

Big Meet Cornwall

Slightly more than 100 participants gathered in impressive interior of the The Great Hall at The Alverton, Truro on Wednesday 16th November for a stimulating and interactive agenda about Place. The event was organised by The Architecture Centre Devon and Cornwall as a Place Alliance supporter, and in welcoming guests **Mark Pearson**, the Executive Director explained that this was very good timing for all those concerned to promote good design and better place-making in Cornwall to come together...

Firstly, the long-awaited adoption of a Local Plan for Cornwall was now imminent – and therefore, with the amount of development finally decided, the debate about growth now needed to concentrate firmly on quality. Secondly, this autumn marked the first anniversary of the Cornwall Design Review Panel operating to a new and improved constitution - and, acting as the Chair of CDRP, Mark wanted to feedback to a wider audience on the types of projects that were being encountered; the common design challenges faced; and, the growing evidence of positive outcomes from the process. Thirdly, the High Court challenge disputing the St Ives Neighbourhood Plan's innovative policy to deny new-build 'second homes' had just been dismissed – strengthening the already strong impetus for neighbourhood planning in the county. Coincidentally (or not?), St Ives was announced as the winner of the 'audience poll' for the best place in Cornwall – a town, Mark observed (and illustrated with a satellite image), that perfectly combines urban quality with coastal phenomena and natural beauty...

There was, in fact, a strong contingent of Neighbourhood Plan-makers in the audience – community members joining professionals from all disciplines; house-builders and developers; local authority officers; and, representatives from other bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnership. It was a very healthy mix and extremely encouraging that the subjects of Place and Good Design were attracting their firm interest.

The event began with a keynote presentation from **Prof Matthew Carmona** as chair of the Place Alliance. Matthew welcomed the idea of the Big Meet format being replicated in the provinces and gave an insightful survey into what he believed to be the current 'aspirations, blockages and priorities' for place quality in the UK. His observation that European research had concluded that contemporary development outside of the historic urban cores almost invariably created poor places was harrowing (if not unexpected) confirmation of the challenges ahead.

In order to keep a fast pace and to introduce some of the appointed **Cornwall Design Review** panellists to a wider public, three varied 'Pecha Kucha' style presentations were interspersed amongst the main speakers – all given the same title "My Place, Cornwall". These were delivered by **Tim Kellett** (an urban designer - discussing the opes and alleyways of Falmouth); **Mike Westley** (a landscape architect – explaining his work in linking landscape with health and sustainability outcomes), and **Paul Holden** (an architectural historian – discussing the impact of the historic environment of the identity of Cornwall).

The second substantial presentation was delivered by **Mark Pearson**, reporting on the CDRP – a positive first year that had included some significant challenges – frequent battles against promoters that seemed to wish to propose 'clone developments' regardless of context based on standard development formats and corporate templates with no 'sense of place', and housing layouts that paid little heed of topography and struggled to make positive relationships with retained hedgerows and other ecological assets. But there had been many more constructive engagements - with mixed use and creative regenerative projects and a series of fascinating reviews with a 'Custom Build' residential scheme. The

panel had also collaborated positively with the Council's Estates Department - assessing design quality in a competition to find a preferred development partner for a council-owned site in Penzance.

As the third major component to the evening, **Richard Guise** of Context 4D was invited to give a preview of his forthcoming publication "Characterising Neighbourhoods". Building on his celebrated joint work "Shaping Neighbourhoods" that was co-authored with his former colleagues at UWE, this new text looks set to be an incredibly useful sourcebook and methodology for those engaged with neighbourhood planning or anyone just seeking to understand their home patch with greater insight. His immaculate hand-drawn illustrations will adorn what looks to be an indispensable reference for urban designers. This new book is a collaboration with James Webb (historic environment consultant - and another CDRP panellist!).

In a lively **Q + A session**, chaired by Matthew Carmona, the speakers were joined by Cornwall Council portfolio holder for planning and regeneration, **Cllr Edwina Hannaford**. She then concluded the meeting with some spirited observations and warmly endorsed the event and its ambition.

In summary a very positive gathering - and it ended with firm hopes that the place-making agenda may be revisited in a second Big Meet Cornwall in twelve months' time...

MDP 25.11.2016