

MAG Principles

# Inclusive Places

---



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP  
ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

# About this series

The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) is producing a series of short documents that examine our built environment and identify important design issues that we need to address in making our cities, towns, villages and rural communities better places to live, work and play. How do we protect and create the best built environment? This document considers the role of inclusive places in our places and spaces.

While opinions on style will vary, it is essential that we consider context in design decisions and how the resulting design contributes to our public spaces. Everyone needs to be involved in these decisions from home occupiers to developers, architects to engineers and planners to policy makers.

This document illustrates key principles that help create public spaces that are sustainable, support social interaction, the local economy and improve individual and collective wellbeing. To do this, MAG has documented three completed projects considered successful by a broad range of design professionals. These projects are then used to illustrate practical design principles advocated by MAG.

**These documents are structured around three key themes:**

**Sustainability:** Reducing the environmental impact and carbon output when designing, building, refurbishing, and maintaining our built environment.

**Economy:** Supporting wealth-generating activity that attracts investment, provides meaningful employment for everyone and makes goods accessible.

**Well-being:** Creating a built environment that supports human health and happiness.

Good design is not enough. Great places to live require stewardship, which means that everyone from home occupiers to property managers need to contribute positively to creating vibrant, safe, beautiful, and practical places to live. Great design should facilitate these characteristics.





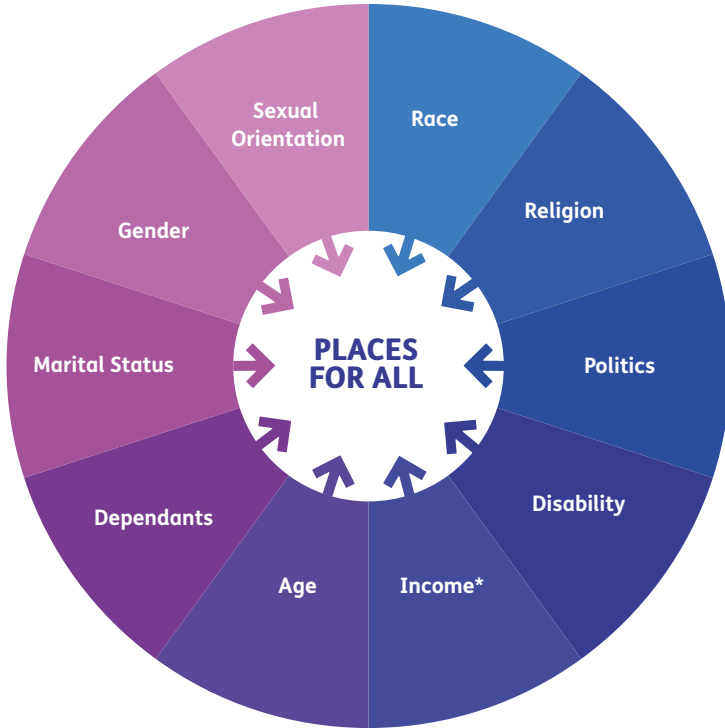
Places for all, no matter who you are, where you are from, or what you believe

Image: James Hennessey.



# Introduction

## What do we mean by Inclusive Places?



Equality of Opportunity, based on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998 (\* Income added)

Inclusive public places are safe and welcoming to all people. In our democratic society they are the spaces where we are free to gather, celebrate, protest, trade, exercise or simply enjoy the company of people and nature. Inclusive public places and our everyday interactions in them help create a sense of pride of place, bring people closer together and in turn foster the building of a stronger society.

Places can be best thought of as ‘spaces with people’ and we should judge the success of our public spaces on their ability to attract use over the long term. Places designed and managed to accommodate a broad range of activities create communities of interest and of geography which help to reduce social isolation and its associated ill health. The experience of Covid 19 lockdowns reminded us that interaction in public spaces is an important component of reducing social isolation while improving and maintaining well-being and happiness.

Good places are complex in the way they are managed and interact with buildings. The ways in which our building entrances, windows and walls define many of our public spaces are key components to consider. The best buildings work to clearly define our public spaces and activate them with outward facing uses.

Inclusive places, of whatever size, are achieved through good design and ongoing, creative management that reflects the needs and objectives of the user. They are accessible, affordable, safe, simple, flexible, robust and of high quality. These spaces can transform to suit the needs of various groups and activities at different times of the day and year helping to activate our cities, towns and villages.

This document examines a number of successful places at different scales and their relationship to inclusive design and management. It identifies key qualities that contribute to their success and seeks to highlight features that should be considered in the creation of public spaces of all sizes.



# Why Inclusive Places Matter

## Sustainability

Towns and cities across the globe have a major role to play in facing the climate and ecological crisis. Space and other finite resources must be used far more efficiently, adapting towards more compact settlement patterns that centre around walking, cycling, public transport and biodiverse green spaces. Inclusive places have a critical role to play in this context, ensuring that necessary change is just and beneficial to all in society. Furthermore, established concepts that are integral to sustainable urbanism (such as the 15 minute city) also go a long way to improving levels of inclusion.

## Economy

Urban places are the powerhouses of our regional and national economies - not only as places to live, but also to work, invest and visit. In an ever competitive and international marketplace, the inclusivity of the spaces we create directly contributes to vibrancy. By creating and maintaining inclusive public spaces, a positive shared identity is reinforced, liveability improved and investment attracted in turn.

## Wellbeing

Feeling safe, welcomed and accepted in wider society is integral to our sense of identity, community and wellbeing. The venue for such experiences is more often than not the public realm - the streets, spaces and neighbourhoods that we call home. It is therefore vital that we continually strive to make all such places as inclusive as possible - places for everyone.



A responsibility falls upon all of us to make our places as inclusive as possible.

Image: The Paul Hogarth Company



# Principles

There is no single solution to creating an Inclusive Place. However, a series of design and management principles can be combined to create good, successful places with inclusion at their heart.

## DESIGN - making spaces for inclusion:

- (i) **Connected** - Getting to an Inclusive Place must be easy. This requires them to be well connected to their immediate surroundings and wider urban context, placing a priority on the most accessible forms of travel - walking, cycles, public transport. This connectivity must support people of all mobilities including those using wheelchairs, buggies or walking aids.
  
- (ii) **Safe** - Inclusive Places are safe for all. This means they need to be overlooked by windows, activated by frontages and well lit after dark to discourage anti-social behaviour. Maintaining high levels of footfall also helps to keep spaces safer, while the interaction between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles must be carefully managed.
  
- (iii) **Free** - An Inclusive Place should be free. Everyone must be welcome to spend time there without charge or an expectation of purchase. Spaces must also be free of clutter and obstructions.

- (iv) **Sociable** - places to sit, congregate and communicate are essential to an Inclusive Space. These need to be carefully designed and positioned to maximise use and comfort. That means spaces that have good sight lines, that are oriented for enjoyment of the sun, and offer spaces of shade which will be needed for hotter summers.
  
- (v) **Engaging** - Inclusive Places attract use and encourage people to linger. These spaces need points of interest including artworks, water features, pollinating plants, rich habitat for birds and insects, spaces to play and congregate. These spaces also need to be flexible to accommodate a wide range of activities, large and small.

### **MANAGEMENT – Creating and keeping spaces inclusive:**

Consultation and management are important in creating inclusive spaces that are used and cherished by the people who will use them.

- (vi) **Participative** - Who do we need to include? It is vital that the voices of those for whom a place is intended are heard from the outset of the design process. In doing so tangible opportunities should be found together to make spaces more inclusive.
  
- (vii) **Responsive** - How inclusive is your place? A proactive approach to inclusion must be maintained, making sure that people from all walks of life are found, invited and welcomed to use the space. If people are not using the space, find out why and how that can be changed. Addressing the challenge of exclusion can bring communities together.



- (viii) **Cared For** - Inclusive Places are spaces you want to be in. This requires them to be well looked after, clean and in working order, with issues addressed as soon as they occur. A great way to include people in a space is to give them opportunities in a voluntary capacity to help care for it and to make decisions.
  
- (ix) **Championed** - Inclusive Places have visible identities and voices. This requires good leadership, effective communication and adequate resources to make sure the space feels owned - and loved - in the best possible way.
  
- (x) **Evolving** - Keeping space inclusive means keeping up with ever changing communities and societies. Keeping it relevant to as many people as possible is critical or spaces can become underused and neglected. Accommodating new uses, events and activities means our spaces reflect who we are and attracts use.



Artworks, creative events and a coherent theme help give C.S. Lewis Square an inclusive and engaging identity.

Image: Eastside Partnership

## Case Study 1: C.S. Lewis Square East Belfast, Northern Ireland

Named after East Belfast's world famous author, C.S. Lewis Square was built in 2016 as the centrepiece of the Connswater Community Greenway.

It is located behind shops at the busy road intersection of Hollywood Arches, where they meet two greenways - one along the former Comber to Belfast Railway Line and another newly formed along the route of the Connswater River.

The square comprises a large granite paved events space surrounded by seating steps and terraces. Adjacent paths weave through a magical landscape of tree clad mounds within which are set a series of metal sculptures depicting characters from **'The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe.'** Bordering C.S. Lewis Square are a range of new uses including a visitor centre and cafe, a restaurant made of shipping containers and an active travel hub.

C.S. Lewis Square has succeeded in transforming a desolate 'no-go' area of car parking and waste ground into a lively civic space used by a wide range of people from the surrounding area and much further afield.

---

### PROJECT DETAILS

**CLIENT:** Eastside Partnership / Belfast City Council

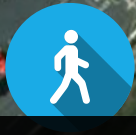
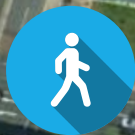
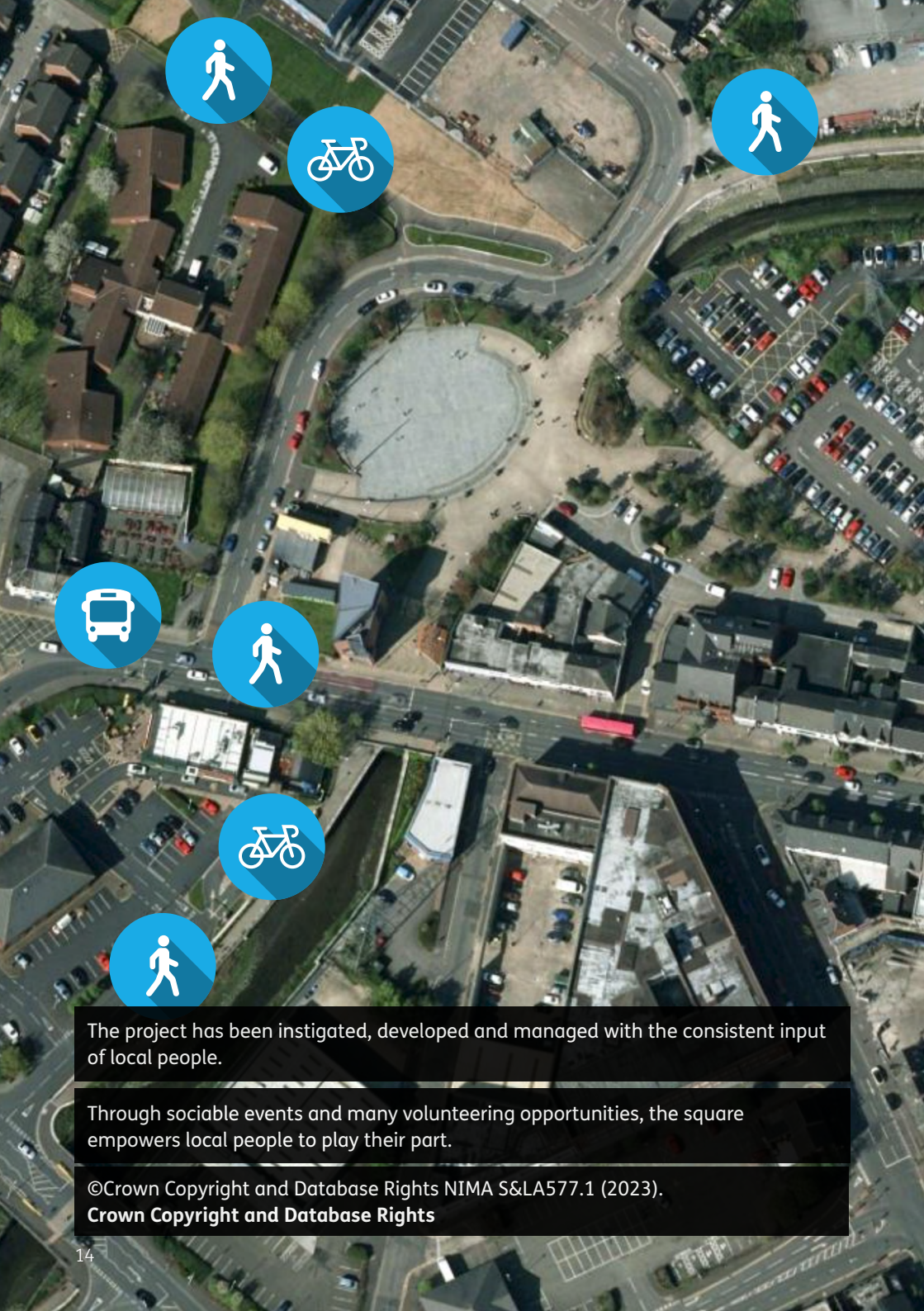
**DESIGN TEAM:** The Paul Hogarth Company / ARUP

**DATE:** 2016

**BUDGET:** £2.5m

**FUNDING:** Big Lottery Fund, BCC, DfC, DfI



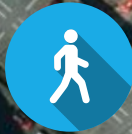
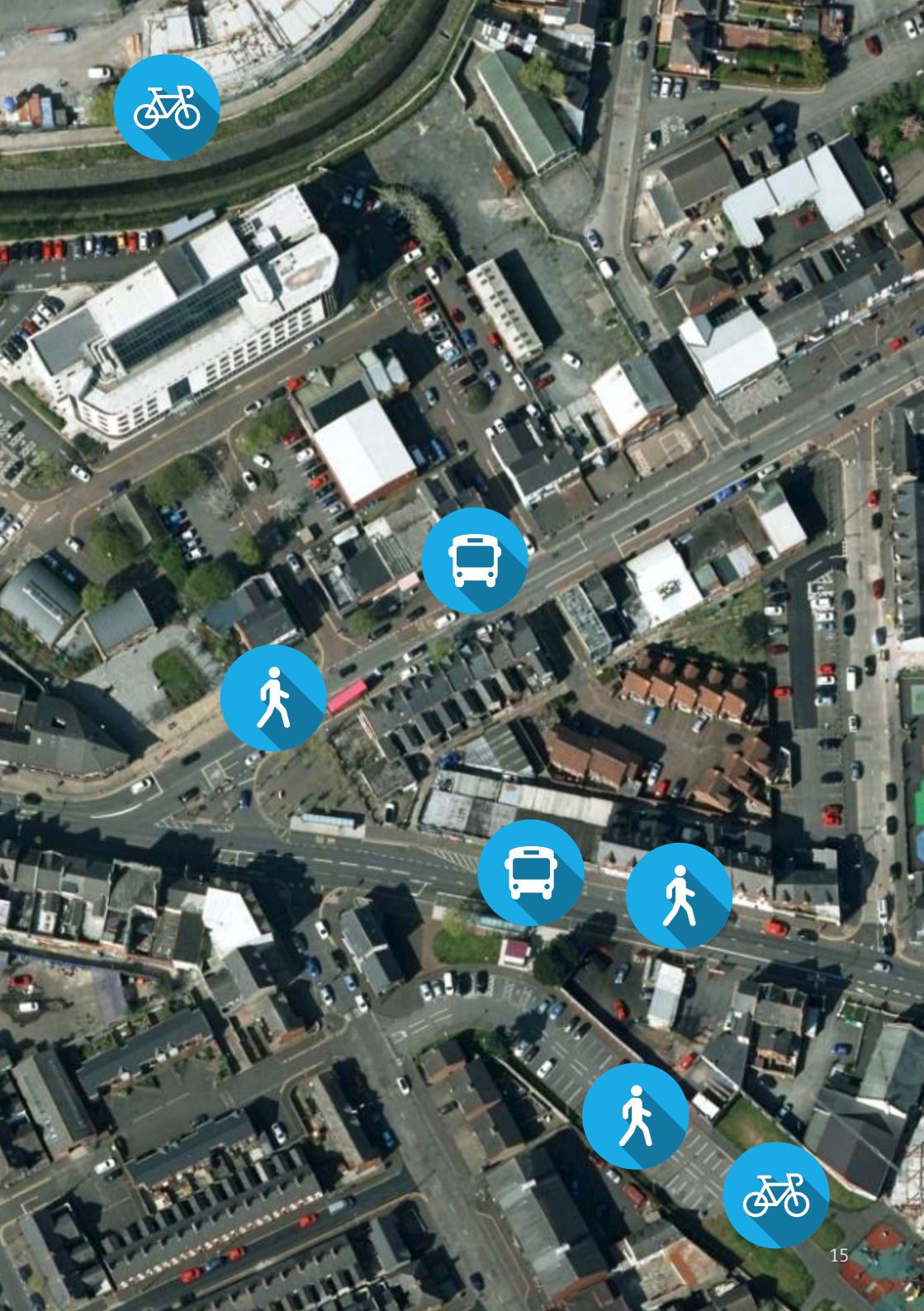


The project has been instigated, developed and managed with the consistent input of local people.

Through sociable events and many volunteering opportunities, the square empowers local people to play their part.

©Crown Copyright and Database Rights NIMA S&LA577.1 (2023).  
**Crown Copyright and Database Rights**



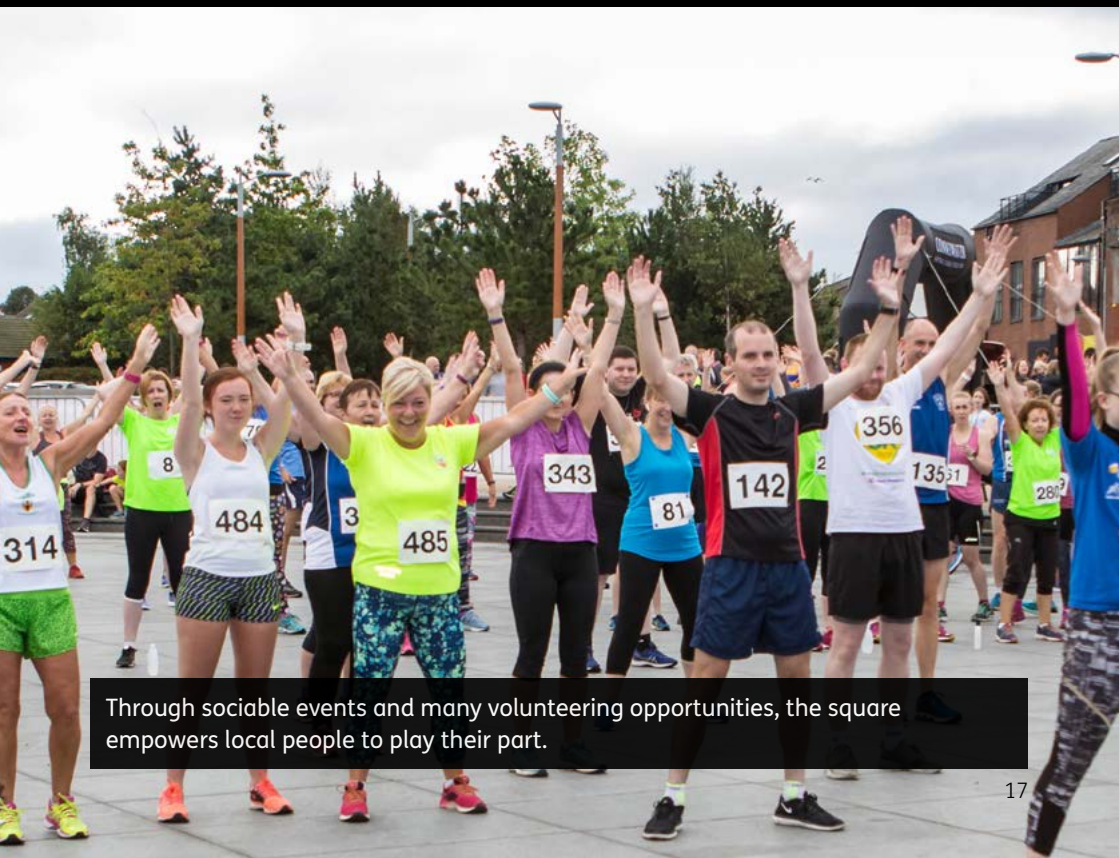




Free - By being open 24hours a day and managed discreetly, C.S. Lewis is a relaxed, welcoming and genuinely 'public' space.



Images: Eastside Partnership



Through sociable events and many volunteering opportunities, the square empowers local people to play their part.



Evolving - C.S. Lewis Square is a dynamic place that is constantly evolving, innovating and catalysing other developments, such as cafes, an active travel hub and plans for housing and a hotel.







By designing for diversity and flexibility of use, the square is a shared space, meeting the needs and interests of multiple users.





Marmalade Lane demonstrates how inclusivity and commercial success can go hand in hand through successful partnerships.

Image: David Butler Photography / Mole Architects

## Case Study 2: Marmalade Lane Cambridge, England

Marmalade Lane is a co-housing development on the northern fringes of Cambridge, England. It was built in 2017 and is now home to 42 families with a diverse range of ages and backgrounds.

The property crash of 2008 instigated a rethinking of the development approach in this rapidly growing part of the city. With the developer pulling out of its landholding, Cambridge City Council commissioned a feasibility study to assess alternative models of housing for the site. They concluded upon a system of co-ownership and advertised for members to form a co-housing group that along with the council, oversaw the design and construction process.

Marmalade Lane comprises a mix of 1 to 4 bedroom houses and flat typologies arranged in a series of 2 - 3 storey terraces. The focal points of the scheme are 3 communal spaces which each attract different types of activity to reflect different needs and interests. The Lane is a pedestrianised street designed to promote resident interaction and smaller groups. The Common House is for the shared use by residents as a place to socialise, eat and host guests; the Gardens are a large green space used primarily for the growing of food.

The project presents an excellent alternative model for housing provision, centred around inclusive external space made active and safe by the integrated design approach between external spaces and housing.

---

### PROJECT DETAILS

**CLIENT:** Cambridge City Council / TOWN / Trivselhus UK

**DESIGN TEAM:** Mole Architects

**DATE:** 2017

**BUDGET:** £16m

**FUNDING:** CCC, Trivselhus

By prioritising pedestrian and cycle movement within the site, Marmalade Lane adopts a people first approach to design, increasing accessibility and use by all.

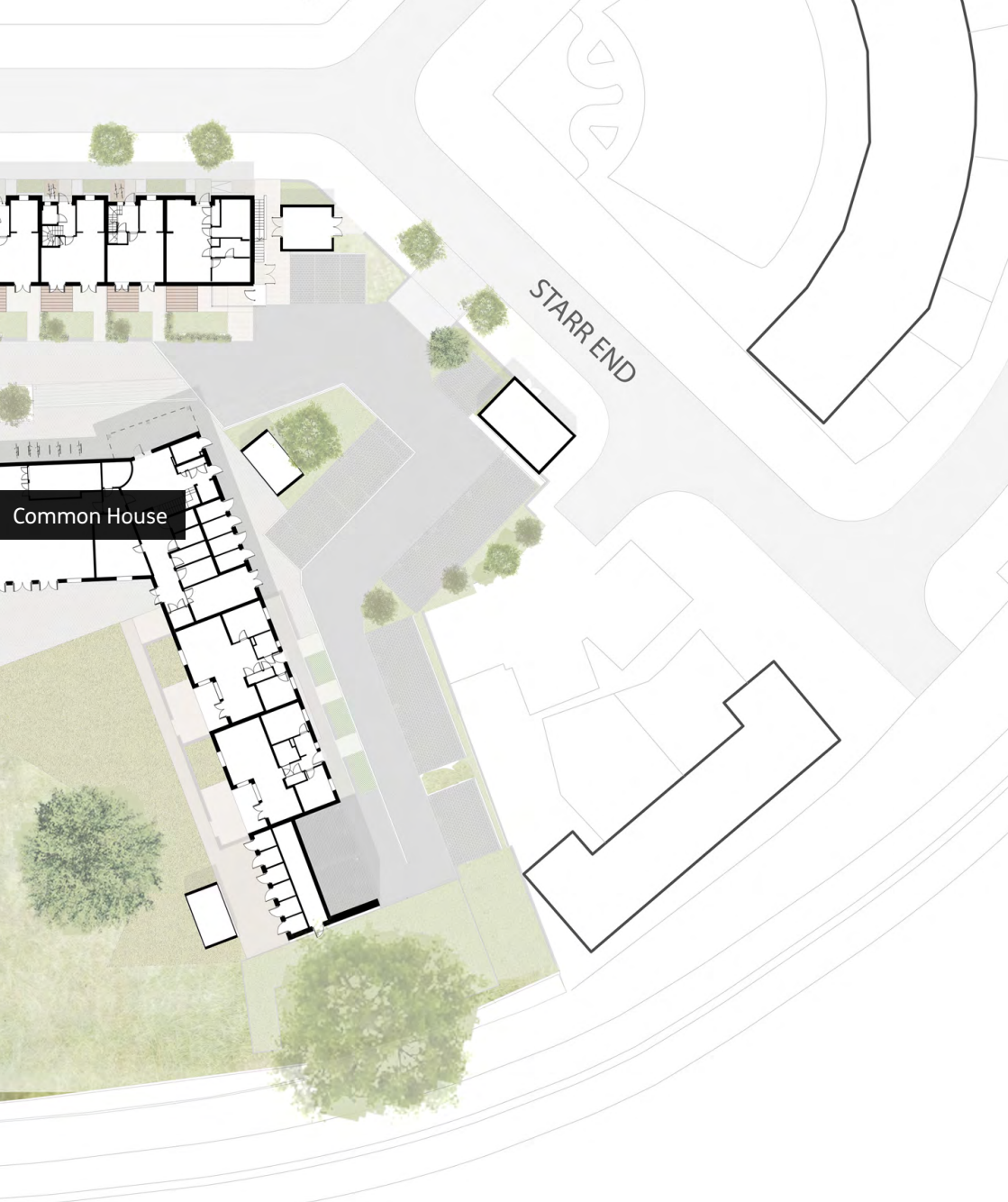


Lane

Garden

GRAHAM ROAD





Common House

STARR END

A mix of dwelling sizes to meet the needs of different residents 'designs in' diversity of user.



Marmalade Lane comprises three engaging spaces designed to bring residents together – Common House, Garden and Lane.



Images: David Butler Photography / Mole Architects





Cared for: By providing and defining the role of communal spaces, inclusivity and interaction are promoted.





Championed - The success of People's Park as a place for all can be traced to leadership, the overcoming of barriers and the careful taking of risks.





## Case Study 3: People's Park Portadown, Northern Ireland

People's Park is a large, mature public space serving the town of Portadown and its population of 22,000 people. The park was established in the early 1800s from the grounds of a 17th century castle. From its very inception the park was created around the idea of inclusion, named 'People's Park' to promote cohesion between everyone in the town, regardless of their religious and political beliefs.

The park fell into disrepair during the turbulence of the Troubles, losing all sense of neutrality and becoming a dangerous flashpoint between divided communities.

Today however, in more peaceful times, People's Park has been rejuvenated into a vibrant, positive and shared space, comprising playing fields, play facilities, walking routes, lawns, gardens, a river and lake. This is thanks to a funding grant under the EU Peace initiative and most importantly, the passionate tenacity of local stakeholders, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and its predecessor, Craigavon Borough Council.

“I have purchased the castle and grounds formerly of Lord Obins [...] and am bequeathing the beautiful front gardens of this castle to all people for a people's park for all peoples and all faiths and cultures to enjoy in peace, friendship and happiness.”

Lord Mandeville,  
The 6th Duke of Manchester

---

### PROJECT DETAILS

**CLIENT:** Craigavon Borough Council  
(Now ACBC Council)

**DESIGN TEAM:** The Paul Hogarth Company  
/ Hamilton Architects

**DATE:** 2016

**BUDGET:** £5.4m

**FUNDING:** EU Peace III, DfC

The strategic masterplan approach was critical to delivery of the park and its role in catalysing wider inclusive regeneration.

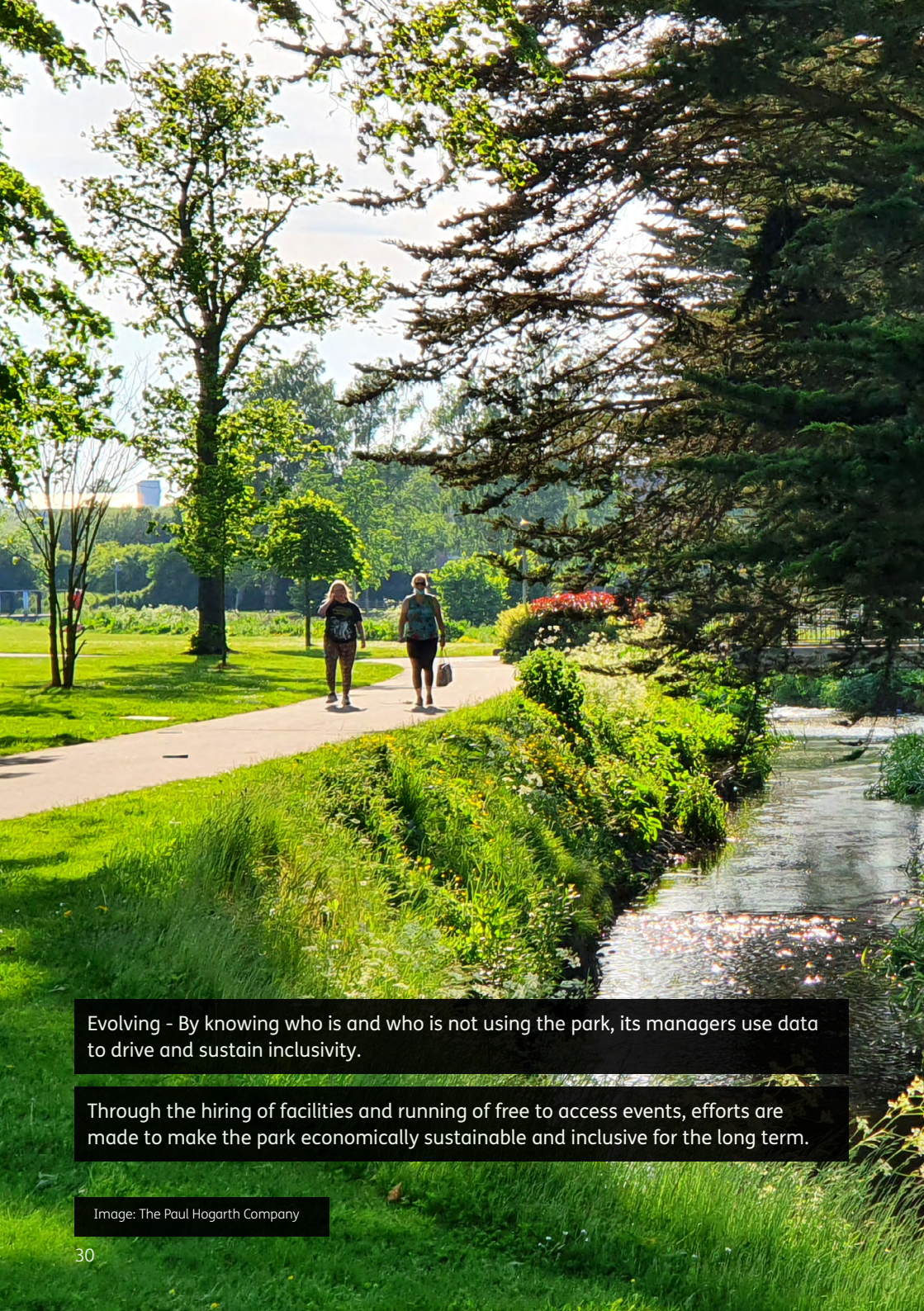




By investing in design quality, People's Park is not only functional, but a place in which residents take pride.







Evolving - By knowing who is and who is not using the park, its managers use data to drive and sustain inclusivity.

Through the hiring of facilities and running of free to access events, efforts are made to make the park economically sustainable and inclusive for the long term.

Image: The Paul Hogarth Company









Everyone at People's Park cares and constantly strives to uphold safety and improve inclusivity - the job is never done.

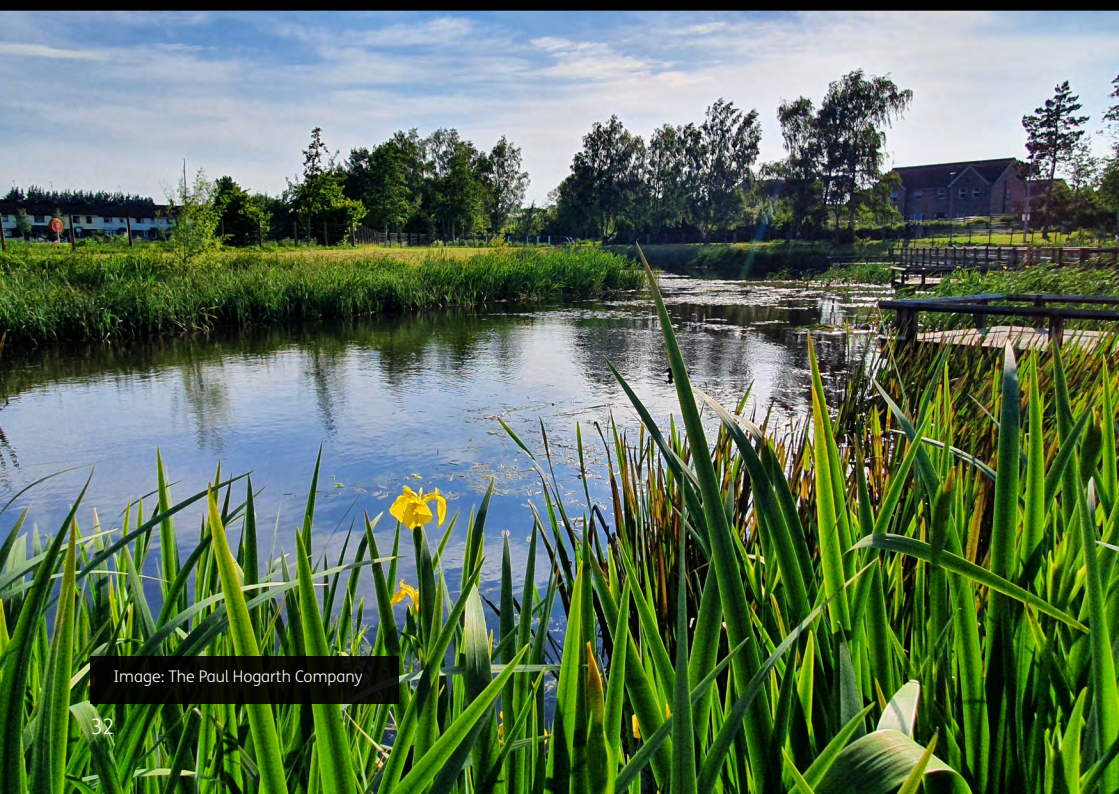


Image: The Paul Hogarth Company





People's Park is characterised by an energetic and responsive approach to inclusivity.







# Conclusion

Inclusive Places are a fundamental component of a successful city, town, village or neighbourhood. They help bestow a shared sense of identity and community, while providing opportunities for everyone to relax, socialise and enjoy nature, regardless of who they are or where they are from.

Through this document we have seen the critical role played by design in ensuring our spaces and places are connected, safe, free, sociable and engaging. We have also learned that good design on its own is not enough. Inclusive Places are also well managed on a continual basis, ensuring they are participative, responsive, cared for, championed and evolving.

Featured projects like C.S. Lewis Square demonstrate that Inclusive Places not only bring people together, but also contribute to the local economy by catalysing investment around them. Furthermore, they are central to sustainability in a climate crisis, providing safe, walkable and biodiverse spaces right on our doorsteps. Indeed, acting responsibly for the benefit of future generations is in itself a meaningful form of inclusion.

Given such substantial benefits, an onus is placed upon us all to ensure that the spaces around us are made and kept truly inclusive - spaces for everyone.

# Case Study Awards and Recognition

## C. S. Lewis Square (Connswater Community Greenway)

- Academy of Urbanism Great Place Award, 2020
- Urban Villages Community Thriving Places Award, 2018
- River Restoration Centre UK Rivers Prize, 2018
- CEF Construction Excellence, Social / Community Construction, 2017

## Marmalade Lane

- Shortlisted, Mies Van De Rohe Award 2022
- Civic Trust Award for Sustainability 2021
- RICS Social Impact Awards, Project of the year 2020
- RTPI Silver Jubilee Cup, Overall Winner 2020
- RIBA National Award 2019
- Housing Design Awards Richard Feilden Award 2019
- National Urban Design Award (Public Sector) 2019
- Structural Timber Award (Social Housing Project) 2019
- Cambridge Design & Construction Award Joint Winner 2019
- Cambridge Property Awards Environmental Award 2016 & 2018

## People's Park

- RICS Regeneration Award, 2016
- RICS Community Benefit Award, 2016



# Useful Guidance and References

- Clarkson et al (2013) **Inclusive Design: design for the whole population**. London: Springer
- Design Council / CABI (2004), **The Principles of Inclusive Design**  
<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/principles-inclusive-design>
- Fleck, J (2019) **Are You an Inclusive Designer?** London: Royal Institute for British Architects
- Imrie, R & Hall, P (2003), **Inclusive Design: designing and developing accessible environments**. London: Spon
- Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland (2022) **Living High Streets - Craft Kit**  
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/mag-living-high-streets-craft-kit>
- Northern Ireland Assembly (1998) **Northern Ireland Act (1998): Section 75**  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/section/75>
- Steinfeld, E & Maisel, J (2012) **Universal Design: designing inclusive environments**, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons
- Sustrans & ARUP (2020) **Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cycling in cities and towns**.  
<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/research/all-themes/all/inclusive-cycling-in-cities-and-towns>

## Key Contacts

The MAG Secretariat within Department for Communities supplies administrative support to MAG and can be contacted at:

**MAGsecretariat@communities-ni.gov.uk**

**By telephone:** 028 9051 5063

**By post:**

MAG Secretariat  
Department for Communities  
7th Floor Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
Belfast BT2 7EG



## Policy

MAG is here to implement and develop the Architecture + Built Environment Policy. All input from MAG will be aligned to current policy and emerging best practice.

## Well-being, Sustainability and the Economy

The built environment is fundamental to the way we live our lives. Northern Ireland must confront a series of challenges in our built environment to help address the well-being of our people, the climate emergency and support of the regional economy. These challenges are not mutually exclusive and will be important underlying issues in the design review process.



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP  
ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



Department for

**Communities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn

**Pobal**

Department für

**Commonities**