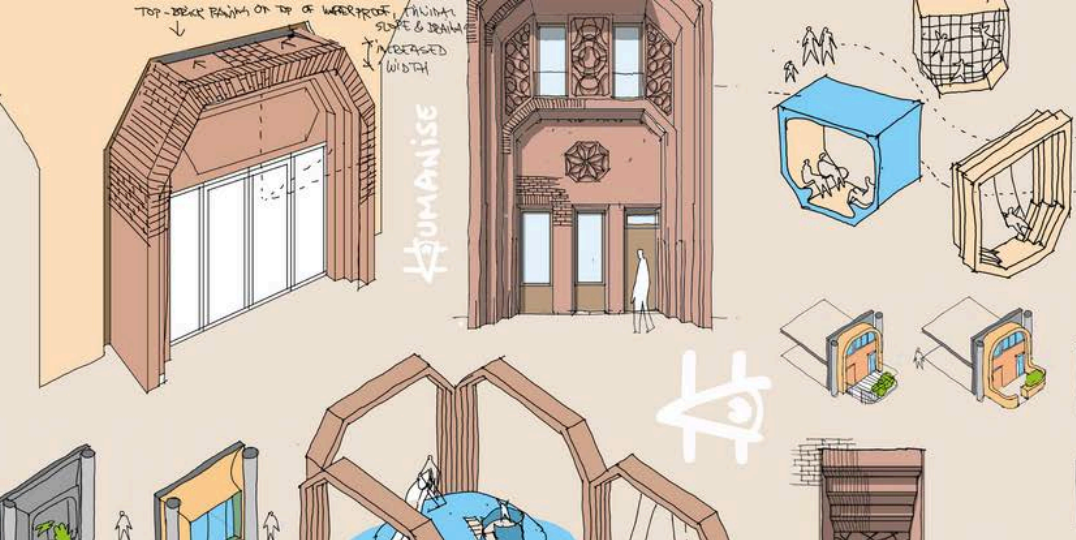


The **HUMANISE** Principles

Better conversations, good decisions, joyful buildings





“

In a world overflowing with policy and guidance, the Humanise Principles are a breath of fresh air: simple, practical, and genuinely useful. They’ve given our team a developed and structured way to talk and think about design. The result: places that are built to be loved, joyful, and climate resilient.”

Jonathan Wilson

Co-Founder and Managing Director, Citu

Contents

Introduction

Principle 1: Emotion as a function

Principle 2: Public conversations

Principle 3: Visual complexity

Principle 4: Door, street and city scale

Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking

Share your examples

Join us

Introduction

What is Humanise?

Humanise is an approach that leads to better buildings. It brings a people-centred perspective to development.

What are the Humanise Principles?

Five principles designed to help inform your decisions about design and investment, have better conversations with planners and communities, and ultimately create more joyful, engaging and human buildings.

How were they created?

The principles are inspired by Thomas Heatherwick's book *Humanise: a maker's guide to building our world*. The Humanise campaign worked with planning consultancy Tibbalds to make them more specific and relevant to the construction and development sector. We've also tested the language and content on partners from the sector, and are very grateful for their helpful feedback.

Introduction

The five principles fit into two related categories:

Practice

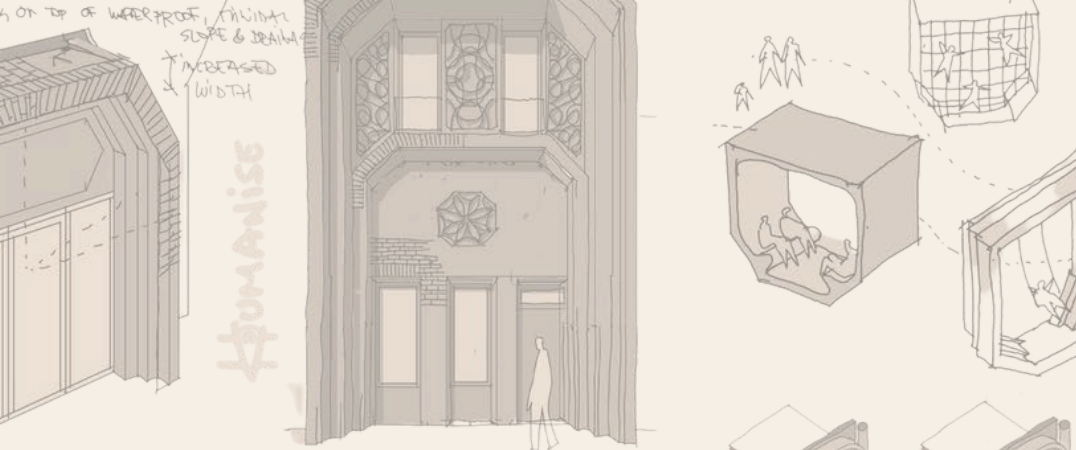
1. Emotion as a function
2. Public conversations

Process

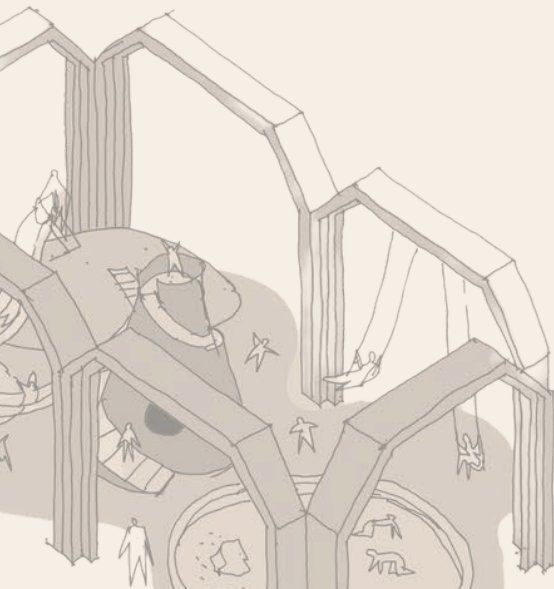
3. Visual complexity
4. Door, street and city scales
5. 1,000-year thinking

The first two principles shape everything from the setting of briefs, the selection of project teams and your approach to engaging with stakeholders. They should inform strategic investment decisions, and the location and form of your development portfolios. The issues are also inherently linked to your brand and reputation.

The three process principles are about the interplay between developers, the public and the site. These principles directly influence how involved people feel in the process, how much they understand the benefits and reasoning behind design decisions, and how much they will value and care for the buildings at the end.



Principle 1: Emotion as a function



Principle 1: Emotion as a function

Why should we care?

People want to spend time in places that make them feel good. They want to feel safe. They want to feel welcome. Using the lens of 'emotion' provides a way of articulating this in a way that's accessible to customers, planners and the passers-by. We're all conscious of how spaces make us feel, although we don't spend much time talking about it.

Once we've established emotional language around design moves and interventions, we can then communicate this clearly with planners and through our marketing teams.

The lens of emotion also provides a useful tool for appraising the positive impact of a building on people over time, and demonstrating this through hard evidence that enhances your corporate reputation.

Principle 1: Emotion as a function

How can we do it?

Ask people about the site before you start a project

What do they feel and value about the area? Which buildings are special to them and why? What would they like your development to make them feel? And what might make that happen?

Embed these findings and language into outcome-based briefs. Require your design team to provide a clear approach to delivering these emotional responses.

Develop a list of practical interventions

Identify the recurring features, components and qualities that deliver different types of emotional response. Develop the tools to design for these emotions through conscious decisions on things like visibility, acoustics, enclosure, scale, land use, and visual connection. Make these a standard part of your approach to design and planning. They also provide great tools for public engagement.

Principle 1: Emotion as a function

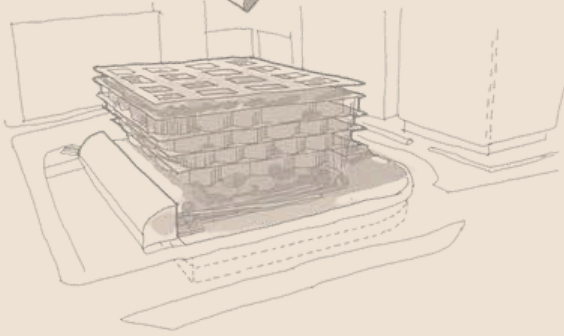
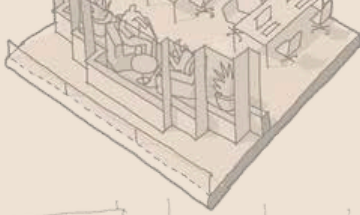
Ask people when you've finished

Carry out post-occupancy evaluations focussed on how buildings make your customers feel. Have your projects delivered the emotional response you intended? Which projects have delivered this most successfully and why? And where have you had successes that you can tell others about?

How is it relevant to planning?

The NPPF prioritises social impact as one of its three main criteria for achieving sustainable development (in paragraph 8). Achieving healthy, inclusive and safe places is the key focus of section 8 of the NPPF. Prioritising the emotional role and function of buildings in their setting will achieve this.

In addition, principle C3 of the National Design Guide recognises that sense of place – an emotional response – is shaped by a range of factors including heritage and culture, and that it impacts on wellbeing.



Principle 2: Public conversations



Principle 2: Public conversations

Why should we care?

New development makes people nervous. We all worry about change. And it's hard not to see that we need a different type of dialogue from the one that usually takes place: a discussion about shared interests and mutual benefits, where the public feel confident and welcome; and a genuinely useful debate that can inform strategic investment decisions for developers.

That needs to take place both at the level of individual sites and in British society as a whole, so that people feel they can 'speak architecture' and have a voice in what gets built.

There are benefits for your business and the whole industry in championing public conversations. It goes beyond individual sites and relates to the way developers and new development is seen across boroughs, cities and society at large. Nobody wins in a culture scarred by a lack of trust. It just means that less gets built.

Principle 2: Public conversations

How can we do it?

Engage early and well

Carrying out early engagement to inform the brief and objectives for a site is simply good practice. This needs to be a two-way transaction with events and activities that feel inviting, useful and fun. Make sure everyone gains something in return for their time and insight, and has a reason to return.

Give the community some power

Having some limited power to visibly influence the design and development is crucial. Otherwise why would anyone take part? You could consider involving the community in selecting the architects, commissioning street furniture, or engaging with schools, makers and manufacturers locally. We all know this: people need to feel a sense of agency.

Lead the conversation as a business

Developers work in a difficult context full of suspicion and misunderstanding. You can help change this and humanise the public face of the industry. Partner with

Principle 2: Public conversations

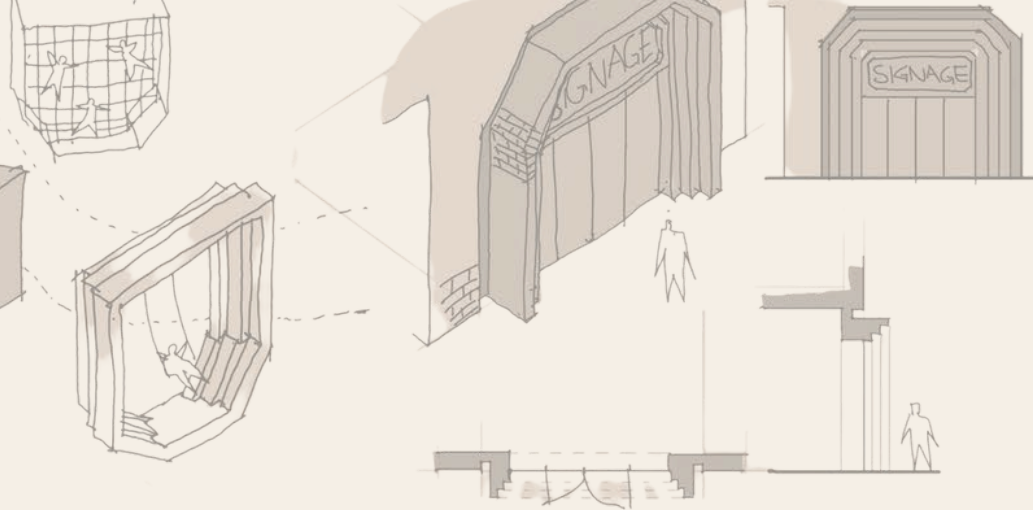
people who are experts in getting the public involved, like the Urban Rooms Network. Encourage every town and city to have a physical centre where people can go to get involved. Produce an ESG strategy that gives your business an active role in the national debate about the value of new buildings and places to the economy and society.

How is it relevant to planning?

NPPF paragraph 137 is clear that buildings shaped by early, proactive and effective engagement will be looked on more favourably in planning decisions. Section 12 of the NPPF emphasises that early engagement is required to create well-designed buildings. It allows potentially competing design or planning expectations to be reconciled and supports a more effective planning process.

Additionally, principle L3 of the National Design Guide recognises that public conversations through the design process can start to establish a sense of community ownership.

[Back to the contents page](#)



Principle 3: Visual complexity

HUMANISE



HUMANISE

Principle 3: Necessary visual complexity

Why should we care?

We think every new building that is visible to the public should be interesting. It should have 'necessary visual complexity'. The style doesn't matter, or what culture or tradition it belongs to. It should simply not be boring.

Visual complexity refers to the amount of detail and craftsmanship on the outside of the buildings. It matters because it makes buildings feel distinct and special – it gives character – and it also creates a much strong marketing proposition.

This isn't just about niceness. Visual complexity is a health issue. A powerful body of research now shows that external building design affects mood and stress levels; mutual trust and willingness to help strangers; exercise and mobility; as well as people's happiness and their physical and mental health.

Principle 3: Necessary visual complexity

How can we do it?

This visual complexity could be expressed through brickwork, through the mouldings around an entrance, or in materials which age gracefully over time. These features stand out, even on simpler and larger forms that contemporary construction often uses. And it isn't necessary for all the elements of a building to be complex. In fact, it's the contrast with simplicity that makes these features interesting, drawing our attention and making people curious.

Make buildings interesting

Prioritise details and patterns visible at ground level, where people can get near to the building. Use these details to highlight key features and emphasise entrances and routes.


Celebrate patterns and ornament

Buildings should tell stories. Work with designers and artists to develop an appropriate number of bespoke features, details and artworks that reflect local history, architecture and materiality.

Principle 3: Necessary visual complexity

Set clear budgets

Safeguard some investment in necessary visual complexity, and ensure that this isn't value engineered out of the final development.



How is it relevant to planning?

Prioritising necessary visual complexity responds to NPPF paragraph 135, which seeks well-designed places that are visually attractive and sympathetic to local character. With an attention to detail and craftsmanship, outstanding and innovative building design can be achieved. This is given significant weight by NPPF paragraph 139.

Principle I2 of the National Design Guide recognises that visual complexity can ensure buildings delight occupants and passers-by, and appeal to our senses.



Principle 4: Door, street and city scale



Principle 4: Door, street and city scale

Why should we care?

These three scales focus on how a building is experienced from the outside. They embed the experience of the passer-by into the design process. Door scale refers to the parts of a building that are visible when you approach it up-close from around 2m away at ground level. This is where the materials and details really impact you with their presence or hit you with their absence.

Street scale refers to how you experience a building from across or down the street, around 20m away. You might not be able to see the whole thing but there should be enough visual interest to trigger your curiosity and make you want to look again.

City scale refers to how a building is seen from a distance as part of the city and as a silhouette on the skyline. At this distance, at least 40m away, buildings have real emotional power and the form is a key consideration in heritage impact.

Principle 4: Door, street and city scale

These three scales contribute directly to a strong sense of place, familiarity and belonging. This can have a big impact on footfall, which has obvious monetary benefits for retailers and business. In residential areas, it generates kerb appeal, increasing property values as a result.

How can we do it?

The three scales provide a really useful structure for conversations with politicians, planning officers and the community. You can use sections, three dimensional drawings and models to test what is being proposed.

At *door scale* you want people to take a moment and appreciate the detail and design of the building facade and how it meets the street.

Visual complexity is most important at this scale (see Principle 3). Emphasise features that will bring some richness of detail and invite people into the building.

Principle 4: Door, street and city scale

At this scale, people notice things like colour, texture, the mix of materials, details and signage. They also make sense of what they see is going on inside the building and how they can interact with it.

At *street scale* you want people to pause as they walk past the building, taking note of what it is and where it's leading.

Design at this scale plays an important role in how you orientate around the building and adjacent streets. It's about how the building works in its context and contributes to the experience of the street.

You need to address issues around enclosure (massing and building line), consistency (repetitiveness of facade and fenestration), size of windows, the prominence of corners and primary entrances.

At *city scale* we want to stitch the building or development back into the city. This is largely



Principle 4: Door, street and city scale

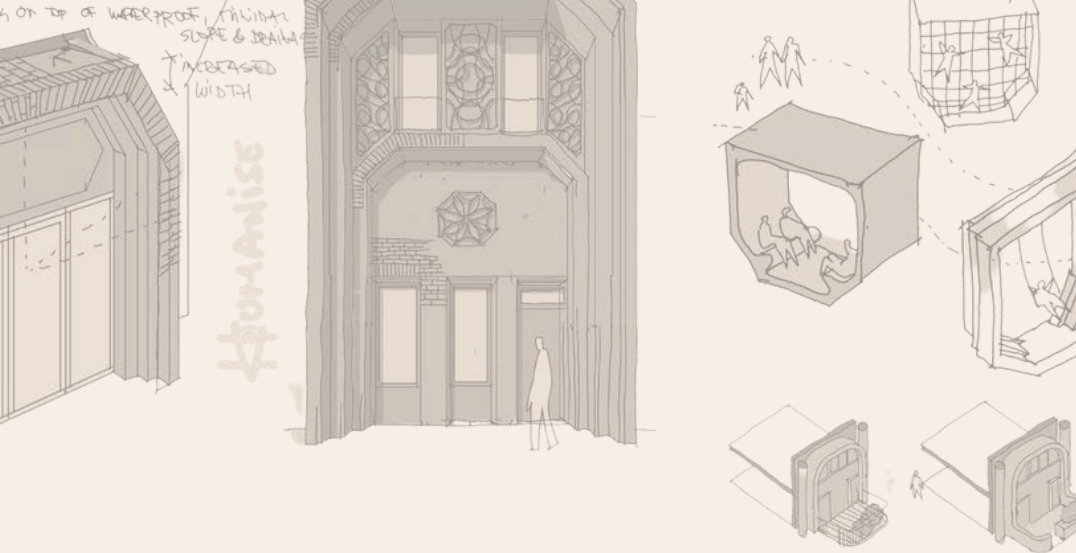
informed by its massing and roofscape. It can also be achieved by using landmark features and a distinctive material palette.

There's no right or wrong way to approach this scale but the design cannot be purely driven by numbers.

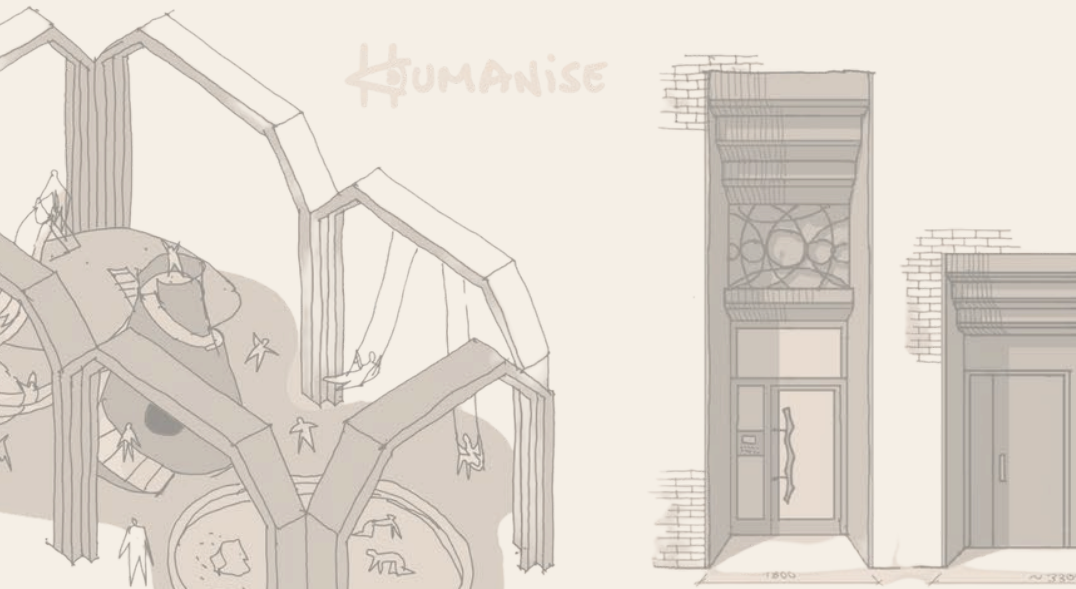
How is it relevant to planning?

Considering these different scales ensures that buildings meet the expectations of NPPF paragraph 135 - that proposals should be integrated into their surroundings, physically, socially and visually. This structured process of moving between detailed to strategic scales provides a useful tool to communicate designs effectively, which is encouraged by NPPF paragraph 138.

Principle I3 of the National Design Guide also recognises that this approach will support establishing a coherent identity and memorable sense of place.



Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking



Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking

Why should we care?

1,000-year thinking is about creating buildings that age gracefully and have strong 'bones' made from robust and enduring materials. It involves the careful design of components for maintenance, reuse and replacement, and having a clear strategy for the service life of systems.

1,000-year thinking also means seeing your buildings from both a technical and material lens, and from a social and cultural perspective, providing people with the flexibility to make each building their own. It will help you convey how the physical structure of new development can help achieve everyone's long-term ambitions for an area, and be cherished by the children and the grandchildren of your customers and community.

It provides a long-term lens for looking at value and efficiency, and ultimately ensures greater resilience for your investment.

Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking

How can we do it?

Think about your role as the custodian of a relatively small chapter in the long history of a building, and commit to investing in how the development will evolve.

Plug into local knowledge

Talk to long-established community organisations, planning officers, and community review panels to discuss the role of the building across generations. These groups all have a direct interest in the long-term. Their insight should inform project briefs, and how the development is marketed.

Invest in the whole life cycle of buildings

Embed sufficient value in the basic fabric of the building. This will make its long-term use and adaptation worthwhile. It requires upfront investment in quality and design. But it pays back a much greater return over the long-term.

Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking

Tell a story of today

The heritage buildings that we really value tell us about their original time, place and purpose – even if some elements have changed. Today we should also be creating buildings that reflect the culture of our times. Our buildings should tell modern stories, supported by long-term design standards. That is 1,000 year thinking.

How is it relevant to planning?

The central ambition of the NPPF is to achieve sustainable development through long-term thinking, meeting the needs of both current and future generations (paragraph 7). Paragraph 161 recognises that re-using existing resources and conserving existing buildings contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Principle C2 of the National Design Guide also recognises that adapting and re-using buildings

Principle 5: 1,000-year thinking

over time contributes to the richness and variety of a place. Taking a 1,000-year approach supports the National Design Guide, including long-term management (NDG principle L1); changing needs and evolving technologies (NDG principle L2); and ownership and belonging (NDG principle L3).

Share YOUR examples

We're building some case studies to show how developers are starting to bring the Humanise Principles to life - so if you've got a success story to share, we'd love to hear from you. Have you had results from opening up public conversations? Does your latest development show 1,000-year thinking in action? We'd love to know more. Get in touch at mail@humanise.org.

Join us

If you're an organisation who wants to get involved in making buildings and cities more human, please contact mail@humanise.org. We'd love to talk about working together on research, events, campaigns or any kind of partnership.

