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HOLISTIC LIVING

The planning and design strategies used in a township should, as far as possible, be in harmony with the site and the environs to enhance the quality of life for residents, says **AR. VIVEK NANDAN**

For an end user, a township can offer a very well organised space with enhanced benefits and proper infrastructure in an ideal environment

Any integrated development in an area of 100 acres or more is designated as an 'Integrated Township Development'. As the area itself is pretty big, it offers a varied scope and flexibility to truly achieve the maxims of "Holistic Living". To the end user actually living at such a development, it can offer a very well organised space with enhanced benefits and proper infrastructure in an ideal environment – provided the optimum Design Strategies are employed to maximise the potential of such a large tract of integrated development.

Though townships can effectively promote a "walk-to-work" culture, in many a case the scenario may change eventually. The site / location thus attains a strategic importance to the consumer in terms of the local context and connectivity, traffic and transportation, and facilities available and provided. In such a kind of large-scale development the alignment of the streets assumes significance as it dictates the subsequent patterns of the built-form and its relation with the climate and the environment. These are of importance to the consumer as it will determine the quality of

natural light and ventilation, sustainability issues, and the views - the ambience that the resident will be able to enjoy.

A north-south orientation of a street may result in an east-west orientation of the buildings along and parallel to it which can ensure optimal day lighting especially in the Indian context – something each and every house-owner desires. Furthermore, when these main wide avenues are oriented at an oblique angle to the prevailing wind direction, it enables penetration of the wind into the heart of the town. The buildings along these streets are exposed to different air pressures on the front and rear facades. This street orientation thus provides a very good potential for natural ventilation of not only the building but also at the street level – essential to promote a physical comfort zone for all the people / pedestrians inhabiting the townscape.

Any built or un-built environment comes alive with the addition of the human element. Streets, which are essentially the spine of any planned development, should most importantly enhance participation, accessibility, publicness, livability, safety and comfort. Public socialising and

Community enjoyment in daily life can thus most easily occur.

Such great streets are defined in two ways - vertically by the height of the buildings or wall or trees and horizontally which has more to do with length of and spacing between whatever is doing the defining. Along such streets, breaks ought to be introduced not only in terms of intersections or traffic islands but also like parks, plazas, green spaces, other recreational areas like playgrounds, water-bodies etc. – urban spaces that provide stopping places, pauses, reference points along the path.

These urban spaces not only provide places for pedestrian circulation, gathering and socialising but also serve secondary purposes of exhibition, dining, retail, and performances. They create multi-purpose gathering spaces and enable pedestrian friendly connections between streets, places and discrete buildings. More importantly they provide climate moderated environments for places and people and acts as lungs of the whole development scheme.

The layout of the streets, urban spaces etc. also create various vistas, climatic mi-

crozones, varied types and size of neighbourhoods which then influences the type and scale of the built environment. An integrated township should effectively be able to cater to a varied / mixed configuration – one-bedroom studio apartments to 5 BHK luxurious penthouses, Golf and/or Lake view Villas, bungalows (independent or attached) – to all segments and budgets. It should also house commercial centres, small and medium office blocks, shopping centres, malls, restaurants and hotels. Facilities for sports and leisure, entertainment, schools and hospitals too should find adequate expression in a development of this nature. These drive the "quality of life quotient" and are the most important concerns of any customer wanting to move to such a township scheme.

The planning and design strategies used should be as far as possible in harmony with the site and the environs – to preserve and improve the environmental health of the people and the contingent natural systems. In one of our large-scale projects, a portion of the land / site was in a natural trough. All the rainwater and the runoff used to get collected creating a natural water-body. The design strategy envisaged the creation of an urban plaza around the water-body. Boating facilities and other activities were planned for and the promenade around it housed cafes, sit-outs, viewing galleries, paved walkways etc. – a natural feature minimally modified and built upon to enhance the complete experience of an existing site element.

Sustainable site design thus envisages planned landscape development according to the various features of the surrounding context rather than imposing some disparate pattern or solution. Even appropriately changing the colour of a building and/or terrace reduces the amount of solar energy absorbed by the building, thereby reducing the cooling load significantly.

Sustainable strategies thereby influence site design, building orientation and natural light usage to reduce heat and energy consumption, water efficient fixtures, rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge, STP, waste management, improving quality of air, water and vegetation, usage of Solar power systems, lead free paints etc. The implementation of these measures directly affects the customer favourably as it reduces considerably the long-term running and maintenance cost and also preserves and enhances the natural habitat. Various other Design issues like Traffic Calming, Parking and Circulation, Graphic Communication and Way-finding, Outdoor lighting, and Acoustic considerations, among other things, too need to be taken into account to achieve a harmonious development.

It is the judicious sum of all these parts which creates the almost Utopia like scenario feeding the mind, body and soul – creating an enviable "Integrated Life Style Development" that all would want to be a part of.

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