



Constraints on evidence-based policy: insights from government practices

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EDGE Debate: Does built environment policy work?
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Did evidence produce policy that worked? The case of the Department of Health and the NHS

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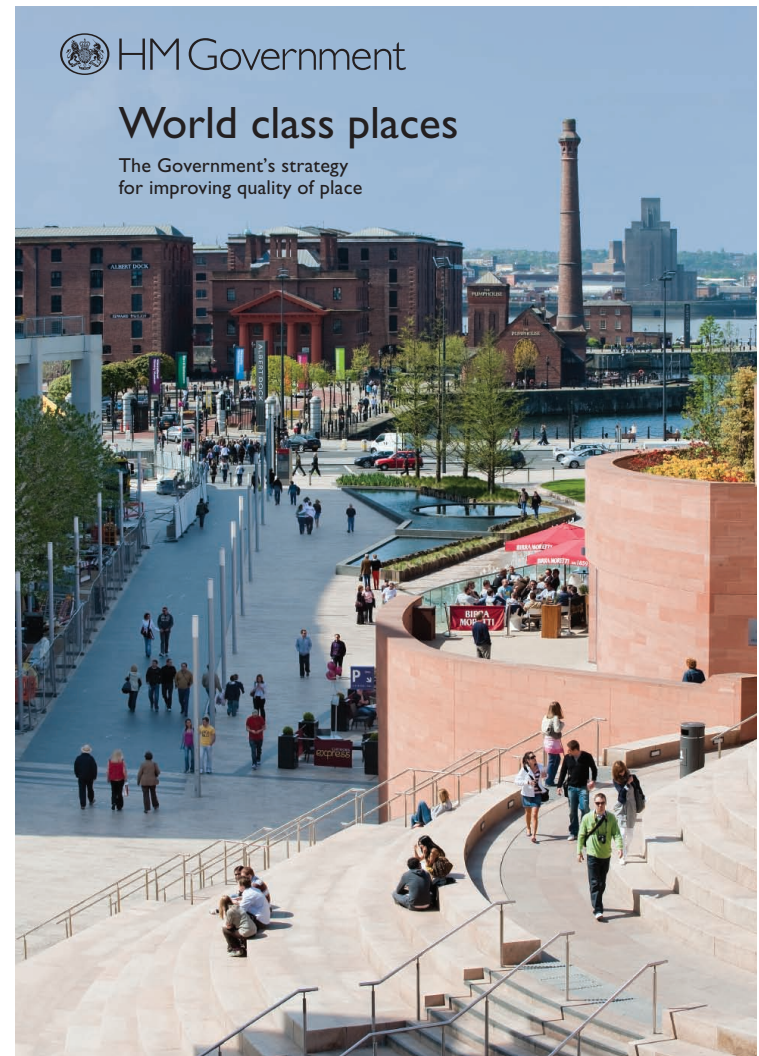
- Continuing demand from government for more & more evidence about the value of good design for health outcomes
- No matter what evidence CABE & many others provided, it was never enough
- Policy was supposed to be 'evidence-based'
- Yet CABE's audit of LIFT projects in 2007 showed the same programme producing both good & bad functional design



Did evidence produce policy that worked? The case of No. 10 and *World Class Places*, 2009

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- Strongly evidence-based analysis & policy recommendations by Cabinet Office Policy Unit
- Initially, direct interest from No 10
- New ministers: changing focus
- Heavily contended within government - departments not interested unless ministers already had similar plans
- Overtaken by sub-prime mortgage crisis & economic collapse
- Shelved by Coalition



What was going on?

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■ DoH & NHS

- Organizational complexity & issues with accountability in devolved structures
- Lack of client skills
- Alternative priorities
- Dismissive attitudes: e.g. Roger Ulrich's evidence that better design improves patient recovery dismissed because it used evidence about US patients

■ World Class Places

- Departmental inertia
- Ministers on missions of their own
- Eroding effect of ministerial 'musical chairs'
- The centre (No. 10) could not hold against the interests of other ministers & senior civil servants
- A 'deficit of deliberation' – there was evidence but the policy apps were not designed with sufficient time and care
- 'Events, dear boy, events' – short-term problems thwarted development of policies for the long term

What should we do?

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1. Politicians believe that what people think is evidence, so find out what people really want and use that as evidence
2. Analyse, understand & exploit stakeholders' interests
3. Understand which bits of government matter to your subject, & to which bits your subject matters
4. Offer workable solutions, not just criticism or more problems
5. Be alive to the context (the 'policy frame') into which evidence is fed; be ready to argue & persuade
6. Be timely – assemble evidence fast & look for quick wins
7. Make your case digestible: be brief, be clear, keep it simple & smart
8. Remember that politics is the 'art of the possible': democratic government is never purely technocratic. Evidence is never applied in neutral territory



Thank you