

Mentally Health City

Building a liveable Leeds

Leeds Art Gallery, 11th June 2014

Summary

A key part of the Health and Wellbeing Board's work is to galvanise the city to become a healthy and sustainable community – this is the fifth outcome in the [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#). This builds on the social and environmental model of health which emphasises the creation of the right conditions for health to flourish in Leeds, alongside working with a medical model which tackles and treats ill health.

This event specifically looked at Mental Health, and asked how we can build a 'Mentally Healthy City' – one where the buildings, the roads, the parks, the leisure facilities, the houses, the cycle paths, the community assets, the social networks, all work to foster good mental health.

Attendees

The workshop was attended by a wide range of professionals in Leeds, with over 70 participants ranging from planning and urban design officers to mental health service leads, directors, lead health commissioners, active recreation specialists, along with a large number of leaders from the 3rd sector specialising in 'place-shaping' work.

Keynote address

The keynote address was given by David Rudlin, Director of URBED (Urbanism Environment and Design). David is a planner by training and has managed a range of high profile consultancy projects including the Oldham Beyond Vision, the Selby Renaissance Charter for Yorkshire Forward, Temple Quay 2 in Bristol, The New England Quarter in Brighton and the 4,500 home Southall Gasworks masterplan in West London. He is the author of a number of research reports including '21st Century Homes' for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Tomorrow a peaceful path to urban reform' for Friends of the Earth and 'But would you live there?' for the Urban Task Force. David was a member of the CABI design review committee from 2002 to 2005, and is Chair of Beam in Wakefield, joint Chair of the Sheffield Design Panel and a founder Academician of the Academy for Urbanism. Some of David's writings are also available on his [Climax City](#) blog.

David's presentation focussed on 'Health, Happiness and Wellbeing', and a full link to the presentation, with speaking notes, can be found [here](#).



Exercises

The second half of the morning was devoted to case studies focussing on three areas of the city:

1. South Bank

The South Bank of the City is likely to experience significant growth in the coming years. Not only is this necessary and a sustainable use of brownfield land but it will also enable the city centre to relink with the outer areas of Holbeck, Hunslet and Richmond Hill.

The area was always urbanised but mass housing clearances in the 60's and 70's left communities isolated and created much of the light land use and disconnectivity that we see today. The vision for this part of the city will re-urbanise the area. However this poses new challenges for people's mental health and we face the opportunity, and the challenge to create a truly mentally healthy place for the long term future of the city.

Some elements to consider are:

The importance of local distinctiveness and heritage for this part of the city - Would new development of the same style, scale etc contribute to the area becoming bland and uninteresting? (ennui?) How important are older elements of the place. Hunslet and Holbeck were the great engineering powerhouses of the industrial revolution. Is collective memory in the remaining buildings important? How do these assist people's mental health?

The proposed City Park - The proposal for a city park around the Tetley's site will create a major green space within the city. But how large does it have to be? Can it be treated in such a way as to stimulate the senses and provide relief from the often harsh urban environment? How can this be done. Should we have a botanical gardens or urban spa's?

The role of the River Aire - How should development respond to the river. What role would the river have on people's mental health. Would leaving areas alone (i.e. nature reserves?) benefit people's lives? Can development and the natural environment thrive? How important are trees to this area?

Connectivity – How would safe and attractive walking, cycling routes affect people in this area and neighbouring areas? (NB - See pedestrian dominance mapping project currently underway) Would extra connectivity to Holbeck, Hunslet etc be beneficial? How do we overcome mass infrastructure like HS2, M621 etc?

2. New Housing development

There is a need to build 70,000 houses in the city in the next 10 years. What implications would this have on people's mental health? Are 'new towns' the answer? What happened at Milton Keynes? Can we build new sustainable Garden Cities?

How important is *local distinctiveness*? Are some housing sites simply too large to maintain the character that make rural places so attractive? How can we make new development more responsive to context?



What are the implications of people *travelling* 10+ miles to work everyday? How would this affect people? Should we reopen rural railway lines? Should we be building more roads to serve these communities? Are there problems of *integration into older communities* by a mass of housing?

How is *loss of rural aspect/greenspace* designed in? Is it possible to minimise impacts on such areas? If so, how? Will we be building more 'little boxes on the hillside?' How important is design in new schemes?

3. Dewsbury Road

Dewsbury Road is an inner city area of Leeds in Beeston/Holbeck. Several regeneration initiatives have been undertaken in the past but the real issues are poor connections, lack of green space, ageing housing stock and poor tenure.

Is it true that this area has lots of character and the rows of houses provide a real **identity**? How does this affect people's mental health? Can these houses be retained and retrofitted? What happens if we demolish these houses? Will we built anything better?

How important are linkages to the city? The railways somewhat cut off these areas from the city but in more recent times the M621 was built through Holbeck Moor and caused greater fragmentation and isolation. How can we reconcile these areas? Does this create an 'us and them' mentality? How will HS2 benefit these areas?

Local culture – Many diverse communities now live in these areas, how can we harness the creativity and cultures that are here.

Crime – How does crime or fear of crime affect such areas? Does this affect people's mental health?

Opportunities - What are the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of these areas? This area has great potential but how can it realise this potential?

To commence the session, there was a very brief explanation of each area by Andy Graham, followed by a number of voluntary/3rd sector organisations who gave brief five-minute 'lightning talks' to inspire and inform participants of projects happening in these case study areas. Talks were given by representatives from:

- Groundwork UK
- Leeds Health for All
- The conservations Volunteers
- Leeds Housing Concern

Groups were then given an Ordnance Survey Baseplan of the study area and post-it notes, and with the help of the contextual notes were challenged to answer the question '**What do these schemes need to make them Mentally Healthy?**'

The exercise culminated in getting together to share each group's ideas:

Southbank:

- Use Mentally Healthy Cities as 'USP'
- Local Facilities
- Community hubs
- Attractive variety of housing
- Intergenerational
- Pedestrian friendly
- Lifetime family homes
- Industrial heritage: Temple Works, Tetley's, Park, Discovery Centre.
- Low cost flexible spaces
- Cultural space
- Other infrastructure should not be jeopardise
- Bradford centre style water space
- Pocket parks and community facilities
- No green spaces
- Green route from HS2 to City Centre
- Links to surrounding communities
- Pedestrian zones
- Make use of existing warehouses
- Indoor Sports area's
- Community not to be dependent on city centre

Dewsbury Road:

- Play spaces for children – good experiences for kids
- Free Wi-Fi zone
- Consultations with local public
- Tidy up
- Need to feel less hostile
- Improve the busy road
- Have a Youth Centre
- Lack of connection
- Direct links to schools and community centres
- Use of green space
- There is a fear of crime
- Improve houses and shops appearance
- Difficult for pedestrians and cyclist to get to city centre and around the city
- Utilise old/derelict buildings
- Build of heritage
- Links to other places/areas
- Build community opportunities
- High density population
- More Colours!
- Green walking routes
- Need to maximise view of green spaces
- Bus routes
- Make community needs as part of development space
- Use similar/sympathetic building material
- No fence around the development

New Housing:

- Design Sensitivity: good design, in keeping with surroundings, integrated routes.
- Consultations: What are the current needs?
- New connected to old
- Contrasting to historic context
- Good quality of new builds
- Will it work for the communities of 2100 as well as 2014
- Green walking routes
- Need to maximise view of green spaces
- Bus routes
- Make community needs as part of development space
- Use similar/sympathetic building material
- No fence around the development

Conclusion

The day concluded with a summary of discussions by Cllr Lisa Mulherin, followed by a challenge from her as the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board in Leeds:

What are the opportunities you have, whether as a mental health professional, city planner, public health worker, working with the 3rd sector in communities or whatever you do, to take away the messages from today's event into your areas of influence?

Participants filled in 'pledge cards' which will be posted back to them in three months' time.

Next Steps

Since the workshop feedback has been very positive from health professionals, design colleagues and elected members. Next steps are still being discussed, with an inevitably long-term focus to deliberations, but the outcomes of this masterclass will be taken into consideration in a number of different planning and development contexts, including the ongoing work to develop the Core Strategy and the site allocations for the city. Additionally, Executive Board of the council will consider the outputs from this event in the autumn.