



P R A G M A B E N O Y

Data-Driven Design

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As the downward trend in retail sales, rents and values continue to challenge the investment in and ownership of assets; with particular emphasis on town centres; the Pragma and Benoy combined data-driven design approach to optimising values has never been more relevant.

What is data-driven design?

“Data-driven design is an approach where design solutions are informed by facts, figures and insight, as opposed to instinct, whim or preconceptions. Through data-driven design, we put hard science behind the process of understanding a client’s asset and delivering value from a social, economic and environmental perspective.”

Problems in towns and cities are often perceived to be the same retail contraction, high-street collapse and diminished footfall, but as we know, the answers to these problems can never be the same. They have to be different because every location is different.

Data analysis helps us understand which of the myriad of issues, attributes, trends and challenges that define urban centres are relevant now, and in the future, to our clients’ assets. This enables us to provide a comprehensive high-level review of asset ownership amidst the wider socio-economic context. We can then use this research, augmented by integral site visits and stakeholder consultation, to create nuanced and educated architectural solutions that deliver the requisite placemaking solutions that are essential to create and maintain value.

Fundamental to this approach is being analysis-led. You wouldn’t construct a building without proper foundations, and you shouldn’t propose a design scheme without the proper analytical groundwork. As form follows function, so design follows data.

Getting The Brief Right

Through ‘*research-driven brief creation*’, we often use data to re-engage a client with their asset, encouraging them to view it from different perspectives. This process involves establishing success criteria early on to determine the scale of the intervention required. For example, some projects need only limited asset upgrades, while others comprise of wholesale town centre transformation. And clients haven’t always researched whether the direction they’re proposing is the right one.

“Using data, we can provide trusted evidence to demonstrate the scale of retail performance that is achievable and sustainable.”

We provide and utilise trusted evidence in the form of direct, benchmark and estimated trading figures, analysis of tenant profiles and knowledge of occupier business models to understand the appropriateness and sustainability of rents in light of business rates and service charge. Sometimes, an asset is doing better than an owner imagines. Rather than scrapping everything and starting again, we might suggest options for retention of key occupiers and the reuse and redevelopment of space that is failing to contribute. The data can help to steer



clients away from architectural narratives that haven’t fully considered the true value of what’s already there. In this way, we can help to reshape the vision for a project.

We look at the sustainability of space by assessing elements like the size and nature of the catchment, existing and planned competition, local shopping patterns and local, national and international trends and behaviours. We then assess the ability of occupiers in these circumstances to deliver against a landlord’s aspirations and crucially, provide the necessary insight to understand the opportunity from the occupier perspective, in relation to their business model, store estate and brand aspirations. Compared to top-down analysis, which is very general, our approach provides a unique level of detail and precision. It adds huge value to clients looking to develop a business strategy.

The Initial Analysis

Every project begins with a joint site visit. We strongly believe in the value of walking the streets before any desk research begins, speaking to asset managers, centre staff, occupiers and key stakeholders. Only in this way can we achieve a true sense of place and local experience. We augment this in-person view with robust, insightful data; as an example, mobile phone tracking allows us to understand pedestrian flow routes through and around the asset, understand interaction with the wider built landscape and understand which occupiers are driving visitation and dwell.

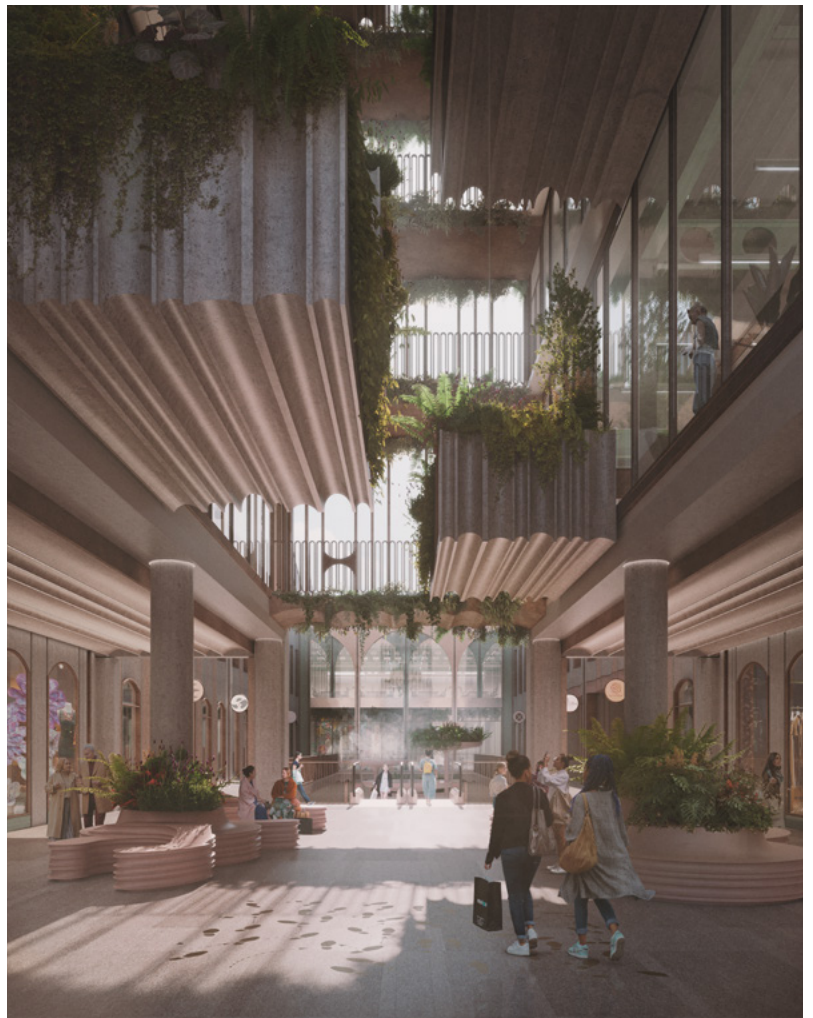


Next, we conduct a rigorous analysis of the economic, social and political landscape. We look at Local Authority strategies and aspirations to see how these might support or conflict with client ambitions. We also consider wider national initiatives that might lead to additional funding and development opportunities. And we look at the core asset; their size, strengths, weaknesses, lease structures and the mix of uses at play.

At the same time, we undertake a detailed architectural analysis, which includes a review of existing and forthcoming developments to help us map the current and future urban context. This process also involves a high-level assessment of the asset and associated practicalities; a review of the planning context; and detailed studies of key urban ingredients, from access, layout and scale to environmental assets, public realm and usage.



Armed with this information, we then begin masterplanning and design development. At this point, we convene group-wide Handley House design workshops, bringing appropriate experts from Benoy, Pragma, Uncommon Land and Holmes Wood to kick-start the creative process. During these sessions, we collectively review the data, challenge the brief and begin to explore ideas and opportunities.



Finally, we bring all our data, insight, expertise and opinions to the table to discuss proposed design solutions that meet and challenge the client brief. By utilising a data-driven design solution, we can ensure that all opportunities have been considered, assessed and prioritised to give the client confidence that routes identified for progression/further development are those that offer the greatest potential for optimising value.

Working Differently



What's unique is our one-consultancy ethos and approach. Both Pragma and Benoy have worked independently with other retail consultancies and architects, typically sequentially as and when the client deems their skillsets required.

“Whilst still able to deliver on this basis; a joint approach allows for greater depth and breadth of examination of potential factors that will determine success and the most appropriate solutions available.”

Close collaboration between the four businesses within the Handley House group enables great flexibility and agility. It also provides a wealth of shared global expertise. Pragma and Benoy's alliance, for instance, allows for multiple scales of intervention – from small-scale capital release through to

large-scale masterplanning and everything in between. Together, we offer a genuine breadth and depth of capabilities; with Pragma's specialist focus on data underpinning our creative solutions. There's an ease of communication and unity of vision that helps to simplify complex problems and processes, which is of huge benefit to the client.

Working together, we're committed to breaking the cycle of short-termism in the market. While being commercial in outlook, we focus on delivering longer-term value through targeted social and environmental assessments and solutions. The data and analytics help us understand how we can deliver maximum project value through economic prosperity, positive social impact and sustainable urban design.

Current Examples



We're currently working on a number of data-driven design projects across the UK. The majority are challenged town centres with high vacancy rates and poor building stock, but at the same time; places that are still much loved and vital to the local community.

In each case, we're using detailed analysis to test the viability of the client's original proposals. Rather than simply following the latest trend, such as repurposing space for a market hall or flexible office

space, we're using data and site visits to get under the skin of these developments and propose alternative options.

As trusted advisers, operating with a fresh mandate unconstrained by historical issues or preconceived ideas, we're helping clients see the value in existing assets. Assets which, with slight adjustment or reallocation, can play a key role in these catchments and deliver sustainable value over time.

Case Study

Pragma and Benoy have recently been working for a major investor in and asset manager of UK shopping centres on a town centre-based retail scheme. The brief identified the client's desire to understand the potential strategies for the scheme to inform a sale, either of the scheme in totality or piecemeal, by dividing the scheme into separate sections.

Our analysis of the scheme highlighted, despite a number of short-term and historical vacancies, a continued strength in performance for a number of core value-focused operators, and provided an evidence base that suggests, given local supply and demand and wider consumer and occupier behaviour, that current occupational costs could continue to be sustained for the majority of these occupiers. These gave confidence that there was a core of retail at ground floor that offered a sustainable channel to drive income.

Through researching the local and regional market and speaking with key stakeholders, including centre staff, local agents and elements of the public sector, we were able to assess the potential opportunity for other uses to contribute to the future vision for the scheme. With



the local leisure market well-served by extensive provision and public sector resources showing recent investment – including a library and new medical centre – focus was placed on the potential for residential and office space.

Demand for office space in what is primarily a blue-collar location was suppressed and analysis and interviews indicated the market would be unable to substantiate the rents that would be required to make conversion of part of the client's asset to offices commercially feasible. This then led to a focus on the opportunity for residential.



We assessed numerous potential solutions, including student, retirement, social housing, build-to-rent and private ownership to understand the model and product that would provide the greatest potential for the client to reach their aims.

Throughout the project, we looked at potential partners to support in delivering the vision. The local authority, though supportive of aims and uses, showed limited potential to help our client achieve their aims, given their commitment to other projects within the town and wider area. However, a change in governance at a regional level presented an opportunity to introduce our client to a wider set of potential funding.

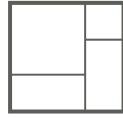
By following a robust, data-driven process, we were able to establish a clear design brief for how the scheme could be designed to both retain existing and add further value. Presented designs considered the potential height, style and quantum of additional space that could be added and crucially, resolved the potential access issues that are presented by a mix of uses and a split ownership – elements that are often overlooked when a high-level review of asset potential is carried out.

The value we brought to the project was:

- A fresh, independent perspective, unburdened by previous assessments
- A data-led design, focussing on the key data, trends and evidence
- A collegiate approach, working with both the client team and wider stakeholders
- Our expertise, gathered through years of working across similar projects across the UK, Europe and globally
- Momentum – we worked to a strict timetable to ensure the client questions were addressed and resolved
- Clarity – having identified the optimal uses, we presented a range of design solutions that provided the client with the ability to meet their objectives

With the multiple challenges facing investors, owners and asset managers, a data-driven design approach provides the optimal solutions to maximising value and ensuring relevant, long lasting design solutions created for the benefit of all.





HANDLEY HOUSE

Handley House is the parent company overseeing four international businesses. Bringing together commercial advice and strategic research, technical knowledge and design expertise, the company delivers a holistic approach from data analysis, master-planning and architecture, to urban and landscape design, interior design and wayfinding.

Our companies:

BENOY

Benoy is an international firm of architects, master planners, interior architects and graphic designers working from design studios in the United Kingdom, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing.

P R A G M A

Pragma is a commercial advisor for investors and operators in mixed-use, travel and retail and its expertise includes customer insight & segmentation, catchment analysis, trading & performance analysis, tenant mix guidelines and rent sustainability & leasing.

UNCOMMON LAND

Uncommon Land is a landscape practice, balancing creative vision with commercial viability, shaping memorable landscapes that deliver lasting social, environmental and economic value.

Holmes Wood

Holmes Wood are a leading UK based design company specialising in wayfinding, sign and graphic design solutions.

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