

New Urbanism: a Technique to Build Poundbury with the Past

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Abstract. Based on the very serious problem of losing local distinctiveness in ordinary villages in the 20th century, this paper tries to rethink design principles in an appropriate way that can respect and maintain traditional community forms for new developments that meet people's contemporary needs. One of the helpful ways is learning lessons from the typical example on both theoretical and practical aspects.

In this research, Poundbury would be selected as the exemplar. It began in the late 1980s as the UK's best-known sample of new urbanist community. It was intervened by Charles, the Prince of Wales, and designed by the 'godfather' of new urbanism, Leon Krier. Obviously, Poundbury with a traditional face seems destined to become an important and attractive spot for local residents and visitors.

This paper tries to conclude the design principles of new urbanism that Poundbury applied to create a new community under the situation of the very great challenge of disappearing local identities.

Keywords: New Urbanism, Poundbury, Design Principles

1. The research background

During the preindustrial era, most ordinary villages were normally built to adapt to the local social and environmental context, and their ingenious designs and diversity have become a treasure trove that inspires some contemporary architects. However with a booming economy since the 20th century, the bond between new residential buildings and the environment is disappearing in villages. In the process of new development, there is a desire to abandon the past and purely seek for concrete blocks and multi-storey flats which usually have been mass-produced in the urban area. This generation makes most modern development divorce from specific places, so much of priceless value has been lost or destroyed. In addition, the new design is found as unattractive and dislike places where appearance and form are short of individual recognition and indistinguishable from similar environments elsewhere. The villages have become regional or national, even international, in their scope and effects (Owen, 1995).

Therefore, it is very important to look for an appropriate way to respect and maintain traditional settlement forms for new development to meet people's contemporary needs in ordinary villages, and also vital that lessons are learnt from exemplars. As HRH the Prince of Wales (1989, P15) said: "We can build new developments which echo the familiar, attractive features of our regional vernacular styles. There are architects who can design with sensitivity and imagination so that people can live in more pleasing surroundings. And not just in our towns and cities, it is possible in country areas to build straightforward, visually appealing houses in local materials for people on lower incomes. This paper would select Poundbury as an exemplar. According to Hardy (2006), there are four sources to shape new settlements and create something unique in Poundbury. First, it is through the movement known as 'new urbanism'. Second, it is a practical development of the Prince's own ideas which includes ten precepts of the place, hierarchy, scale, harmony, enclosure, materials, decoration, art, signs & lights, and community. Third, it is through the appointment of the Luxemburg architect and master-planner, Leon Krier who is designated the primary intellectual 'father' or 'godfather' of new urbanism (Thompson-Fawcett, 2003). Finally, but not less important, it is the location of site which is the extension of Dorchester.

2. New urbanism

2.1. Defining new urbanism

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The new urbanism nomenclature was not adopted until 1993 when CNU (Congress of the New Urbanism) was founded by Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Calthorpe, Solomon, Polyzoides, and Moule (CNU, 2000). It sees physical design—regional design, urban design, architecture, landscape design and environmental design—as critical to the future of our communities. The ‘new’ in new urbanism has several aspects. It is an attempt not only to apply the age-old principles of urbanism—diversity, street life, and human scale—to the suburb in the twenty-first century but also to resolve the apparent conflict between the fine grain of traditional urban environments and the large-scale realities of contemporary institutions and technologies. And it is also an attempt to update traditional urbanism to fit our modern lifestyles and increasingly complex economies. (Watson, etc, eds, 2003, P3.10-1). Then Charter of CNU stands for the restoration of existing urban centres and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighbourhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy (CNU, 2000, P7). The alternative term ‘neo-traditionalism’ perhaps better defines what it is trying to achieve. British researcher Stephen Marshall describes that new urbanism is effectively an urban design package that combines neo-traditional style buildings arranged in street grids to form relatively dense, walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods (Marshall, 2003, P189). Obviously, the ascendant of new urbanism is very paramount. In spite of its traditional leanings, at the end of the 20th century New Urbanism marked a radical change of direction. In particular, in the British context, it represented a challenge to a form of planning (Hardy, 2006, P34). Peter Calthorpe concludes that it is about the way we conceive our community and how we form the region—its diversity, scale and public space in every context (Neal, 2003, P8). Therefore, according to the above analysis, in this research, new urbanism is not a revival of historic or traditional planning strategies. but a attempt to apply principles of urbanism—identifiable with a clear edge and coherent neighborhoods, compact, mixed use, pedestrian friendly, walkable, distributed green spaces, designing buildings in a series of links, accommodating cars but giving priority to the pedestrian, attaching importance to symbolic architecture and local attractions, and shaping architecture by surroundings and local building traditions, to meet our changing society and new technology in order that the new built environment can be re-ordered into the form of complete cities, towns, villages, and neighbourhoods—the way communities have been built for centuries around the world.

2.2. The key players of new urbanism of the development in Poundbury

The twentieth century seems to have no limits, oozing inexorably over landscape with little form or character (Grant, 2006, P4). In the late of nineteenth, some important representatives started to think about the above serious problem and they did have a very big influence on the rise of new urbanism. They share the same values of traditional urbanism from the Aristotelian ideas of liveable communities for all citizens to the works and thoughts on urban design formulated in the writings and practices of Camillo Sitte, Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs, Gordon Cullen, Colin Rowe, Christopher Alexander, Leon Krier, HRH the Prince of Wales, and others (Haas, ed, 2008, P9). It is very important to focus on Leon Krier and the prince here because they are the key players of the development of Poundbury. Leon Krier is designated the primary intellectual ‘godfather’ of new urbanism because he had an important mentoring role in the early development of the CNU. He would build walkable urban quarters with clear edges and centres, and coherent architectural styles by favouring an authentic urbanism grounded in the traditional principles of the European city. His concern about the loss of authenticity in urban form presages a common theme in new urbanist discourse, especially in the writings of Duany and Plater-Zyberk: a close reading of *Suburban Nation* reveals the preoccupation with ‘true’, ‘real’, and ‘authentic’ neighbourhoods and places throughout the text. His view of the city appealed to an important patron: Charles, the Prince of Wales (Grant, 2006, P52-53). As a British pioneer of new urbanism, Charles thinks his ten principles should be at the heart of a new approach to shape the future of Britain’s towns and countryside, which influenced much on the development of Poundbury.

3. Poundbury

In 1987, West Dorset District Council selected Duchy land to the west of Dorchester for future expansion. As the Duke of Cornwall, Charles, the Prince of Wales who re-examined many of the precepts of urban and rural planning, took this opportunity to work with the council. Poundbury is aimed to be highly

planned, coded environment based on the integration of design principles of new urbanism and the prince. (Krier, 1989, P47, cited by Thompson-Fawcett, 2003, P258, & www.duchyofcornwall.org).

3.1. Master plan

The location of the site is in the south central part of England, adjacent to the west of Dorchester. Leon Krier needs to prepare the overall development concept for 400 acres including 250 acres of mixed-use buildings and 150 acres of landscaping. He divides Poundbury into four distinctive quarters, as showed in Figure 1 & 2. For development purposes, each quarter corresponds to a phase. Poundbury is being phased according to market demand and is expected to increase the population of Dorchester by about one-quarter which is approximately 5,000 people by 2025. As at the beginning of 2011, there were about 2,000 people living in Poundbury and 1,200 employed in businesses.

The framework for the development of Poundbury allows each section to establish a life of its own, but still connected to the town as a whole (ODPM, 1998, P25). The underlying design of Poundbury is strictly traditional which can be summarily analyzed by the following design principles which are identifiable community with a clear edge between town and country, mixed use, walkable, designing buildings in a series of links, reducing car uses, shaping architecture by surroundings and local building traditions, and involving people in shaping their own community.

3.2. Design principles of Poundbury

3.2.1 Identifiable community with a clear edge between town and country

Leon Krier views that the uncontrolled growth of suburbs destroys the character and integrity of towns and cities. Therefore, there is no suburban transition between Poundbury and surrounding countryside. Their relationship is managed with a clear boundary via outward facing development, which can create a sense of place.

3.2.2 Mixed use

Apparently, it is very paramount that makes Poundbury development mixed-use to meet as many as possible of the town's future needs, and provide easily accessible and facilities including socially and functionally mixed with employment opportunities and facilities alongside dwellings. In addition, mixed use developments can help reduce the need for travel. For example, the larger workplaces are accessed directly from the distributor roads. And it can be treated as the public realm by integrating affordable housing and streets where the car is subsidiary to the pedestrian.



Figure 1: Master plan. Resource from www.duchyofcornwall.org, accessed at 10/11/2011.

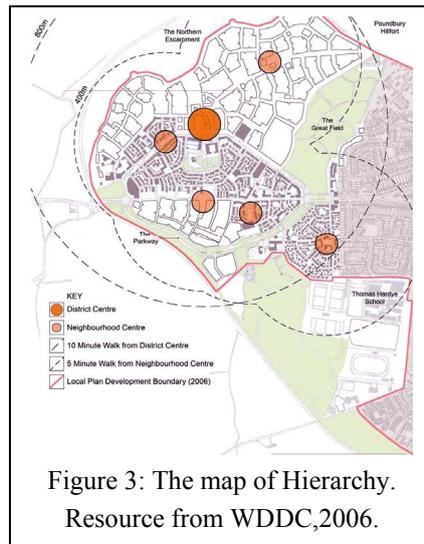


Figure 2: Detailed master plan. Resource from www.poundburyforum.proboards.com, accessed at 10/11/2011.

3.2.3 The analysis of walking distance

It is very obvious that people living in Poundbury demand for convenience needs, like food, services and local facilities. In order to make sure all these are as approachable as possible for the local population, and to control the site and distribution of shops and services, a hierarchy of centres have been identified according

to human scale in the development, which varies in importance, with concentration of real commercial and community uses, as showed in Figure 3.



3.2.4 Designing buildings in a series of links

According to the conventional road space and housing pattern, Leon Krier, as the master-planner of Poundbury, created a distinctive housing pattern specifically. The close road, usually following uniform streets, is the classic geometric pattern of road-dominated layout, with the road designed first and then the houses arranged around them. It could be anywhere in the country regardless of local context. Though they have benefits (particularly as places where children can play in relative safety) they limit ease of movement, especially for pedestrians and cyclists. (ODPM, 1998, P23). Leon Krier required a different approach for Poundbury to arrange the buildings by considering the place, community and local context. It is very paramount to create a good relationship of buildings to each other in the making of places.

3.2.5 Reducing car provision and use

Poundbury makes a good provision for cars by placing garages behind homes or in alleys (at least one car per dwelling). Much of the parking is on-road. Off-road parking is provided in certain areas where surfaced with gravel. Some of the parking are allocated to parking bays. (www.transportpolicy.org.uk, accessed at 27/11/2011) In fact, car use is very important, given the way in which Poundbury locates on the edge of Dorchester and doesn't contain many shops. Poundbury is not far from the centre of the old town, Dorchester, only about one mile, but it feels much larger, and public transport facilities is not very good. So Poundbury is criticised for relying heavily on the cars although one of the design concepts is actively promoting walking and reducing the car use.

3.2.6 Shaping architecture by surroundings and local building traditions

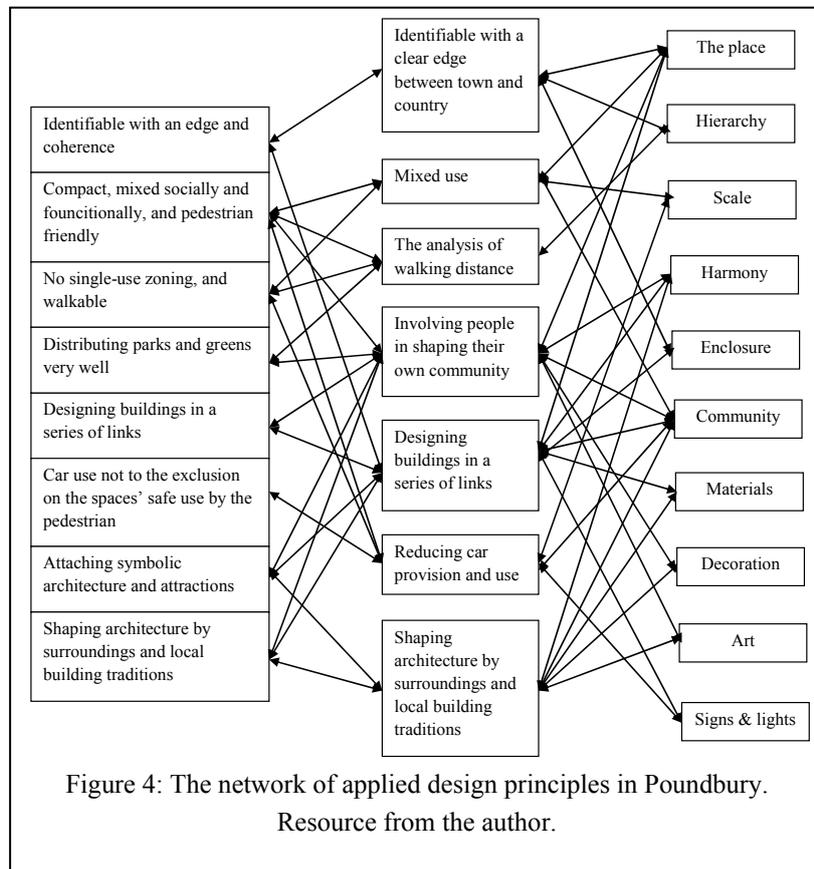
In a rapidly changing world, with new technological breakthroughs every other day, what on earth is wrong with people desiring surroundings which are familiar, traditional, well-trying and beautiful? Such a desire does not mean that we are any the less 'modern'; that we are suddenly going to revert to a pre-industrial existence and behave in an 18th century fashion. Far from it. It seems to me that such a union of apparent opposites is essential for our sanity in today's world (HRH the Prince of Wales, 1989, P12). The architecture at Poundbury is using a variety of Dorset materials such as stone, slate and render. It draws on the rich heritage of Dorset and, in particular, on the attractive streets of Dorchester itself. This can express the idea of importance to create harmony between new development and existing places.

3.2.7 Involving people in shaping their own community

This should also be one of design principles for the development of Poundbury. Professionals need to consult the users of their buildings more closely. The inhabitants have the local knowledge: they must not be despised. People are not there to be planner for; they are to be worked with. In the creation of new

communities the problems may be more difficult, but there is always local knowledge and that is where a community starts (HRH the Prince of Wales, 1989).

Except the above principles, distributing parks and greens very well and attaching symbolic architecture and attractions are also very important to help the development of Poundbury. A range of parks and greens can not only add characters and local distinctiveness to the community. For attaching symbolic architecture and attractions, it can add variety and interest to the appearance, provide point of focus, and keep local context.



4. Conclusions

Based on all the discussions, it is reasonable to make conclusions that the design principles that Poundbury has applied should be a network of new urbanism as showed in Figure 4. This helps Poundbury to have a traditional face. It seems destined to become an important and attractive spot for local residents and visitors. As a result, it is, in fact, an unashamed attempt to create a traditional community via the technique of new urbanism under the very great challenge of disappearing local identities during the process of new development.

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