CIVILIZING SPACES
IMPROVING LONDON’S PUBLIC REALM
CIVILIZING SPACES
12 SEPTEMBER - 8 OCTOBER 2005
NEW LONDON ARCHITECTURE
THE BUILDING CENTRE
26 STORE STREET
LONDON WC1E 7BT

MAYOR OF LONDON
Transport for London
LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

NEWLONDONARCHITECTURE.ORG
COPYRIGHT 2005 NEW LONDON ARCHITECTURE
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
CIVILIZING SPACES: IMPROVING LONDON’S PUBLIC REALM

London's public realm comprises everything outside our front door: from pavements, bollards and street benches to great Georgian squares, Victorian streets and parks, modern roads and transport interchanges. The public spaces of London, like other world cities, have always been places where people gather - to meet, to talk, to eat and drink, to argue, to rest, to trade and to travel through. Street life is at the heart of urban community. A network of well-designed streets and public spaces makes walking and cycling a pleasure, makes dense, populated areas more liveable, and provides inspiring places where people want to stay and enjoy themselves rather than rush through or avoid.

The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, and Richard Rogers, his Chief Advisor on Architecture and Urbanism, recognise the importance of paying greater attention to London’s public realm. They are committed to making London more walkable, sustainable and beautiful.

The public space projects and initiatives on display in this exhibition are the first steps in turning London into the world’s most civilised, pedestrian friendly city, establishing a lasting legacy for a better quality of life for Londoners.

Working closely with the London boroughs, Transport for London and the London Development Agency, the Mayor’s Architecture + Urbanism Unit has put quality of urban design firmly on the public agenda.

Work with other partners such as Urban Design London – a network of London borough elected members, design champions and officers – and London’s Regeneration Centre of Excellence, aims to enhance the skills needed to deliver this improved public realm and to help change the way we perceive and enjoy our city.

THE PROBLEM

London is home to elegant architecture, beautiful parks, historic squares and grand streets. Despite these great assets, the quality of our streets and public spaces has for too long suffered from a lack of proper investment and poor quality design. Consequently many of our public spaces have become hostile and shabby, underused or avoided by Londoners. This is harmful to city pride, local communities and local economies.

Typical problems include spaces that are cluttered with too much and poorly coordinated street furniture, or spaces that are enclosed, hard to access or simply missed by the passer-by. Too many existing public
London's streetscape is often poor: cluttered with barriers, signage and lacking in integrated design

Detailing and construction is often of low quality

Successful public spaces must be designed to accommodate a range of different activities

Good detailing and high quality materials are essential to ensure durability and engender a sense of civic pride
spaces are poorly connected to the town centres which they should serve and are consequently underused.

Many of London's streets are unpleasant environments dominated by increasing levels of traffic, and are hard to cross and dangerous. Insufficient priority is given to the pedestrian or the cyclist and there are frequently low levels of usage from the elderly, children and people with impaired mobility.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

Over the past couple of decades London has been lagging behind many of its international counterparts in its approach to the public realm. Cities like Copenhagen, Barcelona and Rotterdam have championed concepts of accessible, attractive public spaces. The Government's Urban Task Force promoted the restoration of inner urban areas as places where people want to live and work through improvement of the public realm, shifting the balance from the needs of the private car towards public transport, walking and cycling. But there is still far to go to match the quality of the environment of some European counterparts.

Jan Gehl's study on central London “Public Spaces Public Life: Towards a fine city for people” - commissioned by Transport for London and the Central London Partnership - sets out how the current imbalance between vehicular traffic and pedestrians can be redressed by widening pavements, creating better pedestrian crossings, removing obstacles and animating spaces with public art, landscaping, planting and seating. Many of the projects displayed are inspired by this approach.

NEW THINKING

Over the last few years there have been isolated attempts at improving our public realm environment. Some high profile public space projects, promoted by private developers and public authorities, have already come to fruition. The transformation of Trafalgar Square and elegant designs of Kensington High Street and Tower Hill show the way, with individual projects such as Vauxhall Cross, Shoreditch and the Corporation of London's City Street Challenge showing significant steps in the right direction. This level of new thinking is now inspiring a new generation of public space projects, illustrated in this exhibition, which will make a substantial difference to how London looks and feels in the future.
Left: Plaça del General Moragues, Barcelona. One of the 150 new parks and squares created in the city since 1980.

Right: New landscaping around the Tower of London has immeasurably enhanced the visitor experience.

Left: Sankt Hans Torv, one of the many public spaces in Copenhagen that are more intensely used by residents and visitors to the city.

Right: Kensington High Street has been improved by the removal of clutter and better detailing of paving and street furniture.

Left: Exchange Square, Broadgate. This development around Liverpool Street station, started in 1985, was one of the first in Britain to take the provision of public space seriously.

Right: St John Street, Clerkenwell, was temporarily turned into a park when it was turfed over as part of the London Architecture Biennale 2004.
A STRATEGY

Improving the public realm is a key component of the Mayor's London Plan which sets out a vision for the development of the capital over the next 10 years.

The Architecture + Urbanism Unit has also been working with Transport for London on an emerging public realm strategy which pulls together many initiatives already underway and aims to set out a more coherent approach to delivering improvement and transformation in the quality of our streets and public spaces. The strategy sets out 3 layers of intervention across London and will also promote the use of trees in the capital's streets and public spaces.

1) EVERY DETAIL

a. The Architecture + Urbanism Unit is advocating small scale interventions everywhere starting with 5 simple things which would include, for example, the use of the same colour paint for all metal work and a review of existing street furniture to minimise clutter.

b. Transport for London's recently published Streetscape Guidance provides advice and detailed design principles for streetscape improvements and the subsequent management of the Transport for London Road Network. The guide encourages the use of durable and maintainable materials and consistency in textures and colours to create calm, simple and well-designed streets for people. Each element of the streetscape - street furniture, lighting, footway and carriageway surfaces and cycle and bus lanes to name a few - are considered in detail and guidance is given on their use to provide a high quality environment.

c. Richard Rogers has also been promoting 1 Million Trees for London to look after the trees we have as well as planting new ones in the right places.