

### **13: Space at home, making a good place to live**

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Just to set my perspective, I have spent a long while working with space standards and have become highly suspicious of space standards taken on their own, because I have also spent a long while demolishing and looking at those estates of the late Sixties and early Seventies, all of which were built to space standards. They were all built to Parker Morris (plus ten per cent quite often), to Greater London Council (GLC) standards, to Design Bulletin 6 and all of those things that were coming up at that time. We have had a straight line in a sense where Parker Morris provided the foundation and over the years we have developed our knowledge base on top of it, and I think what we are going to see is that this is not a stable starting point. Space standards in themselves are not the answer; it is what we do with them, it is the places we make with them that is important. It is our ambition to look at creating communities which are stable - places where people wish to bring up their families or where they wish to stay and have their parents around or accommodate any other household configuration. So it is a whole range of other issues that are critical which are not necessarily to do with buildings.

We have, over the last year, carried out reviews with about five RSLs on their design manuals, and particularly I am taking examples in this talk from East Thames where we have a collaboration with PRP architects and from work with London And Quadrant Housing Group. Through those projects we ran a series of workshops which were for residents of all tenures, development staff, board members and others. We asked them a series of questions, but the most common theme was what were the qualities that led you to choose where you live now or which qualities you value the most. They did not specifically talk about space standards – you would not expect them to – they talked about a sense of space, but the sense of space was about values, it was about a place you could create and call your own and a place to add your identity to. It was about adaptability because everyone said that households change. It might be one person, it might be two persons, there might be two persons with children and then the household might change back to other configurations. So it has to be adaptable. To enable that adaptability to happen storage is required – things go into storage and come out of storage. So these were quite practical expressions of something which I am going to create a new name for today and call elbow room. People also expect good natural light, they thought that was a benefit, and they expect, related to the home itself, amenity space and play space.

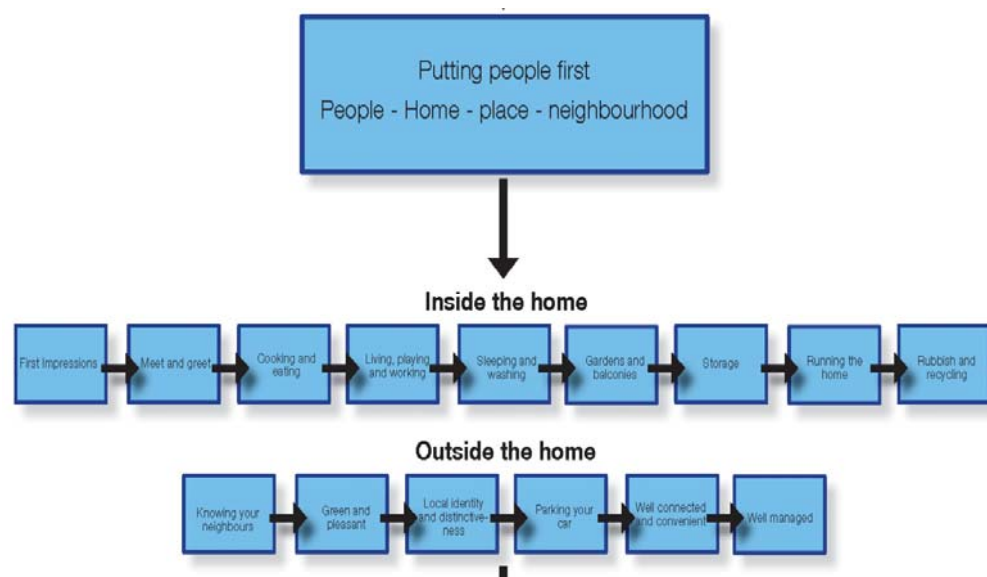
We then did a similar exercise in terms of outside the home. Here we saw different priorities. For many people the first one was knowing your neighbour – that could be a positive or a negative experience but knowing who they were was quite important. One of the references that came out was that people felt that within a development you were likely to know people within a cluster of about 20 to 30 homes; beyond that you did not know who they were, they did not know you, you did not talk to them - you did not have a community. So community is quite a close thing and clearly if you have a staircase or a small terrace it becomes closer.

The second priority was about access to services, not necessarily on your doorstep but certainly within the five minute or ten minute walk which we all use as a clear criterion. Then came the notion of a green and pleasant place. It is the kind of

approach people have: ‘I have a green garden’, ‘I have got a green street’, ‘there is a park at the end of the road’, ‘these are facilities I can use and share with my neighbours and other children’. Finally, much to the chagrin of all good liberals, was the requirement for a convenient and secure parking place, if possible outside the front door. So those were the top-scoring elements in that exercise.

We then developed something which we called the journey (illustration 1) because talking about space standards is not helpful – I do not think it is even helpful as a design tool. We do not experience space in square metres as we pass through it, it is the qualities of the space and whether it delivers some functionality to us in a pleasant way that matters.

First impressions inside the home might start, if it is a house, with the front gate. What are the first impressions of this person’s home? It is after all part of their identity. We see that immediately when people exercise their right-to-buy; the first thing they do is put their identity on it, saying ‘I am here’. Then we move into the front hall where there are a series of functions called meet and greet. It is where you bring people into your home, take off your coat, park a buggy – lots of rather boring things, but we all do them every day and being able to do them well is important.



*Illustration 1: from quantity to quality*

We then move into different rooms and each of those in a sense is a function itself. It is cooking and eating, living, dining and working – do they connect, do they interconnect, and are they distinct? Then there is sleeping and washing, gardens and balconies – then storage, running the home – where are all the bits that you need to make your home work? Are they accessible? Finally we have rubbish and recycling.

Externally we created another walk which is the walk from the notional bus stop to your front door, and asked what qualitative issues people felt were important. Firstly, it was knowing your neighbours; if you were passing people on the street it was good to have some idea of who they were, to give you a sense of security. It was also important that space was green and pleasant, that it had identity and distinctiveness. This was about finding your way, having waymarks, knowing where you were going

and being able, if you were a stranger, to get from a bus stop to a front door which you may never have visited before.

A common problem on nearly all of those 70s estates is that you can never find your way. Next came parking the car which needed to be convenient and well managed. So there was a hierarchy there where, if you put people first and thought about it as people, home, place and neighbourhood you began to rank a series of actions that we take every day without thinking about them too much, but which do affect the quality of our lives. What we have then is something which is re-establishing core values in a world where, increasingly, by default we all look to this manual on the shelf, a whole ream of standards which we work to.

We then looked at one relatively nuclear household - two parents and three children under seven. They live in a home which was built as a two-bed Parker Morris flat, its location is Inner London, its density is around 500 hab rooms, 175 per hectare, and the tenure of the development is 80 per cent local authority and 20 per cent privately owned - pretty usual. Given that their children clearly are beginning to outgrow the flat why are they still there? What makes the difference between moving and staying? The difference between them is interesting. What we are looking at now is something in the private sector which we have only seen previously in the public sector. This is the lack of ability to move on from home to home; the public sector has in practice been limited ever since we had that dream when we could provide a house to meet every need, the private sector was perceived as more flexible. But in the private sector six months ago you could not afford to move and now you could not get the mortgage to do it even if you could afford to move. So we are looking at people who stay longer and have to make hard decisions about where they stay.



*Illustration 2: The Brunswick Centre, Camden*

The location for our family is Brunswick (illustration 2), which is now a much better estate than it was a little while ago and is beginning to improve again socially and economically. But it is in a sense a typical inner city estate, so what made the difference for those people? It was a range of things which happened outside the family (illustration 3). If we start with the home itself it was about having a large

balcony for the children to play on. We then move on to develop that further by having a secure terrace, which is actually the roof of some of the finished units. It is not a play area, but it is a secure space; so having these provides a space for young people to play out safely which was one of the primary considerations. The next is about playing and socialising again – the estate happens to be next to a park so it has good access to play - the ability for their children to socialise and for the family to socialise was high on the list. It is also close to public transport and it is close to schools. All of that happens outside the home but the family said this was what made the difference between moving and staying. The difficulty for us as architects, therefore, is that there are a range of things which you do not have any control over; they are provided by others by and large.



*Illustration 3: what makes the difference - moving vs. staying*

In a television programme last night on housing in Manchester it highlighted that there are 700 one and two-bed homes which are vacant at the moment. What the programme illustrated was that these vacant flats were in gated communities, in essentially hostile environments. The assumption was that you went into it, you shut your door and you stayed there. It is interesting because that is what the residents used to say on those failed 60s estate where we have worked. What happened to the relationship between the inside and outside was illustrated to be equally a complete failure in Manchester.

We are looking therefore at maintaining the balance between these things; it is not just space standards, it is about looking forward. What we are finding now, and what is going to be mirrored in society at large, is that there are no longer standard one-bed two-person families, there are no longer standard two-bed four-person families. We are moving to a society where we have a broader spectrum of need and we need to provide a broader spectrum of housing. So it is about single parent carers who may need child care, it is about growing and changing households and it is about an aging population, none of whom may have wide choices about moving.

*Illustration 4: Type 2b/4p. Area 70.8 sq.m*

The only thing I know about the flat layout in illustration 4 is that I do *not* know who is going to move in. I do know they will not have furniture like that and they are not likely to be a typical two-bed four person household. So we are being asked to design homes which do not necessarily follow social demands and I think this is the big gap. The flat is about 70 square metres and what we need to look at, coming back to my technical term, is creating elbow room because one thing we do know is that we need to build in the ability to change - whether this is for furniture or anything else is irrelevant. Someone asked this morning, should we go back to Parker Morris? Parker Morris is about a culture and lifestyle of the early Sixties and late Fifties in Britain, it is not about people living how people live today.



*Illustration 5: 2b/4p+. Area 81.5 sq.m excluding storage*

If we have a larger bedroom to start with (illustration 5) then over time it can be changed. The larger bedroom can form two single bedrooms, or allow for a study off

the living room. The bathroom, bedroom and living space could be redesigned - all of those things can change. That is the objective which we have to move to because if we do not do that then we will be increasing the statistics of overcrowding, we will be creating tensions which will spill out and which we will not have the social provision for. And so our housing will go through yet another cycle of churn and change and depression.

Finally, I would suggest that we do have to move away from the simplicities within our space standards. So we should talk about the one and a half bedroom house, the two and a half bedroom, the two bed that becomes the one and a half, so that as households and circumstances change those changes can be accommodated. For example, the one and a half bed could in fact be a single person with a work space or it could easily be a single parent who has part time child care and needs space for that. Our base model is potentially a family home which has to accommodate growth in the family. Our aging population model is one where people may stay for 25 years and need adaptations which reduce their two-bed to one and a half, but they can continue to stay there with their social network and support systems in a place they wish to retain.