The streets we choose



Farrells reflect on autonomous vehicles and future place-making by Katerina Karaga



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Two years ago, here at Farrells we began to explore the likely impacts of the autonomous vehicles on our future streets and places (PiL issue 98, July-September 2016). With advances in knowledge and predictions, we provide an update on how our own analysis and thinking has moved on.

We recently demonstrated our vision of how we can 'Reclaim the Streets' in our entry for an international competition organised by World Architecture News, and we were delighted to be the only UK participant in a global shortlist of 12 with a strong concept. Our multi-ethnic team of urban designers and architects: Neil Bennett, Giulia Robba, Daria Zakharova, Jaewon Shin, Edward Powe and myself, pulled together a vision which I am going to capture in this article.

Working with the unknown variables on how future transport will change and how soon that change will happen, here at Farrells we are continuously challenged in the creation of our masterplans and buildings for the future, some looking even 40 to 50 years ahead, as our clients come to us to plan major strategic moves. One example is a UK Town Centre delivery masterplan, first of its kind, necessarily offering flexibility in its delivery to allow for on-going radical change in patterns of activity form and fabric powered by rapid changes in technology, whether AVs or new ways of living and working.

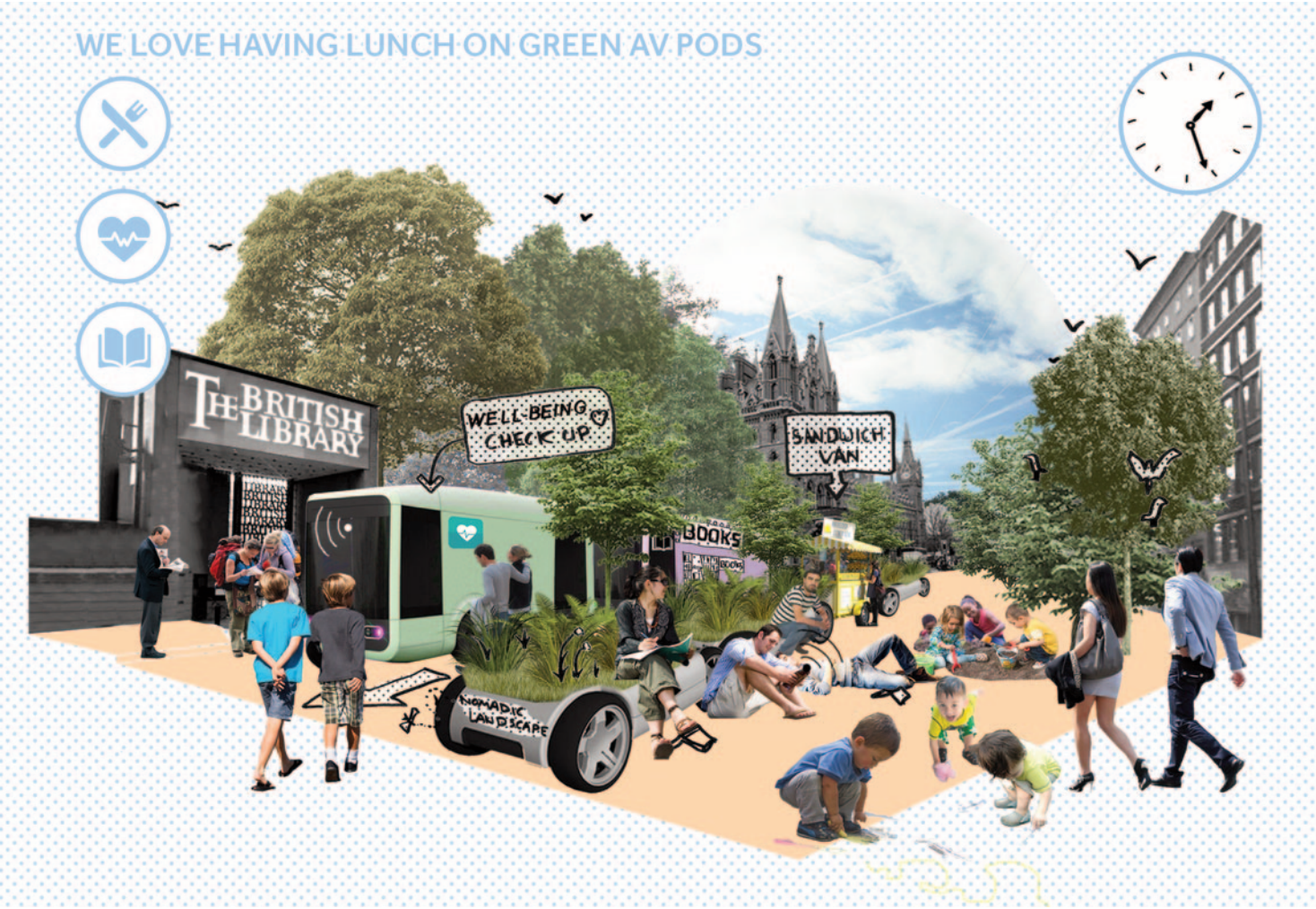
Whether we are looking at the transitional period of the more intense introduction of AVs or connected vehicles on our streets, a complete transformation to driverless cars only, or even flying cars and drones, our goal is to use this opportunity of the future dramatic modal shift to create a better public and street environment, a harmonious and democratic one, putting people first.

In the anticipation of the autonomous vehicle occupying our streets and technology changing the way we socialise, where should we lead the change? How should we use these drivers of change to create cities that enhance human interaction and build strong communities? How should we use the modern and ever changing technology to take control of our streets and public spaces?

Our vision is to liberate the spaces between our buildings for the benefit of all.

We used a London example, the busy thoroughfare of Euston Road, to imagine the potential benefits and transformational change of a city with driverless and connected vehicles. And not only passenger vehicles, the dramatic change actually can happen, when all other vehicles that take up much of the space in the cities, such as buses, refuse trucks, delivery vans, trailers and similar are replaced by driverless-vehicles.

We believe autonomous vehicles and AI will enable us not only to reduce the amount of space for vehicles and free up the >>>



>>> streets of redundant street signage and traffic lights, liberating it for alternative uses, but also to manage minute-by-minute the street space and movement capacity, enabling fluid use of unused road space, across the network.

Imagine children playing in the middle of Euston Road, New York's Fifth Avenue or Paris's Champs-Élysées. Imagine the complete lack of any vehicles, even on the busiest roads. The very same roads where people could practice yoga in the morning, have lunch on green meadows at noon and watch a movie in movable pods at night. Imagine that our congested streets become nomadic landscapes responding to our continuously changing needs.

Cities could become an ever-changing pop-up theatre. In our vision, the space is democratic, it belongs to all and responds via an app to the needs and wishes of those around it – flexible streets 24/7.

In a smart city of the future, streets and public spaces will be fluid, transformable and pollution free. AVs will give us the opportunity to change our streetscapes and rebalance their amenity. This will shift our current perception towards streets and promote long term wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.

Transitions between the phases will be smooth, responsive, and as frequent as we want, controlling the vehicular movement. This will collectively re-shape the nature of the streets through an app with a voting system.

Local communities can decide what they need, e.g. at what part of what day they want their street closed for any traffic and the mobile park is delivered. Suddenly, every house has a park address for a period. Social infrastructure will be made more accessible and citizen-led initiatives can request for mobile well-being and healthcare facility, a library or even a mobile pirate play area.

In this democratic society, we will be enabled to make our own choices for our outside space.

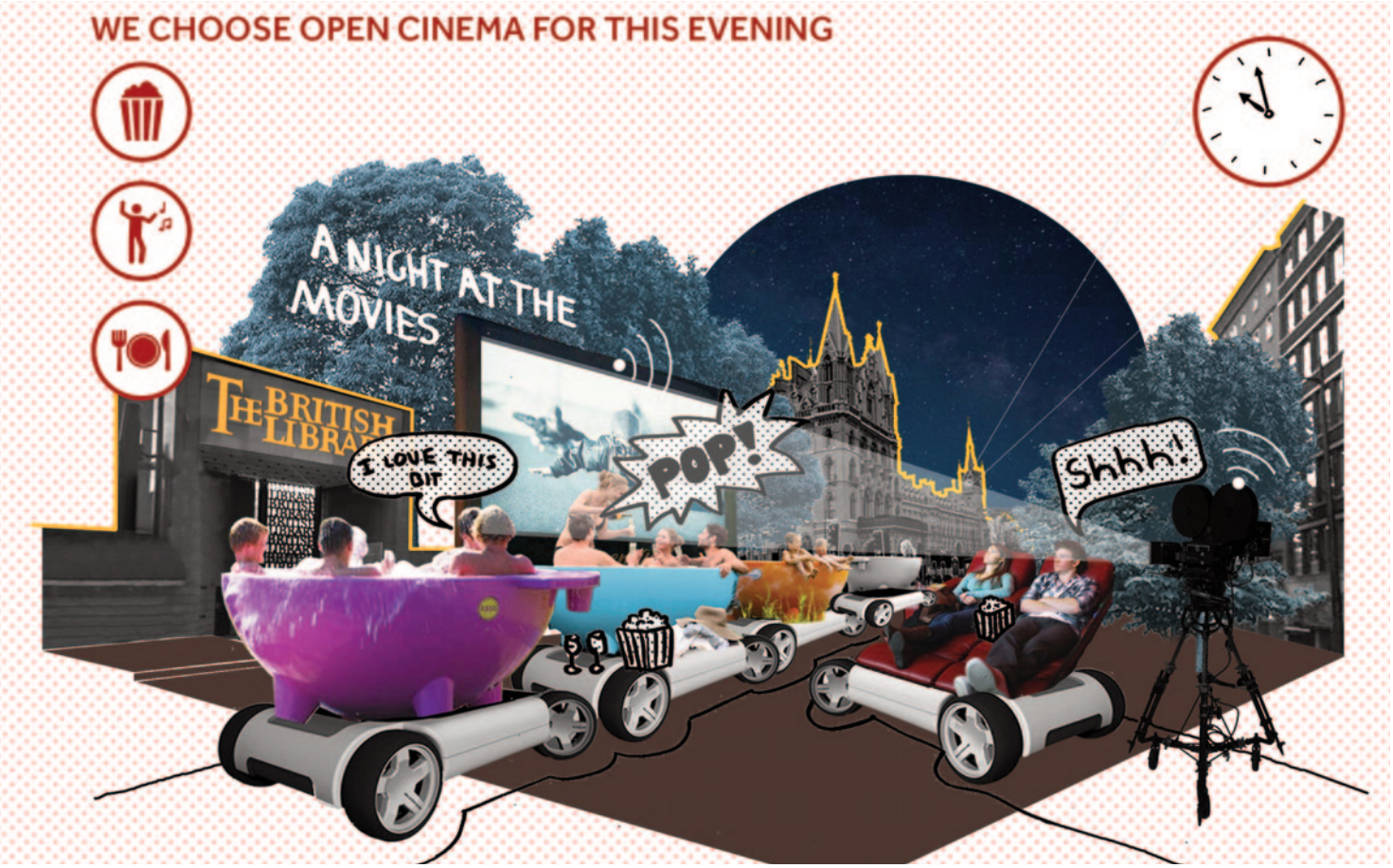
During the night streets could become surface AV parks, situated close to the morning users thereby minimising AV travel time to stations, such as Euston Station. AV pods could also be used as sleep cabins, extensions of our homes, nomadic hotels, or offices and more of a social space and not only as a means of transport.

This adaptive and people-centric streetscape will, with time, establish efficient patterns of redistribution of assets to where they are needed. Looking ahead, the new street mobility will bring opportunities in suitable business models for streets and public spaces, maintenance, and governance.

Our vision is for all our streets and public spaces to be shaped by citizens.

People will retake possession of the streets, using a bottom-up approach, the opposite of the current top-down decision model applied by governments and transport organisations.

With the best use of technology to reclaim our streets, the new urban dynamic should create a stronger society - a society celebrating human interaction and responding to the needs of the local community, reclaiming our streets as people places. ■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A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES
THE BRITISH LIBRARY
I LOVE THIS BIT
POP!
Shhh!


IT'S SO CONVENIENT STAYING RIGHT NEXT TO KINGS CROSS!
HOOT HOOT!
P
THE BRITISH LIBRARY
FULL CHARGE IN 28 MIN
FULL CHARGE IN 56 MIN
I NEED TO FIND A SLEEPING POD
Q FIND
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