

# A word...

## Scope

BY TIM WATERMAN

So many urban design projects begin with drawing a red line boundary on a plan and then, somewhere within that boundary, drawing a heart. It seems so simple and affirming. Here I am. Here are the boundaries. Here is the middle where everything happens. No single act, though, can quite so thoroughly quash all possibilities by narrowing scope and by making imagined boundaries real, closing them off to context. Social analyst Richard Sennett has written and spoken often about the differences between borders and boundaries; that the border is an active edge (social, cultural, ecological), while the boundary is closed and final. Drawing a heart focuses attention away from the vibrant edges, where the real sites of exchange are so often located.

We tend to see our professions and organisations in much the same way. Throughout the 20th century, we have been constantly engaged in trying to define a core message and then staking out the intellectual and professional territory with impermeable boundaries. In this way, our energies have become ever more fragmented, and we become ever more wedded to procedures than to values. When, recently, a range of organisations assembled or assisted by the government for the furtherance of the public good began to be systematically dismantled by the current ideology, there was a failure across the board to mount a coherent defence of planning and civics.

Now the Localism Bill is in. The National Planning Policy Framework has been published. CABE and the Design Council have merged and this new built environment body only has funding assured for one more year.

The Big Society ideology will delegate decision-making to communities, actually leaving society in fragments. Communities have powerful instincts for self-preservation; they draw strong boundaries to defend their hearts. This is not a situation that encourages long-term planning. How do we maintain ideals of justice, cooperation and sustainability in the face of this Balkanisation?

We need robust, far-thinking professions and charities to begin actively merging and collaborating. Some organisations are consumed with infighting and factionalisation, but others provide inspiring models. The Royal Town Planning Institution, for example, set a fine precedent with its 'New Vision for Planning' of 2001, in which it explicitly opened up the organisation to dialogue with other like-minded groups. This openness to critical discourse and a detachment from dogma, labels and procedure in favour of a values-led approach is the only way to move forward progressively.

The Landscape Institute also has the capacity to open up; indeed, it must open up to survive. In order to do so, we need to define not our core, our boundaries and our methods, but our scope – our range and point of view. Then we need to reach out. ●

Tim Waterman is the honorary editor of *Landscape*. He is a lecturer in landscape architecture and urban design at Writtle School of Design



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHANINA WARD