

Action Planning Launch - 11 January 1996 - St James's Palace, London
Address by Nick Wates

I simply want to say a big thank you to all of those who've helped make this handbook possible, and explain briefly how it came about.

The desperate need for how-to-do-it information on community regeneration techniques was forcibly brought home to me when I was running an Urban Conservation Project in Hastings at the end of the eighties.

As a hectically busy, grass-roots practitioner for a few years, I realised there was a yawning gulf between the output of the architectural publishing industry - in which I've spent most of the rest of my professional life - and the requirements of the community-based enabler.

Dealing with the relentless, day-to-day demands of local people wanting help improving their surroundings, there was little time to read wordy theoretical texts or case studies - which is mostly all that existed - and which proved of little practical use anyway.

What was needed, it seemed to me - and others I discussed it with - was simple, universally applicable, graphic, nuts-and-bolts information on neighbourhood regeneration techniques, which would stop one having to constantly 'reinvent the wheel', and which could be distributed to people - from all walks of life - that one was dealing with on any particular project - the same kind of material that is now available in most bookshops on subjects like gardening or home improvements.

The Tools for Community Design programme has been set up by Ros Tennyson, John Thompson and myself to speed up the process of production, promotion and distribution of such material.

Those who have tried will know how absurdly difficult it is to get funding for practical research and development in this field. So we were over the moon when The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture offered to provide a base for the initiative, and when English Partnerships, Inner City Aid and the Urban

Villages Forum offered financial assistance for a first handbook on Action Planning. Without the help of all these organisations, the programme couldn't have got off the ground.

A great many others have also contributed. In line with the philosophy behind Action Planning itself, the production of the handbook has been a fascinating exercise in 'action research' and 'participatory editing'.

The first draft was compiled and tested at two planning weekends in 1994 - at West Silvertown in London Docklands, and Blairs College near Aberdeen - with help from Institute students, and participants at the events.

Over 30 practitioners then gave up their time to debate this first draft at what turned out to be a very enjoyable 'Editing Day' at the Institute last February. And many others have commented on drafts, and supplied photos since.

The end product is infinitely better than it would have been without this input and, although we haven't got it completely right yet, establishes a stylistic format and production process for the future.

We now intend to embark - in partnership with others who would like to be involved - on further publications, and, equally important, on improving distribution systems so that more of the immense amount of practical experience in community planning, from all over the world, is consolidated and made available to people on the ground.

The experience of my earlier book with Charles Knevitt on 'Community Architecture' - more copies of which have now been sold in Taiwan than in England - convinces me there is enormous potential for international information exchange in this field.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading, and more importantly using, this little handbook on Action Planning and will help us by encouraging your colleagues, neighbours and friends to buy copies.

Thank you all again for your help so far, and for taking the time to come to this event today.