

CO-LOCATION LIVING – THE NEW SOLUTION FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Posted on June 12, 2020



In this ever changing Covid-19 world, where people are rethinking how their lives and the built environment have or may change in the future – we have to grapple with some fundamental principles, and purposes, of our buildings and spaces.

As planning professionals, we find ourselves thinking about how the built environment can develop and respond to these changes. A sense of community has been more important now than ever, and while planning has always claimed to have local communities at heart, many interventions have failed to deliver on the fundamental principle of delivering sustainable communities.

For too long, the planning industry has categorised uses and types of development; retail is on high streets or retail parks, schools are often outside of centres next to open fields, jobs are in large cities requiring travel, residential uses can be found in the space in between with density and character driven purely by what is next door.

Typically, as a nation we are poor at mixing uses. While there are some great examples of mixed-use buildings, these tend to be uses stacked on top of one another with separate entrances and limited opportunity for people to genuinely mix.

Planning in London has started to respond in policy terms, through co-location, whereby commercial and industrial uses are mixed with residential. This can truly work well, as is evident in places such as Hackney Wick where people work, live and socialise in an area that creates an interesting and lively place.

Co-living schemes are on the rise and present a great opportunity to provide smaller affordable

accommodation for people with all the quality shared spaces that allow them to function as a community such as [Mason + Fifth](#) in Bermondsey, London. With 28 studio apartments the scheme provides a wellness agenda that aims to “strengthen communities and boost well-being from the inside out”. Whilst successful, these schemes tend to cater more for younger occupants, so intergenerational mixing is still a challenge.

The current situation is a wonderful opportunity to rethink our developments and spaces – to bring real communities to their heart.

‘Genuine mixed and flexible use solutions are needed, to deliver for the mixed, varied and vibrant population that they serve.’

Rather than being policy lead, planning judgement needs to be more at the centre of how we plan our places. A move away from the tick box approach to planning decisions is required. A rigid process leads to rigid developments.

Change is coming, and planning needs to be at the heart – not for checking compliance, but for encouraging positive and sustainable place making.