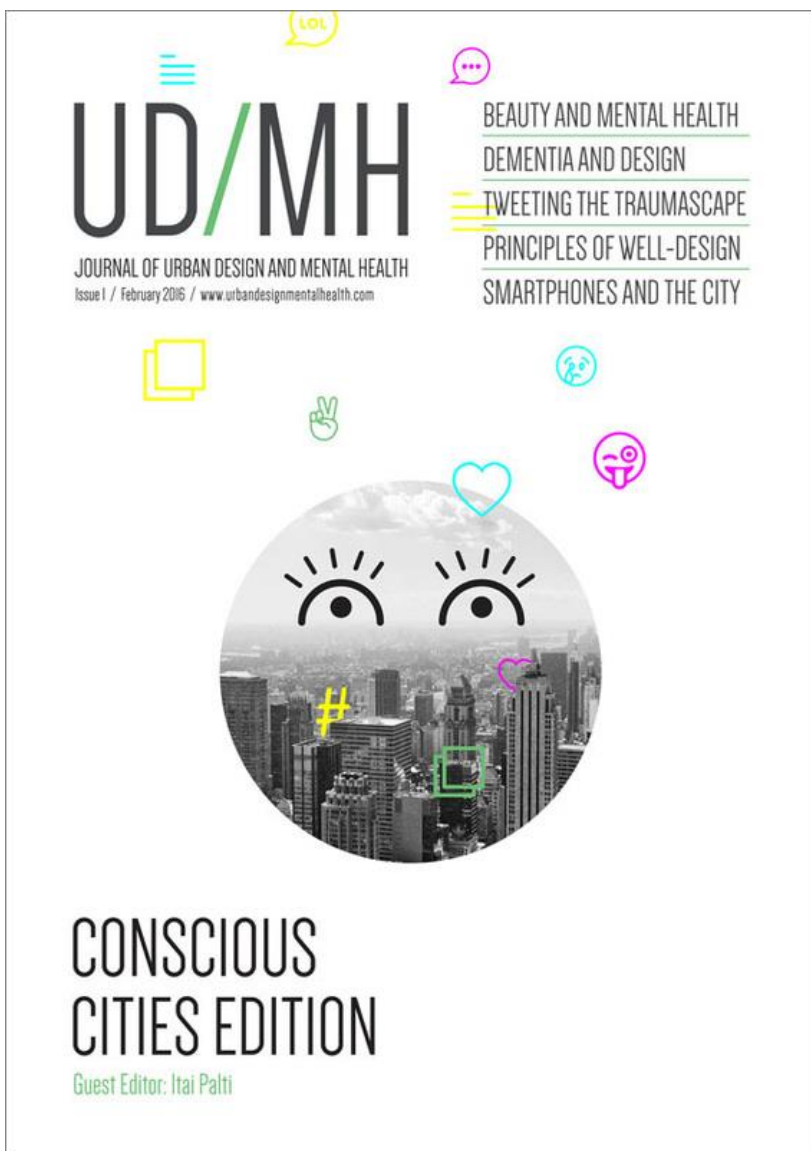


Graham Marshall | g.marshall@prosocialplace.co.uk



# PLACEMAKING FOR MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Feb 2016 WELLCOME TRUST LONDON



**The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health** hosts interdisciplinary dialogues in cities around the world to help answer the question: how can we design better mental health into our cities?

This is a transcript of the talk presented by Graham Marshall on the Prosocial Place Programme at the launch of the Centre's new journal:

<http://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal.html>



## Speaker Profile

**Graham Marshall BA(Hons) | PGDipLA | MAUD | CMLI**

Graham's interest in place-making began on the shores of Morecambe Bay, where a powerful juxtaposition of urban cultures, big landscapes and a transient economy inspired him to leave for London to study landscape architecture and urban design in a desire to spend a lifetime designing and changing places. During his training and early years in practice, a number of mentors left Graham with a powerful insight into the value of a wide perspective when contemplating places.

In 1991, Graham was *Design Team Leader* at the **National Garden Festival Wales**, before focussing exclusively on urban design. He worked with several leading London design practices for over a decade before joining **Liverpool Vision** as a founding director in 1999. He was responsible for the creation and successful delivery of the *Liverpool City Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework*, winning many awards for this work.

Establishing **Maxim Urban Design** in 2004, Graham returned his focus to towns and communities, acting primarily as a design advisor to public clients. At the same time, he was an *Urban Design Advisor* to the London Development Agency, and an active member of several regional Design Review Panels. He continues his pro bono enabling work as a *Built Environment Expert* with **Design Council CABE**.

In 2013, Graham established the **Prosocial Place Programme**, partnering with researchers in Liverpool and Middlesex Universities to develop an integrated evidence base approach to urban planning, design, development and stewardship. He has transformed Maxim into a social enterprise, **Prosocial Place**, to implement this knowledge-based approach to urban design. He is a *Visiting Senior Research Fellow* at the **University of Liverpool Institute of Psychology Health and Society**.



## Slide 1 - £5k Public Realm Strategy

Hello; I'm a reformed urban designer and I would like to tell you the story of this catharsis and the *Massive Small* project that sparked it.

This is a short talk and if you take nothing else away today I would like you to think about this: If we are to create and maintain healthy places we need to shift our focus from the **built** to the **living environment**.

The project was in Bakewell, Derbyshire, where they had recently redeveloped their town centre over the former livestock market. The scheme maintained the street pattern, was built in local stone and most people were pleased with it...but something was missing.

We were commissioned to provide a quick appraisal of the public realm and provide an outline strategy for improvement - a simple palette of materials was expected by some stakeholders, with a few pointers to win Derbyshire in Bloom.

Our initial observations were that:

- The new development delivered mostly dead frontages with little or no connection to the 'public realm'.
- All the towns' spaces were car parks.
- All the streets were excessively dominated by traffic.

***In short, there was no public realm!***

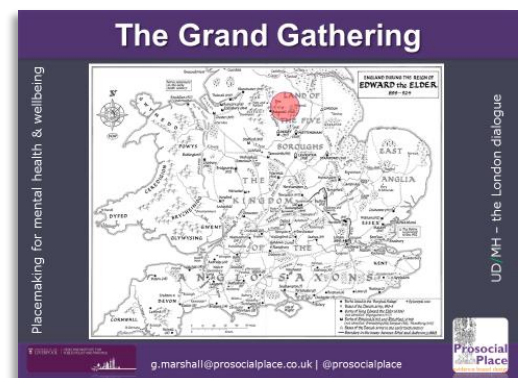
## Slide 2 – The Grand Gathering

Our research told us that Edward the Elder called a Grand Gathering here between the many tribes of the Danes and the Vikings to broker a truce. This Gathering led to the unification of England under one King, Edwards's son.

Importantly, it established a new role for towns as centres for justice and protection, the Borough system connecting the new country together – it provided an urban focus to a new nation.

The Normans loved it, finding it easy to 'conquer' the country with this administrative system in place!

But importantly for us, a thousand years ago we established a progressive urban system focussed on people and their relationships – not on buildings and architecture.



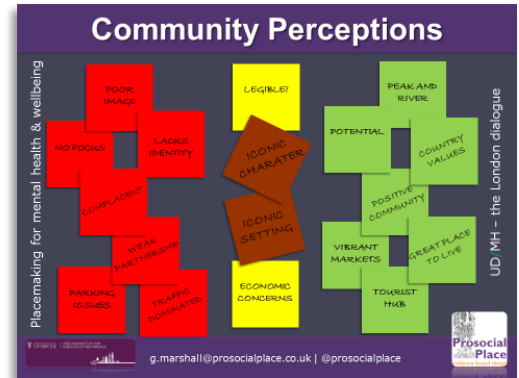
### Slides 3 – Community Perceptions

With a group of community leaders we developed a co-design approach to the project. Using Edward de Bono’s Six Hats method, we used post-it notes to record our conversations.

Our first workshop discussed ‘*what we knew*’ and ‘*what we felt*’ about Bakewell. From hundreds of post-its we generated several themes:

- The ‘PLACE’ was very important to people and was described as *special*.
- The ‘ASSETS’ in the wider district were also seen as important but were not benefitting the town.
- All the negative issues seemed to be around ‘STEWARDSHIP’.

It was the negative impacts that were seen as the barrier to capitalising on the assets, and they particularly affected the *legibility* and *economy* of the town.



### Slide 4 – Social Sustainability

At the next workshop we reviewed the earlier post-it notes as a basis to a discussion about ‘*the future of Bakewell*’. We were not talking about paving materials – we were talking about what was important to them about their town.

It was clear that the role of the public realm was important to their understanding of place and by not over-facilitating we developed a deeper understanding. When we discussed the town the *built environment* remained the central focus – something solid they could relate to.

But when we spoke about the assets, people became very passionate and it is here that they felt the purpose of the town lay - in the people – in the *living environment*.

***There was a shift in perception.***

They also realised how detrimental poor stewardship could be and it led to a discussion about the tipping point – where do we set the benchmark between success and failure. From these discussions we began to develop our Prosocial ideas about:

- Antisocial design - doing things *to*, badly.
- Social design - doing things *to*, better
- Prosocial design - doing things *with*, well.





## Slide 5 – Key to Improvement?

At our third workshop we asked ‘*what we could do to improve things*’. In the discussion the focus **shifted significantly** from *place* to *community* and their vision.

We also found that the concept of *place* **shifted** from *buildings* to *public space* - in the diagram, flanked by stewardship issues and positive assets. These shifts were from *built* to *living environment*.

The key outcome of the project was the successful establishment of a ‘*Town Team*’ and the identification of champions to take forward the themes of the strategy. A *natural narrative* emerged in the project which led to the project title of ***The Gatherings*** – the Vision.

<http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/learning-about/news/archive/2012/news/accolade-for-bakewell-town-centre-framework>  
[http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/220045/LWR-Bakewell-Public-Realm-Framework-DRAFT.pdf](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/220045/LWR-Bakewell-Public-Realm-Framework-DRAFT.pdf)



## Slide 6 – The Gatherings

We had a good client in the Peak District National Park Authority, who were open to our exploratory approach to the brief – we were Highly Commended in the Landscape Institute 2012 Awards for the project. The things that we learned from this *Massive Small* project included:

- Recognition that the traditional urban design approach to the central redevelopment had UN-PLACED the town.
- The unsympathetic stewardship had DIS-PLACED the community.
- We showed that ordinary citizens can ‘see’ the issues in place.
- When prompted they can begin to understand their implications – their outlook become allocentric.
- With improved mastery and autonomy they become essential partners in the process to address the issues.
- At the same time urban design expertise is needed to guide the process – but that requires better integrated national policies for places to succeed.

Prosocial Place campaigns for urban design policies built around people’s needs – instead of good design or well designed, social policy points to following the evidence towards WELL-DESIGN. We have produced a short think piece for this launch around the idea of THRIVAL in place of survival in place.

<http://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal1-planning4wellbeing.html>

