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GREEN THINK-TANK

Australia must urgently address the impact of climate change on its cities according to Caroline Stalker, a Director with Architectus, Brisbane. Despite the emergence of climate as a critical issue, Stalker says that relatively little consideration has been given to ways in which cities must adapt.

The effects of climate change on our cities is the focus of a high-level workshop to be led by Architectus in Sydney on April 28-29, 2008. The seminar/workshop will feature a range of leading planners, regulators, architects, government and industry leaders.

A central focus of the think-tank will be the challenge of how to retro-fit cities to become much more energy efficient and sustainable in their settlement patterns. The theme: 'Retrofitting cities for climate change and

sustainability' will see participants consider topics such as retro-fitting urban coastal edges, dealing with and designing for the effects of extreme weather events, retro-fitting existing urban and suburban communities and the reduction of carbon emissions.

Keynote presenters include David Craven, Executive Director of the Green Building Council and Greg Withers, Director, Queensland Office of Climate Change.

The Green Think-Tank is one in a series run by Architectus and Caroline Stalker hopes it will be a catalyst for change with input from some of the nation's leading climate change and urban design specialists.

"The workshop," she says, "has a real sense of urgency and direction. It's about ideas development and discussion and we will also be calling on the participants to produce specific proposals regarding sustainable design and the challenge of climate change.

"Hopefully the recommendations that flow from this will be considered very seriously by governments at all levels." Stalker says architects and planners have a special responsibility and role and believes there is a need for such initiatives "rather than simply respond once things have gone wrong.

"This is a critical moment for urban designers everywhere, especially in Australia where urban sprawl and development pressure on sensitive



coastal areas is being compounded by climate change. This is a pivotal moment that we simply cannot neglect.

"We now have a Federal and State Government that are very focussed on this issue. The problem is that there are plenty of ideas floating around out there in the intellectual ether but I've yet to see anything that really addresses the kind of design work we need to be doing that relates to climate change.

"The big challenge we have in amongst all of this is that there are carbon emission targets we must meet and yet we have these vast urban areas that contradict green commonsense.

"Governments are understandably very interested in how we can retrofit cities and the impact of rising sea-levels. These are very serious issues and yet no-one that I am aware of has looked at urban design.

Stalker understands that urban designers are uniquely placed to influence the environment and yet recognizes that the scale of the challenge is such that a total community effort is required to confront and manage the process of change.

"This," she says, "is a primary reason for holding this think-tank so that we can better research and find solutions. We also want to better connect with Federal and State Governments to see how we can really achieve some more immediate and longer-term answers."

While there is a real concern about better managing development and the environment, Stalker is also optimistic. "We now have a government that is interested in cities and the role cities play in sustainability. For 11 years we had a government that was really blinkered about climate change. Finally we have a government at the federal level that recognises



that cities can't be allowed to remain as these laissez fair products of the economy.

"Cities are an instrument of humanity and in that regard we really need to guide them rather than go feral in their energy use. We need to act quickly, collectively and to make more of the right decisions to protect and shape our future."

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02.

Project: Atherton old school site master-plan
Location: Northern Queensland



ATHERTON'S NEW ACTIVE CENTRE

Atherton is facing the challenge of providing for increasing community and retail use demands in an existing lively town centre.

A master plan for the Far North Queensland town of Atherton has been prepared by Architectus to guide future development on the old primary school site on Mabel Street. Atherton remains a significant regional service centre with growing retail and community needs. In response to this, Council commissioned the master plan to better utilize this key site.

One key objective for the master plan is to balance community and retail uses. "The aim is to create thriving community and retail precincts that return the town centre to its historic pre-eminence," says Architectus Urban Designer and Director Caroline Stalker.

Providing for a range of community uses, the master plan demonstrates that the site can support shops/offices and more community uses than is now offered on site. Caroline Stalker sees the plan as helping to restore pride and faith in the civic and retail experience. "It should demonstrate how to organize a range of new community-based uses around a wonderful central public space. This in turn will link Council's administrative precinct to the town library, future auditorium and sports area".

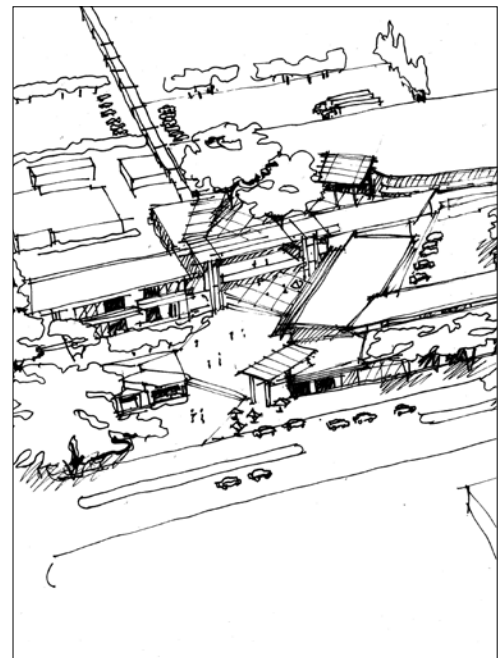
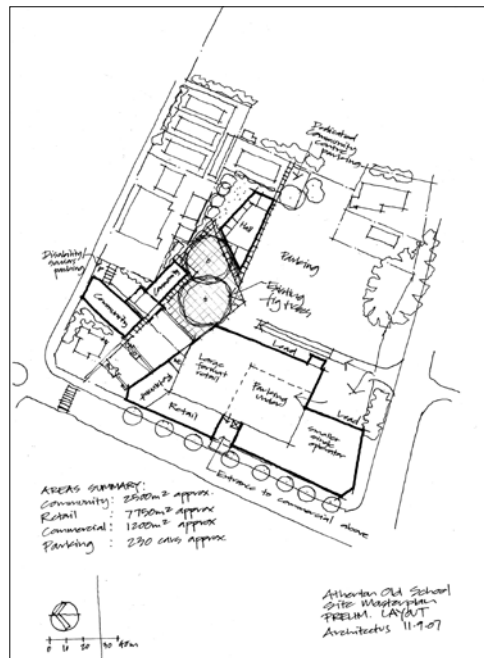
"The master plan," says Stalker, "was prepared through a process of site analysis, options testing and community consultation." The report details key design recommendations including the wedge-shaped public space in the site centre that she believes "will become a hub of community activity. This public activity space will be surrounded by 'active edges' including retail and cafes to help give it a liveliness and community focus."

Two existing large trees which are to be kept, will offer a leafy, tropical character that will be reinforced in buildings and plantings

surrounding the space. The primary axis of this space faces in a northerly direction, and offers an ideal orientation for street cafes.

Atherton's history as a primarily agriculture-based community continues and the new master plan created by Architectus blends the needs of this experience with a growing interest in tourism of the Seven Sisters and nearby volcanic mountains.

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Interview

STEWART VERITY

Stewart Verity is Director
Urban Design and Planning,
Architectus Sydney.

Should urban design and planning aim for an invisible or conspicuous presence?

It requires something of both. They're really interrelated. A place should feel very comfortable and easy to be in as well as stimulate the senses. Ideally there are those elements that are a little more upfront, a few key markers that provide that liveliness and light. If you go too much either way you can end up with either a very bland or a very contrived environment - so getting the balance right is a big part of it. As an urban designer you want to help create the right pulse to a place.

One of the perceptions of planners is to do with being negative, or deciding what people and communities can't do rather than what they can do?

That is a fair reading. A lot of planning documents, such as development control plans, LEP's and the like are prepared with a predisposition toward poor development as the norm, rather than an assumption of at least reasonable quality. There is a perception that the worst will happen if we don't get in there and do something to stop it. The practice of planning has changed a lot over the years. Around the turn of the century people like Raymond Unwin and Ebenezer Howard were town planners working more as city designers. That has now changed to the point where the 'design' aspect has fallen away in favour of a greater emphasis on 'control'.

How would you like to see cities becoming greener?

Parks and trees are the simplest thing, but ecological systems are much more complex than that. I think that there is definitely a role for planners in helping to restrict or limit the neglect of our environment as well as encouraging sustainability.

So regulations are part of the stick, what represents the carrot, the incentive that planning can also offer a way of living well and living better?

That is the carrot isn't it? If you accept the values of effective planning and design, then the rewards really accrue to include almost every area of life from improved financial rewards to a more comfortable, more accessible and sustainable living environment.

Urban design often resembles a patchwork quilt that usually occurs as a series of overlapping patches over a period of time? Is this the ideal way to create great cities?

There are so many influences on what shapes a great city or place. To assert that sound planning and design alone will result in a great city is an overly simplistic and naive view. Likewise, some of the nicest places around the

world are accidental, they're not overly planned. Contrary to the way many public spaces are designed to encourage communication and interaction by the layout of fixed seating and other elements, Paley Park in New York for example has fully moveable seating that people can move around and put where they like. The space is designed, but the elements within it allow individuals to change and modify the space to suit their particular circumstances.

You've worked as an urban designer and planner throughout Australia, the UK, in Europe, China and in the Middle East. What were the main differences that impressed you?

I think the UK and Europe are very similar to Australia. Despite the political or legal system in these places there is a strongly established context to respond to. Working in China and the Middle East was extraordinary because you leapt in scale from working with up to a few hundred hectares to suddenly designing a new city for 250,000 people covering hundreds of square kilometres. My first project there involved planning for 90kms of waterfront along the Pearl River, which was a scale I was not used to. Additionally, the City Government was concerned more for the future outcome than the existing settlement of the area, so in a built form sense, there was no real context to draw on or relate to. In such situations you really need to get back to the basics of the physical environment and how you can best respond to it in an environmentally sustainable way, while also trying to deliver something that encourages its own identity.

Are there any trends or shifts globally in urban planning that are likely to affect or benefit Australia?

Sustainability is really the overriding issue. Even China seems to be delivering far more in terms of sustainability than it used to. It's not just lip service anymore. In many respects we are at the front of the pack and others are learning from us. I think that's part of the reason that Australian professional skills are in demand overseas.

So with a project such as Murwillumbah, what are some of the specific actions?

What we have brought to the project is 20-30 years of international experience working on town centres that have the same issues and pressures that Murwillumbah is going through. There are physical constraints - flooding is a major one and the impact of neighbouring towns such as the expansion of Tweed. There is also the issue of the mix of uses and quality of public space within the town centre. With these projects you tend to look for the fundamental qualities of a place and try to draw them out and reinforce them, while also addressing some of the inherent problems that



may exist. In Murwillumbah's case there is a strong existing character which we have tried to nurture and reinforce. We are also concerned with addressing the potential threat of a new supermarket on the continuing viability of the main street as well as trying to create a place that is able to limit some of the leakage to Tweed Heads. At a smaller scale, the arrangement of built form and activities has been particularly cognisant of constraints such as flooding and the encouragement of more appropriate sub-tropical design.

What are the trends and shifts in urban planning that are occurring globally that can be applied to and benefit Australia?

In the case of Murwillumbah you really call on your experience and we know that a major shopping centre that is located outside of the town centre can suck the life out of the town centre. That is simply one absolute constant.

What is your favourite city in the world?

I don't have a single favourite city. I prefer larger cities to small ones. I love Sydney for its lifestyle and access to the Harbour and beaches. Shanghai is my favourite Asian city, while many European cities also have so much to offer.

So what are the great town planning lessons for the rest of the world?

I think it is about liveability. We should be aspiring to make places that are truly liveable in the full sense of the word. They should be rewarding from a physical, social and economic viewpoint, which is easier to theorise than deliver in most parts of the world. My experience of China though is that with its central government structure it can do what is necessary much more easily than we can in Australia. Government policies there have created unprecedented economic prosperity in cities such as Shanghai, which has also resulted in a significant loss of environmental quality and destruction of some of the historic fabric of the city. In response to this, the government decided about 15 or 20 years ago they needed to green the city and so they went on a massive tree-planting program to the point where almost every street is now lined with mature trees. They knocked down whole city blocks of post war housing in order to establish a system of local parks to make the place greener, so that was pretty radical. There is also now a renewed effort to retain important historic buildings and places, finding new uses such as funky restaurants, bars, retail and office spaces and then mixing these with more modern development that blends renovation with the new so it has really been reinvented - and become greener in the process.

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05.

Project: Murwillumbah
Location: Northern NSW



MURWILLUMBAH SHAPES AS A GOOD THING

The name Murwillumbah derives from an Aboriginal word meaning 'camping place'. It is in this spirit of stopping and staying awhile, whether as visitor or resident, that the local Council engaged Architectus to develop an urban design strategy.

Located on the Tweed River in northern NSW, and with a population of around 9,500, Murwillumbah has the good fortune of a comparatively compact and lively town centre along with numerous scenic attractions. Its main street has a memorable quality that contributes to a strong retail trade.

Throughout early and mid 2007 Architectus worked with Council and the local community to understand key issues for the future development of the centre and to provide an appropriate framework for growth.

Murwillumbah has a robust urban structure and a unique landscape setting, including a large park close to the town centre. These strengths provide a basis for continuing to consolidate Murwillumbah into the future as a lively hinterland town.

Through a rigorous design process, Architectus evolved key urban design ideas and strategies for the town. These include:

- Support and consolidation of retail and mixed use within the town centre rather than allow retail to spread and fragment to surrounding areas.
- Support and create future design initiatives to keep the existing strong relationship to the landscape character and the sense of a hinterland village.
- Capital works initiatives to link the town centre more strongly to the river.
- Strategies to revitalize South Murwillumbah.
- Provide a framework for new mixed-use development.
- Promote more walking and cycling through improved streetscape and bicycle links, as well as encourage more people to live in the town centre.

Architectus Directors and Urban Designers Caroline Stalker and Stewart Verity worked closely with Council to ensure the strategy fully understood the Council and township's objectives and underlying needs, thereby creating design solutions that generate added value for this generation and those to come to this 'camping place'.

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- 2 - 3 Storey Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Light Industry
- Open Spaces
- Pedestrian Links

- A) Medium density residential
 - Rezone to 2B
 - Min 1,200m²
 - 0.9.1
- B) Infill guidelines
- C) Mixed use
 - Incremental change (no min lot size)
 - Change zoning to B3
 - "Equalize" residential development potential
 - Parking provisions
- D) Medium density residential
 - Rezone to 2B
 - Min 1,200m² lot size
 - 0.9.1
- E) Mixed use
 - Allow residential
 - Requires rezoning to 3B
 - 0.9.1
- F) Consolidate retail
- G) Shade tree plantings on Murwillumbah Street
- H) Clarify pedestrian linkage to Council building
- I) New deck over river's edge
- J) Steel framed link pergola to pedestrian edge of bridge
- K) Pathway to gallery
- L)
 - Rezone to allow residential
 - Guidelines for ground planes and streetscape
 - a) Commercial mixed use (RES)
 - b) Cultural industries precinct action plan for feasibility
- M) Urban improvements around bus station
- N) Improve clarity of presentation at entry
- O) Entry landscape promotes view to river
- P) Zoning remains as is guidelines for improving address
- Q) Planting to attract glimpses to river and create view corridors

FACELIFT FOR KING GEORGE SQUARE

Brisbane's most significant civic space – King George Square that flows from the city's town hall – is undergoing a transformation. Progress is well underway to revitalise this once grand urban space. When completed in 2009, the 'new' square will provide a far more vibrant, contemporary and free flowing connection to the Roma Street parklands and the surrounding streets and open spaces.

Most people familiar with King George Square would be surprised to know that motor-vehicles and a tram route operated through the square until 1969, when the roadway was closed to traffic.

Development of the Square is underway at this time as traffic is due to enter the square once again, although taken underground in an extension of the busway services to all points north.

What is widely accepted as an overdue reworking of this central civic space, Architectus has designed new structures for the square at the invitation of Urbis JHD which won the design competition for the square's revitalization.

The design includes helping maintain the above-ground pedestrian flow while welcoming the five new levels being constructed underground in a state-of-the-art busway, new parking facility

and sustainability-conscious biker shower, lockers and storage space.

Last year Urbis JHD and Brisbane City Council appointed Architectus to work collaboratively to develop key design themes of a 'folded floor' and 'city deck'. Two busway station entries are expressed as folded planes lifted from the square of the floor, to provide a generous chamber of space as a welcoming arrival experience for bus commuters.

The city deck provides a large viewing platform for events in the square and doubles as a functions space. The structure also houses a café at the ground level and has at grade access from Ann Street. These structures contribute to Urbis' competition winning vision of a contemporary and animated space.

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BLUEWATER QUAY SEA CHANGE

Promoting the interaction between this 'Sugar Capital' city and the Pioneer River, the Mackay Bluewater Quay project provides a space for celebration and riverside recreation.

While recent extreme flooding and pace of various community refurbishments have tested the town, Bluewater Quay is due to be completed later this year.

Architectus was invited to develop the project by the local Council whose funds for the \$9.5 million works program were assisted by funding from the Queensland Government's 150 Years of Statehood program.

Like many Queensland coastal areas, Mackay City Council has been focusing on the revitalization of the CBD and its reorientation

towards the waterfront. Architectus is assisting Council to ensure redevelopment of the waterfront creates a highly accessible, active and exciting precinct. This includes sustainability aspects at a local and global level, as well as being sensitive to both the urban and rural context.

The scheme comprises a generous waterside deck with a café and stage which is reminiscent of the earlier wharf structures of the area. Other elements include a public square, market areas, a playground with water-play feature, and grassy terraces to accommodate a calendar of events. Key design components include long multi-faceted seating walls and 'origami roofs' to give the space a strong presence within a future busy mixed-use precinct.

"The Bluewater Quay project represents a key investment in public domain as part of an overall plan to re-orientate the city centre toward the waterfront," says Architectus Director and Urban Designer Caroline Stalker.

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04.
Project: Fanshawe Street
Location: Auckland



AUCKLAND'S GREEN VISION

A high profile site on one of the main gateways into Auckland's CBD the Viaduct Exchange master plan seeks to create an urban work environment that challenges the standard of concrete jungle. Here the approach is to establish a people oriented hub that embraces the opportunity of a green civic square.

Residential and commercial growth in the Viaduct Basin and Lighter Quay areas has seen a strong demand for revitalized, pedestrian friendly growth.

As a result this 1.6ha site in the Western Reclamation is being developed as a mixed use development to provide 50,000m² of commercial office space and retail space as well as public landscaping, access roads and underground carparking.

The development framework prepared by Architectus breaks the site into five building elements. This permits an improved scale of individual buildings, reduced shadow, variability for visual connections and easy pedestrian access through the site.

Buildings come to the external site boundaries and provide a defined edge to the surrounding urban fabric. To the west the scheme anticipates the widening of Daldy Street into a linear park.

An east west pedestrian spine and central public outdoor space provides a focal point for people and neighbourhood activities. A series of colonnaded edges to all buildings further contribute to the quality of sunlight and dappled shade for precinct visitors.

Architectus is proceeding with the design of individual buildings on site to achieve a 5-Star Green Star environmental rating.

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