Life + Design in a Pandemic World
Spring 2020 will forever be in our memories, as the Covid19 pandemic brings profound changes to how we live our lives.

The nature of the places and spaces we live in, work in, shop in, exercise in, and raise our children in, have suddenly been brought into sharp focus as we collectively seek to navigate our way into living a ‘new normal’.

As strategists, planners, and designers of place, Prior + Partners has started a conversation with our employees, our contacts, partners and clients, about the implications of this pandemic for how we approach the planning and design of our towns and cities.

The implications are far reaching, and require us to consider not just how we may plan and design new places, but also whether we may need to consider redesigning our existing places and spaces.

This booklet sets out some of our initial thoughts in response to a series of questions about the nature of our public space, living space, town centres, work places, and how we interact socially. We invite you to consider your own perspectives, and share your reflections with us, so we can collectively evolve our thinking regarding key design principles for the places we inhabit now and will inhabit in the future.
Does the nature of public space need to change?

Public spaces provide opportunities for respite from the demands of urban life; a place to relax, socialise, exercise, play, and interact with the natural environment. However, through the necessity to reduce social contact, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen some of our parks and playgrounds close, and has restricted what is permitted in those that remain open.

These spaces are often the only places for those living in higher density areas to go outside, and experience the health and well being benefits that brings. The design of our public spaces needs rethinking to provide:

1. **Allowance for social distancing**
   Pathways and entry/exit gates should be large enough for people to be able to walk along and through at a safe distance from others.

   Open space needs to be sufficiently big enough for childrens’ play and adult exercise.

2. **Natural play-space**
   Spaces should allow children to engage with their surroundings in play, using natural materials, minimising transmission from frequent contact with metal surfaces.

3. **Pleasant streets**
   In both high and low density urban areas, parks are not always close by, or may be too busy to safely enter. Our streets must become multi-purpose, extending our open space to our front doors. By widening pavements, plotting trees, and reducing traffic speed or access, our streets can be transformed.

Consideration should also be given to the availability and proximity of public open space to every household. Small and large parks and open spaces support our health and well being, and should be near enough for all to access, and designed so they can remain safely open to use in these times.
Should our living spaces be more multi-functional?

Previously often empty during the day, our living spaces now have to accommodate being nurseries, schools, offices, a gym and the local pub all at once. As many of us look ahead to continuing to spend a large amount of time at home, reconsidering how homes optimise the use of space to provide for different life functions is becoming a necessity.

1. **Outside space**
The pandemic is highlighting the differences in experiences between those that have, and those that don’t have their own private amenity space. Well designed spacious balconies, shared courtyards, and roof terraces should not be considered as optional design features in a building but core components.

2. **Inside space**
Our homes needs to be able to be big enough and flexible enough to adapt to different functions. Rooms should be multi not sole use.

3. **Light and natural ventilation**
Daylight, sunlight, and fresh air are crucial to our physical and mental well being. Being able to experience the seasons and connect with the outside world whilst isolating or staying at home requires consideration of building aspect, appropriate window sizing, and user operated open-able windows to facilitate airflow.

4. **Medium and high risk apartments**
Sufficient number and appropriately sized lifts and stairwells are needed for residents to travel in and out safely.

Covid19 has brought the above design considerations into the spotlight, but arguably all of the points above represent good design in both a pandemic and non pandemic world.
What adaptations are needed in our high streets and local centres?

The requirement to stay local has seen local grocery shops experience a resurgence in popularity alongside a dramatic increase in online ordering and delivery. Some pubs and restaurants have transformed themselves by selling the ingredients for a meal, rather than the meal itself, or offering delivery and takeaway services. These rapid selling and purchasing shifts are throwing up challenges as many areas find themselves ill equipped to manage an increase in activity and people in the street, at the same time as respecting social distancing measures.

1. Creating space to sell and buy
Cities around the world are temporarily closing their roads in order to accommodate both the increased numbers of people queuing outside, and businesses selling outside. Over the medium and longer term, consideration should be given as to whether there is sufficient space designed into our local centres to accommodate social distancing measures for shops, restaurants and market stalls to sell on the street, and how sufficient space can be accommodated within and outside units to allow for safe shopping, socialising, and queuing.

2. Logistics
Delivery by foot, bicycle, mopeds, cars, and vans is now commonplace, but safe loading/unloading spaces are not. Re-purposing of existing space should be considered to allow for safe pick up and drop-offs.

The short term impacts of the Covid19 pandemic are being acutely felt in our high streets and local centres as businesses have been forced to close or rapidly adapt to be able to continue to operate. The medium to long term implications of the closures will be significant and are worthy of more lengthy consideration.

However, as restrictions start to ease, adaptability and flexibility in how our high streets and local centres operate, and how space is managed is key for local people to be able to shop and local businesses to be able to operate safely.
Is this the end of the office as we know it?

Despite ‘agile working’ being the buzz-word of the last few years, and increasing numbers of employers locating some or all of their employees in co-working spaces, the long predicted shift to working from home has been slow in its realisation. March though saw entire offices emptying almost overnight as workforces moved on mass to work from home. With the expectation that the majority of office workers will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future, a fundamental shift in working patterns is underway. Office life is unlikely to ever return to the way it was before.

1. In the short term
   Whilst employers seek to provide enhanced support to their employees to work from home, those returning to their offices will need to adapt to a very different environment to the one they left. Buildings will seem nearly empty, meetings will continue virtually, and travelling will be mainly by cycle or foot. Shared and co-working space providers will need to put social distancing measures in place to operate safely, but could potentially provide an alternative to traditional office working for those who are struggling to work from home and cannot commute.

2. In the medium to long term
   Just as the future of the high street will look different, so will the future of the office. Once employees have adapted to more flexible patterns of work, workspaces will need a renewed purpose. No longer just places of work, their design will need to centre around the possibilities for interaction to generate new ideas and aid creativity and innovation.
How can we facilitate social interaction during and after the pandemic?

The impact of social distancing has been multi-fold. The adverse impact on our mental health will be felt for a long time to come. However, there are many examples of neighbourhood spirit being rekindled and a sense of community forming in previous anonymous streets and apartment blocks. Over the last few weeks, we have seen people forming bonds with their neighbours for the first time, and helping those who need it most. Learning how the design of a building, neighbourhood, town and city can support safe interaction during pandemics will be vital for communities to thrive.

1. **Technology enabled cities**
   As face to face interactions have become necessarily limited, people have discovered new ways to communicate, whether through video calling friends, family and colleagues or establishing neighbourhood groups on social media. High speed connections to every home should be a core part of their infrastructure so this ability to connect with others is universally shared.

2. **Space to communicate with your neighbours**
   Some of the most striking scenes during this pandemic have been videos of neighbours interacting with one another at a safe distance from their balconies or front gardens. Roof terraces, outdoor shared amenity spaces, and porches can provide similar functionality. Being able to interact with your neighbours at a safe distance can provide much needed social contact for those unable to leave their homes, and such private spaces with opportunity for public interaction should be carefully designed into new homes and neighbourhoods.

3. **Socialising outdoors**
   As we learn more about how to prevent transmission, it appears that outdoor interaction is far safer than indoor. Turning the city inside out to allow for meeting others and being entertained at a distance is perhaps one of the biggest design challenges our cities face, and learning from other cities internationally will be important to getting this right.