

The Terrace and Density - Lecture by Dr Patrick Clarke of Llewellyn Davies, given at the Design for Homes Joined-up Housing conference, November 2000

This Design for Homes CPD module should take you about half an hour to go through

Good morning. I was very conscious, looking at the programme for today, that there are a heck of a lot of people on the programme and in the audience that know a great deal more about terraced housing than I do, and I feel rather exposed, and Stefan has done nothing to diminish that feeling, with that excellent presentation. Indeed, I became so engrossed that I have almost forgotten what I am going to say.

I thought what I had best do in the circumstances, in relation to the other speakers who are going to come later today, is to try to set the terrace in a broader planning policy perspective in relation to the new PPG3 Urban Task Force agenda. I think together those documents take us into a new era, when we are thinking about housing layout, housing design and so forth. I think there are things that are changing in the way we design for people, rather than the car, the way we think about road layouts, that enable us to look at the terrace and the potential contribution of the terrace in a new light. That is really what I would like to do today. I am going to focus, to a fair extent, on suburban family housing because that is a key area of concern for the Planning Policy Guidance on Housing, how we deal with housing, at 30 to 40 dwellings to the hectare.

Therefore if we begin with some very broad objectives, I have, as it were, tried to distil these into three overlapping objectives, and people will no doubt have more that they want to add. But when we stand back from the very heated debate we have had about the future of house building, where houses should be built and whether the household projections might go away if we stick our heads in the sand for long enough. What we are really about is trying to create places that are attractive places to live, places where people will choose to live, not just five minutes after they are built but five, 10, 50, 100 years down the line – and we saw some of those places on the screen earlier on – places that will be places of enduring quality and choice.

We are also very much more concerned today than we were 10 years ago about sustainability, about the use of natural resources, about how we use land. PPG3, the Urban Task Force, places a great deal of emphasis on increasing the density of development, and in particular dragging up housing that has been built at the lowest density of 20 dwellings to the hectare, which is not far off the south-east average, up to above a minimum threshold of 30 and towards 40, and clearly going higher in appropriate places where access to facilities and public transport is good.

Clearly also there are all the issues to do with energy efficiency, the recycling of water and so forth, that other people, I am sure, will talk about this morning.

Then thirdly with the new administration, a much greater emphasis on inclusive communities, building neighbourhoods, parts of towns and cities, not residential enclaves, so places that reflect the rich make-up of an urban society in terms of age, ethnicity, income and so forth.



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Therefore those are some very broad over-arching objectives, against which we can look at current and contemporary practice and where we might be wanting to go in the future, and in particular at the role of the terraced house within that.

If we get back to where we are starting from and as one of my fellow directors at Llewellyn-Davies said the other evening, we are seeking an urban renaissance and thinking about the renaissance places in Tuscany or wherever, we have a long way to go in this country in the way we think about housing and development in general.

This is not a cross-section of my brain (1), it is of course a 1980s developer/local highway authority road layout for a major housing development. We can see the network coming off a main road here. We have this principal distributor road that lives all the way round the site, with all these little cul-de-sacs hanging off them. We think about public transport accessibility: there is no way in this world a quality or half decent bus service is going to operate in a layout like that. Think about walking from here to here (indicating) and how you are going to follow your way out

onto the main road, round the roundabout and back down over there – a layout that is designed, in short, around the needs of the car and not a great deal else. If we look into that sort of place, the edge of Swindon, the edge of any major town in England, we see the sort of environment we are all familiar with. This is a distributor road so houses are not allowed to front onto it. If they front onto it they have to have a separate access way because there is no direct access. There is a dedicated pedestrian route which is not overlooked, a not particularly safe or attractive place to walk, certainly in the evenings and after dark.

I am coming now to one of my favourite shots, the out of focus houses that I often joke were designed to be out of focus (2). The real reason is I was too embarrassed to get out of the car (laughter) to take the photograph, because I do not think we could claim that we were from the Government, researching good housing design practice and that we thought this was a good example for other places to follow.

But this is what happens when you put in the roads and then drop the houses in and around them. It meets all the local authority standards on highway design, overlooking distances, minimum garden sizes, density, off-street car parking provision, all those tick box standards are all ticked off and delivered and the developer gets his planning consent in a very straightforward way, and we are left with a place that does not have the enduring quality of many of the places that Stefan was showing us earlier on.

We get to the end of the cul-de-sac and we come to a particular triumph of post-war planning (laughter), excellent use of black tub, black board fencing and arrange of different housing styles (3).

I admit those are a pretty pejorative selection of photographs but I have chosen them to make a point.

New templates are emerging, there is a new interest in design, a much greater commitment to design. PPG1 I understand to be redrafted to give even greater emphasis to design. The Urban White Paper of a few weeks ago, emphasises design where it would have been unthinkable in a Government publication at that level to be talking about detailed design matters 15 or 20 years ago.

The research that we are doing for the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions to produce a good practice guide on improving housing design is really concerned with drawing together the lessons from the good practice that is out there, from both historic and contemporary practice.

Terraced housing features fairly prominently in the area case studies at which we are looking, and I thought I should like to share some of those with you this morning, just to give an indication of the range of terraced types that we were drawing on.

The next slide is Canning Street in Liverpool (4), a tremendous – though I had never appreciated the quality of some of the urban fabric in Liverpool, this is a particularly attractive example, Canning Street on the right, Isleden Village (5), not far from where we are today, a more modern interpretation of the Georgian terraced form.

The range is quite high density urban apartments and town houses, through to fairly dense – this is about 70 dwellings to the hectare – with very limited back to back distances, small gardens, perhaps five metres in length but still providing an attractive high quality living environment, albeit for people who are choosing where they live in the housing market, (6)



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living in West London, in a very, very expensive part of town, and right through to suburban family housing. This is about 40 dwellings to the hectare, pretty ordinary layouts of by-law housing but with quite generous rear garden areas. I will come back to that particular model later on in my talk.

There are trade-offs and differences in the morphology and the layout. Some of the classic perimeter blocks leave the car on the street and have a secure rear garden area.

This slide (7, 8), shows Jesmond in Newcastle where servicing takes place at the rear, so you have very, very attractive frontage, no bin stores, just the cars in the street, opportunities for landscaping and a very, very attractive frontage, but it does come at a cost. We have virtually no rear garden space and we have the rear service yard (9), which works there in a nice, safe, stable middle-class environment; it could work a lot less successfully in more difficult circumstances and that could become a very nasty place. Therefore I think issues of servicing are very important. Again a range of styles. It is not about historic styles: the terrace is a form that can take a very modern guise or a very traditional guise.

We are looking here (10) at Rolls Crescent, a modern development by ECD Architects, as part of the Holme Regeneration Project, and we are looking at the more traditional forms developed by Leon Crier at Poundbury (11). They are both terraced housing of widely different format, probably not very dissimilar densities: the Rolls Crescent is about 30 to 35 dwellings to the hectare again but a wide variety of architectural styles and characters are possible within the terraced form.

So just some quick reflections at that point. Clearly the terrace is capable of delivering a very wide range of densities, from urban apartments through to suburban family housing, in different forms. It is a very simple structure. Stefan showed some illustrations of the street plans, the gridiron layout, that looked incredibly repetitive and very dull in plan form but can actually deliver quite a rich urban setting through the detailing, the landscaping, and so forth, and the variety from house to house, particularly when that has aged over time and matured, with a great deal of serendipity. But servicing and parking are key issues in dealing with the terrace. Where do the cars go? Do they go round the back or do they stay in the street? If they go round the back, what are the downsides to that: loss of garden space, loss of amenity, loss of security? If they stay in the street, how do we meet the parking demand, if 0.8 cars per dwelling is about the limit of the terraced form when they are parked side on to the kerb? Those are factors that need very careful consideration when we think about how we might develop and use the terraced type in a modern context.



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I said at the start that in encouraging local authorities and developers to take current practice, which is producing housing areas at 20 dwellings to the hectare and increasing that to 30 and perhaps towards 40 as a key objective to PPG3, that is for a very simple objective, it takes it to a threshold where it can begin to support public transport and local facilities. It also makes the greatest saving in inland requirement, doubling the density from 20 to 40 halves the amount of land required; increasing it from 50 to 60 makes a more marginal land saving. Thus getting housing at the lower end of the density spectrum up to a respectable 30 dwellings per hectare threshold is a very important part of PPG3 and I know it is represents a significant challenge for many developers and local authorities, thinking about how they deal with car parking and so forth. I thought it might be useful to look at a piece of terraced and semi-detached housing in that density band, just to see how it works and how it performs in terms of planning policy objectives, about walking, public transport, access to facilities and so forth. I suppose I am using this as a counterfoil to the example I highlighted earlier. Therefore here we are, a joined up suburb, 30 to 40 dwellings per hectare with just the buildings highlighted. Again, a very simple piece of urban fabric.

You can react differently to that (12). Some people will say, oh, that's a really nice piece of grid. One of my staff even said if we printed that off at A0 we could use it as Christmas wrapping paper. Other people would say: "Well that is incredibly dull. What on earth has it to commend it?"

Well, let us have a look. It has shops, schools and open space. You can see there is a range of local shops in the principal roads, within walking distance of the residential properties around the back. We have local schools here and here. We do not have very much open space – there is a problem with this particular area – but we have some parkland here, here and here (indicating).

What about public transport? How does that compare to the 'brain' diagram I showed you earlier? Well, actually pretty good. Buses run through the area, along the main roads and even through what is principally a residential street here. They have put on the bus stops and the catchments. You can see that every single property in that neighbourhood is within a five minute walk of a bus stop.

Therefore in terms of delivering basic objectives, of providing ready access on foot to local facilities, to public transport and so forth, that model is working a good deal better than the one I put up earlier, although clearly it is only one model.

Car parking, I have said was an issue. How do we deal with the issues of car parking? The area at which we have just been looking was built before the car had been invented. If we look at one of the streets (13) we can see that parking now takes place on the street, but actually it is very satisfactory, although in planning policy terms, the local highway authority, that is something that causes them a great



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deal of difficulty, the whole concept of on-street car parking.

I would argue that it is actually one of the most efficient forms of car parking arrangement known to man, in that it is communal, so it evens out variations in car ownership between households at different stages of the family cycle, the car ownership cycle, so that if one family owns three cars and another one does not own any, then that is okay. They are on the street, at the front of the houses, so that people come and go and say hello to each other as they get in and out of their cars in the mornings and afternoons, and so forth. But it can only deliver about 0.8 of car parking spaces per dwelling, which is a level of provision which is considerably lower than most houses are built with today. Thus the issue of car parking needs to be rethought if models like this are going to make a fresh appearance.

There are different ways we can deal with the car. We can look at echelon parking, we can look at arranging the cars in line in the middle of the street, with two separate carriageways. We can think about how we can use car parking as a traffic calming device in the street, so we are designing the traffic calming in from day one, not adding it after the development is completed. We can get to one car parking space per dwelling fairly easily, with the terraced form, bearing in mind that the PPG3 sets a general maxima for car parking provision of one and



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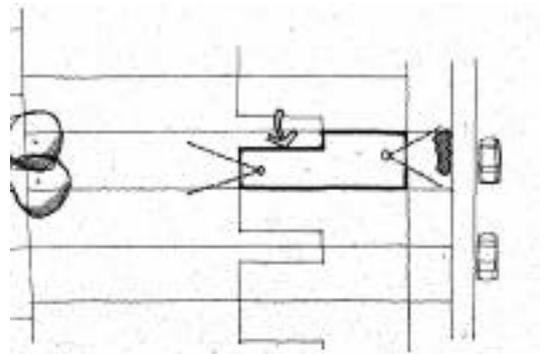
a half spaces per dwelling. I think the terrace can live with that and respond to that agenda through

creative design approaches. In particular, I think, thinking about how we bring trees into the street to soften the impact of car parking by breaking up the appearance of a continuous line of steel along the kerbside.

If we come down to the dwelling itself, what does that have, if anything, to commend it? Stefan talked about the very simple and straightforward plan form. Here we have one of the houses in the street. It is a by-law house from the turn of the century and it is occupying a plot of about 200 square metres. What is quite interesting, I think, is the internal space standards (14). It is a three bedroom house and it is about 150/155 square metres internally, which is quite generous when we set it against what the development industry has been producing fairly recently, and I know standards and types are changing. But there are a lot of three bedroom houses built in internal space areas a lot smaller than that, about 100 square metres. Garden area 125 square metres, and again I think that compares favourably with many new houses that have been built recently.

Therefore I think there are lessons about that. To be clear about this, this is a street that is built at 40 dwellings to the hectare as compared to 20, contemporary practice, and is providing perhaps 50% more internal space within the home and a garden area of perhaps 50/60/70 per cent larger again. The reason it is delivering those benefits – and those are significant benefits when we think about what people are looking for in space around the house – is that we are dealing with the car in a much more efficient way: we are providing less space to manoeuvre it and less space to park it. I think that that is one of the fundamental lessons that I would like people to go away with: that if we can create efficient movement patterns, not only for pedestrians but for getting cars parked outside the house in a way that uses a lot less land, than we can put those benefits and that space back into much more positive use of space within the home and around the home. I think there is much to commend the terrace in those respects.

I have so far focused on layout issues and principles. This is a slide taken from the Holme regeneration area, as is Rolls Crescent, of which we were looking at some of the photographs of the housing earlier (15, 16). Superficially these blocks look as if they are fairly identical. When you look at them more closely, you see that they are quite different. These blocks are continuous or almost continuous perimeter blocks, car parking again on the street. These blocks have the car parking brought into the back, so you have a sort of slight breakdown in the back and the relationship to the street. But the point I really wanted to make about this is that detailed design does matter and that the layout form will not deliver the quality and the richness of architecture that we should be seeking. This is the architect designed ECD scheme. It is



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social housing, affordable housing, single family houses and some sheltered housing: very sensibly and carefully created; there is a nice use of colour, a nice use of glazing, a good relationship to the street, and really a very, very nice piece of contemporary architecture following an historic form.

However, the stuff across the road, (17) which follows the same block structure, in crude terms, is more standard, more cheaply built, lacks the architectural integrity and I think fails to deliver the quality for which we should be looking in new housing, and particularly in a regeneration area: we are trying to create a new image, a new sense of place.

Therefore detailed design does matter and I have a particular plea particularly for you developers: please invest properly in design. Design is not something that is done for free at the start of a project, particularly at the master planning or the strategic planning stage, it needs to be invested in from the outset. If we are going to get the quality that we are looking for and the urban renaissance that we are seeking, we have to invest an awful lot more time and effort in designing and crafting the quality of residential environments.

Success and real quality comes with a lot of effort and a lot of graft. I think that effort has to be properly resourced and properly funded, it cannot be done on the cheap. I think that is a very important message that I hope people will take away. I think that design, if it is funded properly, can create quality and can create value, and it will create a situation which everybody wins and everybody benefits, not just now but well into the future as well. Therefore please, if we could have more attention and more and better funding of design throughout a project design process, that would help us greatly. I move just on to conclusions. We have already touched on many of these.

Clearly the terrace does provide a robust, enduring and I think at its best a very much loved type that people actively choose to live in today, as they have done over the last 200 years or so. It is capable of delivering a wide range of housing forms, from suburban family housing at comparatively low densities, with 30 to 40 dwellings to the hectare, with generous internal space standards and generous private garden areas, to quite dense urban apartments that meet the needs of single people, young couples and so forth. It can deliver privacy, it can deliver space within the home and amenity, and it can deliver security, secure rear gardens that are difficult for people who should not be there to get into, good overlooking and surveillance of the street so that people on the street know that they are being observed, the sort of see and be seen principle.

They are a very efficient user of land, as I have been emphasising, they give a lot less space, in the classic form, to the car, car parking and vehicle access, and put that space to more productive use in terms of space within the home and space around the home. Also they can sustain the densities that are needed to

support public transport and local facilities.

But new mindsets are required in the way we think about road layout and car parking. There are people out there who are deeply wedded to the old ways of doing things, who still believe in cul-de-sacs, distributor roads and arcane road hierarchies, that deliver the sorts of places that cannot deliver our objectives of urban renaissance and higher quality residential environments. Therefore new mindsets are needed and we have to work very hard to get those in place.

Finally a closing thought. It does, standing back from all this, strike us that today we have a tendency for developers to try to create 18th and 19th Century style housing, but to put that housing onto 20th Century road layouts that have been designed around the needs of the car.

Perhaps looking to the future, what we should be attempting to do is to design contemporary 21st Century housing of our own style but perhaps setting that in the context of the lessons we can learn from 19th Century road layouts that were actually planned around the needs of the pedestrian, and to provide ready and direct access to local facilities and public transport. So I should like to leave you with that thought. Thank you very much for listening.