

Case study library

Over its eleven years CUBE developed an extensive digital library of case studies to champion high quality architecture, urban design and public spaces, and this became one of their most popular and influential resources. Since its creation the Place Alliance is regularly asked, by Government and others, for good case studies, suggesting that the demand remains for good quality contemporary case study materials. Whilst CUBE's case studies are still available at the CUBE archive, as time goes by this material will become increasingly dated, and there is an absence of properly curated case study material that reflects the new realities of the austerity years and beyond.

It is proposed to begin the process of building a new digital case study library to compliment that in the CUBE archive. This will continue where the CUBE library left off. A quote from a prominent urban design practitioner (reflecting on the CUBE library) gives an indication of the potential value of such an initiative and of the range of case study material that could be assessed through it:

“If we wanted a precedent about something, if we wanted to find out about what was going on in schools in Europe, or what was the best example of a new park – CUBE was the first place to go to. Everybody was out there looking for case studies, going on trips and looking. People were even doing it as a hobby, travelling at weekends, and finding, for example, the best housing development in Holland. So the website was pretty powerful”.

As well as commissioning case studies (through sponsorship), if Place Alliance could encourage its supporters to contribute case studies to the library (in a similar fashion to that suggested by the quote), over time this would help to build a similarly invaluable shared resource.

As a first step, it is suggested that a working group be convened with responsibility for taking this initiative forward: drafting guidance, finding sponsorship, selecting and commissioning case studies, quality control, etc. etc.

Further background CUBE library

At their height, CUBE's digital case studies were receiving 31,000 views per week and three quarters of visits to the website targeted that section. By 2011 a library of some 398 cases had been built up targeting the following areas: housing (116), public space (102), culture and leisure (66), regeneration (57), commercial buildings (52), educational buildings (44), neighbourhoods (41), sustainable development (41) parks and green spaces (36), historic environment (32), health buildings (29), planning (10), transport & infrastructure (9), inclusive design (8).

Each case study has a standard format with sections covering a description of the case, the design process, an evaluation of the case, further information, and identification of the design team. Choosing case studies involved a selection of best practice from across the country, and often included projects that CUBE had been involved in, for example enabling

their realisation. CABE's case studies were often conceived and developed with partner organisations, and were typically commissioned externally.

The development of clear internal documentation helped to streamline the case study process, including templates and writing guides for the preparation of entries, and calls were frequently put out to likely organisations to rapidly compile case studies in order to mop up any end of year unspent budget. Evaluations of the case study library were conducted in 2003, 2005, and 2009 which confirmed the on-going popularity of the resource with the strength of the photography regularly highlighted as a key asset by site users.