



Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study
Feria Urbanism

Sponsored by

STRIDE TREGLOWN

1.



TETRA TECH
Planning

1. Team Background

Feria Urbanism was founded in 2007 by Richard Eastham. Establishing a flexible consultancy enabled him to balance his passion for urban planning and urban design with his new found childcare responsibilities. Richard established a flexible working pattern that focused on tasks rather than time keeping allowing him to support his partner and young family. Ahead of its time, this working pattern is one that many businesses are now moving towards.

This same pattern now enables the wider Feria Urbanism team to work around family commitments and integrate their working life into their daily and weekly routines. This does not affect productivity. Indeed the team, although small, pulls together to achieve projects that far outweigh their capacity on paper. The team is diverse in terms of background.

Richard Eastham, who trained as an urban designer and urban planner, has found synergies with Jennie Savage, who joined the team in early 2020. Jennie's background is in public art, and she taught at the Chelsea College of Art for over ten years. Her socially engaged art practice focused on enabling people to articulate a sense of place. Her extensive experience working with communities on ecology, walking and mapping as a form of collective activism was able to find a home in a practice where Richard had already made significant progress developing co-created approaches to urban design and neighbourhood planning.

The team is currently completed by Henrike Johannsen, an architecture graduate who provides project support in terms of drawing production, model-making, and research

2. Development and application of imaginative approaches and techniques to achieve high quality planning solutions.

We feel strongly that giving voice to communities in planning projects achieves the best outcomes. Our range of innovative approaches can be best captured in the following three examples, each of differing scope and scale – the strategic scale of a neighbourhood plan, the 1:1 scale of on-site experimentation, and the long-term nature of a ten-year city vision.

Neighbourhood planning forms a key part of our workload. Richard and Jennie love helping communities think more deeply about where they live and empowering them to effect real change through the creation of a statutory plan. This notion of “democracy through planning” and the equitable distribution of space lies at the heart of our practice thinking. The neighbourhood plan – as a process and as a product – is an opportunity to work collaboratively with communities.

Several of the team's neighbourhood plans have included intensive multi-agency design events. Over three days, we transform the town or village hall into an open access design studio, where everybody is welcome to contribute ideas. Working late into the night, our team builds consensus, synthesises concepts, creates detailed drawings, and makes rapid plan-led progress on the big issues that affect people.

The restrictions on public gathering due to the Covid-19 pandemic forced our team to adapt our methodologies and transfer some of our collaborative work on online. We can now combine real-time online mapping technologies with multi-participant video calls – creating the digital equivalent of sitting around a table with a paper plan and a set of felt tip pens. The results are just as immediate and can be recorded and shared more effectively.

We were commissioned to lead a multi-disciplinary team to design a town square in Dorchester. Wanting to develop ideas through experimentation, we commissioned the production of a bespoke kit of scaled building blocks. Fabricated out of foam light enough to move but strong enough to stand on, these blocks allowed us to work at 1:1 scale in real time and space. This innovative and performative interruption of public space sparked illuminating conversations and engagements with the public. This has directly informed our design proposals. We have since used the same set of foam blocks to engage with young people in Cirencester, allowing them to explore ways to revive a

key town centre street that is feeling the negative effects of retail decline.

Our city vision statements are more than just an urban design framework as they include recommendations for how communities can participate in the delivery of change itself. As part of a multi-disciplinary team, Feria Urbanism was instrumental in the successful production of a highly-regarded ten year vision for the city of Winchester. We delivered a process-led piece of research that sought to establish a series of micro-communities and working groups. Their work was ultimately published as a series of “urban handbooks” detailing specific projects and processes that can be implemented over the next ten years, from quick wins to long term strategies.

3. Client/applicant/partners satisfaction with the service provided.

Richard’s technical knowledge of the planning system, and his appearance at examination, has been commended: “Thank you for your hard work and professionalism which you applied to the development of the Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan following the statutory consultation. Members of the town council who attended the examination were impressed with your measured and forensic approach to the all the challenges presented by other representatives and, from time to time, by the examiner” – Jackie Westlake OBE LLB CiLCA, Clerk to Faversham Town Council.

Our three-day design forum technique, used to develop neighbourhood plans, has been praised by several parish councils: “The Three Day Design Forum has been an overwhelming success and to date only positive feedback had been received all round. The process had facilitated individuals to look again at the parish in a different light. Genuine new ideas and approaches were brought to the fore. The energy levels had been high on all three days. Residents have been impressed by the Feria Urbanism team’s knowledge and understanding of the locality. A cross section of the community of all ages had participated” – Staplehurst Rural Settlement Group, meeting minutes.

“First and most importantly, what a fantastic team you are! Thank you all so much for all your hard work last week. It must have been a gruelling few days! Your guidance was fantastic, and you were all so brilliant at making people feel welcome and at home with the team and helping us to contribute to the process. We can’t imagine we could have had a better group to help us!” – Joy & Chris Austen, Hawkhurst Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Our flexibility towards a design brief was met with support from a non-profit community group: “The Feria Urbanism team was impressive and professional when consulting with the wider public. The team quickly assimilated the needs of the potential stakeholders of the campus and adjusted their plans accordingly. Flexibility is, indeed, one of Feria Urbanism’s key strengths” – Erik Wilcock, Halesworth Campus Ltd, Director & Vice Chair.

Our ground-breaking urban quarter study for the LGBTQ+ community in Liverpool was praised by a local politician: “The Stanley Street report is exceptional; the best report of its type I have seen in recent years. I firmly believe that Feria Urbanism have produced something special that will have a very positive impact on the future of the city” – Councillor Nick Small, Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills, Liverpool City Council.

Richard’s contribution to the higher education sector has been well-received: “Richard has delivered several urban design lectures to the LJMU Architecture Society in recent years. His latest lecture was on several Feria Urbanism projects that address town centre regeneration and new urban extensions. We had some positive feedback, especially from 2nd year and 6th year architecture students. They said how relevant his talk was to their current projects and how it inspired them in terms of narrative and visualisation” – Lucy Helliwell, Chair of the Liverpool John Moores University Architecture Society.

4. Ability of planners to manage multi-disciplinary projects or to work within a multi-disciplinary environment

Our team is known for designing and delivering comprehensive community engagement strategies that refine and refocus a project brief. This allows other related disciplines to deliver their own work to a higher standard than otherwise. This has happened on many occasions, but we use one recent example here, at Whitehill & Bordon in Hampshire.

Whitehill & Bordon is being transformed into a sustainable green town now that the Army's Defence School of Electronic and Mechanical Engineering has relocated, freeing-up approximately 100 hectares of land. A major regeneration scheme is now progressing which will deliver 3,350 new homes, 5,500 new jobs, a new town centre, new schools and the protection and enhancement of 150 hectares of countryside environment.

One fascinating aspect of this project is how it will initiate a whole new set of relations between the community and a "green loop" – comprising woodland, nature reserves, open space, and recreational land – that encircles the redevelopment area. The community – both existing and new – will reside within the centre of this loop and will use it as a social space on the edge of their town to walk, play, meet and socialise outdoors. A "green grid" has also been established – a series of streets that cross-cross the town to allow wildlife, plants, and humans to connect across the middle of the loop. The purpose of the loop and the grid is to encourage active travel and get people active.

The Feria Urbanism team were appointed to design and deliver a public consultation process to inform a wayfinding scheme for the loop and grid. This multi-disciplinary project involves professionals from the three tiers of local government – the town, district, and county councils – alongside landscape design, architecture, graphic design, sign-making, and fabrication. We initially fitted into this jigsaw by acting as the conduit between the design professionals and the public. However as the project evolved, and in response to our conversations with the public, we started to ask much broader questions. Many of the people participating in our workshops wanted to articulate something about their connection to this so-called natural loop. We challenged them: "This is an ex-military training ground. Is this really nature? What does the word nature even mean?"

The questions and answers that emerged from the consultation addressed local concerns but also, and perhaps more crucially, started to question the language we use to describe the natural world, how narrative and history appear and whether the word "ecology" – used to describe human/nature interactions – might be better used with the type of new town plan that will influence Whitehill & Bordon over the years ahead. Our more philosophical approach to consultation allowed Jennie and Richard to communicate complex ideas and concepts to the wider design team and to the client. In turn, this has influenced both the materiality and the visual design language of the wayfinding scheme. Installation on site is due in the second half of 202

5. A demonstrable commitment to EDI sits at the heart of our definition of a high level service Good health and well-being:

One of our current projects is public realm redesign. We are leading a team comprising landscape designers, lighting designers and digital media consultants. Our brief was to create a new town square in Cornhill, Dorchester. We want to use this project to demonstrate our commitment to EDI as it does so on several levels. Once implemented on site, this project will be a playful addition to the town, addressing the needs of the whole community.

Cornhill is the site of the original town water pump and is where the market is traditionally held. The combination of historic mercantile activity and the Roman water source informed this "original community space" and this became our starting point. We have since developed a scheme around the key principles of restoring the pump as a working water source (the pump is still there but has been broken for as long as anybody can remember) and rediscovering the sense of it being a "place

to stay” by making it better serve the growing inter-generational communities of Dorchester.

We began our research by making astute observations: Who is currently uses the minimal seating on site? How long do they stay? And what other kinds of other activity are on site at present? A market, café spill out activity but also too much delivery traffic that should not be there. An innovative element of our research was to take a set of foam building blocks on site to playfully engage with the public, testing out new ideas. During this experimentation, several children enjoyed clambering over them whilst their parents stopped to talk to us. We drew the conclusion that children and parents should see the new space as a place to meet and a place to play e.g. on the way home from school. Our emerging designs were later drawn onto the ground in chalk so both the public and the client team could visualise the change at 1:1 scale. Our research results gave us several key elements to play with in terms of the EDI outcomes we wanted to achieve. These include:

- comfortable seating and more of it, especially important for an older generation
- a place to play, especially for younger children
- a place to hang out, especially for teenagers
- a place for local cultural institutions to engage various local communities
- a meeting place that will connect the site to its Roman roots allowing a greater understanding of the town’s history, important for residents and visitors alike
- using water as a focal point to draw a diverse community into a single shared environment
- using the right ergonomics and dimensions to accommodate those less mobile and those using wheelchairs

Our final designs will comprise minimalist forms that will be multipurpose: seating, play and display. On occasion, the largest element can be used as a performance stage or place for public engagement with the museums. Installation on site is due in the first half of 2022.

6. Commitment to staff development, business improvements and active participation in professional and educational activities

Richard and Jennie first met around seven years ago through their work at the Arts University Bournemouth (AUB), both working as Visiting Tutors on the architecture course, supporting undergraduate and postgraduate students. Richard’s background in urban planning and urban design allowed him to bring a distinctive angle to the course, explaining the strategic and legislative context to site-based architectural projects. Meanwhile, Jennie experience as a public artist that engages with communities brought an often overlooked human dimension to an architecture course, creating a discourse around who stands to benefits from architectural proposals and the social and environmental implications of the development process.

While often working independently of each other at AUB, on occasion they ran joint tutorials. This led to a realisation they held a shared interest in teaching, communities, and the consequences of planning decisions. Jennie and Richard decided to continue to explore this work through FERIA Urbanism, with Jennie joining the practice in early 2020.

Richard and Jennie maintain occasional teaching roles at AUB alongside their work at FERIA Urbanism. Since 2018 Richard, has also been a Teaching Fellow at the University of Southampton, designing and delivering an urban design course for final year civil engineering students. Much of the course deals with strategic matters linked to city planning, the legislative framework and how the planning system responds to city centre regeneration initiatives. Richard has also provided occasional lectures and design review support at Liverpool John Moores University and the

University of Kent in Canterbury.

These formal teaching roles sit neatly alongside Richard and Jennie's active consultancy work. What is particularly rewarding is that neither Richard or Jennie teach planning students. Instead, they share their experiences and knowledge of planning with architecture and engineering students, providing these related disciplines with a vital understanding of what planning is and what planners do.

Both Richard and Jennie are members of the Academy of Urbanism (AoU) and actively support the AoU lecture series. They presented their research on the 15 Minute City at the 2020 Annual Congress, run jointly with the Urban Design Group (UDG). They have also been active with the RTPi South West, delivering several well-received lectures on their public realm project in Dorchester.

Past team members have joined FERIA Urbanism in the gap between their undergraduate and their postgraduate studies. In this time, Richard has provided mentoring as they work on live projects. He helped past team members complete their professional experience development record (PEDR) as required by professional bodies. Past team members have learned a huge amount in their time at FERIA Urbanism, leaving to pursue specific careers in architecture with a grounded experience in urban planning and urban design.

Current team member Henrike Johannsen is registered on the MSc Green Architecture at the Wismar University of Applied Sciences in Germany. This course is specifically set up to be undertaken while working full-time. The practice is supportive of Henrike, giving her the flexibility to successfully combine her work and studies

7. Why should your team win this award

WE BELIEVE OUR TEAM DESERVE THIS AWARD because of our unique offer. We work at the interface between experimentation and legislation; between playfulness and academia; between local knowledge and collective dreaming. We know of no other organisation that combines our skills, ideas, techniques, and innovations in ways that unlock planning in the way we do.

We are a small agile team, and we work with a close network of architects, engineers, landscape designers, social media managers, film makers and digital innovators. This puts planning and planners at the heart of collaborative networks, the best place for us to enable change. Planners cannot affect change alone; we need willing and like-minded partners to do this. The relatively small scale of our team allows us to influence and shape not just the projects, but those we necessarily work alongside too.

WE BELIEVE OUR TEAM DESERVE THIS AWARD because we now have a body of exceptional work built up over more than 13 years. Our back catalogue is varied and spans the public, private and third sectors. It includes projects from site-level interventions to strategic city-wide thinking. However, at the heart of all our projects is a concern for the voices of those affected who are not ordinarily heard. We find these voices and amplify them.

Our 13 year track record also demonstrates a longevity and sustainability to our approach and values. The family-friendly working methods – that were the foundation of the practice – have been proven to be successful. We are pleased to see so many other organisations now adopting a way of working that has been at the heart of what we do since our origin.

WE BELIEVE OUR TEAM DESERVE THIS AWARD because we make urban planning and urban

design exciting and understandable in a way no other team does. The public, our partners and our clients are inspired by the way we work. Working as a strong collective, Richard, Jennie and Henrike – together with our partners and collaborators – make the design and planning of the built environment a comprehensible, relatable, and engaging proposition for all concerned.

For too long, the built environment – and planning in particular, it must be said – is presented as an opaque, mysterious and closed world. This leaves communities frustrated and disenfranchised. They feel powerless and unable to make their voices heard. Addressing this specific issue motivates everything we do.

WE BELIEVE OUR TEAM DESERVE THIS AWARD because the Feria Urbanism team are already acting as representatives for a new way of thinking and new way of working. We are delivering local change by making community aspiration the foundation of our activity.

The team award from the RTPi will be a visible recognition of our work. It will confirm that the attitudes, approaches and ideals we bring to our projects, and the effects we have upon people and places we engage, with are valued. This award will help us promote our work more effectively, to the benefit of the whole profession.

8. Why you should be considered for the Chair's award:

We wish to be considered for the Chair's award in 2021 as we believe our work has a positive influence on wellbeing, gender, and youth inclusivity in the planning of new places.

WELLBEING & PLACE-MAKING: Several of our projects have an emphasis on health, wellbeing, and access to green spaces. In 2018, we were part of a team that delivered an award-winning Healthy New Town (HNT) project in Whitehill & Bordon. This involved working with several local schools to identify left over spaces along their walking routes to school. One of these spaces was then transformed into community garden for the summer months. We helped design and produce a vinyl floor graphic that reflected children's ideas, introduced raised planter beds that were tended by local people and erected a set of temporary wayfinding signs, based on children's drawings and text. This three-month installation was a pilot project for the permanent "Green Grid, Green Loop" wayfinding scheme now in development.

We have recently undertaken an urban forests wellbeing research project, in partnership with In Between Time Festival based Bristol. We are also regularly involved in supporting neighbourhood planning groups as they identify and categorise land suitable for Local Green Space (LGS) designation.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PLACE-MAKING: We have developed techniques that involve young people in the design and planning of the built environment. We believe this demographic is often overlooked in the preparation of plans and strategies. We have included primary school children in several projects, either working directly in the classroom, on site or through worksheets prepared by us but then delivered by the classroom teachers.

A recent example is the redesign of a Hampshire recreation ground, with children being given a range of model making materials – plasticine, matchsticks, string – and asked to design their dream playground. The imaginative results were photographed, and the children filmed as they described their creations. The results were used to inform a design brief for the contractors.

GENDER & PLACE-MAKING: Our team has an awareness that spaces and places can affect

women and men in different ways. Intersectional with this awareness is the age profile of those participating in urban life. Our projects increasingly look to integrate our understanding of these issues. As part of our work preparing the Winchester Vision 2020-2030, Jennie designed, organised, and ran a “Teenage Girls Urban Design” workshop. This dedicated session explored how the design of the urban environment can include or exclude certain age groups and genders. Held on a video platform, this workshop revealed a disenfranchisement with the city centre for girls aged 12 – 16 years old, who would rather meet their friends in each other’s homes, where they feel safer and more welcome.

Meanwhile, Richard has supervised a student at the University of Southampton on a gendered spaces project. This linked the writings of Jane Austen, who was resident in the city for several years, to contemporary issues of regeneration and feelings of safety and independence within the urban environment