even radical and apparently uncontrolled changes can be traced back to general principles. Muratorian research already contains the architectural notion of 'generativity'. The same idea of type in the morphological-processual school, if correctly interpreted in a contemporary context, is a generative notion (Strappa, 2015) open to transformation and innovative design. In the case of retail space it is necessary to face the new crisis with 'open', *original* tools, since large *commercial* structures are now at the beginning of their decline owing to the irruption of e-commerce. Their uncertain transformation requires original and 'open' analytical and design tools, not considering the built landscape as an artefact, but rather as a temporary condition – as matter in a state of becoming.

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# Heritage and townscape conservation: perspectives from urban morphology and planning practice

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A frequently discussed issue in this journal is the potential for urban morphology to engage more effectively with development planning systems (see, for example, Barke, 2015; Hall, 2013; Samuels, 2013; Thomas, 2018). One way of realizing this potential is to better understand the frames of reference and language used by the different 'actors' involved.

In England, planning permission is required from the local authority for changes of land use and other forms of development. Applications for planning permission must be determined against the policies set out in the local authority's development plan, while also considering the national government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other material considerations. The NPPF (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019) must also be considered when local authorities prepare their development plans. Decisions to refuse planning permission can be appealed to government appointed inspectors, and decisions by local authorities and inspectors can be challenged in the courts. In addition, separate legislation governs the identification of buildings and townscapes of heritage value and their protection.

In relation to heritage, the focus of the government's policy is directed towards 'heritage assets', defined in the NPPF as 'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest' (MHCLG, 2019, p. 67). Some heritage assets have greater status by virtue of being 'designated heritage assets', for example listed buildings and conservation areas. The NPPF is explicit regarding the overall importance of built heritage and its conservation, stating: 'Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which

are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations' (MHCLG, 2019, p. 54).

The NPPF sets out a comprehensive approach to decision making in relation to heritage assets. The process should include:

(i) identifying and describing the heritage assets, including their setting, affected by development proposals;
(ii) identifying the significance of those assets;
(iii) assessing the potential harm to them, including their setting; and
(iv) considering the benefits of the proposed development.

When development affects heritage assets, weight is given to the recognized benefits of conserving built heritage, particularly in relation to designated heritage assets (MHCLG, 2019, pp. 55–6). Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset or its setting requires 'clear and convincing justification'. Substantial harm to Grade II listed buildings and Grade II registered parks and gardens should be 'exceptional' and substantial harm to more important sites should be 'wholly exceptional'.

The recognition in the English planning system of the value of conserving historic townscapes should provide a policy environment that is sympathetic to a Conzenian approach to townscape conservation. A pertinent question is whether Conzenian urban morphology has the tools and the language required by the English planning system to engage in the debate regarding changes to the townscape that affect heritage assets.

In a series of papers, Conzen (1966, 1975, 1988) sets out a theoretical basis for townscape conservation from an urban morphological perspective. It is founded on principles of morphological analysis based on the three components, or form complexes, of the townscape: the town plan, building fabric and land utilization. Over time these form complexes are subject to accumulation, transformation and replacement. In an additive process the townscape becomes a historical record of a particular society in a particular place. As a result the townscape comes to embody the spirit of the place – its *genius loci*. However, townscape changes may not address all society's changing functional requirements and the townscape may also begin to develop discontinuities between the inherited amalgam of the form complexes on the one hand and current functional requirements on the other. Whilst the temporal depth exhibited by certain townscapes can add to their value as historical records (their historicity) it also creates demands for changes to the townscape. Those demands are mediated and managed through the planning system.

The first requirements of the NPPF relate to information about the historic townscape being accessible in order to inform decision making. Morphological analysis has proved to be a useful tool in defining the boundaries of morphological regions as the basis for conservation areas (see, for example, Barrett, 1996; Birkhamshaw and Whitehand, 2012; Larkham, 1990). In the language of the NPPF this is the identification of heritage assets and assessing their significance, leading to their formal designation. Local authorities are required to maintain or have access to records identifying the location and significance of heritage assets (MHCLG, 2019, p. 54). These include Historic Environment Records, Conservation Area Character Appraisals and the results of cataloguing historic landscapes and townscapes. Particularly significant among these cataloguing projects are the county-wide Historic Landscape Characterization projects and the Extensive Urban Surveys carried out under the auspices of Historic England (formerly English Heritage) (Thomas, 2018). The results of urban morphological research can contribute to the breadth and depth of these records providing they are made available to local authorities.

In terms of decision making, an approach based on the Conzenian formulation would be accommodating to townscape change but only to the extent that it makes a positive

contribution to the historicity of that townscape. At a more detailed level, positive change would take account of the following morphological processes and principles:

(i) different form complexes and components of the town plan tend to change at different rates;
(ii) specific forms and processes are associated with the development of burgages;
(iii) building styles and materials have local variations;
(iv) the existence of different morphological regions;
(v) the possibility of identifying morphological periods associated with characteristic built forms; and
(vi) the uneven distribution of historicity across the townscape.

Urban morphology could also provide additional insights within this framework. From a Conzenian perspective the significance of a heritage asset would derive from all three form complexes rather than being vested in the built fabric alone. Such a perspective would also provide methods for defining the setting of a heritage asset that was a single building – for example in terms of the plan unit and morphological region of which it formed part. These insights would add extra information when considering the harm that particular development proposals would have on heritage assets or their setting. The difficulty in communicating the fringe-belt concept to planners (Whitehand and Morton, 2003, 2004) may be eased if, in the case of development in the vicinity of listed buildings or registered parks and gardens, there were the opportunity to describe other parts of the fringe belt as part of the setting of that heritage asset. Green Balance (2018) provides examples of the wider estate associated with a country house and the open aspect beyond a castle's grounds as legitimately forming part of the settings of those designated heritage assets.

The NPPF also identifies the 'desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness' (MHCLG, 2019, pp. 54–5). This is clearly consistent with Conzen's description of historicity as the product of an ongoing process. Crucially, morphological study can also usefully provide an insight into the plan forms and built forms that would provide the positive contribution to the local historic environment that is being sought.

These opportunities should be pursued, and it is to be hoped that communication between urban morphologists and planning professionals can be further developed to assist with pursuing them. A need for this has also been identified: a report prepared for Historic England analysed decisions by local planning authorities and inspectors on planning applications that affected listed buildings or the settings of listed buildings (Green Balance, 2018). It concludes that complete compliance with the process for considering those planning applications set out in the NPPF is rare. The most frequent gaps identified were in respect of applicants not identifying heritage assets that could be affected by the proposed development, assessments of the significance of heritage assets not being undertaken, and the impact of proposals on the settings of heritage assets not being assessed. In the case of the latter two, for example, there would appear to be opportunities for methods or checklists based on urban morphological methods to be developed to assist in addressing these omissions.

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# A view from the giants' shoulders – a reply to Slater's critique (2019)

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Terry Slater's critique of my paper (Haslam, 2018) brings up a number of important issues, though only a few can be dealt with adequately here. He starts (and indeed ends) by questioning whether the term 'ensemble' has any relevance to the business of town-plan analysis. (I would certainly not be so foolish as to entertain the exaggerated claim, as he suggests (p. 59), that the use of the term 'overturns the principles and practice of town-plan analysis'). He has, however, missed the point. The term is not so much a 'concept', but rather a metaphor, of which the drawing of the house plan in Figure 1 is merely an allegory. The term 'ensemble' is used to focus attention on some aspects of the relationship between form and function in the morphological building blocks of urban places, from which developmental processes can be inferred. This is an 'archaeological' approach, in which the spatial inter-relationships between elements of the plan form can generate alternative narratives about past processes which are independent of the documentary sources. In making the rather off-beam and ill-thought out admonition that this is 'an extraordinary claim for any scholar working in the historical field' (p. 66), Slater fails to understand that this is a core process of enquiry in medieval archaeology – which is not a handmaid to history.

Many of Slater's working assumptions, and his tendency to make dogmatic assertions