

DESIGNING THE FIRST MIXED CITY CENTRE APARTMENT

Report from workshops delivered by PLACED Saturday 17th October 2015

OVERVIEW

As part of the 2015 Liveable Liverpool Seminar Series PLACED worked with Engage Liverpool to deliver two hands-on workshops; one for families and a second for older people. The workshops involved structured discussion and the development of design ideas for the 'first mixed apartment community'. The principle objectives of the workshop were to:

- Gain an insight into the opportunities and challenges of city centre living for two key groups; families and older people
- Inform discussion and policy when considering how mixed apartment communities can be created and how people from these groups could be encouraged to live in the city centre.

FORMAT

Four families (14 people) and 8 older people attended the workshops, which involved:

- Participants considering what is good, what is less successful and the opportunities for living in the city centre are for them
- Development of 'briefs' for their ideal apartment including looking at size / number of apartments, transport links, the resident make up, what they would want to be included in the apartment block and what they would want to see in the surrounding area
- Modelling their apartment / surrounding area informed by the above
- Structured discussion of design ideas and points highlighted through the design process.

Workshops were delivered by the PLACED Director and two PLACED Ambassadors. Gerry Proctor, Chair of Engage Liverpool, also attended the workshops. The following provides an overview of discussion and ideas from the workshops.

KEY THEMES:

Across both groups, the following were key themes:

- Diverse communities are sought. The development of more three bed apartments with larger rooms is thought to be integral to supporting mixed, sustainable communities. Making apartments accessible would support families and those with disabilities to live in the city
- More and better quality communal and public space in apartment blocks and in the wider area is desired, with participants believing this would help to create a greater sense of community, identity and cohesion. In particular there is a desire for more green space
- Improvements to transport – whether public transport links or cycling – are important to all to prevent isolation and ensure local facilities are accessible
- All participants like being close to all that is on offer in the city centre

- The current approach to apartment development and the wider urban policy for city centres presents a number of challenges and there was an understanding that there would be challenges in 'who pays' for the above. However, it was felt that with changes to policy and culture there would be opportunity for more sustainable city centre living with more diverse communities attracted to city centre / apartment living.

DETAILED OUTCOMES:

CHILDREN

Like:

- The location of their apartments - close to the centre and waterfront. Children reflected that there are plenty of interesting things to do in the vicinity and they are close to their schools
- They feel safe and most like the building that they live in.

Dislike

- Some felt that their apartment itself was small and dark inside with not a lot of personal space or room for their growing family
- It was noted how development can impact on their home; two children noted that they had a 'beautiful view' ruined when development took place in front of their apartment
- The space on balconies – as the only outside space – is felt to be limited and an absence of shared play spaces / parks was noted
- Some felt there are no other children to play with.

Would change

- There was a focus on the creation of more shared spaces; community garden, playing spaces, a garden, habitat for nature, swimming pools. They also wanted to see more children in the neighbourhood
- Children wanted to be closer to bus stops
- Children wanted larger, brighter apartments with space for them and their siblings.

PARENTS

Like

- Some noted that their apartment is very bright with a big main bedroom
- Central living, located close to everything, was a very popular factor
- One family new to the area mentioned their apartment 'feels like home'.

Don't like

- Size was a common issue, in particular with regards to lack of three bedroom apartments, small bedrooms and a lack of storage. This meant there is very little space for people to stay over e.g. grandparents, friends, and for growing families

- An lack of shared spaces and gardens was discussed, as was an absence of a sense of neighbourhood / community
- Accessibility can be a problem – for example stairs to access house, lack of disabled parking
- Comment on new developments in area looking ‘bleak and soulless’
- Lack of local shop that children can walk to on their own

Change

- Parents wanted to see more space to store things, even if this is in the wider building
- Wanted more three bedroom apartments, with large bedrooms, especially as families grow
- More meeting spaces in the neighbourhood, with a greener outdoors and gardens – even if shared – and a park were all very popular
- Number of parents would like to see the option of office / workspace in building
- Proper parking and bike storage on the ground floor would aid transportation.

FAMILY DESIGN IDEAS AND PRIORITIES

- **Size:** The number ranged, but 20-30 apartments per block was the general scale for an individual block. This could be part of a larger complex of apartments but with individual blocks split into this scale. The design quality and provision of communal services was more important than the number itself
- **Tenure:** All participants wanted to see diverse and mixed tenancy with all ages and social groups living in the apartment complex. They felt all would benefit from living near each other and they didn’t like the idea of ‘ghettos’
- **Apartment, interior:** Preference for 3+ large bedrooms, study / workspace, opportunity for personal space, beautiful views with balconies overlooking the waterfront and a place to go if something breaks down (concierge). A use of colour on the exterior of apartment, buildings that are beautiful and not just ‘boxes’, flexible spaces which could be reconfigured and solar panels was also suggested
- **Apartment blocks:** All designs / briefs included significant communal space and the creation of opportunities to meet with other residents and making connections. The following were specifically identified; community gym, club hall, playground, café, small office units, games room, laundry room, free Wi-Fi, and a common study on each landing. Outdoor space - gardens, roof garden, vegetable garden / allotments, kids shelter, a public square, communal terraces – were very popular. More parking and bike storage was also a priority
- **Transport:** Walking and cycling was a popular method for getting around, and a need for good cycle routes was noted. However good, reliable, affordable public transport being close by was also felt to be important

- **Surrounding area:** More quality, community space was a priority. Ideas included a skate park, meeting spaces, pocket parks, trees on every street, urban orchard for foraging, a nice playground, clubs for kids, (independent) shops and good schools. The popularity of swimming pools amongst children included a suggestion to use some of the waterfront for a swimming pool for people who live in the area.

OLDER RESIDENTS:

Like

- The location in the city centre was a key factor for city centre living. Amenities are within easy reach – museums, art galleries, theatres, restaurants, public transport. The location of apartments are far enough from things so as not to be bothered by noise, but still walkable meaning an apartment can be both dynamic and peaceful. The potential views of the Mersey were also a draw
- The buildings themselves were also cited as being important, with potential for huge spaces and architectural features
- Maintenance was a consideration - well maintained blocks and also an absence of a garden perceived to be an advantage by some.

Don't like

- The lack of bus routes, distance from transport stops and poor car parking were all problems. An additional comment was the significant traffic at peak hour on Riverside Drive
- There was a concern about potential future developments and the impact they could have
- Litter was a problem for some, both in the street and within their boundary
- A lack of a concierge a problem for some
- Due to the higher density, some had concerns about potential problems with neighbours, although said it hadn't been an issue they had faced
- Felt the area would benefit from more lighting, increasing feelings of safety.

Would change

- Improved public transport is a particular issue with a concern about access as they grow older. The lack of good public transport limited access to shops and increases isolation. Calls for reinstatement of the bus lane / bus routes, and for a ban of cycling on the pavements
- As with families, there was a call for increased communal / public areas in the vicinity and improvements to existing ones. In particular it was felt there is an absence of green space
- Better access to local shops – which could be supported by improved transport links
- Maintenance of nearby buildings was a concern for some.

DESIGN IDEAS AND PRIORITIES

- **Size:** The preferred size ranged – from 112 apartments to relatively small scale developments of 3 storeys. A mix of two and three bed apartments was thought to be very

important. Some were concerned higher apartments could result in problems if lifts broke down and noise from neighbours below and above

- **Tenure:** A mix of professionals, older people and young families was sought by all, although some noted they would not want students and would like a focus on owner occupation rather than rent. Better access would also allow those with a disability to live in apartments
- **Apartment blocks:** A communal garden area to encourage external pursuits e.g. allotments, lawn, trees, gardening, wild life, bee hives, planting containers and seating was popular.
- **Transport:** Easy access for public transport (bus, train and boat) was very important to this group. Improvements to cycling, including a suggestion that the bus lanes become cycle lanes, was also supported. More appropriate car parking is required
- **Surrounding area:** Meeting places are perceived to be very important in helping to create a sense of community e.g. cafes, restaurants, reading / painting / hobby areas. Nursery, sports and fitness facilities, room hire / community meeting spaces, community alarm system, study areas, café and shops, medical centre, police presence and play areas were all noted.

OLDER RESIDENTS NOT LIVING IN THE CITY CENTRE

3 older people who have chosen to not live in the city centre attended. Their reasons for not living in the city and what they want from their homes / neighbourhood can be summarised as:

- Feel they have a good community, friendly neighbours and the support network which comes with this. This was true whether a mixed or older people's neighbourhood; it was not felt a similar sense of community exists in the city centre apartments
- Quiet, surrounded by greenery, garden, trees and parks so it feels like living in the countryside. There are good walks locally, and shared spaces (streets, verges) are maintained
- Living in a house meant they could have light and spacious living accommodation
- Good lighting and individual security lights
- Accessibility in the city centre was an issue; one lady had considered a move to an apartment in the city centre but found problems with accessibility – a disability meant wouldn't work in terms of transport and apartment design
- One drawback was the lack of access in the immediate vicinity to community / communal spaces to meet.

FEEDBACK

10 feedback forms were collected at the end of the session; 3 adults and 7 adults. This has been collated and summarised below.

100% of participants reported they agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- It was fun
- It was interesting
- Learnt how to do something new
- Learnt about buildings and designing for people
- The workshop leads were good

90% of participants reported they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement below (1 unsure):

- Like to do other activities like this

When asked what they most enjoyed about the workshop feedback included:

- Building
- Modelling and designing
- Modelling my ideas into an outside allotment / garden / playground
- Interaction
- Discussion – leaders listened

When asked what they least enjoyed about the workshop feedback included:

- Presenting
- Short time
- Challenge of doing art work
- Trying to do models

When asked if they had any other comments, feedback included:

- It's marvellous
- Have more of them
- It was super-duper, mega, awesome