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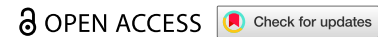


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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## The Greater Peterborough City Centre Plan. Gordon Cullen and the cinematics of British Townscape

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### ABSTRACT

Gordon Cullen (1914–1994) was a key figure in 20th-century urban design. If Cullen's contribution in promoting the Townscape's Architectural Review agenda is well known, his career as a private consultant and his involvement in innumerable British redevelopment plans has not still been sufficiently investigated. Furthermore, his archive at the University of Westminster is almost entirely unstudied, leaving a significant gap in understanding his broader influence on urban development. This paper addresses this omission focusing on The Greater Peterborough City Plan (1971). The research employs archival investigation of Cullen's reports, sketches, and drawings, alongside site visits, photographic documentation, and visual analysis of present-day urban spaces. The findings highlight Cullen's distinctive ability to capture lived experience through sequential sketches. His Peterborough project demonstrates that modernisation and new buildings can coexist with historic character, showing that urban development, when thoughtfully conceived, can reinforce a sense of place.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Gordon Cullen; Townscape; architectural review; peterborough; urban design

### Gordon Thomas Cullen: an introduction

Gordon Thomas Cullen was born in Bradford on 09 August 1914 and was educated in part as an artist, at the London School of Arts and Crafts, and later as an architect, at the Regent Street Polytechnic. In 1933, Cullen joined the architectural office of Raymond McGrath and since then, he has had a long and various career, working in collaboration with several firms and local authorities as illustrator, designer, urban planner and consultant (Reed 1994). Cullen gained international attention and recognition for his drawings and for his role as assistant editor of the Architectural Review (AR) in the 1950s and 1960s, promoting the Townscape campaign together with Hubert de Cronin Hastings, Nikolaus Pevsner, and several other scholars and architects (Aitchison, 2011).

Gordon Cullen's work is often assessed only in relation to his book *Townscape* (published in 1961, and then republished in 1971 with the title *The Concise Townscape* (Cullen, 1971) as an edited and shortened version), one of the most important books on urban design theory written in the second-half of the twentieth century (Orillard 2012). This text was part of the AR's broader agenda to promote Townscape as a guideline for urban designers (Aitchison 2012), and as a critique of both the Modern Movement and Sir Patrick Abercrombie's bombastic, symmetric plans for English towns. The critical fortune of Cullen, therefore, has been strictly intertwined with his book and his role as illustrator and writer of the AR, while his fundamental role as a consultant for public authorities and private foundations has passed over almost in silence.

Cullen worked as an urban designer consultant both in the United Kingdom and abroad for the second part of his career, for almost 40 years. The work carried out between 1959 and 1962 in New Delhi and Calcutta for the Ford Foundation, marks his 'spectacular international debut' (Orillard 2009, 357), together with his project for writing a book on the American townscape with Ian Nairn, assigned by the University

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of Pennsylvania and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (Darley 2012). Although he maintained his international fame, thanks in particular to the success of the book *Townscape*, and as demonstrated by several invitations to guest lecturing in universities around the world, the reach of his work scaled down during the 1960s, when he concentrated almost exclusively on British consultancy. He was part of Graham Shankland's team for the reconstruction of Liverpool and worked for several public authorities in Bolton, Northampton, Peterborough, the Borough of Camden, Kent County, just to name a few. One of the last notable commissions towards the end of his career was the consultancy for the London Docklands Development Corporation (Gosling 1996).

Cullen's work as a consultant, therefore, represents the least known part of his career, but also the most continuous over time (Engler 2015), and the one in which his innovative and theoretical approach to urban design has had the opportunity to emerge in a practical way. This paper addresses this gap, focusing on Cullen's work for the city of Peterborough during the 1960s. Furthermore, this article addresses a significant gap in scholarship by developing research based on materials housed in the Gordon Cullen Archive at the University of Westminster. These sketches, notes, and reports have been 'barely consulted since his death' (Orillard 2012, 719), and their analysis provides fresh insights into Cullen's work and its methodological implications. By engaging with this underexplored archive, the study contributes new perspectives to architectural history and theory, enriching current debates on Townscape and design practice.

Donated by the Cullen family, the archive comprises 115 boxes of drawings, notes, sketches, photographs, and other records collected and created by Cullen throughout his life. While parts of the collection have been digitised and organised by theme or period, many remain less structured, with projects such as the Peterborough plan dispersed across multiple boxes. The first stage of the study, therefore, involved locating all materials related to Peterborough and carefully analysing them to reconstruct the timeline of Cullen's commission and to identify his specific contributions to the plan. This archival work provided the foundation for examining Cullen's vision and ideas for Peterborough, which were then considered in relation to the city's contemporary urban fabric. Site visits were undertaken to photograph and sketch key locations, enabling a comparative assessment of which aspects of Cullen's vision remain visible, and which have been altered or lost. By combining archival research, analytical reconstruction, and field observation, the study offers a comprehensive account of Cullen's contribution to Peterborough and situates his work within broader debates on Townscape, visual perception, and urban experience.

Cullen's urban project for Peterborough is significant because, on one hand, it shows his definitive liberation from the agenda of the AR, as the New Towns (of which Peterborough is part of) are one of the pillars of Sir Patrick Abercrombie's vision, against which the AR was vocal since the early 1950s. On the second hand, it shows the great versatility of Cullen's Townscape method, as an approach applicable - potentially - to a vast number of diverse situations. Finally, the research demonstrates how some features of Cullen's vision for Peterborough, despite the years, are still extremely vivid in the visual experience of the historic centre today.

## The Greater Peterborough City Centre Plan

Similar to many English cities, Peterborough has been developed during different times: the first traces date back to the Bronze Age, to continue in the Saxon period when we find some sources that mention the monastery that will later become the city's famous cathedral, until 1850, with the opening of the railway station of the Greater Northern Railway, the line that connects London to York. The presence of the station defines Peterborough's role as an industrial city in Cambridgeshire, renowned for its brickmakers and machinery. However, it was in the 1960s of the twentieth century that the city experienced its main development. In 1967, Peterborough became a New Town (Third Wave - July 21), together with, among others, Milton Keynes (1967), Daventry (overspill), Corby (1950) and Runcorn (1964) (Thomas 1969). As happened in the other New Towns, the Peterborough project envisages the construction of four new autonomous and functional townships, with the necessary services to support the new districts, to avoid the balkanisation of the suburbs (Grant 2017). Only three of the four planned townships, Bretton, Orton and Werrington, are built, while the fourth, Castor, remains unfinished, and the city centre was heavily

remodelled to take its current form. The engine of this crucial process of transformation was the Peterborough Development Corporation (PDC), a partnership created between the Peterborough City Council and the Peterborough County Council. This Corporation managed to radically change the character of the city, transforming it from manufacturing-based to a services-oriented city. Already at the beginning of the 1960s, the development of the city was subject to an enormous growth, both in terms of population and gross value added, with a severe slowdown starting from 1997. After the 1970s, three factors enabled Peterborough to support this growth: 1. The presence of a delocalised workforce from the first London conurbation, 2. The presence of well-infrastructured low-cost soils 3. The political situation was favourable to the transition from a manufacturing to a service economy.

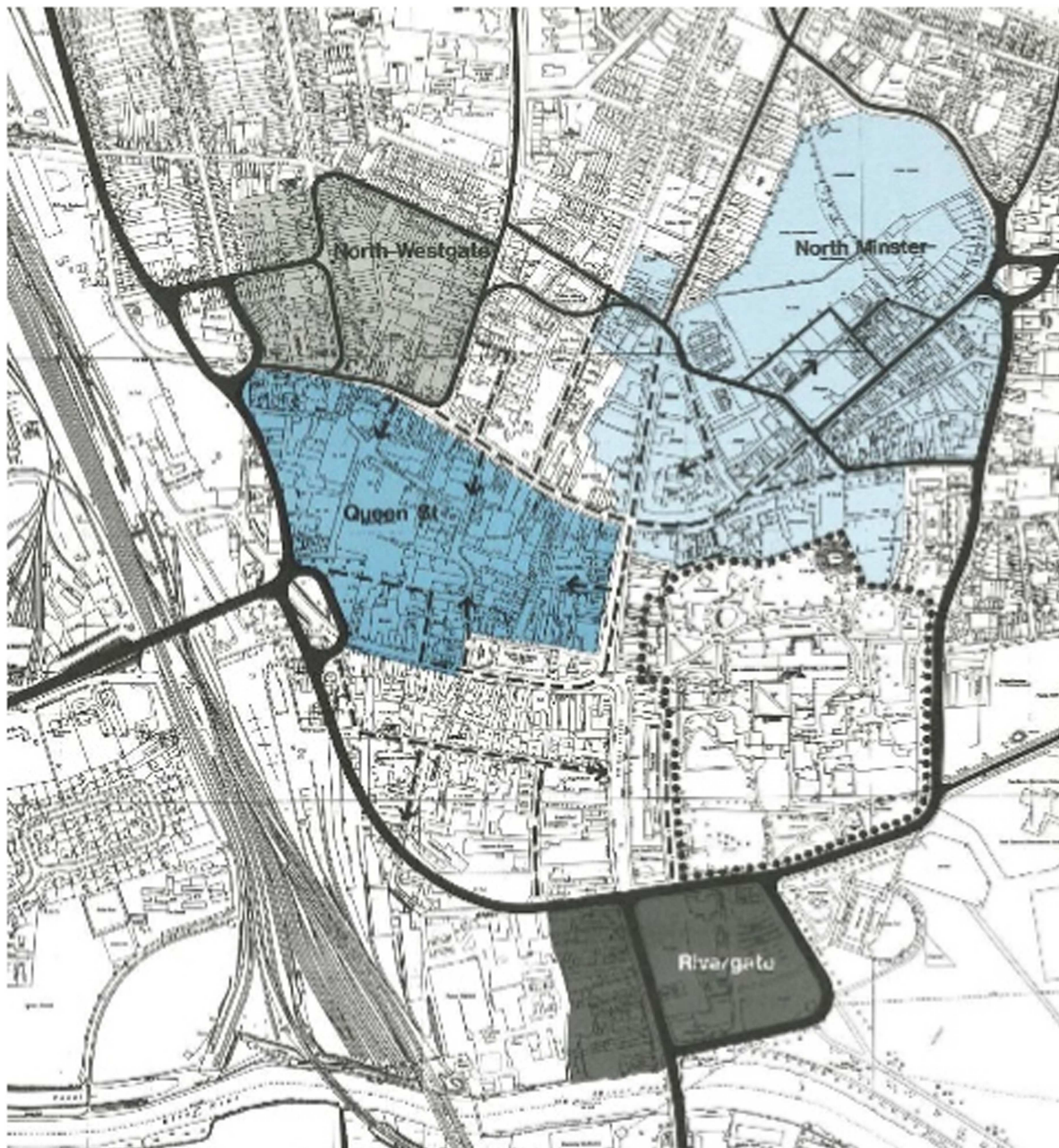
Gordon Cullen was called by the PDC during the first design phases in the 1970s. He worked on the project for Peterborough as a private consultant, mainly focusing on the renovation of its city centre and the urban spaces within the historic fabric.

At the University of Westminster archive, there are four main reports that have been preserved by Cullen, plus a series of letters, notes, and sketches related to Peterborough from 1970 to 1973. The first report is entitled 'Greater Peterborough Centre Plan—Draft Brief' and is a typewritten text dated 1969; it has no images (only one map identifying the interested area) and explains the main aims and objectives of the plan (CUL/Box66). Cullen does not appear in the list of collaborators included at the end of the report. However, we can notice that Cullen added a few handwritten notes along the text and underlined some sentences. Comparing this material with some letters regarding Cullen's involvement, we can assume that he was invited to participate in the plan at the beginning of 1970 and received the Draft Brief to consult. One of the report's sentences underlined by Cullen read: 'The task, put simply, is to prepare a detailed, imaginative but realisable plan that will give the great majority of present and future citizens a city centre which serves them well' (PDC 1969, p. 3).

The other three reports are all dated 1971, and here Cullen is noted as a 'civic design consultant' (PDC 1971a, p. 36). One contains only illustrations, including maps, diagrams, and Cullen's sketches (CUL/Box101); the other two describe the plan for the city in more detail. More specifically, the 'Greater Peterborough - City Centre Plan' (CUL/Box100) is the most comprehensive document, including all illustrations, aims and scopes, but also details of the plan developed in three main chapters: The functional structure; The visual structure; Finance and Implementation. The 'Greater Peterborough - City Centre Renewal Areas - An illustrative report' (CUL/Box65), on the other hand, concentrates on the areas of intervention and is an illustrative document conceived as an addendum to the City Centre Plan, with the main purpose of disseminating to the community all the choices made for the city centre. After a short introduction resuming the phases of the plan, the report focuses on the three areas of development: 1. Queen Street, 2. North Minster, and 3. Rivergate (Figure 1). Each of these areas is presented with a bulleted list of actions and with plans, elevations, photos of the model and some sketches realised by Gordon Cullen.

The main aims of the Greater Peterborough city centre renewal are to stop the depopulation of the preservation areas that had taken place in many of the first and second wave New Towns; and furthermore, to prevent the dilution of economic activities in the adjacent areas and the townships. In this way, the town centre would have maintained its commercial pre-eminence without losing its identity in favour of the residential suburbs. The first area of intervention, Queen Street, shows the creation of a large, articulated mall, close to the railway station. This is a fundamental element of the plan and represents the most complex intervention, both in terms of urban design, with the destruction of an area of over twenty-one acres, but also from an infrastructural point of view, with the creation of parking lots, ramps, bus stops, bridges, and new roads. The area of North Minster, on the other hand, represents the nucleus of historical, archaeological and landscape conservation, but also proposes some office buildings, a new city market and a large parking lot in place of the cattle market. Laconically and in brackets, in the text, we read that 'The cattle market itself, if still needed, would be better relocated outside the city' (PDC 1971b, p. 3). Finally, the Rivergate area, the most interesting from an urban point of view, with different levels for pedestrians and cars, represents a large area of public services, including sports areas, a new Arts Centre, and a multistore and multipurpose building that unfortunately, has never been realised.

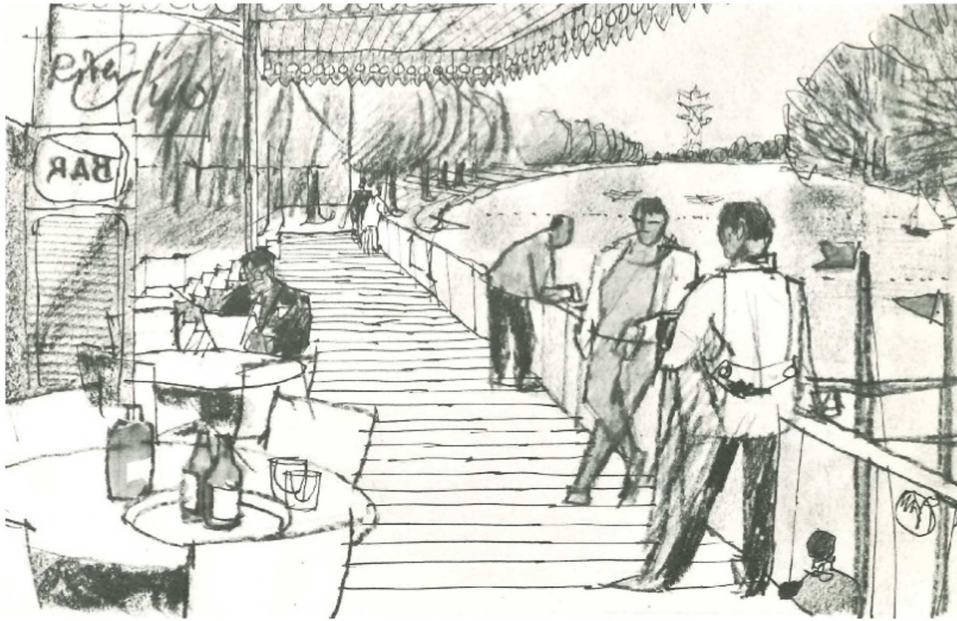




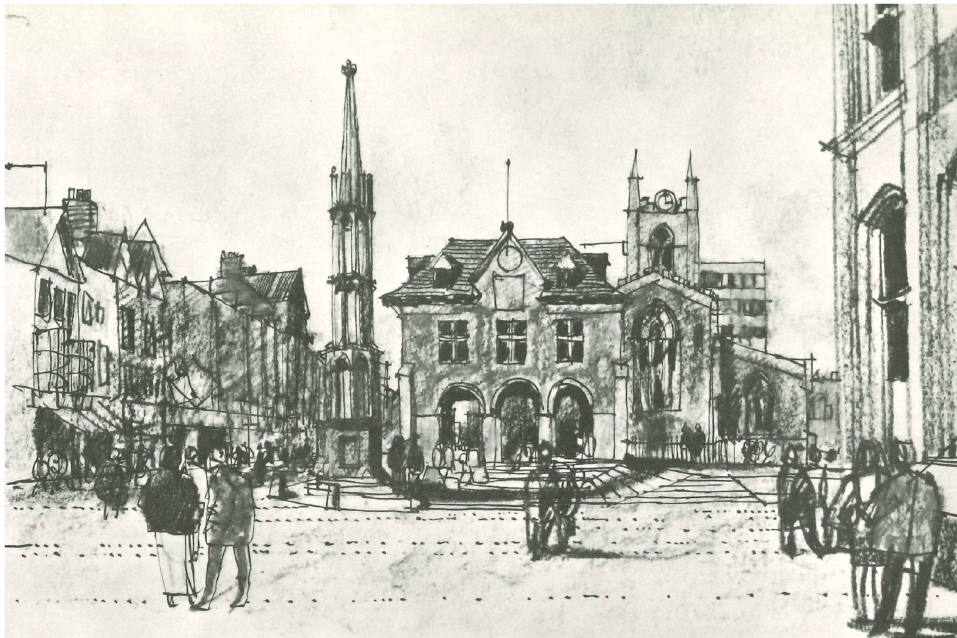
**Figure 1.** The City Centre Renewal Areas map. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.

### **Cullen's sketches for the Great Peterborough City Centre Plan**

Cullen's involvement in developing the Great Peterborough City Centre Plan could be traced to two main outputs: the series of sketches and the chapter 'Visual Structure' included in the City Centre Plan report. The sketches are fourteen beautiful hand-drawings realised in black and white that represent the main features of the city centre and of the three areas interested in the changes and are scattered in the different reports (Figures 2–5). Even if they are not at the level of Cullen's most famous drawings (Serrano 2015), they show his exquisite ability to grasp the sense of places through a few well-detailed graphic signs. Furthermore, they show the relationship between space and pedestrians' position and possible people's reactions to the new urban layout (for example, approaching the kiosk, walking in the park of the cathedral, or reading the newspaper sitting at the coffee table on the river). In this sense, these sketches,



**Figure 2.** Gordon Cullen, view on the river. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.



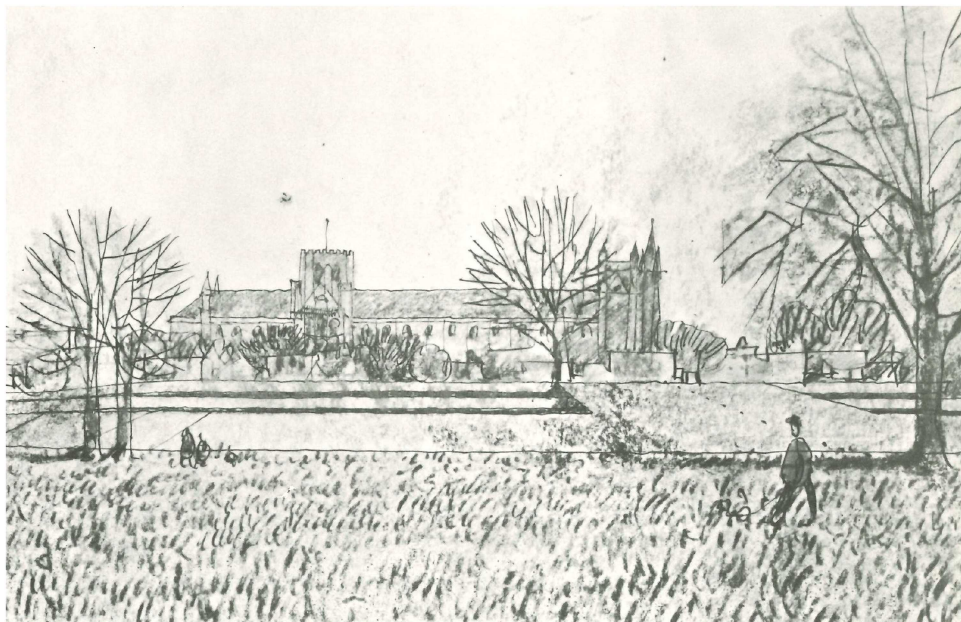
**Figure 3.** Gordon Cullen, Cathedral Square. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.

made as a private, urban consultant, have a lot in common with those in his book *Townscape* (Cullen 1961). The book tries to promote the meaning of Townscape using photos, sketches and short captions to compose a text that is almost a manual, visually showing an incredible range of different urban details and possible design approaches to city space. In the introduction of the book, Cullen summarises all the major points of his vision of urban characteristics, and one of the most relevant is the relationship between 'known here/known there' and that between 'known here/unknown there'. Reading Cullen's sketches in relation to his words also means reconsidering the value of the inhabitants' appropriation of space. The





**Figure 4.** Gordon Cullen, Midgate and the new covered market. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/ Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.



**Figure 5.** Gordon Cullen, view south from Stanley Recreation Ground. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/ Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.

bar/restaurant on the upper level of the river helps to look at the city differently, which only the inhabitant (the one who therefore does not limit - like the tourist - his action to the Serial vision in space) can enjoy. Quoting Cullen: 'If, therefore, we design our towns from the point of view of the moving person (pedestrian or car-borne), it is easy to see how the whole city becomes a plastic experience, a journey through pressures and vacuums, a sequence of exposures and enclosures, of constraint and relief.' (Cullen 1961, p. 12) Cullen's idea that occupying a territory means carrying out an action that might be static (sitting and chatting) or dynamic (moving in a park towards the Cathedral) represents his attempt to



**Figure 6.** View on the river, photo taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).

re-establish the citizens' connection with their city (Morris 1962). The transformation taking place, in this sense, is not only of a commercial nature but has the aim of bringing the population back to the city centre so that it can regain possession of the urban space, with a phenomenon catalysed by the very design of the public area.

Focusing again on the sketches, it is extremely interesting to notice how Cullen's first sketch, showing the Gates Memorial in the middle of Cathedral Square, has been maintained as a part of the report published in 1971, despite the Memorial being removed in 1967 and moved to the nearby Bishop Garden. This shows the interest of the PDC to use Cullen's original work, but also the level of accuracy of his views. In this sense, it has also been extremely useful for this research to compare some of the sketches made by Cullen with the real views of today in Peterborough. In the photos recently taken (Figures 6–9), we can find several elements very similar to Cullen's views. Unfortunately, the attempt to reproduce all Cullen's sketches has been impossible due to the fact that the multistore building represented there has not been realised. However, it is interesting to note how many of the views remain intact, in particular considering the visual reference to the Cathedral that, as we will discuss later, was crucial for Cullen's proposal.

As a final observation regarding the sketches, it is relevant to consider their value not just as individual, independent drawings but organised in sequence. As often theorised by Cullen, the townscape's art is based on the capability to design a renovated identity and sense of place that the pedestrians gain walking through the city (Stiërli 2018). In this sense, the sketches have an important sequential value, trying to depict the complexity of the user's experience across space and time, and finally describing the richness achieved with the juxtaposition of different views.

### The visual structure

In the chapter 'The visual structure', part of the City Centre Plan, Cullen explains the idea of a visual structure policy, 'based on the concept of a busy, compact, closely-built central core set in a spacious,





**Figure 7.** Cathedral square, photo taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).

well-treed urban landscape. Its proposals are accordingly designed to enclose the central core (whose main streets now peter out into formless twilight areas) to enhance the scale and quality of its green setting to the north and south and to mark the points where core and setting interact with two distinctive new places—Landgate and Rivergate’ (PDC 1971a, p. 36).

Starting from an analysis of the sixteenth-century Peterborough (Figure 10), Cullen identifies a central core for the city, now expanded in different directions, and that has the Cathedral as the main point of reference. The proposal suggests maintaining most of the ‘older and most precious buildings’ and, at the same time, considering a ‘collective contribution to the visual character of the centre’ (PDC 1971a, p. 38) of the rest of the buildings. We can identify three fundamental actions that Cullen recommends for preserving and enhancing the visual character of Peterborough. One is based on the necessity to maintain the intimate, human scale of the urban space, avoiding any widening of streets for traffic purposes and adding urban furniture and planting, if necessary. A second action promotes ‘the inherent diversity of the townscape’ (PDC 1971a, p. 38) and, in this sense, emphasises the visual power of different buildings and urban features in succession. Finally, Cullen aims for a ‘distinctive atmosphere and character’ (PDC 1971a, p. 40) that should arise from each of the quadrants based on their specific functions.

These three main actions find an effective way to be supported thanks to the identification of two redevelopment axes for the urban plan. One axis is called the Stone Axis, which connects the most important stone buildings in the city, from East to West, and the other one is called the Green Axis, a South-North line that connects Bridge Street, Long Causeway and continues on Broadway in the city centre to reach Central Park. Both axes were planned as entirely pedestrian and can be considered the main lines supporting the city centre renovation plan (Figure 11). As Cullen theorised, the urban dimension needs to be considered as an experience in motion, where the serial views are a sequence of

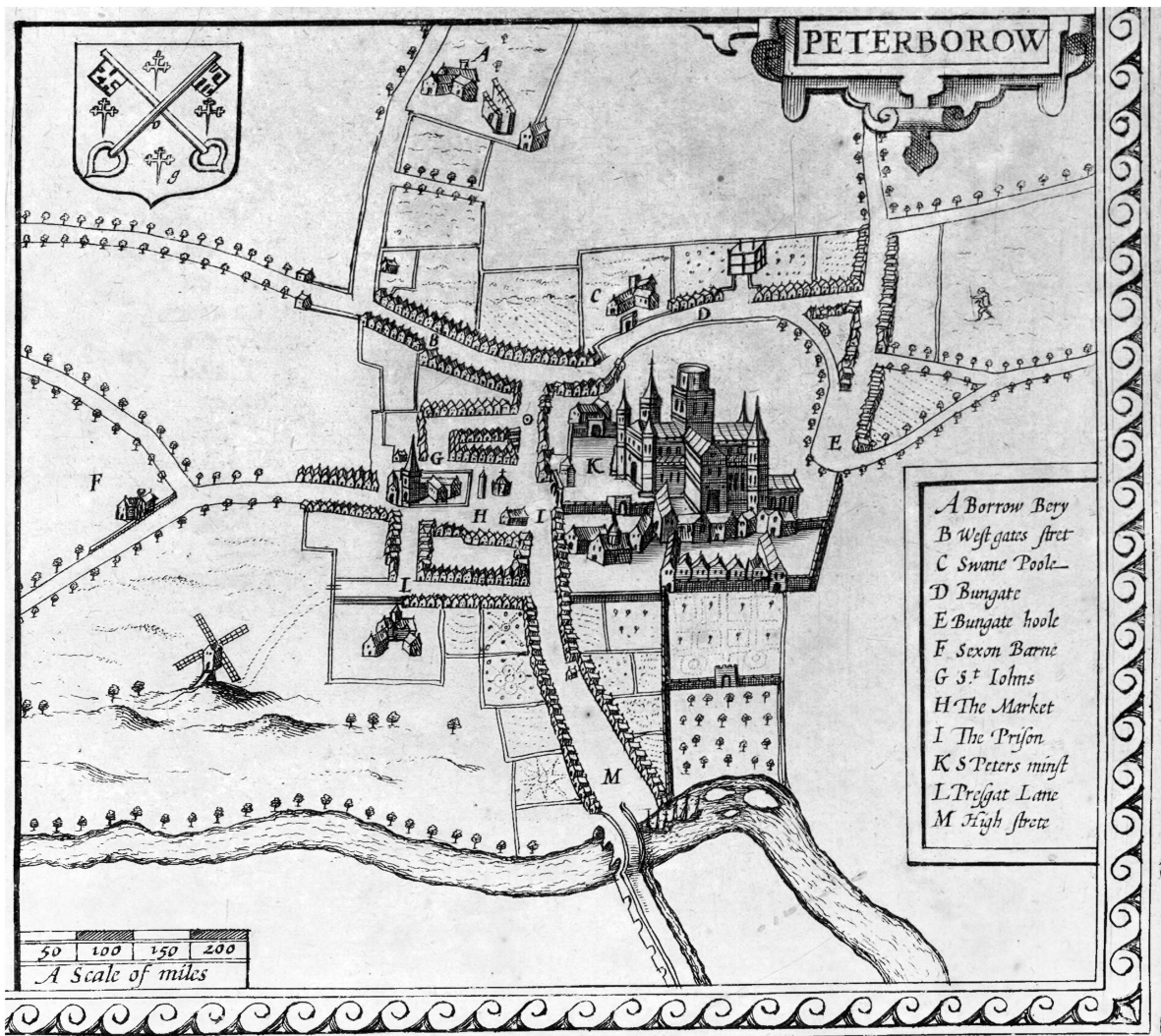


**Figure 8.** Midgate and the new covered market, photo taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).



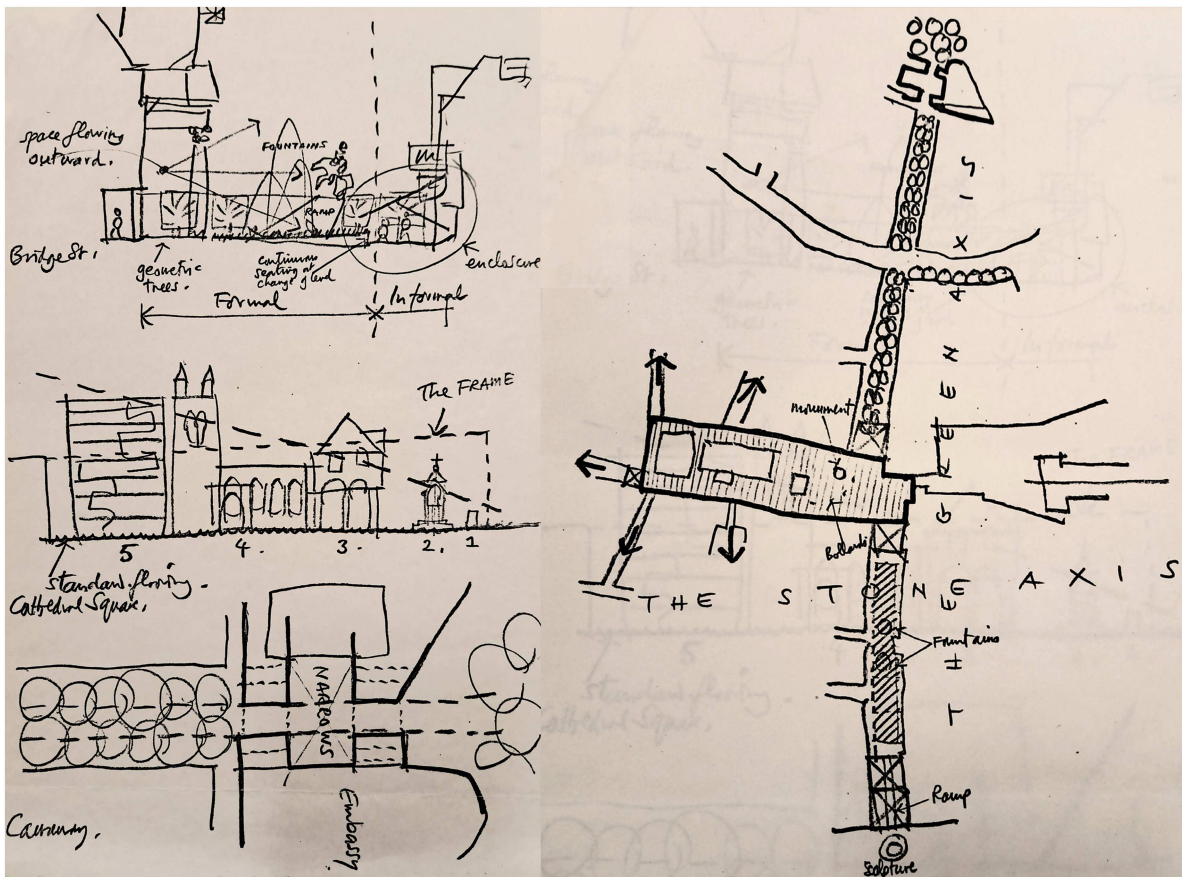
**Figure 9.** South view from Stanley Recreation Ground, photo taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).





**Figure 10.** John Speed, 1611, Peterborough map, printed by Jodocus Hondius. Excerpt from Northampton Shire Map, Creative Commons License @ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

revelations for people walking across the town. The Stone Axis connects the train station to the Cathedral, creating a direct link between two of the most relevant points of Peterborough, and crossing the road the new, big commercial mall and the Town Square. Above all, this axis underlines the historical character of the city, on which Cullen tended to dwell: the unity of language of the character of the English city. This unity, however, is not false or anti-historical, on the contrary, it conceives the new, the contemporary, as a support to the unexpected urban experience, to what Patrick Geddes defines as 'Drama in times' (Geddes 1904, p. 107). The City Council's demolition of the Norwich Union Building in 2009, helped in recreating an urban view of the stone axis, and indeed today, the vision that from Cowgate, through Church Street, the Cathedral is the focal point, appears now much more coherent and unitary. On the other hand, the North-South axis, despite being still *green* for most of its length, appears interrupted at both ends. At North, the city market closed between the gates does not provide the opportunity to connect Midgate to the Stanley Recreation Ground. At South, the scattered buildings realised at Rivergate instead of Cullen's multistore complex proposed in the plan block the visual connection between Bridge Street and River Nene. However, most of the Green Axis is still walkable, lined by a series of beautiful trees. In this way, the Green Axis offers quite a different urban experience compared to the Stone Axis, as visualised by Cullen. Furthermore, the linearity of the axes creates the opportunity to put in sequence new and old, linking the serial vision to a series of 'shots and revelations': photographs that define the urban experience as a



**Figure 11.** Gordon Cullen, sketch for Peterborough. CUL/Box19/101 © Gordon Cullen Estate/Reproduced courtesy of University of Westminster Archive.

sequence of diverse events in space (Figures 12, 13). Perhaps taking up Geddes, Cullen, regarding the serial vision, observed: 'Although from a scientific or commercial point of view the town may be a unity, from our optical viewpoint we have split it into two elements: the existing view and the emerging view. In the normal way this is an accidental chain of events and whatever significance may arise out of the linking of views will be fortuitous. Suppose, however, that we take over this linking as a branch of the art of relationship; then we are finding a tool with which human imagination can begin to mould the city into a coherent drama. The process of manipulation has begun to turn the blind facts into a taut emotional situation' (Cullen 1961, p. 11–12).

The serial visions for Peterborough show both types of views: the existing views are represented by the historical fabric of the city, while the newly conceived buildings represent 'accidents' whose relationship with the existing ones create the coherent drama described in the text. In the plan, there is no moral conflict between the new and the existing; on the contrary, a formal continuity is observed, which will also occur in the final realisation of the Queensgate Shopping Centre, in which the new tries to fit into the formal continuity of the existing elevations (Figure 14) (Powers 2012).

Finally, the last key theme described by Cullen in his chapter is based on the fundamental visual role played by the Cathedral. 'The Cathedral itself must, of course, remain the visual focus of the whole centre. [...] The distinctive visual quality of the approach to the Cathedral from each point of the compass must also be protected and, where possible, enhanced' (PDC 1971, p. 42). Once more, Cullen considers the visual quality of an urban object, in this case the Cathedral, in itself, but also, and mostly, in relation to the pedestrian movements. The actions suggested to preserve the Cathedral's visual quality are to set a maximum height of new buildings in the centre, as well as to identify, maintain, and enhance the variety of views of the Cathedral from different directions. In the sketches, we can see, for instance, the 'dramatic





**Figure 12.** The Stone Axis. Photos taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).



**Figure 13.** The Green Axis. Photos taken by the authors (Peterborough July 2021).

revelation of the west front as one enters the Precincts through the existing archway' (PDC 1971, p. 42) (Figure 15) or the open views of the Cathedral from the south-east (Figure 16) that should be preserved and improved by the design of the new park. The Peterborough Cathedral has a crucial role for the city, similar to the one the Cullen describes for the Duomo in Florence: 'Wherever one goes in Florence the Duomo is the Inescapable Monument. It is always there closing the vista with impressive sheer physical bulk. It is an architectural personality, a presence as jovial as a fat man in an overcoat, as magnetic and as outside as a balloon which has made a forced landing in somebody's back yard' (Cullen 1961, p. 192).

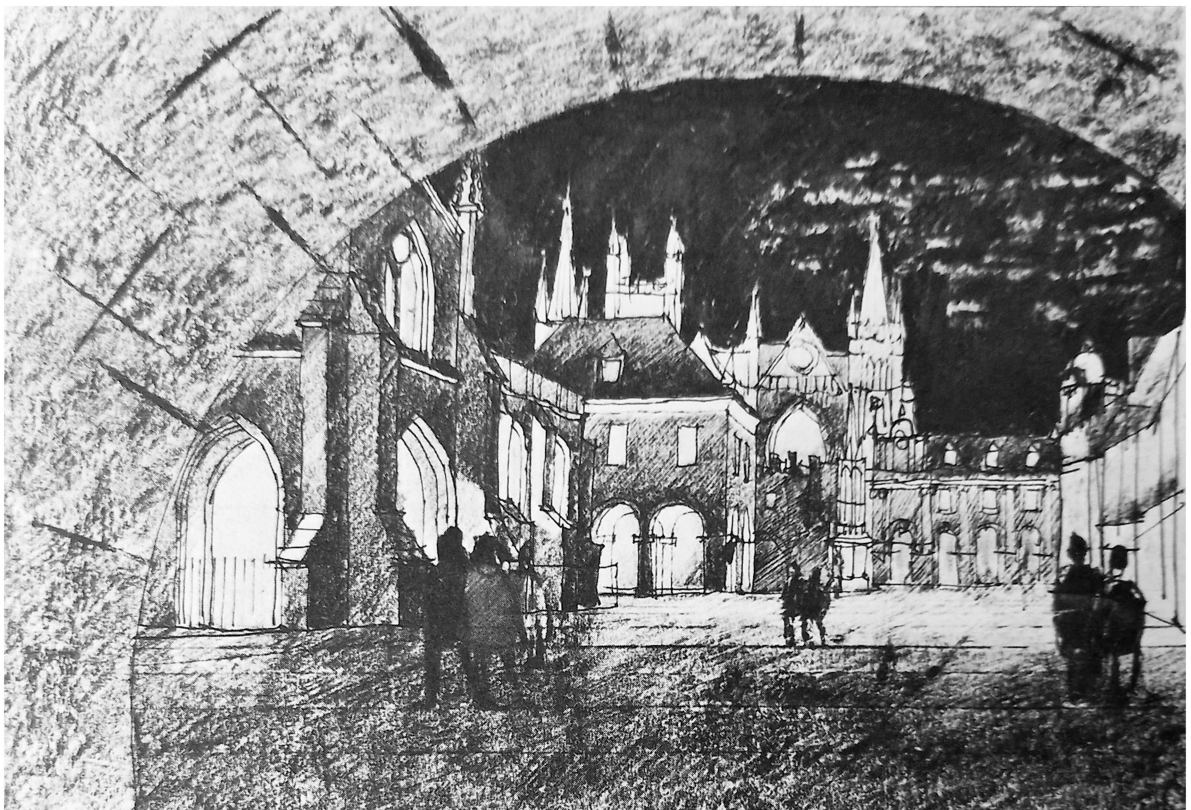
### **Gordon Cullen: a townscape consultant**

The work at Peterborough shows some interesting new perspectives in understanding Cullen's role and position as a consultant for English towns. On one side, there are substantial differences in Cullen's approach to New Towns with respect to his contemporaries. We have been able to observe how the Townscape policy is never abandoned, and indeed it remains his method for composing the urban space, enhancing the character (or the Englishness) of the British urban settlement as an essential factor of the human optical experience (Pevsner 2010). However, on the other hand, we can see how Cullen is trying to develop a unique and personal way to consider Townscape, outside the critical and hyper-theoretical framework of the AR (Parnell 2012; Raynsford 2015). In fact, if we compare Cullen's sketches for Peterborough with those—more popular—by Helmut Jacoby for Milton Keynes or those by Lionel Brett for Portsmouth, we can observe how the triumphant aspect of modernism, typical of the rhetoric of the time, fades into the background, and the contemporary buildings are focal points, frames or companions of the existing, historical settings. Indeed, on superficial observation, the spatial composition



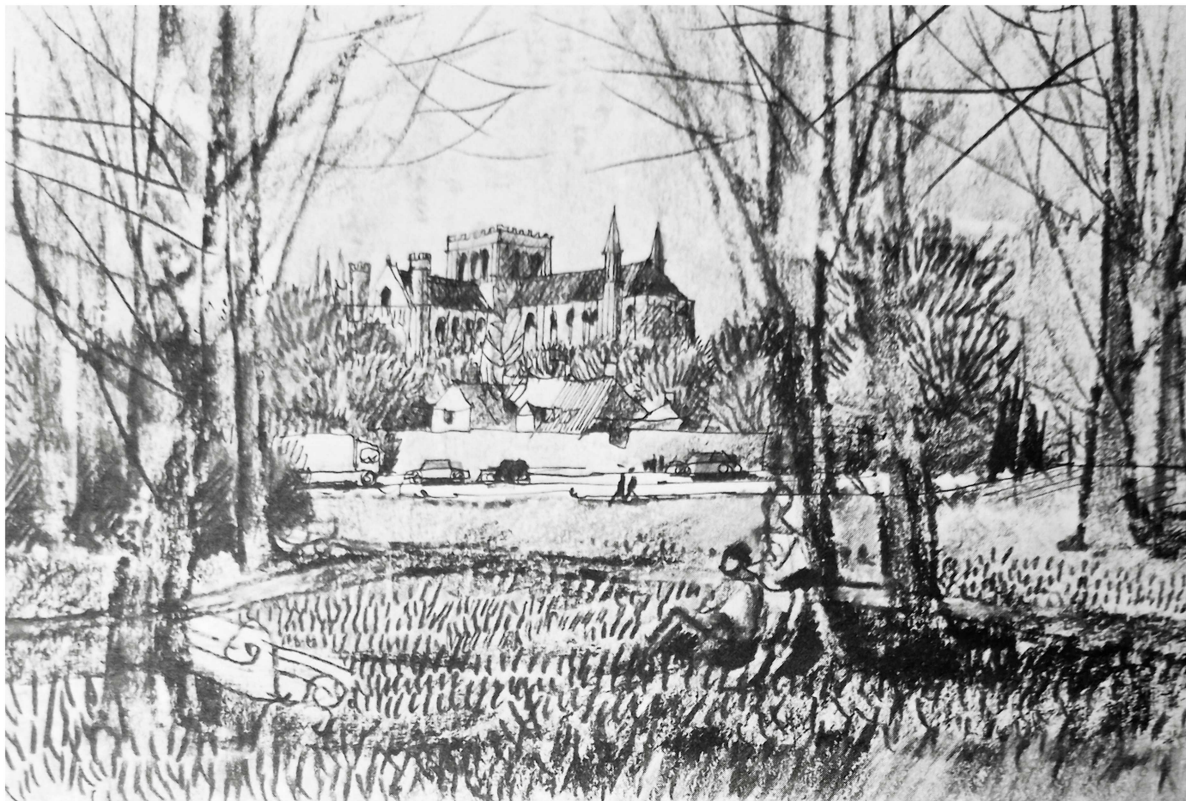


**Figure 14.** Gordon Cullen, view of the Queensgate shopping centre from the Cathedral square. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.



**Figure 15.** Gordon Cullen, view of the Cathedral from the archway. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.





**Figure 16.** Gordon Cullen, Cathedral from the south-east. CUL/Box19/65 © Peterborough City Council Estate/Reproduced courtesy of Peterborough City Council.

of the views for Peterborough and Portsmouth is extremely similar, with slightly off-axis central perspectives, the buildings that create the perspective telescope and the passers-by that indicate the urban scale. But Cullen's sketches are a vivid representation of possible urban experiences. His richness and accuracy in showing the urban materiality, the complexity of inhabitation, and the design voids filled by people, and creates portraits of the sense of place. What is missing in Cullen's drawings is the exhibition of a futuristic perspective of wellness, based on the fetish of a progress overwhelming and inescapable. In this romantic disenchantment, therefore, we can identify the uniqueness of Cullen as a consultant, in his ability to look for a small-scale, personal narrative, for projects that are realistic and related to enormous scales. Cullen's urban designs are never futuristic plans: they are an encouragement to search for the perfect view in an urbanity that, shortly thereafter, would need to find a balance and a compromise with the promise of progress.

This realistic and pragmatic approach, focusing on users' experience more than anything else, is even more evident if we consider the chapter written along with the sketches: Cullen defines a visual structure *policy*. Far from Hastings's political and social speculations or from Pevsner's theoretical claims, he aimed to suggest an operational system to apply to actual urban scenarios. As we find in Cullen's *Townscape*, the casebook of urban features coming from different contexts and scales is then applied thoroughly to a series of specific town studies, providing the opportunity to transform the theory into practice. The decades that Cullen spent as a townscape consultant, tirelessly working on numerous English cities and towns' plans, indicate his strong desire to put into action the townscape's principles and, despite the limited focus on visual aspects, his ability to create rigorous urban development strategies.

However, it is important to underline some limits of Gordon Cullen's Townscape method as employed for Peterborough. While he successfully captured the richness of human experience in urban settings, his approach remained focused on visual sequences of bodily movement. This reinforced an ocular-centric perspective, overlooking multisensory dimensions of place, a limitation still difficult to overcome today (Pallasmaa 1996). Developed in the 1950s and 1960s, Townscape also reflected the priorities of its time,

paying little attention to social and political themes that are central to contemporary urban debates, such as inclusivity and equity. However, the method remains valid when it comes to engaging with lived experience, offering valuable insights into how people perceive and inhabit urban space.

## Conclusion

Cullen's contribution to the Great Peterborough City Centre Plan illustrates the enduring relevance of his Townscape method. His sketches and the 'Visual Structure' chapter reveal a remarkable ability to capture the lived experience of urban space, emphasising sequential views, pedestrian movement, and the emotional drama of encountering the city. This focus on the user's perspective remains crucial today, as designers still find it difficult to fully integrate the richness of urban experience into planning and design processes. Cullen's method offers a quick and effective way to do so, combining rational and lucid urban analysis with imaginative visions for future development. Equally important, Cullen's work demonstrates the continuing value of analogic tools, particularly in the early phases of design. These tools allow ideas to be communicated and tested with immediacy, fostering dialogue and creativity before more technical processes take over. The Peterborough project also shows that modernising urban spaces and adding new buildings does not necessarily mean erasing character or identity. When the most important qualities of the city and its urban spaces are carefully studied, new interventions can be incorporated into the existing fabric, supporting the sense of place and belonging.

While Cullen's Townscape approach was developed in the 1950s and 1960s and did not engage with contemporary social and political themes such as inclusivity or equity, it nonetheless provides a foundation for thinking about how people inhabit and appropriate urban space. His work reminds us that urban development, if thoughtfully conceived, can be an opportunity for all, supporting coherence, belonging, and renewed civic life, while inspiring designers to place human experience at the centre of their vision.

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## Author contributions

None.



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