

Anna Parsons

Associate Design Director, Catesby
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What do you do?

I'm a masterplanner and urban designer. I work with the team to bring together technical information and design layouts for residential and commercial developments.

I'm a big picture maker, problem solver and solution finder, with the technical expertise to balance competing demands from different disciplines and policies - such as transport, ecology and drainage - to create inspiring high quality places for future generations.

How did you get into it?

Aged 15 I was placed in a work experience placement in the planning department at the London Borough of Hillingdon Council. This sparked an interest in town planning and development and influenced by A-level choices (economics, geography and graphic communication), all of which are relevant to the built environment profession.

I went on to do my undergraduate degree in urban planning and management at Nottingham University, which included modules in urban design. I found my specialism at this point and continued to gravitate towards urban design modules and practices, spending many happy hours alongside architects imagining big city growth and regeneration.

On completion of my degree, I started work as a planner/ masterplanner in a central London planning and architecture company, moving on a few years later to a local planning authority becoming their Urban Design Officer. Kindly the Council sponsored me to complete a post graduate masters degree in Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University. I have been a masterplanner/ urban designer ever since.

What do you love about your job?

I love the graphical and verbal communication involve in explaining a plan, concept or idea. There is also lots of variety in my role and no two days are ever the same.

Big picture visioning is very rewarding and it's great to start with a blank canvas and pull together the different jigsaw pieces and to interweave new technologies or urbanism concepts to create a sustainable new development.

There aren't many jobs where you can go back to a place 5-10 years later, and you can see elements of your design vision realised and watch people living, work and enjoying that new environment.

Top tips for anyone considering a career in the industry:

Urban designers come from lots of different backgrounds (architecture, landscape architecture, economics, planning, engineering etc), so don't worry about your initial degree specialism when you start out.

The best urban designers are big picture thinkers, who can imagine, design and communicate their ideas in an engaging way while also being flexible to balance the needs and requirements of the many.

Although construction is generally considered to be a male dominated profession, there are lots more women now across all sectors of the industry. I believe we add a different perspective to developments. We challenge long standing practices, approaches and perceptions, and are more attuned to the subtleties and nuances of creating places where the whole community can feel safe, secure and happy to live and work.



International
Women's Day



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