

# MAKING SPACE FOR OLDER AGE

(towards an alternative 'architectural' practice?)

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## Context:

- Twin trends of demographic ageing and urbanisation

By 2030 – 2/3 global population will be living in cities

By 2030 – 1/4 urban populations will be aged 60+ \*

{C. Phillipson: 2011}

## Paradox:

- **Marginalisation** and **containment** of the *subject* of ageing within architectural design, thinking and practice

Limits the way in which architectural practitioners address and engage with older people's (possible) experience of the urban environment

This presentation looks at:

- 1). How the subject of ageing is marginalised (how older people themselves can become marginalised) in architectural thinking, design and practice...?
- 2). How do you open up a critical space within architectural discourse and practice around the subject of ageing that 'makes space' for older age in a different way?

Dominant age-related conventions within architectural discourse and practice:

Limited to a **baseline of physical needs**

- questions of disability and access
- investment in assistive living

- Plays into **medicalised model** of ageing – with implications for design practice.
- Plays into **problem-solving tradition** within design practice [J. Hill: 2006] – with implications in stereotyping approaches to older age.

**Limited geographic reach** in thinking about older age:

- Focus on the 'planned micro-environment' of interior spaces (Peace: 2006)
- Worked-up typologies of interior spaces to exclusion of urban space

**Limited terms of engagement** with a broader 'space beyond the front door'

- eg. I'DGo's work on 'open space'

Replays focus on the body and physical access (rates of access)  
with form and end product of standardised design guidances

*'wide and flat tarmac footways'*

*'easy transition at level changes'*

*'easily visible and understandable signage'*

*'frequent, warm, supportive seating'*

*'well maintained, safe and open toilets'\**

# A pattern of thinking replayed in Age-friendly concepts?



## Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities

This checklist of essential age-friendly city features is based on the results of the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities project consultation in 33 cities in 22 countries. The checklist is a tool for a city's self-assessment and a map for charting progress. More detailed checklists of age-friendly city features are to be found in the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide.

This checklist is intended to be used by individuals and groups interested in making their city more age-friendly. For the checklist to be effective, older people must be involved as full partners. In assessing a city's strengths and deficiencies, older people will describe how the checklist of features matches their own experience of the city's positive characteristics and barriers. They should play a role in suggesting changes and in implementing and monitoring improvements.

### Outdoor spaces and buildings

- Public areas are clean and pleasant.
- Green spaces and outdoor seating are sufficient in number, well-maintained and safe.
- Pavements are well-maintained, free of obstructions and reserved for pedestrians.
- Pavements are non-slip, are wide enough for wheelchairs and have dropped curbs to road level.
- Pedestrian crossings are sufficient in number and safe for people with different levels and types of disability, with non-slip markings, visual and audio cues and adequate crossing times.
- Drivers give way to pedestrians at intersections and pedestrian crossings.
- Cycle paths are separate from pavements and other pedestrian walkways.
- Outdoor safety is promoted by good street lighting, police patrols and community education.

- Services are situated together and are accessible.
- Special customer service arrangements are provided, such as separate queues or service counters for older people.
- Buildings are well-signed outside and inside, with sufficient seating and toilets, accessible elevators, ramps, railings and stairs, and non-slip floors.
- Public toilets outdoors and indoors are sufficient in number, clean, well-maintained and accessible.

### Transportation

- Public transportation costs are consistent, clearly displayed and affordable.
- Public transportation is reliable and frequent, including at night and on weekends and holidays.
- All city areas and services are accessible by public transport, with good connections and well-marked routes and vehicles.

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*Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities*  
(WHO: 2007)

## THE AGE-FRIENDLY PARKS CHECKLIST

An Age-friendly Park is one that is inviting and accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Parkland fitting this requirement is especially important in Philadelphia, as we have the largest proportion of people age 60+ out of the ten largest cities in the United States and one of the largest urban park systems in the country. The following checklist was created by a variety of partner organizations and focus groups of seniors who believe that moving forward, Philadelphia should be a leader in the Age-friendly Park movement. We hope that park designers, volunteers, and administrators consider and advocate for the following when evaluating their local green spaces.\*

- Sidewalks are free of obstructions, wide enough for wheelchairs and have curb cuts
- There are plenty of shaded areas, structures, and paths to avoid over exposure to heat and the sun
- Outdoor seating is appropriately designed (with hand rests), abundant and well-maintained
- Pavements are non-slip and pervious (ie. water can pass through them, which means less ice in the winter)
- All stairways feature a railing and stair tips are painted to distinguish each step
- Bike paths are separate from pedestrian walkways
- Public toilets (outdoors and indoors) are sufficient in number, clean, well-maintained, and accessible
- Crosswalks are sufficient in number, feature visual and audio cues, and have adequate crossing times
- All pathways that can accommodate a wheelchair are solid (ie. not dirt, which can cause the chair to sink)



*The Age-Friendly Parks Checklist*  
(Philadelphia: 2011)

- Why have design conventions around older age traditionally been so limited in their sites and contexts of engagement?  
*Limited literally to the contained interior*  
*Tied to the functional capacity of the body*
- To what extent – and to what *effect* - do deficit-based models of older age feeds into the dominant design conventions of architectural practice?  
*A limited palette of design?*  
*A design culture of risk-aversion?*
- Could architectural design practice enter into ‘other’ kinds of spaces beyond the contained setting? To think beyond the physical body?



Developing a broader repertoire of spatial practice within architectural discourse and practice that makes space for older age in a different way:

- What architects, designers and other spatial practitioners might offer *beyond* problem-solving service (ie. providing solutions of universal checklists and guidances).
- Giving value to another dimension of design and spatial practice that is less solutions-driven is more **speculative, propositional** in intention.
- Giving value to design and spatial practices that are **creative** and **critical** processes in themselves.\*

\* What Rendell describes as a 'critical spatial practice' [J. Rendell: 2006]

- Expanded definition of architectural practice as a practice of **social critique** and **social change**:
  - Duties of care beyond client to society more generally (Till: 2009)
  - Focus on the everyday use and production of space (Lefebvre: 1974 )
  - Methodologies of participatory architectural practice (Blundell Jones et al: 2005)
  
- Alternative techniques of architectural practice that include **small-scale, informal interventions** (often temporary) practice, that:
  - Re-shape and re-imagine spaces in small ways
  - Build from the bottom-up (tied to everyday use of space)
  - Question top-down processes of planning

*Everyday activities and creative practices that, rather than 'maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders [...] seek to critique and question them' \**

*\*[J. Rendell: 2006]*



## Working in Newham (2006-11):

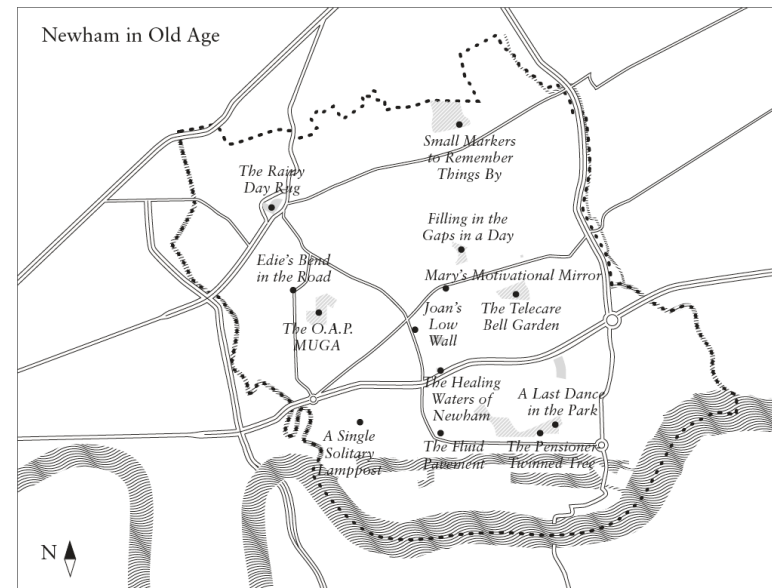
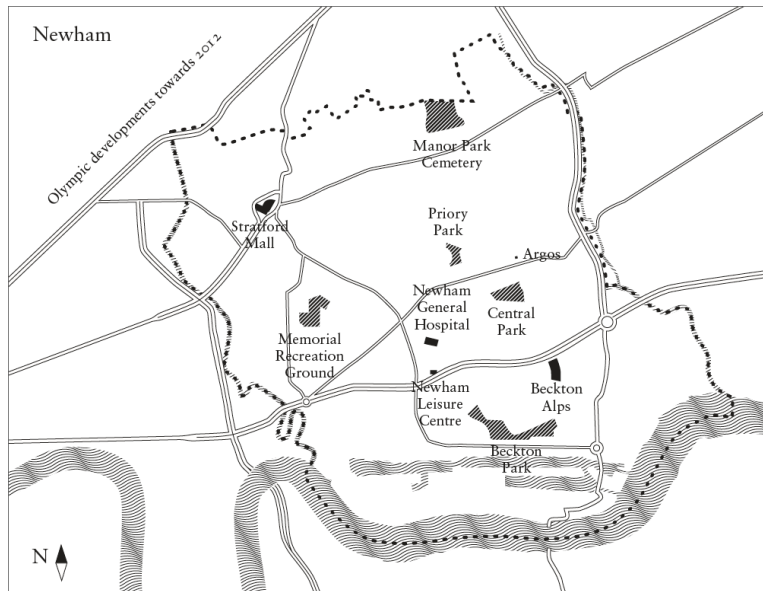
- Similar demographic profile to Manchester (in terms of a 'shrinking' elderly population)
- Idea of working in the 'wrong' place— developing work around ageing where regeneration strategy and programming targeted towards youth
- Way in which physical fabric of urban environment itself becomes planned and designed with younger people in mind:
  - Cities designed with certain age groups in mind (where long-standing relationships to place overlooked)
  - Policies and planning can foster exclusion of certain generations and favour others
  - Implicit (symbolic) alliance of regeneration with youth (as generation of promise - of revival and renewal...)

2006: participative research exercise to critique and question existing, generational order of Newham

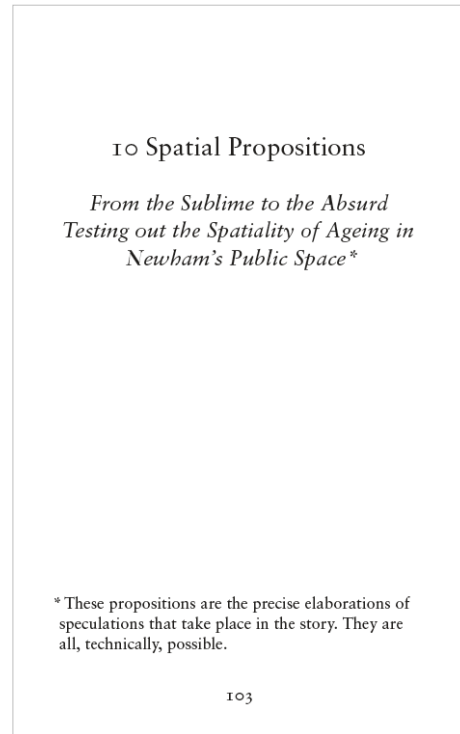


*The Fluid Pavement and Other Stories (On Growing Old in Newham)*  
[LBN Mobile Library: 2006]

*What if youngest borough were mapped out according to its oldest demographic? \**



## 2007-2010: a series of ground-level interventions in Newham



- Evolve a parallel narrative – and informal spatial practice - to mainstream programming of urban regeneration and renewal
- Imagine ‘other’ ways of using, reshaping, laying claim to urban space )

- Temporary interventions based on informal appropriations of 'public' space



#9

## A Last Dance in the Park\*

*An Illicit Tea Dance  
in the Park After-Hours*

*A Last Dance in the Park* is a one-off, unauthorised event: a tea dance in the park after dark. The event is both a historic re-enactment of a lost tradition – dancing in the park on a Saturday afternoon – as well as an illicit flash-mob act of unsanctioned congregation in the park after closing time. With a dress-code of fluorescent-enhanced period (minimum) 1950s dress, *A Last Dance in the Park* combines irreverent misbehaviour with old-style conformity to tradition. For one night the deadening weight of preservation and tradition is provided with a bit of light relief, as historic re-enactment becomes an opportunity for pensioners to lay claim to the public realm *en masse* by night.

\* developed out of pages 94 & 95



- Mapping out those hidden 'tactics' [de Certeau: 1988], everyday practices that are already played out in the urban environment.



**Joan's Low Wall**

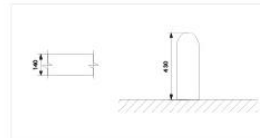
LOWER TYPE RESIDENTIAL BRICK WALL



Function:-  
Boundary wall (residential)

Informal use:-  
Reel stop (on the way to the Post Office and back)

Height: 430 mm  
Sitable area: 140 mm depth (max.)  
Fabric: plastered brick (with paint cracked finish)



Features:-

Public property

Backrest

Available borough-wide

Last used:-  
Last Monday

Location:-  
# 139 Prince Regent Lane



**Function:-**  
Boundary wall (residential)

**Informal use:-**  
Rest stop seating

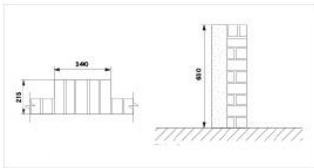
**Height:** 630 mm  
**Sittable area:** 215mm depth (max.)  
**Fabric:** brick

**Features:-**

Public property   
Backrest   
Available borough-wide

**Last used:-**  
Not recalled

**Location:-**  
Hermit Road (past the Rawalpindy before the Salisbury pub)



**Primary Function:-**  
Traffic regulation (pedestrian/vehicular)

**Secondary use:-**  
Additional seating (white waiting for buses # 473, # 500 and # 347)

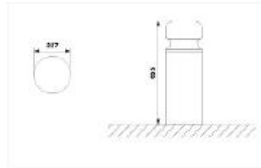
**Height:** 835 mm  
**Sittable area:** 227 mm depth (max.)  
**Fabric:** cast iron cap with gloss enamel finish

**Features:-**

Public property   
Backrest   
Available borough-wide

**Last used:-**  
5 days ago

**Location:-**  
Barnet Road bus stop, Prince Regent Lane



- Devising new ways to appropriate, to make use of urban space in ordinary, everyday ways.
- Expanding the kinds of urban spaces that might be owned in some way 'in-between', interstitial, other 'spaces of uncertainty' [Cupers & Miessen: 2002].
- Developing a critique of urban space through those questions that interventions like these start to raise:

Challenging conventional 'age-appropriate' relationships to urban space.

Questioning the times of day that we might expect to be outdoors?

Reflecting on what our 'rights to the city' [Harvey: 2008] might mean in older age?

**Creative licence** embedded within a spatial practice of small-scale interventions that can challenge conventional *uses* and '*readings*' of urban space.

*'space for experimentation'*

\*[M. Shalke: 2007]

*Role of an alternative architectural practice - within an Age-friendly city - not only to provide solutions but to also provoke and critique?*