

MoStA

Placemaking and The Charette

To us as architects Placemaking is about creating a quality of the environment - space, both internal and external space and how the buildings we design can add value to 'the place' in question. More often than not an appointed professional team will carry out this design exercise. But, what about people? ..... the actual place-makers? Our planning system encourages localism and neighbourhood consultation, but this invariably takes place after the preparation of designs, often after much expense and so very often after irreversible key development decisions have been made ..... enter the Charette process !

The Charette process to take place for the MoStA site was our first, and I suspect a first for many others too. Right at the start of the design process, the community were encouraged to attend and contribute their ideas that would formulate, actually create development proposals for the site. Over an intensive, if not fun weekend and from blank pieces of paper, 4 conceptual designs for the site emerged. A democratic process then voted for the preferred concept and thus we were 'told' what was wanted !

Naturally, the professional team was on hand to assist ..... to help the creative and imaginative minds, that we all have reveal themselves and to now and again guide how that free-thinking might fashion itself amongst the framework of various built-form legislation.

In our case the result was the 'Oak Tree Gardens' concept scheme no.1, and our job to follow was quite simply to take it forward and make it work! I cannot say that was necessarily a straightforward process, but knowing that community support is behind you certainly makes a difference, a very welcome difference. Design is all about community and between us ALL, I hope we have created a welcome addition to the City of St Albans. Through the Charette process we all have the opportunity to contribute to placemaking. Isn't this how it should be?

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