Exploring Architecture in Civil Society:

Social Enterprise as an expression of localism and community advocacy in architectural design – a case study and critical reflection on practice.

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Abstract

Forthcoming legislation in the UK looks set to place greater responsibility for the design and production of the built environment onto communities themselves. This responsibility requires professional and technical support in order to be met effectively.

This paper draws on the author's experience of working for an award winning environmental and social enterprise, Hill Holt Wood, alongside an analysis of the forthcoming legislation associated with the Localism Bill 2010/11 in the UK and suggests that social enterprise offers an exciting model for professionals, such as architects, who wish to support communities as they respond to Localism.

Architects, as one of a number of professional disciplines involved in the design and production of the built environment, have skills that communities will need in order to negotiate the challenges presented by Localism. However, 'normative' professional practice in the construction industry is exclusive and does not easily allow for the participation of community groups on the design process. Architects may have to change what they do in order to continue to practice effectively and responsibly.

At Hill Holt Wood, a student-initiated design practice has been successfully integrated within an existing social enterprise that already provides other local services, such as education and management of the environment. In considering architectural design as a local service rather than merely professional consultancy, an opportunity may exist for architects to better support civil society through social enterprise.

This paper concludes that whilst the social enterprise model presented in the case study offers opportunities to architects to change how they practice, it too may need to review how it practices in order to respond appropriately to Localism. Further detailed analysis of the case study may reveal how this may best be achieved.

Keywords: Architecture; Built Environment; Localism; Social Enterprise.

Structure

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Academic Context

This paper forms part of an M.Arch Architecture (RIBA Part 2) dissertation thesis at the Sheffield School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, UK. The dissertation is viewed as a preliminary study leading onto future PhD research. It utilises a case study and analysis of legislation to raise questions and identify further areas of study. It seeks advice from experts in the field as to the best way to approach these areas, and for an evolving methodology for the research in general.

1.2   Personal Context

At the time of writing, I am also at a particular stage in my training to become a professionally qualified architect in the UK. I have recently completed my 'Year Out', which commonly forms the 'bridge' between the BA Architecture (RIBA Part 1) undergraduate degree and master's level academic training (refer to Fig.1).
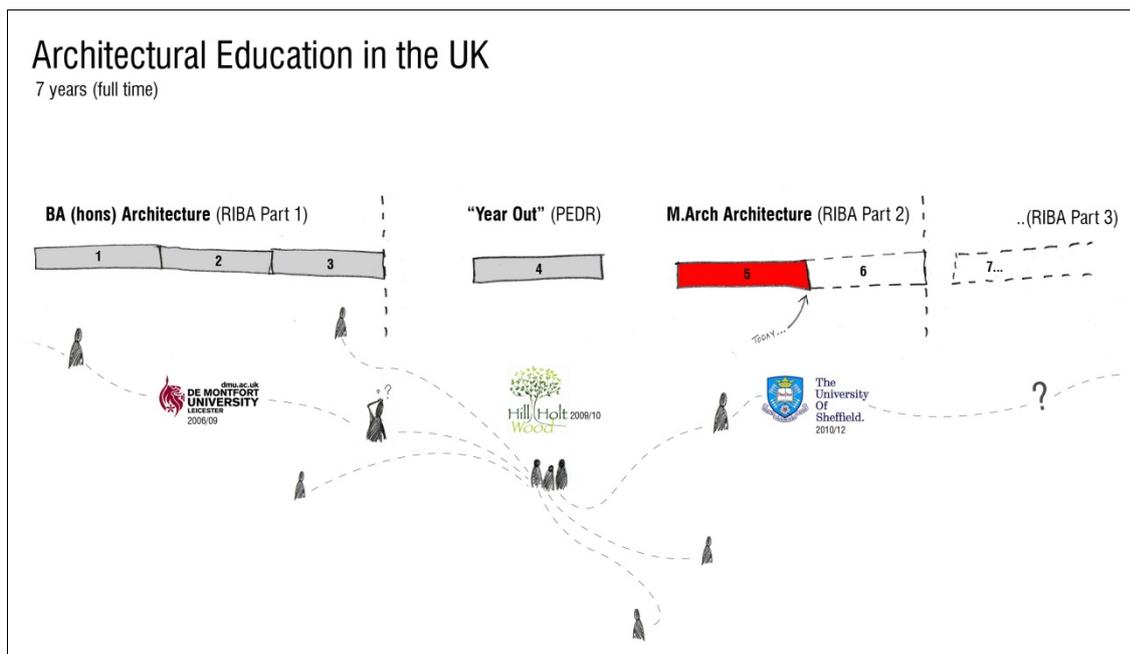

Fig.1 – Architectural Education in the UK

The architecture profession in the UK is regulated by two governing bodies; the Architect's Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of Professional Architects (RIBA). These institutions set standards for the 'Year Out', detailing what can and cannot be counted as valid experience contributing towards progression from Part 1 to Part 2 of professional training.

The design-end of the construction industry has been one of the most severely affected sectors following economic recession in the UK. Upon graduating, I found it incredibly difficult to find employment that met these criteria.

It was this experience that led me to Hill Holt Wood, and the world of social enterprise and the civic economy, where boundaries that previously seemed rigid were blurred, and a fundamentally different way of doing things underpinned the economics of community development. Working here, as a designer, I began to ask questions of my chosen profession and of its influence on - and obligation to - society.

The current UK Coalition government is implementing its 'Big Society' agenda with the introduction of the Localism Bill 2010/11, currently undergoing the slow process of enactment into law through parliament and royal ascent. The Big Society represents a political re-valuation of civil society in the UK, particularly with regard to community development and the provision of local services. This paper acknowledges that the Bill is almost certain to be passed in something closely resembling its current form, and seeks to discuss the opportunities and challenges it presents rather than to debate its merits.

1.3   Methodology

In reflecting on my own experience of architectural practice - and seeking recommendations for how that experience could be improved for both myself and others - I am engaging with an Action Research methodology as discussed by McNiff and Whitehead (2002).

As McNiff points out, it is simply good practice to take stock from time to time in order to decide how best to move forward (Ibid:1). Action Research may therefore be regarded as critically reflective practice. Treating practice, of any kind, as research in this way can ensure that as practitioners we are participating in the "living out of values" (Whitehead 1985:2).

Whilst action research does not require a rigidly defined sequence of methods, it can be characterised by the following:

- We review our current practice and identify an aspect we want to improve;

- We imagine a way forward, try it out and take stock of what happens;

- We modify our plan in the light of what we have found and continue with the 'action';

- We evaluate the modified action;

- ...and so on until we are satisfied with that aspect of our work.

(Lomax et al. 1996:ix)

In this research, I am seeking the answer to two key questions;

First of all, in a context of rapid change, politically, economically and socially, how might I best use the skills that I have gained in my education and experience of architectural practice? What might be the most appropriate form for my own future practice to take, and what might I need to learn in order to apply myself to it?

Secondly, I have experience of working for a social enterprise, which forms the subject of a case study presented in this paper. How might my work best inform the development of that organisation, as an agent of progressive social, economic and environmental change in the community and its neighbourhood?

2.0   The Localism Bill – The Big Society and the UK

2.1   A General Introduction - The Localism Bill as an Act of Parliament.

The Localism Bill 2010/11 was introduced to the House of Commons on 13th December 2010 and introduces new free-standing provisions and amends other legislation in four key areas; local government, planning, regeneration and housing. Its overarching theme is the devolution of power to local authorities and communities (DCLG 2011:1; Parliament 2011a), which forms a core component of the current coalition UK Government's 'Big Society' agenda, upon which the Conservative Party based its election manifesto.

Almost all of the Bill's provisions extend to England and Wales only, except minor aspects of infrastructure planning which also extend into Scottish legislation, and so reference by commentators to the UK may be misleading. The Government expects the Bill to become enacted in 2012, and many believe that it will bring about a profound shift in the way that England is governed (Brady 2011).

The Bill is currently progressing through the process of enactment into legislation by the UK Government. This is a long process, allowing for much debate and scrutiny. At the time of writing, the Bill is at Committee stage in the House of Lords, which represents a fairly advanced stage of enactment. Attention is now being paid to precise wording, rather than general content or vision. Simultaneously, debate surrounding the potential social, environmental and economic impact of the Bill's enactment is shifting from a discussion on its merits and likely influence to the pragmatics of its application in use.
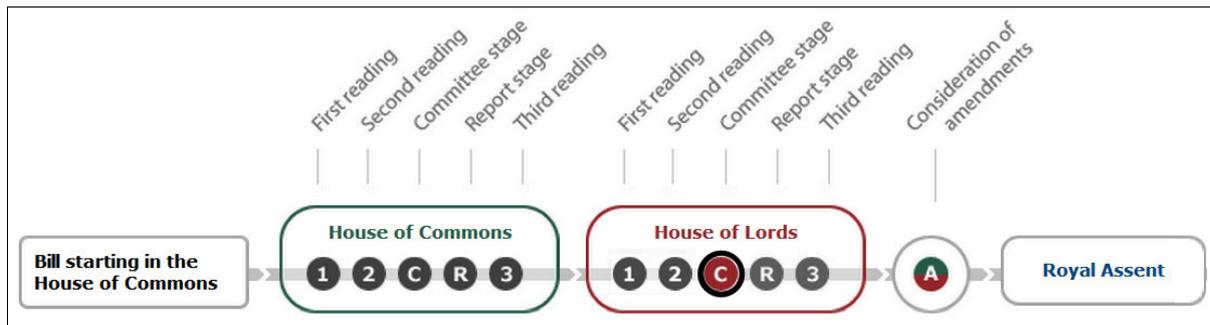
Fig.2 – The passage of the Localism Bill 2010/11 through UK Parliament. At the time of writing the Bill had reached Committee stage in the House of Lords, and has found its more or less final form. Attention is now paid to the exact wording of the Bill. Source: www.parliament.uk

2.2   A literature review of the Localism Bill

Literature surrounding the Bill is confusing, as the Bill itself is still changing. Revisions are documented after each House session or Committee meeting and are also made publically available online (Parliament 2011b), meaning that as it progresses through parliament, it is available to view online, in current and past forms.

The Localism Bill itself currently stands in 2 volumes; the first as a 202-page document of 'clauses' that form the bulk of the Bill's legislation; and the second as a 247-page register of 'schedules' that list other legislation affected or engaged by the Localism Bill. There is also an accompanying 101-page document of explanatory notes (Parliament 2011c). As such, the Localism Bill represents a substantial and wide-reaching piece of legislation.

Simultaneously, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has published a *Pain English Guide to the Localism Bill* (DCLG 2011) which seeks to address any confusion surrounding the consequences of the Bill's enactment. It is very promotional in its tone, and therefore lacks criticality. However, it is aimed at a general audience and serves to clarify some of the intricacies of the Bill.

A large proportion of the Bill's clauses affect the way the built environment is designed, procured and managed and so Localism is swimming gradually into focus in disciplines such as architectural design, urban design and planning which stand to be substantially affected by the new legislation. Notable literature in this area includes the output of a number of regional and national colloquia on the effects of the Localism Bill on the procurement, design and regeneration of the built environment, including material by RIBA President Elect 2010/11 Angela Brady (Brady 2011), and former RIBA President George Ferguson (Ferguson 2011).

Nationally, international development NGO, *Architecture Sans Frontières* (ASF) hosted a conference on social enterprise that concerned itself deeply with Localism (ASF-UK 2011). The RIBA itself has also hosted a number of events that aimed to bring together professionals form backgrounds such as planning and development, alongside architects, in order to discuss how to make Localism 'work' (Boler 2011; Brown 2011; Cuff 2011; Kleiner 2011; Reed 2011).

The RIBA-sponsored think tank for the built environment professions, Building Futures, has also recently published a report entitled 'The Future for Architects?' (Jamieson 2011), which accompanies a pair of nationally-focussed debates and surveys other construction industry professionals about the evolving role and value of an architect as the context of practice changes.

These are all important sources for this study as they represent the general view of a number of inter-dependent professions on the nature of professional practice within a wide area that is set to change with the enactment of the Localism Bill.

2.3   *Physical Analysis of the Localism Bill*

The Localism Bill itself addresses four primary areas of policy for England, in addition to a specific section on policy in London. These are; Local Government; Community Empowerment; Planning; and Housing.

In discussions, this is often simplified to two main areas of discussion; Local Government and Community Empowerment are usually considered together as complimentary sets of ideas, whilst Planning is almost always considered in the context of 'development' and 'regeneration'. Housing, as a topic, almost always remains as a third, isolated area of discussion; proposed changes address issues of management and social housing tenure, rather than design and production.
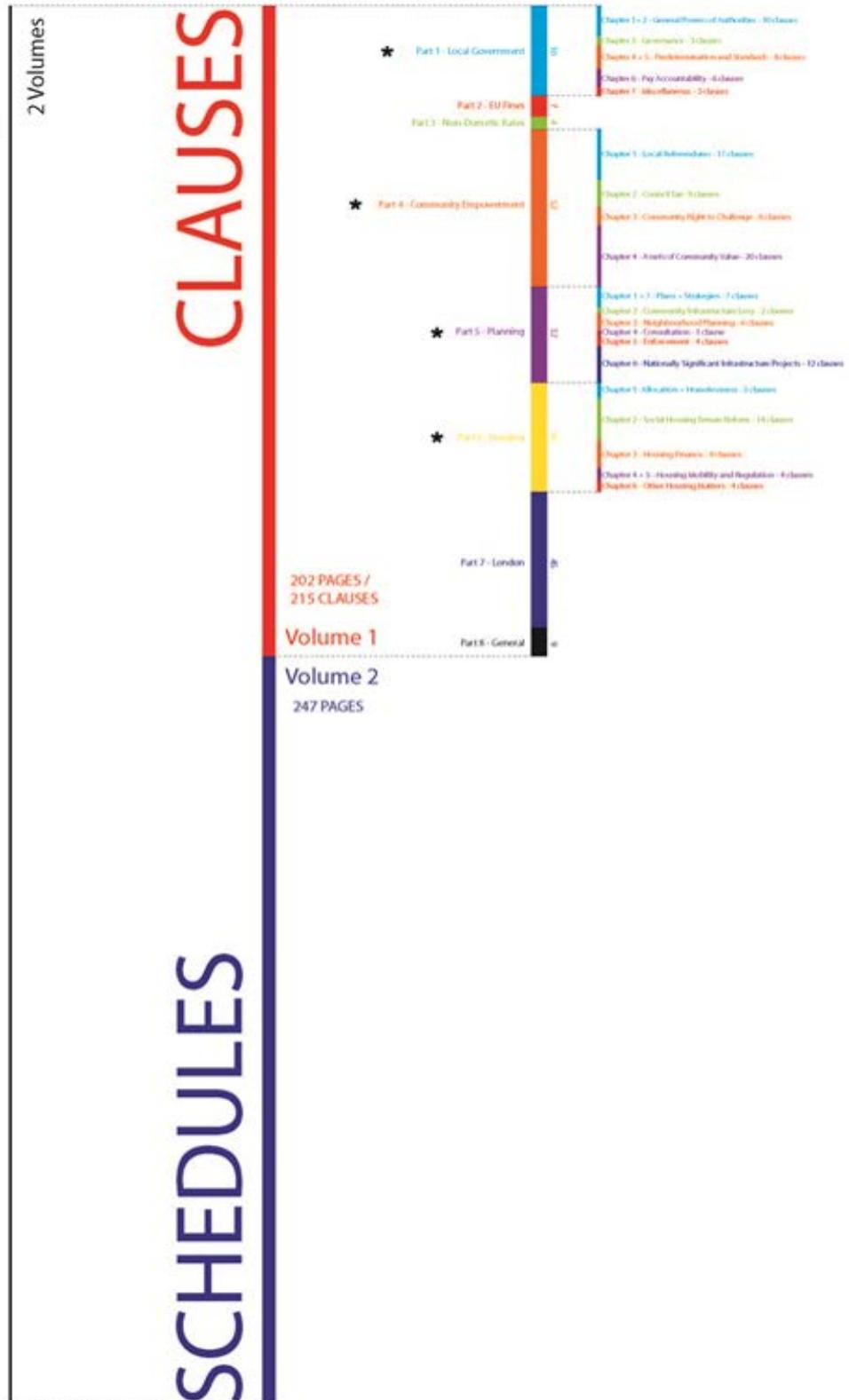
Fig.3 – 'Mapping' the Localism Bill – The Bill itself comprises 'clauses' and 'schedules'; of the clauses, most relate to specific aspects of the devolution of power such as Local Government, Community Empowerment, Planning and Housing.

2.4   Local Government and Community Empowerment

Parts 1 to 4 of the Localism Bill seek to address Local Authority and Community Empowerment. In summary, the Bill seeks to;

- Grant a general power of competence to local authorities (clauses 1-7)

- Enable local authorities to choose to return to the committee system of governance, and allow for referendums for elected mayors in certain authorities (clauses 10-12)

- Abolish the Standards Board regime and the model code of conduct for councillors, and introducing local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare a personal interest in a matter (clauses 14-20)

- give more discretion over business rate relief to local authorities (clauses 35-38)

- grant a new power for residents to initiate local referendums on any local issue and he power to veto excessive council tax increases (clauses 39-65)

- grant new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and giving voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over the provision of their services (clauses 66 to 88).

(DCLG 2011:1-2)

2.5   Planning and Regeneration

Parts 5 and 7 of the Localism Bill affect the Planning System and reflect the government's attitude towards regeneration and the production of the built environment. Generally, the government seeks to devolve power, to streamline the planning system and make it easier for communities to have an input into it (Brady 2011).

Primarily, this has at its heart the intention to reduce the amount of planning guidance that has built up over the years and replace it with a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Brady 2011) – an initiative commonly referred to as *planning reform*. The NPPF is a single document and maps out planning priorities against broader social, environmental and economic objectives. Planning reform is also sometimes referred to as 'bottom-up' planning (Ibid; Ferguson 2011; Cuff 2011) in reference to the aspiration that a neighbourhood should decide what it needs or wants.

In summary, policy addressing planning and regeneration allows for;

- the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies (clause 89)

- the abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission and a return to the position where the Secretary of State takes the final decision on major infrastructure proposals of national importance (clauses 107-118)

- amendments to the provisions governing the Community Infrastructure Levy (which allows councils to charge developers to pay for infrastructure). Some of the revenue raised will be available for the local community (clauses 94-95)

- the provision for neighbourhood plans , which may be approved if they receive 50% of the votes cast in a local referendum (clauses 96-101)

- provision for neighbourhood development orders to allow communities to approve development without requiring normal planning consent (clause 96)

- the conferral of new housing and regeneration powers on the Greater London Authority and abolishing the London Development Agency (Part 7)

(DCLG 2011:2)

2.6 Summary of observations relevant to the design and production of the built environment

Whilst the summaries provided by DCLG in the *Plain English Guide to the Localism Bill* are useful in understanding the wider implications of the Localism Bill, there are a number of aspects of specific relevance to the design and production of the built environment. These are underpinned by three key concepts, which can be summarised as;

- the Community Right to Build;

- the Community Right to Challenge;

- and the Community Right to Buy.

These concepts affect how communities can engage with the design and production of their built environment in three main ways;

- through the production of Neighbourhood Plans;

- through Asset Transfer from Local Authorities;

- and through a new Duty to Consult placed upon developers.

2.6.1 The production of Neighbourhood Plans

Clauses 96 – 101 and Schedule 9 of the Localism Bill provide for this new system of neighbourhood planning. With the enactment of the Localism Bill, Local Authorities will be required to hold *Local Plans* and *Neighbourhood Plans* (DCLG 2011:16), against which to assess applications for planning permission. This is commonly seen as the big change ushered forth by Localism (Brady 2011), as it places the larger part of responsibility for the generation of such plans onto communities rather than the local authority. Neighbourhood Plans are seen as the main vehicle by which communities can have a say about what happens in their neighbourhood, and can exercise the new Community Right to Build.

In an area where there is a parish council the only applicant for a neighbourhood development plan or order can be the parish council. In areas where there is no parish council only "neighbourhood forums" may apply for a neighbourhood development plan or order. A plan or order will not take effect unless there is a referendum on it and more than 50% of those voting, vote in favour of it. (DCLG 2011:18-19). Communities may also propose Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) that specifically permit development of a certain kind in a certain place, and is administered as a new category of planning permission.

Some local authorities are already engaging with the process of neighbourhood planning in anticipation of the enactment of the Localism Bill. However, there are a number of issues.

Firstly, although neighbourhood plans will be able to permit development above that identified by the local authority (Brady 2011), they will have no specific power to stop development, and must conform to local and national planning policies.

Additionally, where a Neighbourhood Plan is absent, there will be a 'presumption in favour of development'. This potentially leaves communities vulnerable to exploitation if they have not drawn up a Plan.

Neighbourhood Forums, with whom power can rest in the absence of a parish council, may constitute as few as three people (Ibid.), which renders the process susceptible to 'vocal minorities'. Ensuring that neighbourhood forums accurately represent a community is therefore essential. However, the identification of a 'community' may itself be difficult and variable, dependent on geographic location or interest. Defining a community or neighbourhood, where it is not already clearly defined, is difficult, as recognisable communities often only identify themselves in response to threat, rather than opportunity.

It is also likely that neighbourhood planning will have a greater take up in some areas than others (Ibid.). Scarcity of resources - such as funding - particularly means that neighbourhood planning will be out of the reach of some communities, whilst others that are perhaps better resourced and more established will find the process easier.

2.6.2 Asset Transfer from Local Authority

The 'Community Right to Challenge' and the 'Community Right to Buy' mainly influence a community's ability to provide their own local services where the State or local Authority is deemed to be lacking or deficient. However, this can also apply to assets such as vacant or under-used land or building stock under the Local Authority control.

Under the 'Community Right to Buy', local groups will have a legal right to nominate any vital community asset - including local shops, pubs, libraries and leisure centres - to be assessed for recording on a 'most wanted' list by the local council. The asset could then be listed for five years. In that time, the owner of a listed asset will have to tell the council if they intend to sell, which will trigger a window of opportunity or

'community countdown', giving people time to prepare their business plan and raise the funds they need to make a credible bid before it goes on the open market (RUDI 2011).

2.6.3 Duty to Consult

Clause 107 (in the draft current as of 23/06/2011,originally listed as Clause 102 in the Bill as originally proposed) effectively shifts the duty to consult on applications for planning consent for major projects onto the applicant (RTPI 2010:12) by making 'consultation' statutory, and seeks to protect and enable the Community Right to Build and to Challenge.

The Localism Bill therefore brings with it a new Duty to Consult for developers, which requires prospective developers to consult local communities before submitting planning applications for certain developments. Developers have often done this as a way of 'demonstrating' that they have consulted locally on plans they have in fact already produced – in other words, a 'tick the box' exercise. The new powers mean that they will have to comprehensively consult on all large proposals before the plans have been produced and then show how they have taken the local community's views into account in the submitted version. Failure to reflect what local people want from development could result in refusal of planning permission.

However, the Duty to Consult only applies to large developments, of approximately two hundred housing units or bigger. Commentators argue that developments much smaller than this can have a significant impact on a local community, and that the remit of the Duty to Consult should be extended (Brady 2011).

2.7 The Localism Bill in the wider context of the Big Society and economic constraint

The Localism Bill 2010/11 as discussed represents a core piece of legislation underpinning the Big Society agenda in UK politics. It sits within a wider context of budget deficit reduction and cuts in government funding, from which civil society is not immune.

Whilst charities and volunteer groups are experiencing reductions in income and other financial support, the UK government is also reducing funding for a range of strategic, mid-level, 'umbrella' organisations – such as Regional Development Agencies - that have traditionally provided strategic support for the civil economy. Many third sector organisations depend upon this kind of support in order to operate at all. Some commentators criticise the Big Society as empty rhetoric that actually acts against the values it advocates, theoretically allowing communities and civil society organisations to do more for themselves whilst simultaneously removing the support that enables them to do so (McCabe 2010:13).

Professional services, such as architectural design, are part of that 'umbrella' support. If their traditional outlet is compromised by government cuts, their support may become unavailable to those with a responsibility for making decisions about the built environment.

3.0   Case Study – The Hill Holt Wood Design Team

3.1   Introduction to Case Study

Localism looks set to empower organisations that can fuse local service provision with the design and production of the built environment. If communities and civil society organisations have greater responsibility placed upon them, then they may need professional and technical support in shouldering those responsibilities effectively.

As a student of architecture, experiencing architectural education as set out in the introduction to this paper, I have been required to undertake a period of professional work experience termed the 'Year Out'. I spent that year working for a social enterprise that sought to integrate the design and production of the natural and built environment with local service provision, as a community advocate and 'honest broker of knowledge'. As such, it sought to provide strategic-level support to individuals, local authorities and civil society, independent from donation, or government grants.

Parrish (2007:165) has described the business as a "sustainability enterprise", where "the potentially competing interests of multiple goals were balanced by structuring activities so that beneficial outcomes in one domain served to reinforce the beneficial outcomes of other domains".

Organisations such as this are in an exciting position as the Localism Bill becomes law, and the following case study begins to examine the particular qualities of that organisation with regard to the strategic support of sustainable community development.

The wider study will ask what lessons can be learned from innovative social enterprise for architectural practice at large.

3.2   Hill Holt Wood as a social and economic assemblage

The hardest thing to do in beginning this case study is discuss what Hill Holt Wood is or what it does. The easiest way is often to describe it firstly and foremost as a business; all be it one with social and environmental goals in place of guarantees of shareholder return on investment. In this way, it is an example of a social enterprise, a business model rapidly gaining publicity in the current political climate of the UK. I find it convenient to think of Hill Holt Wood – both as place and organisation – as a social and economic assemblage of actors and agents, an idea derived from Actor-Network-Theory, as developed by Michael Callon (1986), Bruno Latour (2005) and others.

In this sense, it exists "in a constant making and re-making" (Latour 2005:9) of relationships between individuals, between individuals and the organisation, and between the organisation, State and society, that sustains it as a business. Hill Holt Wood employs people, trains people, accepts volunteers, operates as a school, seeks and accepts contracts both privately and on behalf of the local authority, and seeks to influence policy at local and national administrative levels.

Hill Holt Wood could be summed up as an award-winning environmental social enterprise based in ancient woodland in rural England

The passage below, written reflectively, depicts the scenario in which myself and two colleagues - freshly graduated from our BA (hons) Architecture degree at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK – found ourselves within a few months of arriving at Hill Holt Wood;

> *"We began work on the bunkhouse when we arrived at the Wood; roping in other staff members as and when we could, such as when we needed a digger driving or the sawmill operating. We slowly began to integrate with the other members of staff who, as far as we could tell, had no real idea as to who we were or why we were in their woodland.*
>
> *There was little budget available for the build, save for things we couldn't legally do ourselves, such as the installation of electrical services. We began to reuse materials left over from other building projects; the usual over-ordered material contingencies and products of mistaken Bills of Quantity. Anything we could make out of timber, we did; making full use of the supply of timber thinnings from forestry and woodland management operations; we took durable Douglas Fir and Larch for cladding and shingles, and Scots Pine and Western Hemlock for furniture and interior finishes. We burned the off-cuts in a salvaged wood-burner to stay warm. Surplus insulation was squashed between studs made from cut-down, structural pine decking, whilst doors and windows came from a local contractor refurbishing a nearby school – reusable so long as you didn't mind the dents and scratches. Over a few months of making-do-and-mending, we became more skilled with our hands, doing everything ourselves, from block-laying and concrete-mixing to site carpentry, roofing and plastering.*
>
> *So began the adventure at Hill Holt Wood."*

3.3   What does Hill Holt Wood do?

As it currently stands, Hill Holt Wood, Ltd. is a community-owned enterprise engaged in job skills training for at-risk, socially excluded, and unemployed young adults through the ecological restoration of degraded ancient woodland. The term Hill Holt Wood actually refers to the name of that ancient woodland, which exhibits evidence of woodland management dating back to the Roman period (Hill Holt Wood 2011).

The enterprise is pioneering a model of countryside management that creates income generating opportunities to support the maintenance of healthy ecosystems, provide rural employment, and address the needs of some of society's most disadvantaged members. The enterprise has been held up as a model for rural sustainable development by the UK Environment Secretary, the Forestry Commission, and the Department for Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and has won numerous social business awards. An audit evidencing the beneficial social and environmental impacts of the enterprise was certified by professors of biology and sociology from the University of Lincoln, and Lincoln law

enforcement officials have credited the enterprise for a noticeable reduction in area youth crime (Parrish 2007:143).

The organisation evolved from the aspiration of founding director Nigel Lowthrop to demonstrate that the conservation of any environmentally significant resource and its open access as a public resource need not be reliant on grants and the good-will of patronage or donation. As a trained ecologist and self-styled entrepreneur, Lowthrop sought to prove that the woodland could be used to generate enough income to not only pay for its own rehabilitation, but also to support a family living a responsible modern lifestyle. Buying the woodland in 1995, he and wife Karen Lowthrop formed the Hill Holt Wood Woodland Management Committee in 1997, which developed over the next five years to include representatives from eleven local parishes, recognizing the important role of local communities in their vision.

Hill Holt Wood diversified its activities as the extent to which it could manage the woodland grew. Thinnings were sold as firewood and management strategies developed. As expertise was gained, the Wood was able to take on other local contracts and developed as a forestry and woodland management business. Holding expertise also meant they could train people and offer consultancy, as well as being able to fulfil a long held personal belief that land-based education is more appropriate for some members of society, particularly those that mainstream education service is failing. Training, and the associated goals of community empowerment, became the main social mission of the business, alongside its original environmental objectives. In 2002 the founders conferred ownership of the enterprise to a community-controlled governing board, converting their own status from owners to employed managers. The governing board was restructured to include representation by local individuals, companies, faith organisations, and funders, as well as a staff representative and the executive director. Hill Holt Wood was thus established as a Social Enterprise, which reinvests all profits generated by operations in the woodland into the social and environmental objectives of the business (Clearly So 2010; Hill Holt Wood 2011).

3.4   The Architecture of Hill Holt Wood

As the organisation's operation has grown, so has its need for buildings to operate from. In keeping with its founding inspiration, Lowthrop originally furnished the business with new facilities constructed as self-build projects from materials sourced from the woodland and surrounding community. This gave rise to the replacement of original on-site caravans with a suite of offices and classrooms, complete with electrical and communications servicing, constructed from timber and load-bearing straw-bale. At the same time, the Lowthrops applied for planning permission to build their own family home within the woodland, which although initially met with strong resistance, was granted ten years later following public support generated by their work in returning, managing and maintaining the woodland as a local amenity.

More recently, those early office buildings have been complimented with a new building, developed in partnership with design departments at local universities, in turn supporting the organisation's social objective of providing training opportunities and pushing the boundaries of sustainable development. The new offices, cafe and community hall have again been

constructed as a self-build project by Hill Holt Wood as an organisation, this time utilising rammed earth and more advanced eco-materials such as triple-glazing, recycled plastic roofing tiles and Combined Heat and Power (CHP) generation. Needless to say, Hill Holt Wood has gained a great deal of practical experience by constructing its own buildings, and a great deal of knowledge in eco-design and sustainable development through the associated planning and research.

As an entrepreneur firstly and foremost, Nigel Lowthrop could see the connection between this experience, and the links being made with students at design schools; particularly with graduating architecture students facing difficulty securing the employment necessary to continue their training. These students had skills, which in combination with the resources of Hill Holt Wood could effectively deliver eco-design projects at local level. Lowthrop had always spoken of this aspiration, and as students, myself and my two colleagues had always entertained the idea that we might be able to play a role in supporting that vision. We approached Hill Holt Wood with the proposal that, providing we could gain the support of an RIBA-chartered architect, we could engage in a joint venture investigating the potential of a design service, run mostly by students, working to support both the social objectives of the existing Social Enterprise and on-going training of the students.

As it currently stands, the Hill Holt Wood Design Team consists of two or three students, operating autonomously within the wider social and economic assemblage of Hill Holt Wood and the local services it provides. It operates under the loose directorship of Nigel Lowthrop, with the larger part of decision making in terms of design and general administration of the Design Team being the responsibility of the students. Students – as interns - are firstly and foremost employed as 'Rangers', including general 'Hill Holt' tasks such as teaching, and conservation alongside their duties as members of the Design Team.

Following the initial involvement of myself and two colleagues during our 'Year Out', the Design Team was profitable, generating enough income to cover our wages. This met one of Hill Holt Wood's business objectives of providing training opportunities whilst integrating a new business stream within the wider economic assemblage of the business. A second internship was then offered, employing two more 'Year Out' students. At the time of writing, interviews have been held for a third internship and successful candidates are set to start work in the coming weeks. The Design Team has proven to be a sustainable activity stream for the business. The evidence from this case study therefore suggests that architectural design services can be successfully practiced as part of a social enterprise providing other local services.

The body of research, of which this paper forms a part, will go on to study specific aspects of the Hill Holt Wood Design Team in order to establish the wider viability of architectural design services integrated with other local services as a social enterprise.

4.0   Discussion of Observations

This paper has presented a study of the UK Government's Localism Bill 2010/11 alongside a case study of a design service integrated with local service provision at Hill Holt Wood.

Alongside the areas of interest identified from the case study above, it has made the following observations concerning the Localism Bill;

- The likely importance of Neighbourhood Plans;
- The opportunity for Asset Transfer from Local Authority;
- The new Duty to Consult placed on developers;

It has also presented a case study from which some interesting observations emerge. These observations depend upon an understanding of architectural design as an exclusive profession; and upon an awareness of participatory design processes.

4.1   Architecture as an exclusive profession

As noted in the *Introduction*, professional regulatory bodies for the practice of architecture in the UK – the ARB and the RIBA – define what an architect can and cannot do, which is limiting and exclusive. They also - by state licence – place the architect in an exclusive position of power within the design team (Riley 2010:2).

This exclusive arrangement may not be the most effective in a time of financial constraint and scarce resources, and in response to legislation that places new demands on the design of the built environment. Architects – and their regulatory institutions - may need to 'blur the boundaries' of professional conduct in order to best serve communities acting in response to the demands placed upon them by Localism.

'Boundaries' to be 'blurred' might include the distinction between built environment professionals, such as architects, planners, and urban designers, as well as that between professionals – as traditionally objective consultants – and policy makers in local government.

There is interest in 'making Localism work' across the built environment professions (RTPI 2010, Reed 2011).

By not following rigidly the RIBA Plan of Work, Hill Holt Wood is able to widen the definition of its practice of architecture.

4.2   Participatory Design

The Duty to Consult, as previously discussed, places a greater emphasis on participatory design processes. Communities may need the financial and logistical support of developers to achieve their aspirations, and developers will now require the consent of the majority of that community in order to proceed with development.

Far from being alien to the profession, participation has a rich history within architecture, urban design and planning (Blundell-Jones et al. 2005), as well as current vitality. In embracing participation more fully, the architectural profession may better serve communities and civil society organisations, and provide a richer dialogue between developers and communities regarding development.

Hill Holt Wood did not truly practice participatory design, although the organization's identifiability and accessibility amongst the local community may ideally place it do to so. To develop this thinking, the social enterprise could be considered as a two way valve between developers and communities; it is to 'go to' organisation for anything to do with design and construction of the built environment that affects a particular neighbourhood. It may be useful to consider a social enterprise alongside the idea of neighbourhood forums outlined in the Localism Bill.

4.3   Key observations from case study

Key areas of interest, which need specific support with evidence from the case study, are as follows;

- Choosing not to use the title 'architect', or follow standard construction management procedure such as the RIBA Plan of Works. This might allow for a blurring of professional boundaries better suited to effective support of community development and a more inclusive practice of architectural design. Considering architectural design as a community service, rather than solely as professional consultancy, might allow a more inclusive way of working than the exclusive relationships encouraged by the profession's governing institutions and guiding documentation.

- 'Alternate' as opposed to 'alternative' practice, allowing for the pursuit of 'normal' or 'traditional' modes of practice alongside less traditional modes, such as participation, co-design and community advocacy. Practice in the third sector may be usefully subsidised by 'traditional', more exclusive practice.

- The use of an integrated business model, affording a holistic view of the value of good design alongside other community services, and greater job-satisfaction through variety. This may also make design services accessible to communities by providing them with a known outlet for those services. Hill Holt Wood's aspiration to become a 'one-stop-shop' and 'honest broker of knowledge' for sustainable design and construction present opportunities to work more inclusively.

- The maintenance of strong links with the on-going education of professionals at a strategic point in their university-based training; blurring the boundary between academia and practice. Having social goals – such as the provision of training opportunities - alongside economic ones may afford a different kind of relationship between academia and practice to the traditional pseudo-vocational model, and may present an opportunity to engage and initiate different kinds of projects in different ways.

- The use of 'Special Purpose Vehicles' (SPVs), led by social enterprises, to manage development in trust for a community. This may also present an opportunity to initiate projects in a different, more inclusive way. SPVs allow key stakeholders, such as designers, local authorities, developers and community groups to exchange views and develop projects in an open 'forum', which is specifically tied to a certain project

or on-going community participation in design and production of the built environment in a particular neighbourhood.

- The engagement of local and national policy surrounding community development, and seeking to influence it through demonstration of innovative good practice, rather than merely conforming to prescriptive regulation. This activist approach bears hallmarks of successful community advocacy, and stimulates discussion surrounding concepts such as 'leadership' and 'vision' in development.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Concluding Thoughts

Theory surrounding the Localism Bill is in its infancy, and as such it is difficult to make an accurate survey of it. Literature on Social Enterprise, particularly with reference to the professional practice of architectural design, is also relatively rare. As such it can be hard to draw many conclusions at this preliminary stage.

However, the eventual enactment of the Localism Bill 2010/11 in the UK looks likely to place greater responsibility for design and production of the built environment onto communities and civil society organisations. To engage with design and production effectively and responsibly, those communities and organisations will require professional and technical support from practitioners such as architects.

Social Enterprise represents an opportunity to integrate professional design services with local service provision and community advocacy, providing accessible and accountable support for civil society as it shoulders its growing responsibility for the design of its environment.

Architects, who have traditionally been schooled as a 'jack-of-all-trades', may have something to offer as the climate surrounding development begins to require the specific skills of a generalist. Although architects may have valuable skills, these are currently limited by the exclusivity of 'normative' professional practice, which does not easily permit the production of architecture in many ways other than a clearly defined architect-client-design team relationship.

In order to best serve civil society, and best support community groups as they shoulder their newly acquired responsibilities, architects may have to change how they practice, blurring the boundaries of professional disciplines and embracing social entrepreneurship in the initiation of socially and environmentally progressive community development.

This blurring of boundaries could result in new organisational structures such as social enterprise becoming more common, alongside the adoption of more participatory practices that enable effective and responsible engagement of communities in design and production of their own environment. However, there are many questions arising from what remains an under-theorised field within the built environment professions.

The case study of the Hill Holt Wood Design Team presents promising evidence that architectural design services can be pursued as a social enterprise. Analysis of forthcoming

legislation suggests that practice in this way may more effectively support communities in shouldering the responsibilities demanded of them by Localism in the UK. However, this claim needs to be more rigorously supported with evidence from the case study, alongside theoretical speculation and comparison with other case studies.

However, the important question remains; is the Hill Holt Wood Design Team a one-off product of unique circumstances, or does the integration of architectural design with other local services as social enterprise offer a valuable model for 'alternate' architectural practice? What else do we need to know in order to better support this assertion?

This paper has been presented at the 3rd EMES International Conference on Social Enterprise in order that the author may begin to hold conversations with experts in the field about the outstanding issues prevalent in this study.

5.2   Outstanding Issues

5.2.1   Community

An important area of study will surround the difficulty of identifying 'community'. If Localism asks that 'communities' take on greater responsibility, then identification and empowerment of those communities is a key task. This is also a problem facing Social Enterprises, who need to identify and be accountable to the communities they seek to serve.

There is a disjunction between the geographic idea of community, as referred to by the Localism Bill, and the service of communities of interest as commonly encountered by social enterprises.

What can an architect offer in terms of identifying and engaging with a community? Participatory design processes and creative surveying from arts practice may offer solutions in this respect.

5.2.2   Epistemology

It's difficult to find anyone other than architects thinking publically about the role of architects in response to Localism. We become a very self-referential profession, and tend to think that we are the answer to everything.

Additionally, researching the Localism Bill is difficult. Not a lot is written or published in this field, although there is a lot of 'talking', at colloquia and gatherings, particularly amongst built environment professionals. Discourse is often confusing, often using terminology loosely with varying definitions in different contexts and with a great degree of interchangeability. How can I make my study a sound, rigorous one that is well referenced?

5.2.3   The professional and risk in civil society

How can I talk about civil society in terms that professionals will engage with? How can social enterprise become more common in professional service provision? Is its limiting factor that professional services cost a lot?

One key question would be this; acting as entrepreneurs, who take on and exploit risk, how can architects manage the process of risk and liability? The exclusive nature of the architecture profession seems to be the way it is for precisely that reason, as it allows the architect to be aware of, and to manage risk, by being in control. Construction contracts also tend to allow the tracing of liability between contractor, designer and client. How could risk be managed more informally so as to not be inhibitive for the social entrepreneur? Is it simply a question of worrying less about it?

Professional qualification and association go some way towards guaranteeing competence. At Hill Holt WOod we obtained 'Design Warranty' insurance that incorporated the usual professional indemnity insurance that architects and other built environment professionals normally take out to guarantee themselves against liability for their work. It's harder, and more expensive to get without those professional qualifications. So shouldn't those qualifications, that insurance and risk management rely on, reflect the need for new skills?

5.2.4   Good design and civil society

What evidence is there to suggest that good design is important to the development of a vibrant civil society and strong civic economy?

6.0   Bibliography

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Images

Fig.1   Brown, S. (2011) *Architectural Education in the UK* [Author's own work].

Fig.2   www.parliament.uk (2011) Passage of a Bill [WWW] Available from: http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/passage-bill/ [Accessed: 30/06/2011).

Fig.3   Brown, S. (2011) *Mapping the Localism Bill* [Author's own work].