

# Re-Purposing : Spirit@Work?

<http://eicsp.org/events/event-details/872-online-zoom-forum-re-purposing-14-april-2021>

An edited summary/overview, and some passing commentary, by  
Ian Wight, Forum Convenor  
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What comes to mind when contemplating re-purposing? We are often exercised by questions of purpose - for ourselves or our organizational settings. Less often these might emerge from some conscious 'purposing' on our part, or on our organizations' part – shifting from the more passive noun-form to the more active verb-form. And even if/when this purposing is engaged, how often is the spotlight likely to fall on re-purposing – consciously changing, or perhaps even approaching re-purposing as transforming?

What scope are you willing to entertain where re-purposing is concerned? Is it easier to contemplate, for example, re-purposing the 'built environment' we inhabit – especially old buildings that no longer serve their original purpose? Or can we also contemplate re-purposing our 'inner environment' – especially an old, perhaps smaller, self that is calling for a make-over, a re-fitting for a newer, higher purpose? Might this spectrum of re-purposing be conceived as part of a larger re-set, as manifestation of spirit@work?

EICSP is currently exploring such possible manifestations of Spirit@Work in a series of on-line forums, aiming for a conversation that values a mix of reflective and generative dialogue. Re-purposing is one of three inter-related themes being actively explored – along with placemaking and wellbeing. Each conversation spans a combined, sequenced, concern with divergence, emergence and convergence: divergence in terms of welcoming a diverse range of perspectives and experiences; emergence in terms of new perspectives and new experiences generated in-the-moment, through intimate small-group discussions; and convergence in terms of co-created, co-generated new insights and new meaning.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> 2021 a small group of folks with a common curiosity around re-purposing engaged in some conversation. Some offered 'mini-keynote presentations', to help start the conversation; others offered up some 'key-note listening', to help extend the conversation. One listener represented the outcome as 'a stringing of pearls' – pearls of collective vision, a collective making, of what we were making of 're-purposing', of our 'spirit@work'.

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Acknowledging that spirituality involved exploring new territory for himself, **Cliff Hague** was moved to discern that 'a Christian-shaped, place-nurtured, secular spirituality' probably sourced any 'spirit@work' in himself - on his early purposing and in his later re-purposing endeavours. Family, neighbourhood and education played formative roles in his early 'purposing' such as it was, along with a sense of grounding in place. His then emerging sense of

self was 're-affirmed and re-purposed by a welfare state education', but he was not aware of much intentional re-purposing ('conscious personal agency') at work in himself at the time: 'I tend to think, things 'kind-of happen' to me. I was moved through the system...'

Re-purposing became an implicit if not explicit outward focus in his career, first as a professional planner and then as a planning academic, nationally and internationally. He recalled, in his mid-twenties, seeking – 'ludicrously', and ultimately unsuccessfully - to re-purpose the Glasgow Development Program towards much more consultation and community redevelopment. When he moved into planning education at Heriot-Watt he became engaged in re-purposing (planning) professionalism, away from the expertise and exclusion of then orthodox professionalism, to more consideration of ethical concerns and opening up the use and control of knowledge. Contestation was part of this re-purposing along with 'radical' positioning, against the 'establishment'.

Later in his career, as it became more globalized, his 're-purposing professionalism' endeavours focused on the international level, through the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) in informal settlement planning contexts: 'where I was struck by how the orthodox planning response was often very hostile to such areas and the people living within them'. He sought to shift CAP from being an organization that was mainly about defending the planning profession to one that was about connecting with UN-Habitat - and trying to pursue what was then the Habitat agenda of sustainable human settlements.'

More recently he has moved to a focus on re-purposing in a civic context, as Chair of Edinburgh's Cockburn Association, repositioning it in terms of external relating, and associated leadership and responsibility implications: 'they wanted some agenda-changing, a kind of re-purposing'. Particularly in the context of what he described as 'austerity urbanism' – where issues were much more 'strategic and complex' - he has sought to focus the wider agenda 'around inequalities and commodification of public space'. In this he has come around to more fully appreciating the re-purposing dimension associated with actively attending to, and having care for, one's self (as well as one's team and the organization's membership). There is a balancing act to be achieved between 'your own beliefs and agenda and ethical positions, with the need to carry other people with you, and to create a narrative that is credible and can mobilise others'. Re-purposing is multi-faceted, but the importance of self-regard, in service, might be interpreted as a form of 'spirit@work', in the person and in their operating field.

In his closing comments Cliff sought to re-assert the role of institutions, and his concern that public institutions especially had to achieve much greater empathy with 'the public' they serve. He believed that 'we have to recognize that the state has indeed been re-purposed' of late, and not in a good way, especially in regard to better meeting the needs of the less-well off. Perhaps this merits some intentional re-purposing of the operative 'state of consciousness' of all involved.

For **Hina Hirani**, an architect, placemaker and urbanist (who came to the UK from India over 20 years ago): 'Spirituality has been at my core since my childhood, and anything and everything I

do I is always related to it, especially in my creative placemaking' whether on the scale of a single building or a master planning scheme for a neighbourhood. She is 'passionate about the difference that environment and places can make in people's lives' - mainly in terms of their connection' or as she puts it 'how the connection is'. This is complemented by 'the difference an environment can make to our self – that is our lives and other people, including all living creatures around us. This is what I have felt myself, in my heart'.

She talked about the importance of connection using a current building project, to show 'how we are all closely connected with everything – the building, the physical environment and spaces, and the inner environment which is body, mind and soul'. For her the connection involves the direction of ones 'energies', which becomes 'manifestation of our spirit@work'. Her current work is focused on The Old Kirk and Muirhouse Parish Church, in the Pennywell area of North Edinburgh. It is very much about repurposing in a placemaking context, driven by the question - What is this place? – and the aspiration to 're-imagine the place for the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. The particular focus is 're-purposing the space, the (church) building' - built in 1963 as part of a post-war development pole. The context: 'in today's 21<sup>st</sup> century many churches are struggling with diminishing memberships, with the prospect of them emptying'.

The re-purposing here features re-imagining and re-envisioning, with a particular concern for 'how do we see things?', that is, 'the place, our neighbours - what kind of people come and visit', and 'how do we help them interact and connect with each other?'. Her experience suggests the importance of 'changing our perceptions' and 'thinking big'; this includes attention to the essence of 'human being' and 'being present'. It also includes 'understanding the related change of energy, doing the grounding and being stable', further elaborating on what might be involved in 'spirit@work'.

The 'energy' aspect looms large for Hina: 'We create a built environment, we create individual buildings... some things we can control, some things we can't control. But what we can change is the energy... Connections and energy help us to understand our behaviour and intentions'. As an architect and a place-maker her observation is that 'places and people are closely connected; we all know that people create places, and good places attract people, making good connections'. There seems to be a strong connection between re-purposing and place-making. Hina ended her presentation wondering 'to what extent 're-purposing spirit' might help to create a better life?' Perhaps... spirit as connection, of inner and outer, a current flowing through and between people, charging them; our natural 'spirit@work'?

For **Gavin Thomson**, an architect and a psychotherapist, his dominant perspective on re-purposing is sourced in the context of 'what has been discarded?' He works on buildings as an architect, and with people as a psychotherapist 'to creatively rebuild the heap of discards in old buildings, and to connect with the spirit of the individual in therapy, and to seek to transform'. He senses some common ground between 'what is common in recreating buildings that have been discarded, recreating places that have been discarded, and recreating people who are/have been discarded – and how the two – the buildings and the people – can go hand in hand'. And for him: 'it starts with me, in my person, from the outset'.

His early life experiences have strongly informed his perspective, with very little leading to a sense of positive purpose being instilled; rather, they formed his sense of being discarded: 'Life started for me with a lot of trauma'; 'myself... as a nothing person'; 'as irredeemably bad'; 'largely unsupported I was alone'. He noted some 'seeds of change' being planted around age seven, connecting with some ruins, at Kingarth in Bute – the standing stones and St Blane's Chapel: 'There was a story and something else in the stones that spoke to me out of the ages'... 'that I could apply to my lost fearful self'... 'But It would take many years for the seed to properly germinate and grow, and a lot of work'.

Following the Kingarth experience 'old and vernacular buildings and restoration held an attraction for me', and he was led into studying architecture, and from there into a practice that focused on building restoration and/or conservation (notably at Pittenclerock Mill, near Crieff). This work instilled an ethic of 'rebuilding the shell as true to its integrity of form and spirit as I could discover'. This expanded into a commitment to providing 'good new life' (currently crystallized in his *Living Pattern* charity work). Much learning accumulated: 'The more there was of difficulty, contradiction, impossibility and challenge... the more the buildings acquired distinctiveness'. When 'unforeseen problems' arose... 'with them there always (came) answers and ingenuity. I became creative in my own view of myself. A different sense of self emerged'.

A major crisis around mid-life in his architectural practice meant 'I lost everything - but life had given me the experiences I needed to become a therapist'. He discovered the connection between 're-purposing buildings and facilitating the re-purposing of people – in my experience the two really run together'. Finding so much in common between the two Gavin identified a series of impulses that speak to re-purposing as he has come to experience it:

Deep exploration of the life story going before, and of the surviving fabric in the now.

Listening to the story - taking time to sketch and to imagine the building and setting.

With people, an exacting listening on multiple levels - where does the emotional pain, hurt or injury reside?... what gems of personality and special gifts have been lost or repressed?... looking for hints of what has been, is still there, and can come again anew.

Identifying the growing edge of what is waiting to emerge, and moving to an exploration of a development which shall inspire, excite and transform.

In terms of some lessons learned for himself, additional 'bits and pieces' aiding the process:

The identifying and letting go of structures or stances that are redundant and which obstruct new possibilities of space, light and the emergent.

Allowing the spontaneous and the intuitive into play - bringing creativity, freshness and distinctiveness.

Being prepared to do something that is different which opens one to risk of criticism.  
Not judging self; being open to making mistakes; taking informed and considered risks.

Allowing the scars to speak the story of resilience, spirit and hope. The more there is of difficulty the greater is the creative potential and outcome.

Gavin's current projects feature re-purposing two redundant and neglected buildings, in the Pentlands at Nine Mile Burn (an 'eco-broch'), and in the old police station office in Winchburgh (Living Pattern charity outreach base), both for distinctly therapeutic purposes... 'where the intention is to enable people experiencing life challenges to become empowered and connected to their true life and spirit'. These also provide Gavin with continuing opportunities 'to explore my art, creativity, and the personal, as being essential to my life, and also to my work'.

Gavin's artistic process especially complements his repurposing curiosity. Commenting on three recent pieces of art, he spoke about the importance of this to him now, compared with his early life experiences - 'from being someone who was so withdrawn, unable to put anything forward, unable to be different, unable to speak of my self'. His art involves 'saying things from many viewpoints – the inner and the outer, and what works between the two'.

When he paints: 'I'm never quite sure what I'm going to paint, and I paint with what comes to me out of where I am at the moment'. Painting helps him to discern what really 'matters' and can help in really 'pulling himself together'. It supports his risk-taking and exploration, often leading to the realization: 'I didn't know I had it within me (to produce such an original work)'. He observed of one piece: 'Looking at it now – perhaps it has something of a sadness about it – but I think it's a threshold about moving to something with more joy within it – but it has come through a route of introspection, of dreaming, of seeking; and the world has met me'. Commenting on some of his eco-broch design work, he noted: 'it's not until we come from our self that we are really free'.

**John Halliday** reflected on re-purposing from the perspective of his work for Community Renewal, a charity focused on transforming communities, especially deprived ones experiencing deep poverty (one of the areas where it is active overlaps which where Hina operates, in Muirhouse, North Edinburgh). At the outset he noted that he was 'going to talk about some of the work I'm doing at work – but am specifically doing that because in a lot of my situation my Work (with a capital W) means something to me deeply, personally, that I am actually able to live out day-to-day, and that is fantastic'. He noted that, in terms of institutions, 'I'm inside one – but we all resonate in the right way'. And he was particularly intrigued to reflect on re-purposing because of an awareness of 'the way the state isn't right for people a lot of the time; it (the state) is not often a place where services treat people as people, or as suitable for people'.

He also acknowledged 'how much, how huge the state is, and how much bigger it is than say 30 years ago, and how completely radically unbelievably unrecognizably it is from a century ago'.

John saw this as ‘an opportunity to re-purpose a lot of that, to jump on things that can be done better... for delivering what’s needed by people’. The focus is deprived neighbourhoods, and surprisingly, they are finding that ‘there are actually so many public services, so many people’ (of all employment descriptions), each with their own declared ‘purposes’. However, there seems to be some common sentiment around ‘treating humans as humans’ even if many of the services are organised to work ‘in a very industrial way’, with predominantly isolated linear processes, often curving in on themselves: ‘Any household that you come across that deserves the most support to get itself into a position of having more equality of opportunity, will be having dozens of these all at the same time ... and yet they are all interdependent’.

John observed: ‘We all – constantly, in the public sector and the third sector – have lovely linear diagrams, where everyone moves from bad to better... and actually, it’s a real mess’, with real life being ‘all over the place’; ‘for every individual in it, it’s complicated; and at a neighbourhood level it’s unbelievably complicated’. What he has noticed is: ‘my message increasingly is that it’s all messy, (but) that it’s good; life is messy – it’s really complex, it’s probably chaotic in many ways; (but) that (it feels) is what it should be like’.

Thinking of some intentional re-purposing, John wondered ‘what are some actually very old-fashioned ways that we could be doing things differently?’. Something beyond obsession with ‘outputs and outcomes’. John suggested, ‘if we go really deep into what we want, we are normally interested in how people behave. So are we interested in how someone in (say) a social work profession – in how they behave – how they resonate with their job. The behaviour underneath it seems to be so much more useful’.

His approach to repurposing is coming around to ‘just treating real people like real people’. This is ‘really what is required, but you can’t really get away with that’. It is very much neighbourhood-focused, gathering together volunteers, local people... those ‘who work in that neighbourhood, people who are actually active in that neighbourhood, and who are interested in where that neighbourhood goes’:

Let’s gather them together and call them a group... they are a group of people, and what if they had relationships with each other; what if there was a sense of there being a bit of cotton-wool around them, to help keep out any bad stuff of our modern age (such as KPIs). What if instead, on the inside, we are all about listening; we’re all about helping them bring their selves to work? (rather than bring some sort of process to work). What if they were also trying to work out what their own big-capital-W work was? What if the people who were delivering our services were really interested in that? What if connections, and trust and relationships were at the heart of what we do... and let’s just see how that goes... behaving as leaders’.

What if we take people in that (old) paradigm and try to re-purpose them to say – what would you really want to do, and what do you think that people in this local area want, and what can you do to help them follow their priority. Even if they are ‘bonkers’

priorities?'. (People can) have funny priorities – but that's what local life is like. How do we get there?

This re-purposing approach is Community Renewal's 'experimenting' to discern the principles by which poverty might be eradicated. It is clear they have to range beyond new layers of new services... 'however fantastic they are – because we will always end up getting to a point where we're only making things more complex, but not embracing that; if we actually have more 'embracing of complexity' perhaps we can get somewhere'. Much trialing is underway, and much learning is hoped for. Regarding the term 're-purposing' John closed by remarking: 'it really does resonate with me. It feels like the term re-purposing is one we'd never use (in the past); or we've never thought to use it – and yet going through the process (here) of trying to pull some things together as a way of describing it, I think it's a great term that we ought to be using more actually'.

Following the four programmed presentations there was an opportunity for participants listening in to comment:

**Judy Wilkinson** expressed 'absolute fascination'. She resonated with Cliff's comments, 'particularly about privilege and where we're coming from' and 'bringing people together' around 'equality and opportunity'. And then, in John's presentation, the reference to the importance being assigned to flowers-planting by neighbourhood residents. From her allotments experience especially: 'This is something we've been very conscious of for the last year - the need for flowers and people growing flowers', and the desire to reconnect with the earth.

Judy also resonated with what Hina was saying about body and soul and the mind, and other references to 'how we manage to find the political part... in how we manage to find land for people to grow, and how we get the community to take control of that. And to want to do that'. She concurred with John's sentiments about the need to experience 'growing' (literally and figuratively) to ground a change in attitudes, and then changed behaviour: 'And yes – going back to the flowers, it's a spiritual part of us'.

**Heather Monteith** picked up that: 'obviously the word spiritual has many connotations', but expressed her sense of 'the way spirit is also tied up with breathing – inspire'. She noted in Hina's talk the emphasis on 'people trying to do something to create a better environment for other people'. For Heather, there was 'a common theme in everything that had been talked about i.e. 'poverty of spirit'.

She was very interested in John's contribution where he was talking about deep poverty: 'In some ways, if you don't have a professional job, and you just rely on casual work, you have probably experienced poverty'. This was her own experience – some poverty and the social isolation that comes with that. Heather felt quite fortunate to realise that education, which she embarked upon as a mature student, was one of the keys to bringing about something better in

her life: 'it really did open up my world quite a lot, and it progressed from there'. Some successful intentional re-purposing perhaps.

Heather was also very interested in comments John made about the importance of furnishing the equivalent of 'cotton-wool' when engaging with those in particularly difficult circumstances – 'people who have suffered poverty in all sorts of ways... poverty of nurturing, poverty of education, poverty of prospects'. Her experience too was that 'it can't just be solved by money. It's a gradual thing – and one of the things that does help poverty is if people are able to establish friendships with people – not mentoring, but a sharing with people'. She acknowledged that 'obviously deep poverty tends to be ghettoised, so that people who are quite well-off really don't know what it's like, to not to have anything'. And also, possibly, if having an addiction 'when it gets worse and worse; addictions are terrible – because they make it worse'. Hence her interest in John's 'cotton-wool idea - or creating an environment where the person can gain the confidence to bring something out from inside themselves', which helps them to see that 'yes, the world can change!'.

Heather closed by referencing a particular concern with breathing, because so much is tied into this: 'Society has so many problems right now that they cannot be solved by any outside agency'. In some ways, helping the individual can help, but also if it can be done in a community setting 'where people are interested in the truest sense of communing with each other, helping each other'. Breathing does come into this 'because it can do huge things, positive things, allowing the person to feel confident, allowing the health to improve, allowing them to gain different experiences, to bring out their inner gifts'.

**Bob Palmer** contributed as a 'key-note listener'; the totality of the presentations (by Cliff, Hina, Gavin and John) had him thinking of 'the stringing of the beads': 'If you have a string and each contribution adds a pearl to that string... creating such a wonderful, beautiful necklace'. He liked the notion of 'intentional repurposing' that he sensed in the framing of the forum, as well as in interest in particular forms of conversation, especially reflexive dialogue. He observed that 'often we live in a society in which dialogue is often simply a series of monologues... that we call dialogue, but it's not dialogue at all'. He appreciated the focus on a different kind of conversation, one that can sometimes seem 'lost to us', hoping to 'rebuild that essence of conversation, which is a recognition of what connects us, and what is human in us, and where our differences can enrich us, rather than simply divide us'.

In terms of the spirituality interest – and the related query of re-purposing as a form of 'spirit@work' – he acknowledged that he too had 'a problem with that term' coming into the forum, 'probably because it goes back to one's own childhood and the way in which the notion of spirituality – or the spirit – has been introduced'. But he began to appreciate, in the presentations, the connection being made to the notions of 'place' and 'environment'. He regarded the environment in 'place-plus' terms and was inspired 'to extend it even further by introducing the notion of territory'. He was sensing a difference with place, with territory being 'much wider'. And he had come to appreciate the essence of the reflection in several

presentations: 'We can be talking about places, spaces, territories, or environments that are 'outer' or 'inner'. One's inner territory becomes an important place to explore'.

The place context for re-purposing (inner and outer) registered as important, but this was accompanied by an appreciation of the time dimension. As such 'the way in which each of us might experience the same place could be very different' especially in relation to relative 'wealth and class and privilege, and underprivilege, and – for some of us – the involvement of the welfare state, the way in which we've been educated and so forth'. He suggested that this 'differs enormously' meaning that 'a place has many different interpretations to it'. To impose one's own interpretation, he suggested, 'may not be an appropriate way of discussing place any longer'. He wondered if this particularly applied in relation to planners and planning (the latter being for Bob 'a term I don't like anymore'). He was thinking of planners who in 'their' planning 'seemed' to 'know' the place:

Planning implies being in control; it's kind of top-down (and still is) ... (their) consultation is very rarely a conversation, and hardly ever a dialogue, but more or less a public relations exercise where people feel stitched into the plan, which is being sold to them by a planner. Therefore, these plans simply perpetuate inequality.

Another theme that Bob heard related to 'creating a narrative', the story in - and about - all this re-purposing. For him it became important to wonder: 'Who's narrative is it, then? And can we have multiple narratives? Or are we always talking about the narrative?' And can we have the narrative of difference?' How such different narratives relate to each other 'becomes a really important sense of who we are; as a public - it's a combination of different narratives'.

He was also noticing what he referred to as this notion of energies (particularly from Hina and Gavin) – 'this sense of energetic connections perhaps becoming more important'. He wondered if perhaps this related to 'the conversation involving inner dialogue', and whether 'perhaps this is more important than the public consultations, where we defend what we're doing, or challenge others on what they're doing – on the basis of words'. For Bob 'the words are so limiting today in promoting a sense of a common conversation, or a common narrative'. He wondered about the need 'to explore other means of relating to one another' - rather than simply through 'gatherings' (that we often blandly refer to as 'meetings').

The association with re-purposing, of both architecture and psychotherapy (in Gavin's presentation), was represented as 'eminently interesting'. The underlying sense of trauma was also noted: 'Perhaps this is also something that many of us need to consider more seriously, not only the healing of personal traumas but also the inter-generational trauma, the inherited trauma, that most of us are experiencing'. There seemed to be something in creatively occupying 'the sense of being alone, being physically alone'. Perhaps this could be 'a way to provoke a different type of conversation – conversation between different people who are really alone'. Art – such as Gavin's paintings – could also be a way to have this conversation with oneself. Bob highlighted Gavin's references to 'listening to what is waiting to emerge'. And

the way in which he spoke revealingly about a work as: 'I didn't know I had it in me'; and 'not knowing where I'm starting and where I'm going'. For Bob:

Maybe that should be a new definition for a planner – someone who doesn't know where they're starting and where they're going. And therefore, just becomes a remarkable listener. A way of provoking and convoking what others are interpreting, rather than imposing their own.

John's presentation especially had Bob reflecting on the institutional context for repurposing – especially 'institution as state', and 're-purposing the state'. This seemed a particularly good 'big idea' to be contemplating - 'if one could even contemplate doing that'. He also noted John's criticism of what might be called the reigning, paradigmatic 'theory of change'. Namely, that 'life is not organized, the world is not organized horizontally, laterally – where inputs lead to outputs, and outputs lead to impacts, and impacts lead to outcomes – and so on'. Rather, there is 'a huge messiness'. Which again took Bob into wondering about re-purposing planning:

Maybe all planning should be messy. No planning should be in straight lines any longer. All planning should really try to look at alternative ways of combining things that were not combinable before.

Bob also heard John's focus on listening: 'A common theme throughout I've found is listening to others, but also listening to self'. And also, John's focus on poverty, and especially 'poverty of the spirit, the poverty of loneliness, the poverty that many people experience who are perhaps even in privileged situations'. He wondered if 'perhaps there is (a form) of poverty (of spirit) that unites all of us (although one has to recognise that those who are impoverished economically are more greatly challenged than many of the others)'.

Bob closed with an expression of gratitude for having been introduced to 'this whole theme of re-purposing':

... looking at issues of spirituality, re-examining the notion of institutions, creating a new narrative, developing a sense of territory - both inner and outer, finding ways of combining energies, re-purposing, re-purposing the spirit, tuning in, listening to the story, listening to what is waiting to emerge in each of us, and all of us together.

**Lesley Reid** (a second 'keynote listener') identified with Bob's idea of 'a pearl necklace', having been strung in all that was presented. She also brought her experience of Scotland having moved into 'localities' as a way of planning 'in order to be person-centred and to take account of the people in people's lives (or not in people's lives)'. This is mainly about neighbours and friends, but she wanted to stress the aspect of being in people's lives 'because they are vulnerable, and they need help'.

With the complex involvement of the third sector, and/or the public sector, and/or social enterprises there arises a sense of 'the chaotic-ness' of how they are involved with people's

lives, and ‘how damaging some of that can be (especially because of what had been mentioned, in relation to earlier trauma, and it just repeating itself)’. She found it ‘really helpful to get so many different perspectives on the city’ – and identified in particular with some of Cliff’s experiences. In her local (Portobello) context she could especially relate to the issues raised around ‘public spaces ... and our infrastructure and buildings, and how new developments are happening’.

In terms of the spirit/spirituality framing of the forum, she homed in the importance for her of the word ‘breath’: ‘it comes from the word *ruach*, a (Hebrew) spiritual term for breath – and I believe it’s about co-creating’. And also, the idea of dialogue: ‘a big thing about it is bringing people together’ in dialogue about all the different issues. In this particular context she found ‘I had to think very hard about this; how are we all equally there?’. She believes this is something that is being advanced in Scotland at present, the equality aspect around any issue we come together about, namely: ‘any one could be coming with the answer; any one, in what they contribute, in dialogue with other people, could generate the answer’. Lesley wanted to emphasise the importance of dialogue, and the importance of different perspectives. She indicated she did not believe in ‘consultations’. Rather, ‘I believe in doing work that brings the right people together to have the dialogue’.

Lesley indicated a view of architects, for her, as ‘how they get on with it, they create images, they come back and move forward; they check things out – I think there is a lot to learn from that way of engaging’. Her sense was that ‘we lack good artefacts when we meet together – that really capture what’s said’ and advocated ‘more good generative journalism’. She felt there are some bits missing from ‘what does it mean to be equal in a room talking about something’. This could impair re-purposing efforts.

For Lesley, ‘I just feel there’s a lot about dialogue, about creating spaces, where people can bring themselves – and really look at this’. She was intrigued by Bob’s reference to ‘territory’ – especially what for her was ‘the nature part of it’ – particularly ‘having been through Covid, and the climate change, and really seeing what poverty causes, and trauma causes, in relation to Covid’. All these things are very real to us now, calling for our co-creativity, in our collective re-purposing.

At this point the forum convenor, **Ian Wight**, invited closing synthesis comments from all present, noting that: ‘You’ve certainly achieved what I would call – collectively – that ‘above the line’ dialogue (rather than simply nice, polite conversation)’. Some really rich reflection had been offered ‘and out of that it sounds like something pretty important has been generated, for all of you, just by what has been offered collectively’. He wondered though, ‘if there is something that has emerged for you that you’d want to put out there now, now that everybody has been heard in a sense. What are you processing at this point?’.

**Cliff Hague** noted that, as the listeners indicated, ‘we’ve got some common ground but also diversity (across it)’. He was particularly struck by a couple of things, around balancing the personal and the public, the inner and the external; and on the idea of ‘multiple narratives’. On

the first point he was especially struck 'by people (being) keen on destiny - or giving expression to their own creativity'. For himself, he tended to think more 'that things 'kind of happen' to me'. He conveyed a sense of having 'moved through the system', and going with the flow (also noting that, while he didn't think he'd really 'applied for things' ... 'people have asked me to do things', and he was not very good at saying 'no'). This had him wondering 'how much conscious personal agency' he'd put 'out there', but he also thought that part of his upbringing was 'that you didn't try to push yourself; you didn't try to explore your own creativity'. He thought that that is the kind of thing that might have shaped how he has 'moved forward'.

On the idea of multiple narratives, he agreed that 'yes, there clearly are multiple narratives, but the key thing is that they are contested' (giving the example of the current contestation around public space use in Edinburgh). How far are they seen as public benefits, or how far are they seen as income generators?: 'so these narratives come down to issues of place in the end, and the use of place'.

Cliff finished his closing remarks by re-asserting the role of institutions, and commenting on his review of *Kes*, the Ken Loach film from the late sixties, about the boy and the kestrel and a Yorkshire mining village. What really struck him looking at that: 'at every stage people who were there from welfare state agencies – the teachers, the librarian, the employment agency folks – all these people had no empathy with the kid. They basically failed him'. He suggested that 'when we talk about re-purposing I think we have to recognise that the state has indeed been re-purposed' (and not necessarily in a good way). For him, 'the real challenge is to try to create a set of attitudes and behaviours, within those public bodies, that really does connect - particularly with the needs of the less well off' even if there are all sorts of barriers to that, including around the planning system and consultation. Of late the latter has been 'quite deliberately narrowed down' with the benefits going specifically to 'those who control land and property'. He ended with the hope that some of these ideas can be taken further in other dialogues.

**Hina Hirani**, in her closing thoughts, commented that her thinking 'always was that the system is pretty rigid', referencing the education system and its effects in particular, making re-purposing a natural concern, to move beyond rigidity. She also noted the themes around poverty, and breathing considerations, as important for repurposing 'the system'... 'getting down into that connection and creating something that can help people not just in the monetary aspects of poverty but spirit as well, and how we as human beings unfold'. Hina framed this as transformation, helped by a grounding breathing practice, manifested in behaviour change, in the context of 'how we imagine, how we create things, whether it's architecture or planning, or the individual person, or the inner self, or environment'.

Her own practice features use of 'the energies', especially 'to feed the intuition'. She acknowledged that 'everyone interacts with spirituality differently' but suggested that views might coalesce 'if we talk about spirit and all the seven chakras and how we feel – as being not micro but being a part of the whole universe'. She was thinking not only 'what we see and feel and touch with our senses – but way beyond that. And how do we explore that?'

It's pretty dramatic, and it's good to have; we definitely need – not a system – but some sorts of tools or techniques which help people to transform, in terms of various poverty dimensions.

**Gavin Thomson** commented on the richness of the responses, and the 'thought-provocation'. Highlights for himself included Lesley's points about co-creation and associated action, and Hina's points around how do people who are active, and engaged, 'connect with a system'. Particularly where, much of the time, the system in question 'exists for itself', while supposedly fulfilling a purpose, and people genuinely trying to benefit from that purpose – but with the system often seeming to exist 'on a different plane'. He offered a series of questions on his mind as the forum wound down:

How does the action connect in a way which brings the power for change and transformation – and empowerment – to people as individuals, and in community? Where the system doesn't have control, but actually enables it (the transformation). What mechanisms might bring forward a change where what is happening, what is being co-created, comes from the grassroots (rather than from people working their way up through departments and agencies), to making places to do things better?

**John Halliday** offered some perspectives that had crystallized for himself around spirituality, and the wondering around re-purposing as 'spirit@work'. He acknowledged that – coming into the forum - he did not particularly resonate with, nor resort to, such terminology. However, he had encountered 'three elements that can be associated with spirituality':

1. The examination of the self and the self-reflection, and the role that has in how you are connected with others – at more than just a superficial level - and that's important;
2. In considering spirituality you can become much more aware of fate, of things that are outside your control – the messiness aspect. While the role of fate may be marginalized – 'in a Christian-informed world, in a very monotheistic country... because it can seem like there is a cause and effect in a lot of things' – he now considered that 'a wider understanding of spirituality really helps';
3. The philosophy of how you get a good life: John's main reflection on all of this revolved around gardening as 'a brilliant metaphor':

It always sits well with me. It is in itself a good way of finding contentment in life. It's a good way of reflecting on renewal and what that means. Putting a lot of work into it (gardening) can be its own reward. And how wonderful nature is in informing our wellbeing. But it's also a great metaphor for where happiness can come from.

The latter was reinforced for John by other presenters' stories (especially Hina and Gavin). It felt like there was 'no coincidence that nature and gardening keeps coming up' and 'there's a

reason that nature ends up getting into this; there is something wonderful about it'. And he recalled that in the novel *Candide* – after all the highs and lows – 'all it comes down to is wanting to do some gardening'. And Epicurus - so commonly thought of as a hedonist – actually, all he wanted was some gardening, with some friends. He came up with the formula 'reflect on your life'. For John, such reflection is not just a useful thing for yourself to remember to do, but 'it is also a great metaphor for where contentment lies in life, and in reflecting in/on your own self'.

**Ian Wight** thanked John especially for engaging the spirituality dimensions at some length: 'It was certainly in mind when we formulated this particular series (of forums), looking for something that might hold the (three) topics together... in essence, the kind of background curiosity has been the whole notion of Spirit@Work?'. And this had been evident in spades during the re-purposing forum. He did wonder: whether this would be conventionally recognised, say in our professional or institutional settings, might be another matter – but suggested that 'just by embodying it we're probably able to influence its greater manifestation'.

Ian commented that there was something deliberate, in framing the forum, when we reflected on the 're-purposing'; to get to it from 'purpose' – which seems very institutional, very organizational, very mission and purposes. But when you turn it into purposing, and you realise that that's an action-verb 'that I can act on', then one doesn't need to 'accept' a purpose or 'settle' for a purpose – 'I can be 'working' on my purposing'. And just being curious about that. This brings in the intention that Bob mentioned; just presencing that could be very liberating.

But then, once you get to the purposing it becomes really intriguing when you think of re-purposing, because we are all living in an environment of change. And it's logical that we might want to consider that 'maybe' some re-purposing is necessary here, and just be on the alert for that, rather than assuming that 'static' (or *status quo*) is fine... so I think that's partly how this thing is being woven together.

Ian really appreciated the several references to place. As a former professor of city planning, he evolved his relationship with planning to where, basically, his purpose is to re-purpose planning as placemaking, and his current practice is 'around trying to help professionals think about 'professing' placemaking, rather than just the usual mechanics of planning, and analysis, and control'. He suggested: 'if you take that perspective it can really take you places'.

Ian commented that 'we haven't heard so much directly about what is going to be our third theme – wellbeing'. For him 'there again, it has a connection to wholeness', and for him 'a spiritual perspective honours wholeness'. For Ian, the action that goes along with this perspective takes a particular form:

'whenever I see 'evolving' or 'evolution' in play I interpret that as a call to - 'ever-more-whole-making'. And that becomes – you could say – my underlying purpose. I would always want to be working towards (this); and I think this is something that always happens in the best of places as well; there is an 'ever-more-whole-making' impulse at

work. So, the whole-making then goes to well-being, and I'm hoping that the next two sessions will be as equally rich as this, and we will start seeing more of these interconnecting threads, which I think you've started to draw out tonight.

**Lesley Reid:** 'I have one quick last thing for me; the word transfiguration has been used and I can identify with wanting that. I also want to recognise where disfiguration is taking place. And in relation to the Community Empowerment Act – I don't think that's actually been really used or understood, and I just wondered what power there is for us to name/call out where/what we don't see (what might otherwise be anticipated)'. She sensed 'a tremendous amount of experience' in forum participants 'for (co-)creating the type of spaces that would be more helpful'. To which Ian commented - 'Reconfiguring Empowerment' might be another good theme for a future forum, looking at it (power) in all its dimensions (not just power-over, but also power-with and power-within). And Lesley concurred – stressing the importance of 'calling things out very, very clearly. It's an interdependent type of world that we have to set up, and I think there are ways in which we can try and be honest with ourselves, and the public sector, and planning. Because I do think they want to change – that's the other thing; I do believe that'. This seemed to underline the potential in a thorough-going re-purposing perspective.

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**[For future forum participants:** At this point, Ian asked for other comments before wrapping up? 'We are really 'at time'. We obviously did not get here by the timeline I thought we might; but I'm quite prepared to let 'my plans' dissolve into the ether and embrace the mystery'. To which John offered: 'We co-created this time for you, with our over-running'.

Ian: 'I sense that now – I really feel it, and it's a good lesson for future forums which I hope you'll take an interest in. You're all welcome to participate in the future forums. Again, it will be the same format, and maybe this will pick up some momentum and we can actually get to try out breakout groups. Because there would be even more intimacy there – I accept that. We haven't been able to include that aspect (on this occasion), but I think we've been able to have the best possible dialogue we can, in the circumstances. And I'm grateful for that. Thank you all again for participating, and looking forward to seeing you in a future forum']

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NB A full transcription of the re-purposing forum proceedings, with highlights and hyper-links, is available upon request from [ianwight1949@gmail.com](mailto:ianwight1949@gmail.com)