

Sir Terry Farrell CBE

For many years Sir Terry filled these 'Shaping the World' pages and more recently colleagues from Farrells. We reproduce the cover and an article by Terry from *PiL* 96, January 2016 and the editors add to all the recent tributes

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The near-simultaneous deaths of Nick Grimshaw and Terry Farrell were a reminder of what a powerful force they were when in practice together, for 15 years, before a philosophical falling-out over post-modernism. Each architect went on to national and international success, with buildings and projects around the globe. Terry was always had a greater interest in planning and the evolution of cities than Nick, with Newcastle and Edinburgh examples where his ideas about place-making were put into practice.

But it was London, his adopted home town, that inspired some of Terry's most creative thinking about not just architecture, but the built environment as a whole. He was a sort of pragmatic theorist whose observations and conclusion derived from his life as an architect, but also from his early life studying in the USA with teachers including Robert Venturi. Like Norman Foster and Richard Rogers, but at a different time and in a different place, it was America which influenced his subsequent life as an urbanist.

His thoughts on the nature of cities, the implications of density and intensity, and the recognition that abandonment of the city was a mistake that made him a powerful figure in the world of planning, perhaps more so than architecture. His support of post-modernist architecture made him almost persona non grata in some architectural circles. Absurdly he was never made a Royal Academician (contrast that with some of the second-raters recently promoted to membership), though Nick Grimshaw became president. No RIBA Royal Gold Medal either. But he did receive the Royal Town Planning Institute Gold Medal, prompting a memorable lecture and publication about his ideas.

The combination of architectural and planning thinking is an unusual one in the UK; it is a matter of profound regret that there is no obvious successor to Sir Terry. He always regarded himself as something of an outsider, though the honours and appointments bestowed on him scarcely justified this feeling. He was really an outsider because of the decline of that honourable and necessary profession in the UK: the architect-planner.

— Paul Finch



Sir Terry Farrell's Farrell Review of 2014, which built on the Bishop Review of 2011 (by Peter Bishop), moved us closer to restoring design as a fundamental part of planning and urged the need for national planning, not just development control. Alas Government was not really interested, the perception being of an absence of votes in it. Or worse, as David Cameron voiced it: 'planning is the enemy of enterprise'. He couldn't have been more mistaken.

Although Farrell never matched the national influence Richard Rogers' Towards an Urban Renaissance, he nevertheless had many more useful ideas for thinking about planning London and other places. Back in the early 90s, talking about London Wall and his pink 'jukebox', Alban Gate, he described his approach as 'mending Modernism', now widespread in both architecture and planning as the movement's post-war failings are acknowledged. His critique of the rebarbative nature of London Wall and the Barbican reflected this – whatever you think of the architecture.

He made 'no small plans'. Outside London, by 2008 a new unitary authority took charge of the five towns of Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham. Terry's idea for the area was that 'Five Towns Make a City'. Like so many British towns the Medway towns were conspicuously failing to make the most of their shabby, but fantastic assets – the dramatic topography of the Medway estuary, the historic docks, a tatty industrial estate occupying valuable riverside land, rundown High Streets.

It boiled down to some key concepts. Reinhabit the 'empty stage' of the riverside; create a new linking public realm; connect and heal the High Streets; a continuous landscape of green spaces; connect key nodes with new multi-modal links – cross the river with a cable car, more water transport, new pedestrian routes. Ideas that Medway is still struggling to realise. But what a fabulous place it would be now if Government and Medway had fully delivered on Farrell's ideas.

He was so right about our need for speculative, design-led, creative planning at a local and national level, to create and argue about visions that lead to strategic plans. They are an essential tool for testing potential futures. And as he always maintained – the 'place is the client'. A simple tenet that should drive ambitions for social, environmental and economic sustainability.

— Lee Mallett



Terry probably had more impact on London than any other City although his architecture centre in Newcastle will be an important legacy as will be his very tall buildings in China.

Many people will see his notable London buildings as his legacy – M16 in Vauxhall, Charing Cross station and – just completed – his Chelsea Waterfront development between Lots Road and Chelsea Harbour which was featured on these pages in our last issue.

I see his London Legacy as being largely invisible. Terry was above all a master planner. He promoted, unpaid, concepts for the enhancement of the public domain. A great example was his long running promotion for the improvement of Euston Road which, over time, was largely achieved by underpasses, landscaping, pedestrian crossings and uplifting major developments.

Terry was good at marketing so managed to benefit his practice as he promoted public facing Ideas. Thus, for example, his commission for Regents Place from the British Land Company. Perhaps the most significant achievement of his Euston Road concept has been the major redevelopment of the Paddington railway lands at the western end.

Terry contributed the 'Shaping the World' feature at the back of *Planning in London* since PIL74, July 2010, which partners in Farrells have carried on in recent years.

He had a broad but realistic view of the involvement of communities, once quipping: "I believe in bottom-up planning but the trouble is, when you are at the bottom you don't know which way is up."

— Brian Waters



As we move towards a denser London, is it time to rethink the rules?

It may seem ironic that in looking for ideas for the future, we are starting with the solutions of the past says Terry Farrell

I've spoken many times about the challenges facing London. In the last five years we've added the population of Edinburgh to our city and in the next ten years we will add a 'Birmingham'. Looking beyond that the GLA have identified in their Infrastructure Plan the pressures that will be placed on the capital including the need for doubling the capacity of the underground system and building 600 schools for the predicted population in 2050. Meanwhile, London is still only half the density of other world cities like Paris and New York. So what are the big issues facing us as we move towards a denser London?

There has been much debate about a new generation of towers planned or under construction, and much of the criticism has been centred on the rejection of the fabric and DNA of the city we know and love that makes it uniquely 'London'. Density does not mean building tall, something which is often misunderstood. Many have questioned why we are not building more of the typical, street-based residential blocks that are found in areas like Islington and Covent Garden. Areas that we preserve and make 'conservation areas'. One of the major constraints, in my view, is the set of rules we have come to accept around daylight and sunlight. These rules are actually based on a suburban model rather than the urban model we need to move towards a denser London with a variety and mix of uses.

With higher density comes greatly improved quality of life – access to amenities and public spaces. The closer buildings are together and the more compact the city as a result, the less reliance there is on cars and the easier it is to walk and cycle with all the associated health benefits and reduction in carbon emissions. So it is incumbent upon us to review and refresh the rules, and how they are interpreted, and to understand the unintended consequences.

Our industry is starting to understand the scale of this issue and I've attended a number of events that capture these high level statistics. But when I say 'understand' I believe this is in the abstract, in a non-engaged and often purely theoretical way. Technocrats come to the fore with their habitable rooms per hectare and plot ratios but what really interests me is what it means 'on the ground'. This discussion, in my view, should be led by practitioners who are planning and designing the new and infilled parts of our city – architects and planners that are creatively addressing the issues of delivering new homes in a multi-layered metropolis.

Whether we like it or not, we are moving towards a denser London and with the mayoral election now in the minds of the public and the construction industry, there is no better time to start reimagining our future city. In the last few decades we have seen swathes of the capital transformed from former industrial land into publicly accessible, greened spaces support-



ABOVE: Kensington Court Mansions

ing new communities and vibrant new places. These reimagined parts of the city have been made within the framework of planning rules, often responsive in nature and created in isolation to each other. Layers of technical advice and guidance have been applied to new buildings, which reduce the opportunity and flexibility of design and leads developers to rely on a small number of 'safer' typologies and devices. These controls range from city-wide rules, like the abstract London Views Management Framework, to architectural detail like the BRE daylight guidance. Surely it is time to review these rules and question whether they fit for purpose in order for us to move towards a denser London?

I've recently been working closely with Gordon Ingram, who's company GIA have carried out some fascinating studies on existing daylight levels within some of London's best-loved districts. These areas are full of life, character and charm but if they were to be assessed at planning stage using our current daylight methodology they would never have been built. It will be argued that the BRE guidance is simply that, however it >>>



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BELOW: Bird's Eye View of Marylebone –
High Density, High Value & Tight Knit.
Courtesy of Bing Maps



takes an experienced and confident planning officer to capture the full opportunity and flexibility of its wording. Similarly, the distances between buildings in these areas go against the often quoted 18m face to face 'rules' of many development control officers. Our collaborative research with Savills is looking to establish that proximity is no barrier to quality or value. It is interesting, for example, that many of our most valuable streets in Kensington and Chelsea measure little more than 14m.

This has led me to looking again at some of the capital's finest streets and the emerging thinking in respect to mansion block typologies, which give a tried and tested alternative to the formulaic perimeter blocks we see all too often these days. Mansion blocks by their nature have good percentage of ground coverage (I'm always questioning my design teams to tell me the footprint of our schemes) and this means that a site's use can be optimised. An important factor considering less than 29 per cent of London's brownfield

sites are larger than a hectare. In turn, we can build lower and more cheaply which is increasingly important in a cooling residential market. This approach goes against the rules though. Typically, as we increase densities, buildings get taller and further apart in their 'search' for daylight.

The mansion block typology is closer and tighter and through its architecture moves the debate into a more expansive discussion of quality and experience rather than one based on numbers. Its elevated ground level together with its heightened ceilings on lower floors creates a spatial experience that goes beyond its Sub-BRE daylight levels. Its angled bays change the orientation of its rooms relieving the face-to-face relationships between neighbours and asking more demanding questions of architects. It may seem ironic that in looking for ideas for the future, we are starting with the solutions of the past. But it is the long standing popularity, flexibility and ultimately value of these buildings that may hold all the clues. ■