© Faber Maunsell

**Cleveleys New Wave sea defences and promenade (2004-2008):**

Addressing environmental and economic challenges through an inclusive and creative process. Designed by Birse Coastal.

### **It is an engaging and inclusive process**

At the heart of large scale urban design is a creative process which actively engages everyone. It is compressed into a number of workshops where key players come together, assisted by an expert team, to scope the work, input data, prioritise areas or themes, consider scenarios, draw up preferred proposals and projects and finalise plans for delivery.

### **It is focused on delivery**

An integral part of the approach is developing an implementation plan that sets out a programme of what to do now, with the future in mind. By providing a clear policy and delivery framework, it stabilises, coordinates and directs development activity and, in areas with low values and little or no developer interest, creates more attractive conditions for developers and investors. It makes clear to key partners their part in funding, investment, the provision of land, public services and infrastructure.

### **It is flexible**

Implementing a large scale strategy takes a long time and the context may change, sometimes radically. The new approach accommodates new data being included, and proposals being re-tested and revised. While being capable of providing flexibility and change, the process and its outputs provide nonetheless enough guidance and detail to ensure quality of the final projects, and effective decision making and delivery.



## Characteristics of large scale urban design: Masterplan for Emscher Landschaftspark 2010, Germany (since 1989)

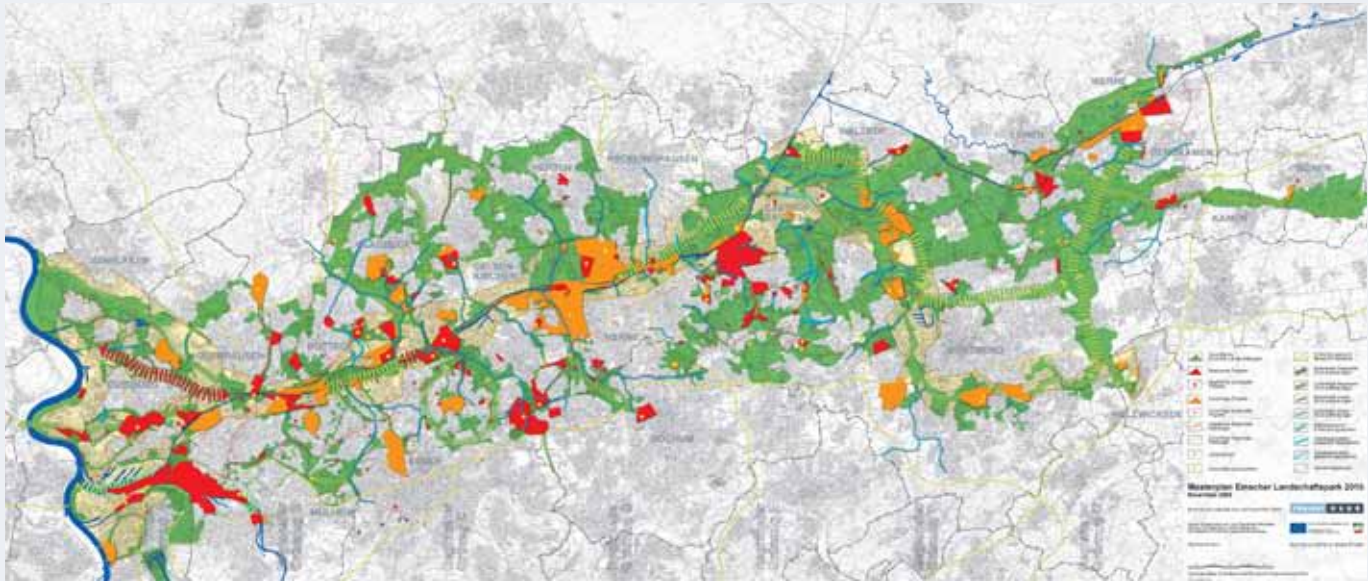
FURTHER INFORMATION:

<http://cabeurl.com/ds>

<http://cabeurl.com/dt>

<http://cabeurl.com/du>

Masterplan for Emscher  
Landschaftspark 2010



The Emscher Landshaftspark (Landscape Park) was originally conceived as a part of a 10-year regeneration programme led by the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park (IBA). The programme addressed the decline of the Ruhr Region in North-Rhine Westphalia, the industrial heartland of north west Germany, stretching across 20 local authorities and including several major urban centres.

The area was characterised by social deprivation, huge outward migration and economic problems caused by the closure of most of the mines and steel factories. Its environment was extremely poor because of decades of heavy industrial pollution.

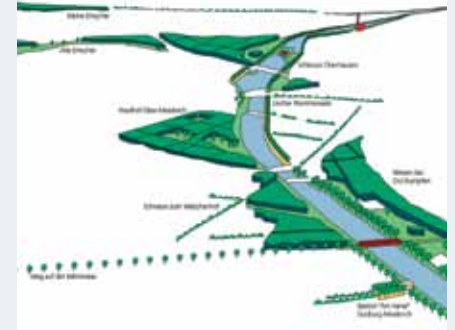
The regeneration programme's coordination group made a bold decision to focus on a handful of strategic themes to reverse the

decline and change the internal and external perceptions of the area. As well as social initiatives – education, training and new types of jobs – they included the following:

- 'Industrial monuments': retention and creative reuse of key industrial heritage
- 'The new Emscher': regeneration of the river system



More detailed proposals for key areas and sites in the Emscher region



- ‘Working in the park’: provision of new types of employment spaces
- ‘Living in the park’: provision of new types of housing.

The most ambitious idea was to unite all the themes under the umbrella of a regional park. This entailed tremendous efforts to improve the environmental quality of the existing green areas and to clean up and integrate former contaminated industrial sites into a green network. Naming the regional park after the river Emscher, which was for decades the main industrial drain of the area and its most polluted

element, was a clear sign of the project's ambition and the project leadership's confidence and resolve.

The team carried out a huge amount of consultation with local authorities in the area to overcome an initial lack of interest in addressing the decline through coordinated delivery of local projects within the agreed strategic themes. Through a process of developing the joint strategy this view gradually changed as people realised that they had to work together to attract investment and people to live and work in the area.

The result of the team's design work with local partners was a non-statutory, flexible spatial strategy to guide the work at local level. Each local authority eventually took on and translated the strategic directions into local policies and projects.

After the conclusion of the initial regeneration programme led by IBA, further revisions of the strategy and the coordination of projects were led by Projekt Ruhr GmbH and Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR). There have been over 400 projects delivered across the sub-region since 1989.

# The outputs from large scale urban design

At the end of a project, those involved will have:

- an overarching ‘story of change’ – a clear description of the transformation to be brought about by a package of interventions and investments in the built and natural fabric of the wider area, based on its identity and potential.
- a creative and inspiring visual expression of this ‘story of change’ that can be communicated easily to a wide range of interest groups
- a database of quantitative and qualitative information which can be analysed spatially, and through multi-layered analysis. This allows a whole range of issues to be considered together, to identify conflicts, synergies and priorities, develop effective proposals and coordinate their delivery
  - a distillation of this analysis into key areas of interest which need to be addressed at this scale or which require greater coordination
  - an agreed set of proposals which define the type and location of priority projects under key themes, including specific sites and design briefs for those sites
  - a set of design and sustainability principles, standards and tools to guide masterplans and more detailed urban design and building proposals.

## **Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, Seoul, South Korea (2005):**

A city-wide effort to revitalise a river and connect the city centre with an ecological conservation area outside the city. Designed by Seoul Development Institute with the Seoul Metropolitan Government.



© Nepal Asathawasi



# Who most benefits from using the process?



© Whitelaw Turkington

**Ashford ring road, Kent:**  
Stimulating growth in the wider area through key infrastructure projects. Designed by Whitelaw Turkington.

Large scale urban design will help those organisations and partnerships – often a mix of public and private sector partners - tasked with delivering solutions to the challenges outlined. Key players will include those most responsible for delivery; local or regional government or other cross-boundary partnerships; developers and others delivering large scale projects; urban design and planning practitioners and policy makers. Those whose lives are affected – the community – are the most important people to be involved in the process.

This urban design approach will particularly benefit local partnerships that:

- want to improve coordination between sector-specific or local strategies, initiatives and projects
- want to improve the quality and distinctiveness of what gets built in their area
- have a concentration of social, environmental or economic problems in the area and need to have a thorough approach to dealing with decline constructively
- are performing well and growing, and wish to either accommodate this growth or spread its benefits across the wider area, particularly significant housing growth or regeneration
- need to strengthen the links between town and city centres or within a natural economic area
- need to plan strategic infrastructure such as water or waste management, energy production or a network of green spaces
- are planning new facilities such as hospitals or large leisure and shopping centres
- want to protect or enhance important natural, cultural or heritage assets.

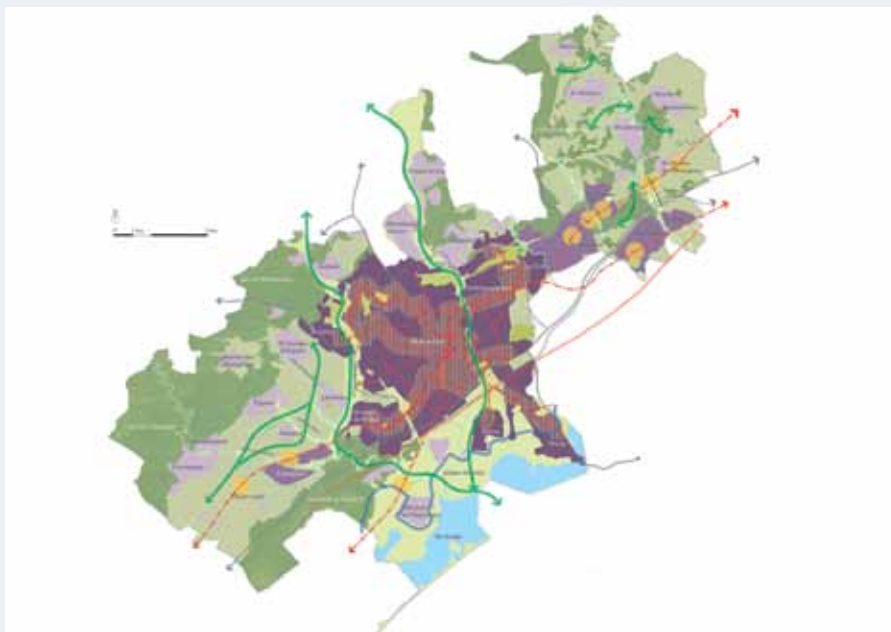
The new large scale urban design approach could be used at a variety of spatial scales (regional, city or town wide), in different delivery contexts (statutory or informal), and internationally.

## From strategy to site briefs: Montpellier SCOT, France (2003-2006)

FURTHER INFORMATION:  
<http://cabeurl.com/dv>

In France a new generation of sub-regional strategies – SCOTs (Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale) have been developed since 2004. Montpellier SCOT provides a cross-scale and cross-sectoral policy and delivery framework for Montpellier conurbation. It includes spatial policy at different spatial scales, including:

- conurbation-wide plans focusing on management and conservation of the strategic environmental, economic and social assets
- more detailed spatial plans for six sub-areas of the conurbation at 1:25,000 scale
- a design guide for local planning, including guidance for preparing urban projects, local plans and street design standards
- design briefs for eleven strategic sites, to demonstrate the application of the SCOT principles in the range of different contexts found in the conurbation.



Key diagram



The proposed limits of urban expansion (left)  
and Existing and proposed retail centres (right)

© Montpellier Agglomération





## Integrating strategies: Cambridge Futures (1997-1999)

FURTHER INFORMATION:

<http://cabeurl.com/dw>

<http://cabeurl.com/dx>

The Cambridge Futures project looked at ways of relieving development pressure in and around Cambridge, in the context of statutory restrictions on growth, including a green belt around the city, and a high degree of perceived community opposition to growth.

A group of local stakeholders, including public and private sector representatives, initiated and managed the project. They developed and evaluated several growth scenarios for the area, including a 'no growth' option and a 'green swap' option (including development in the green belt). Establishing a genuine choice of options, coupled with a well-structured and clearly presented assessment of options, helped the project to get a wide buy-in. This opened the door to the statutory planning process, and the project's results fed into the regional spatial strategy.



Option 4: 'green swap', showing the Cambridge Airport area after the policy is implemented



Option 2: 'densification', showing an area in Cambridge after the policy is implemented

© University of Cambridge / Metaphorm

# Conclusion

**“In general a balance has to be struck between predicting the future and allowing the future to emerge from the economy. We have to be careful that plans don’t narrow down possibilities - creating potential is one of the key things that planners can do for the economy.”**

Strategic urban design panel (2008)

The high growth era in the British economy was strongly linked to investment in property and places, and we have experienced something of a physical renaissance. Our cities, towns and even our villages have all changed, sometimes radically, and often for the better.

In today’s very different fiscal climate, it is even more critical to appreciate the role of architecture, the bricks and mortar, the parks and trees, the trains and trams which provide the backdrop and context for our daily lives. Distinctive places and well designed buildings will support high quality public services, generate civic and community pride, and attract and retain investors.

But if we are to succeed in doing more with less, the way in which we plan and design our towns and cities and rural areas will need to change.

A strategy is about selecting particular developments, a particular relationship, particular problems - and then making the tough decisions. To understand the unique capacity of large scale urban design to help make those decisions and guide the transformation of places, you should go to [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk) for a comprehensive step-by-step guide.

# How to use large scale urban design

The new approach uses a workshop-based process split into three phases, as summarised below.

## 1. Prepare – understand the challenge

The people who set up the large scale urban design project start by defining its scope. The area of study must obviously relate to the scale at which problems can be understood and possible solutions tested. They select a project team, a steering group and a champion to secure the necessary political backing. The project team writes a management plan that includes the aims, outputs and outcomes, a timeline, milestones, resources and risks. It also sets out how it will communicate with all those involved, including with the general public.

The team gathers, summarises, maps and analyses the background information needed for the design phase. This is an intensive and creative part of the process where participants interrogate data and learn a lot about their area. It is informed by perceptions of the quality of the existing area. They look at issues and data in a multi-layered way, assisted by strong and imaginative imagery and presentation of data and spatial information.

The culmination of this phase is a design brief that guides the next phase of work. It sets out the vision statement for the project and includes a summary of the information and analysis, delivery challenges for the wide area, aspirations for design quality and indicators to monitor the forthcoming spatial strategy and/or priority projects.

## Exploring identity: Thames Gateway project (2006-2008)

FURTHER INFORMATION:  
<http://cabeurl.com/dy>

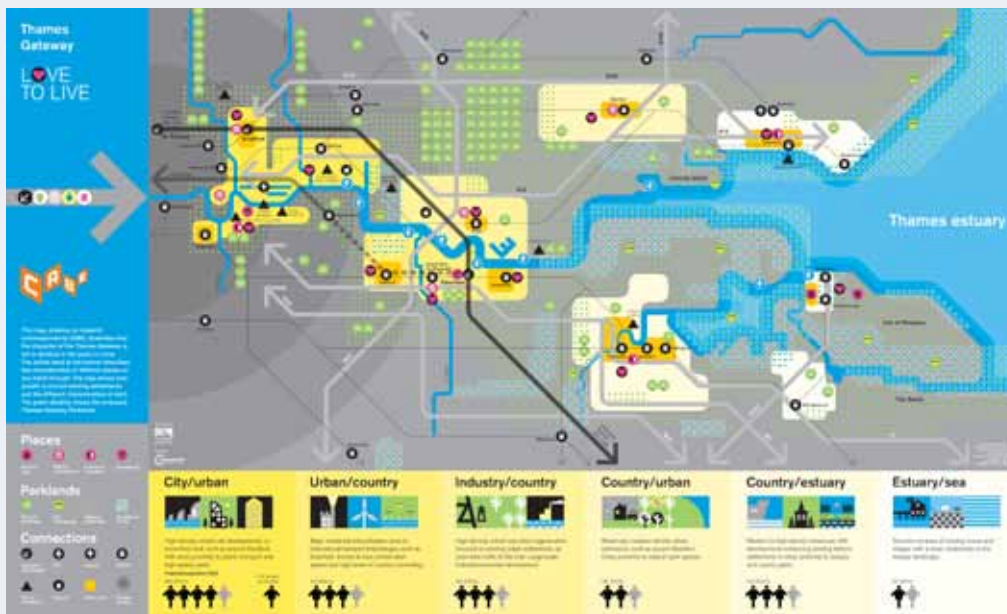
This project, commissioned by the Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership and led by CABE, studied the character and identity of the UK's largest regeneration area, stretching for 40 miles along the Thames Estuary from the London Docklands to Southend in Essex and Sheerness in Kent. Its aim was to investigate how the unique qualities of the landscape and existing places can be used to ensure new development in the

area is of a high quality, creates value and drives investment.

The background research was wide-ranging, including mapping the landscape and urban character, and consultation with the people who live and work in the area and the professionals engaged in change there. The subsequent publication *New things happen* set out a vision for the future of the Thames

Gateway based on four identity themes to help create a strong, coherent image for the region.

The study informed the overarching strategic framework for the Thames Gateway. It was the basis for a further programme of work by CABE including a Design Pact for the Gateway, which sets out the standards and approaches to development that must be adopted.



Thames Gateway 'Love to live' character map draws on research commissioned by CABE and illustrates how the character of the Thames Gateway is set to develop in the years to come.

## 2. Design – develop a spatial strategy

This phase is based on one or more intensive workshops that are guided by expert facilitators.

The people participating develop the vision into a more detailed 'story of change' that includes strategic themes and priority projects. The identification of issues and areas of investigation and design into strategic themes is an important characteristic of the process. It identifies the critical issues and projects that need to be addressed at cross-boundary level.

They create in parallel a number of spatial options or scenarios for implementing the themes and projects and test these by simulating what the impact would be. The options, together with the results of the testing, are often put out to wider community consultation. Once feedback has been analysed, an option is taken forward and refined, including more detailed design briefs or proposals for specific sites.

The key output of this phase is a spatial strategy, which summarises the story of change for the area, preferred themes, projects and the spatial option for their implementation. It is published widely in the area in formats that are easy to understand, to assist public buy in.

Those participating then prepare and publish a design guide to underpin the implementation of more detailed proposals: the success of the urban design process will be judged by the quality of the buildings, spaces and places that are developed.



## Design workshops in action: Hertfordshire guide to growth (2008)

FURTHER INFORMATION:  
<http://cabeurl.com/dz>

The project explored the most socially sustainable and environmentally sensitive ways to accommodate growth in the years to 2021, while maintaining existing character and landscape. It was initiated by local and national sponsors, including Hertfordshire County Council, the University of Hertfordshire, local landowners and a number of organisations and companies based in the county. The project involved a seven day long charrette (an intensive design workshop) for the public and private sectors and social and community advocates, alongside a multi-disciplinary design team.

During the charrette six growth 'scenarios' or spatial options were generated based on the overall growth projections. Each scenario included more detailed examples of the types of projects or spatial interventions that would support it.

The final report included a critical analysis of each option and an environmental assessment. The design team also provided an analysis of typical urban models, including a critique of the design of one of the towns in the county and case studies such as village and hamlet urban extensions.



Hertfordshire charrette in progress



A detailed study of the redevelopment potential of the area around the railway station in Stevenage (before and after), illustrating the application of the 'transport-oriented' scenario



BRE GreenPrint radar sustainability assessment of one of the options



The transport-oriented scenario – one of six growth options developed during the charrette

### 3. Implement – deliver the strategy

The implementation plan sets out how the strategy will be delivered and by whom. This is based on the earlier exploration of delivery issues and its preparation may culminate in a dedicated workshop with delivery partners.

The issues that are covered by the implementation plan are:

- delivery mechanisms
- delivery partners
- costs, funding requirements and sources
- phasing and timing
- managing risks
- coordinating and monitoring of delivery
- monitoring the impact of the strategy
- revising and refreshing the strategy

This may highlight gaps in expertise or investment that need to be filled to make sure that the strategy can be delivered.

Throughout the process, design quality needs to be continued to be made a priority, for example by strengthening existing design policies or introducing new ones into statutory plans; setting up design review or quality panels; or running design competitions.

They also need to agree how to measure the impact of the spatial strategy. This can be a complex task, performed consistently over a long period, possibly decades.

For a comprehensive, step-by-step guide, including examples to illustrate the key stages of the process, go to [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

## Delivering a strategic vision: Spatial-economic vision for Schiphol region, Holland (since 2000)

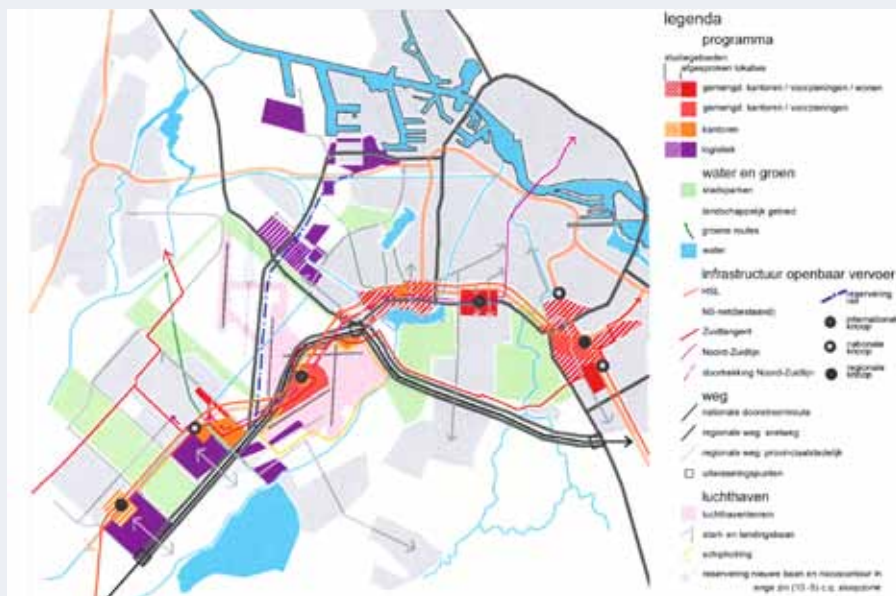
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<http://cabeurl.com/e0>

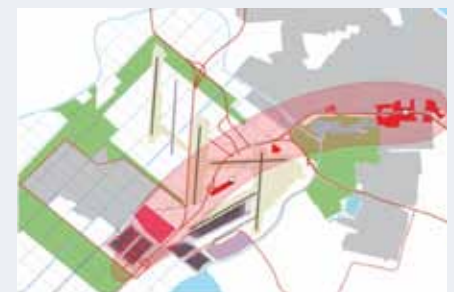
The City of Amsterdam, Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, the Province of Noord-Holland and the Schiphol Group (airport operator) were concerned that they were not sufficiently capitalising on the benefits of the airport because of a lack of joint working. They also felt that leaving the development of business sites around the airport to market forces would lead to fragmented development, with adverse effects on the accessibility and international competitiveness of the airport and the region. To address this they set up a management forum (Bestuursforum Schiphol) in 1987 and subsequently a joint development company – the Schiphol Area Development Company (SADC).

In 2000 the Bestuursforum produced its first spatial-economic vision aimed at providing a coherent development framework for the economic growth in the airport region and a powerful marketing tool. The framework established a strong context for SADC's activities.

Even though the vision was developed and is being implemented outside the statutory planning system, it has been perceived by the partners as an essential and meaningful strategy that fills the gap between the regional structure plan for Noord Holland Zuid and the local land use plans for Amsterdam and Haarlemmermeer.



Key diagram



Amsterdam airport corridor concept diagram

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# The benefits of a workshop-based approach

A workshop-based approach has many advantages over other methods of spatial planning. These include:

- a shorter time scale: the design process is compressed into a number of workshops, making it cheaper and less likely to be out-of-date before it is finished
- iterative working: frequent feedback loops and immediate design responses are built in
- integration: all parties are engaged, and work brought together at different spatial scales in a single design process
- engagement and sense of ownership: active participation in developing design solutions helps stakeholders to be positive and to own the project
- conflict resolution: with all parties working together, any conflicts become evident quickly – stakeholders can discuss and resolve them immediately
- consensus building: working alongside each other allows participants to develop an understanding of the wider issues
- capacity building: participants become informed decision-makers who are able to develop strategic solutions in a structured and inclusive manner
- increased probability of implementation: the workshops consider delivery issues from the start through a process that includes multi-disciplinary teamwork and engages politicians, funders, delivery bodies and the wider community.

Despite these advantages, challenges remain. The biggest of these is how to reconcile different views and avoid 'consensus as compromise', that is, reaching decisions that no one objects to but no one believes in either.

The new approach as outlined in this guide addresses difficult issues head on: this will be a tough process and not everybody is going to get everything they hoped for. It selects a handful of good, deliverable projects rather than agreeing to a long list of untested ones. And it develops strategic themes, spatial options and proposals for key projects to a level that is detailed enough for the wider community to engage with, allows for proper testing and forecasting of impacts, and provides adequate guidance for delivery partners.

**Northala Fields, London (2007):** Involving local residents and school children in the design of a key green space project to transform derelict land. Designed by FORM associates.



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## Footnotes

- 1 Abercrombie P (1933) *Town and Country Planning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p17
- 2 Fundación Metropoli (2007) *Región De Murcia, Programa Territorios Inteligentes*. Madrid: Fundación Metropoli, p29
- 3 Clark G (2009) UK-China SDD Urban, Working Paper, Foundations of Urban Regeneration in the UK, unpublished paper

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How do we deal with economic, social and environmental challenges that affect the lives of people over large areas and cannot be solved through local action? This guide outlines a new approach to large scale urban design that allows people to shape the places they live or work in, and improve its distinctiveness and quality. It will help those organisations and partnerships – often with a mix of public and private partners – tasked with working with local people to prioritise actions and investment.

CABE  
1 Kemble Street  
London WC2B 4AN  
T 020 7070 6700  
F 020 7070 6777  
E [enquiries@cabe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cabe.org.uk)  
[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

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