

PROPERTIES | SUSTAINABILITY

PUBLIC REALM WHITE PAPER

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: SUSTAINABILITY THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES





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FOREWORD

SPECIAL PLACES

Can you recall those special public places that make you feel safe, comfortable, happy, enriched, and connected? Accessible to all, these are often places where nature sneaks into the city – light, water, sky, greenery – becoming a part of social gatherings and everyday activities.

These are the places that make me change my route for the enjoyment of walking through them and sharing them with family and friends over the weekend. We call these places “public realm”.

PUBLIC SPACES UNDER PRESSURE IN MENA CITIES

As our cities expand, the needs of urban dwellers for high quality public realm has grown more pressing. According to UN Habitat, an agency that monitors urban development partly through satellite imagery, public spaces now comprise just 2% of the area of Middle Eastern cities, compared with 12% in the average European city. Often, the requirement for new infrastructure comes at the expense of green spaces; for example, in Riyadh, the amount of land devoted to parks, squares and other public spaces per person has fallen by 80% in half a century.¹ New, high quality public realm is critically needed in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

A BUSINESS & A HUMAN NEED

We have always recognised how incredibly important high quality public realm is to our business’ mission to deliver quality destinations and compelling experiences that enrich people’s daily lives. In 2015, the UN also recognised high quality public realm as a pressing human need. In response, it launched UN Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities by 2030.

OUR COMMITMENT TO ENHANCING THE PUBLIC REALM WITHIN AND AROUND OUR ASSETS

I am delighted, that as a member of the UN Global Compact and a global corporate citizen, Majid Al Futtaim – Properties’ sustainability strategy includes a 2018 goal to create exemplar public spaces both within and around our assets. Since 2014, we have undertaken interviews, case study research, literature review, and internal engagement to develop the business case, an appropriate definition and characteristics of successful public realm in the MENA context.

I hope that by sharing our approach to creating exemplar public realm, MENA developers and managers will find useful tools to further enhance the design and management of their public spaces and collectively, we can contribute to enhancing the quality of public realm across the region.

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DEFINING PUBLIC REALM IN MENA

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

“Public realm comprises the streets, squares, parks, green spaces and other outdoor places that require no key to access them and are available, without charge, for everyone to use.”

UK Government

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

“The public realm includes all exterior places, linkages and built-form elements that are physically and/or visually accessible regardless of ownership. These elements can include, but are not limited to, streets, pedestrian ways, bikeways, bridges, plazas, nodes, squares, transportation hubs, gateways, parks, waterfronts, natural features, view corridors, landmarks and building interfaces.”

Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council





Our first challenge in enhancing the public realm was to define the term. As the two definitions on the previous page make clear (one international², one from MENA³), the public realm is a vast space based on physical and visual access rather than ownership.

WE ARE ADDING PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE INDOOR SPACES TO THE TRADITIONAL DEFINITION

Since many of our assets are in places that experience extreme climatic conditions that can make it uncomfortable to spend time outside, we have tested through expert interviews the idea of including indoor spaces within the definition of public realm. The proposal received broad acceptance, with the proviso that outdoor space should not be forgotten in design or pushed aside in operation in favour of internal public realm.

WE ARE INCLUDING PLACEMAKING IN OUR DEFINITION

We are aware that private operation of public spaces and a general lack of community engagement in MENA property development can lead to public realm that is sterile or does not serve the local community. Public spaces now comprise only 2% of the area of Middle Eastern cities, compared with 12% in the average European city.⁴ So, ensuring that new and existing public spaces respond to community needs is critical. We have therefore chosen to emphasise “placemaking” as an integral part of public realm development. Placemaking is an approach to planning public spaces that has been taken up globally in the last 20 years - it emphasises the importance of engaging the users and neighbours of public space during its development. This aligns with the Community Engagement Charter and Guidelines that we have already developed as part of the Prosperous Communities focus area in our sustainability strategy. Some of the key objectives of the Charter are to foster an inclusive approach that facilitates engagement with multiple stakeholder groups, to understand their needs, and to involve representatives in our decision-making.

OUR DEFINITION OF THE PUBLIC REALM

Majid Al Futtaim – Properties’ public realm includes all internal and exterior places, linkages and built-form elements that are physically and/or visually accessible free of charge, regardless of ownership. Placemaking, a collaborative form of public realm development that involves the community in designing public spaces, is an integral part of high quality public realm.

PLACEMAKING AND THE PUBLIC REALM

“Placemaking is a people-centered approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. Put simply, it involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place.”

Placemaking Chicago⁵

A BUSINESS & A HUMAN NEED

Globally, the business case for public realm is supported by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, local planning regulations, and an increasing body of research showing positive financial impacts.

- In 2015, the UN also recognised that high quality public realm is a pressing human need. In response, it launched UN Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities by 2030.
- Planning authorities around the world have incorporated minimum standards for public realm development, in order to create more social value from real estate developments. Including high quality public realm can therefore be critical to obtaining planning permission in many areas.
- Research findings are demonstrating powerful linkages between property value (sales price, rents, retail income, etc.) and aspects of high quality public realm such as placemaking, green space, walkability and biophilia.



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PUBLIC REALM IN THE MENA REGION

While the business case for exemplar public realm is clear globally, MENA planning regulations generally have minimal public realm requirements. Developers and asset managers must therefore make the business case for high quality public realm in the absence of strong regulatory drivers.

In addition to undertaking research on the demand for public realm in real estate, we also undertook a review of international placemaking case study exemplars (set out in the pages that follow). This research, together with our business vision to create “Great Moments for Everyone, Everyday” and our sustainability strategy enabled us to identify the following business benefits and opportunities from enhancing the public realm:

BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ENHANCING THE PUBLIC REALM

- ✓ Create an “iconic” destination
- ✓ Increase footfall and dwell-time
- ✓ Enhance reputation and brand
- ✓ Enhance asset lifespan and value
- ✓ Respond to the objectives of local stakeholders (such as government and community)
- ✓ Positive local economic and environmental impacts
- ✓ Increase health of local population
- ✓ Safety and crime prevention
- ✓ Tenant and employee attraction

INCREASED REAL ESTATE VALUE THROUGH HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC REALM

5-50%

premiums on home sales in large residential-led, mixed-use urban extension schemes that utilise good placemaking techniques.

(UK)⁶

8-10%

higher property values near improved parks. Rental premiums on commercial property are as high as 40%. Park quality and programming are key to higher value.

(USA)⁷

20-40%
increase
in retail
footfall

10-25%
increase in
turnover

10-30%
increase in
rents from
pedestria-
nisation

(Global)⁸

24%

more visitors enter a shopping centre recreation area when it is decorated with plants.

(New Zealand)⁹

EXEMPLAR PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

Case studies are a valuable tool for learning and also for making the business case to invest in public space. We hope the case studies presented here will inspire developers and managers throughout the MENA region to consider the business benefits of, as well as the critical human need for, designing and managing high quality public realm.

Namba Parks and CF Shops at Don Mills both demonstrate how outdoor space can attract visitors even in extreme climates. King's Cross shows how community engagement and active programming can bring a new mixed-use district to life. Singapore Bay Gardens shows how a biodiverse, inclusive, high quality design can draw visitors from around the world. And finally, Placatoir Miniparks, The Plaza and the Flying Grass Carpet are examples of how low cost, temporary and quickly implementable interventions can improve the experience of existing public spaces.



Namba Parks - Osaka, Japan

NAMBA PARKS

Completed: 2007

Location: Osaka, Japan

Developer: Nankai Electric Railway Co. Ltd. and Takashimaya

Project: Retail/Entertainment 86,000 sq meters, Office 36,000 sq meters, Residential 38,000 sq meters, Public /Green Space 25,000 sq meters, Cultural 2,700 sq meters, Parking 17,000 sq meters, Total building area: 204,700 sq meters.

Characteristics of High Quality Public Realm:

Accessible and safe, biodiverse, responsive, permeable, active management, activated, high quality design, inclusive, sensitive to local context.

Highlights: Namba Parks is a green and visible oasis in a city where nature is virtually absent. The development demonstrates that servicing a genuine community need for nature can turn a lifestyle shopping centre into a landmark. Namba Park's open space is designed to be comfortable in hot and humid summer weather and direct links to the street and train platform create easy access for pedestrians and transit riders.

Public realm details: The conceptual premise is a canyon coursing through an urban park. A green roof-terraced complex of retail spaces envelops an open space in the center, starting out as an oval vertical space, open to the sky and flowing out to the street entrance, forming an indoor-outdoor urban retail and entertainment complex. An elevator tower rises in the oval center and glass-enclosed pedestrian bridges traverse the canyon at various points, connecting the interior spaces. An amphitheater hosts open air entertainment. The park contains 300 types of plants in 1.3 acre – each plant has signage with a calendar explaining seasonality. The roof park is irrigated by filtered restaurant greywater. During the summer, when asphalt can reach a surface temperature of 51°C and concrete is 45°C, the rooftop park is only 34°C.¹⁰

KING'S CROSS

Completed: Initial buildings completed 2011 – Further phases ongoing

Location: London, UK

Developer: King's Cross Central Limited Partnership

Project: 67 acre mixed-use transit-oriented redevelopment. 50 new buildings, 1,900 new homes, 20 new streets, 10 new public parks/squares, 26 acres open space

Characteristics of High Quality Public Realm:

Accessible and safe, biodiverse, responsive, permeable, active management, activated, high quality design, inclusive, sensitive to local context, adaptable.

Highlights: Establishing the public realm early helped redefine King's Cross as a diverse and interesting district of London. A flexible master plan with a strong vision and owners who stayed in for the long-haul were key to success as piecemeal land sales would have affected delivery of the vision. Service charges part-fund the programme of free events in the public realm.

Public Realm details: The King's Cross master plan presented a permeable network of public open spaces, streets, lanes, squares, and parks connecting to the wider city. Specific details of the new district were allowed to emerge over time, aided by a flexible master plan and planning approval that provided 20% flexibility to support the mix of uses. Parks and open spaces are managed by the development estate with an active programme of free events including a children's poetry trail, fitness offerings, movie screenings, art exhibitions, roller skating, a family festival, outdoor swimming, community garden, seasonal pop-ups, markets and many others. Free Wi-Fi access is provided across the whole site.^{11 & 12}



King's Cross - London, UK

CF SHOPS AT DON MILLS

Completed: 2009. Further development of residential units

Location: Toronto, Canada

Developer: Cadillac Fairview Corporation Limited

Project: 43,482 sq. meters, 69 retailers, office space, ongoing building of 2,800 residential units.

Characteristics of High Quality Public Realm:

Activated, permeable, actively managed & maintained, responsive, high quality design.

Highlights: Toronto's first open air urban village centre remains active throughout the very cold winter season. Refreshments are an important draw for visitors to the outdoor format. Visitors also give positive reviews for free events and the public realm design. Cadillac Fairview is currently investing \$21 million in continued improvements to the centre's public realm based on guest and community feedback.

Public realm details: Designed to feel like a downtown shopping district, with city-named streets and a "Town Square". The Town Square hosts a year-round series of free events: artshows, concerts, holiday markets, yoga classes, charity runs, jazz festivals, movie screenings, farmers markets and green space to spend time in. In winter an ice-skating rink is set up to draw visitors into the central area. A miniature train for children circles the mall as a further family attraction. Don Mills has one of the highest percentages of food retailers in any Canadian mall, with most restaurants concentrated around the Town Square.¹³



CF Shops at Don Mills - Toronto, Canada



Singapore Bay Gardens - Singapore

SINGAPORE BAY GARDENS

Completed: 2012 (Bay South)

Location: Singapore

Developer: National Parks Board (NParks), Singapore

Project: 101 hectares, 3 distinct gardens, Flower Dome (circa 87,000 plants), Cloud Forest (circa 130,000 plants), Heritage Gardens (86,155 plants), 18 Supertrees (over 162,900 plants)¹⁴

Characteristics of High Quality Public Realm: Accessible and safe, biodiverse, responsive, active management, activated, high quality design, inclusive, sensitive to local context, adaptable.

Highlights: Public project, led by NParks, to embody Singapore's vision of itself as a Garden City, support the local community, and draw tourists from abroad.¹⁵ Winner of multiple international design awards, including 2012 World Building of the Year, Gardens by the Bay are in the top 20 of world most checked places on Facebook and Singapore's Number 1 Tourist Attraction on TripAdvisor. More than 30 million visitors to date.¹⁶

Public realm details: Three distinctive waterfront gardens – Bay South, Bay East and Bay Central provide freely accessible outdoor space during the day, with charges after 3pm and for the conservatories. Recreation, education, culture and ecology and a sustainable design mission are integrated into the project's design and operation. The Gardens provide a year round calendar of activities - with signature festivals, music concerts and movie screenings, sports and community events, and educational workshops and school programmes.¹⁷

In order to maintain the Gardens' attractiveness in a competitive leisure market, the Company actively manages and maintains the Gardens, using guest feedback and its own regular maintenance and safety checks. In 2015, improvements in response to guest feedback and the Gardens' ongoing internal improvement process, included a range of updated exhibits, wider pedestrian paths, more bridges to improve circulation around public transit stops, expanded F&B offerings, free wheelchairs and rental baby strollers, and a new visitor information centre.¹⁸

TACTICAL URBANISM CASE STUDIES

“Tactical urbanism describes a set of low cost, temporary and quickly implementable interventions to the public realm aimed to improve the quality of physical space and user experience in neighbourhoods and public spaces. This approach is often used to test strategies that can lead to more permanent changes.”

- A Better City

Project: Three case studies of temporary, low-cost interventions that turned under-used public spaces into attractive, people-oriented, successful public realm

Highlights: Responsive, inclusive, activated, adaptable, permeable, accessible and safe

1. Placottoir Miniparks – “A place to chat”, Montreal, Canada

Completed: Ongoing

Location: Canada

Developer: Plateau-Mont-Royal Borough

“A concept inspired by cities such as San Francisco and Vancouver, parklets, or placottoirs in French, are sitting and rest areas resembling outdoor terraces that are installed in the parking areas in front of businesses. What makes them unique? They are accessible to everyone, from customers to people passing by, and the sale of products is forbidden.”¹⁹

2. The Plaza – Cambridge, USA

Completed: 2008

Location: USA

Developer: VIVA Vancouver, City of Vancouver

Harvard University kicked off the reinvention of this underutilised outdoor space passed through by most students and many community members, with the addition of flexible seating and event programming, such as farmers markets, food trucks, petting zoos, family fun nights and a winter ice skating rink. Low capital cost activities such as giant chess pieces, foosball, a plywood stage and ping pong add to the attraction for passers-by.²⁰

3. The Flying Grass Carpet

Completed: Ongoing

Location: Internationally Mobile

Developer: HUNK-design & Studio ID Eddy

“The Flying Grass Carpet travels to underutilized and overlooked plazas around the world, unfurling its 6,000 kilos of artificial lawn over an area as large as 920 square meters...Added amenities like bean bag chairs, picnic blankets, giant building blocks for kids, and live entertainment help activate the area in a variety of ways.”^{21w}



Placottoir Miniparks – “A place to chat”, Montreal, Canada



The Plaza – Cambridge, USA



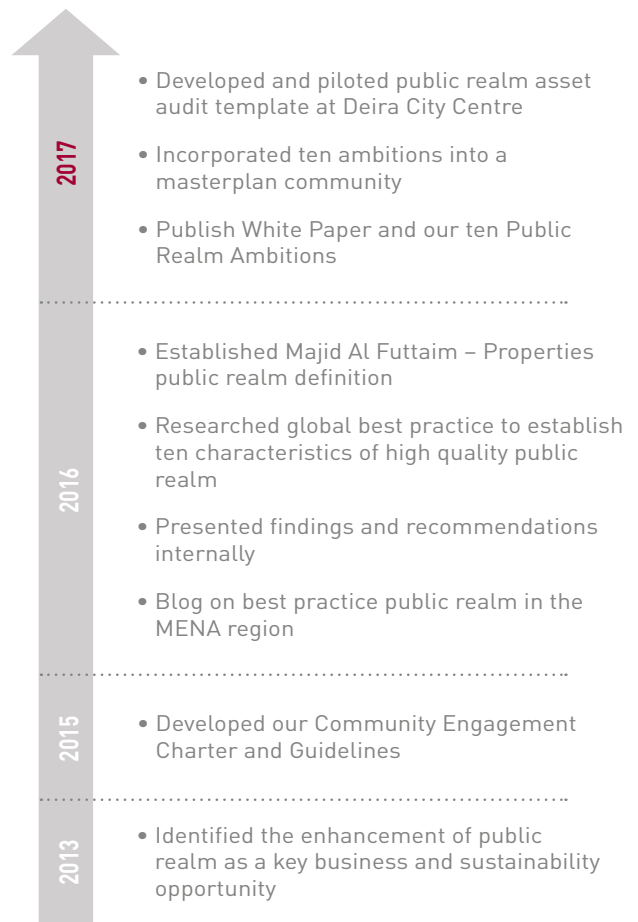
The Flying Grass Carpet - Internationally mobile

OUR APPROACH

Well designed and managed public realm can have positive impacts on health, wellbeing and productivity outcomes through recreational benefits and public enjoyment of space. However, poorly designed and managed public spaces can feel boring, uncomfortable, or even unsafe.²² So how can we make sure our public realm really work well?

Establishing the framework around enhancing the public realm presented us with a key business and sustainability opportunity over the last few years. We have spent time developing and adopting a Community Engagement Charter (see further detail on p3) and crystallising our definition of public realm. We have reviewed international green building standards, public realm guidelines and frameworks, global case studies of successful and less successful projects, and interviewed experts in the field to understand what makes public realm successful. These have all been important stages to determine our approach to creating exemplar public realm (as shown in the accompanying timeline).

HOW WE ARE ENHANCING PUBLIC REALM



MAJID AL FUTTAIM'S PUBLIC REALM AMBITIONS

Over the last twelve months, we have synthesised our research findings and experience into ten characteristics of high quality public realm. These formed the foundation for our public realm ambitions, which reflect a combination of our research and our experience designing and managing public realm. Ultimately, our goal is for our public realm ambitions to be integrated into the heart of all our spaces over the coming years, building on the excellent work we already do in building and managing public spaces that create **"Great Moments for Everyone, Everyday"**.



1 RESPOND TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Respond to the needs of our stakeholders in designing and managing public realm within all assets, using our Community Engagement Charter and Guidelines.



2 PERMEABLE

Design the public realm within and around our assets to be permeable and legible, through signage and design that integrate into the surrounding transport network.



3 ACTIVATED

Design and manage our public spaces to be consistently active. Where appropriate, providing activities in all seasons, throughout the day and in evening and early morning hours preventing "dead spaces" that are underused.



4 SENSITIVE TO LOCAL CUSTOMS

Design our public realm and the activities encouraged within it to be contextual and take into account local customs and traditions.



5 ADAPTABLE

Design our public realm to be adaptable to accommodate changes in the ways in which we live, work, travel and play and review our assets' public realm strategies regularly.



6 HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

Design the public realm at our assets to the highest quality, including the cost of maintenance in our design considerations.



7 BIODIVERSE

Include attractive and stimulating natural environments for adults and children wherever possible.



8 INCLUSIVE

Design our public realm to encourage gender, age, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of users.



9 ACTIVELY MANAGED & MAINTAINED

Actively manage and maintain our public realm to ensure they remain clean, safe, attractive and in working order.



10 ACCESSIBLE & SAFE

We will make our public realm accessible and safe for all regardless of age or ability.



Having established a framework setting out our Public Realm Ambitions, we have focused on trialling their application during two key phases – asset design and management.

INCORPORATING OUR TEN PUBLIC REALM AMBITIONS INTO A MASTERPLAN

When it comes to design and development, part of the task we have taken on in committing to developing “exemplar public realm” in MENA is finding a way to manage the practical considerations. There are many tensions to be balanced in the design and management of the public realm in MENA: the needs of locals vs. visitors; extreme temperatures and preference for car transport vs. outdoor enjoyment and pedestrian/cycle travel; and water scarcity vs. biodiverse landscaping. It is important to acknowledge these tensions and develop public realm strategies that are responsive to the context around them.

With this in mind, we have incorporated Majid Al Futtaim – Properties’ ten public realm ambitions into the development of a ground-breaking masterplan, Ghaf Hills. This 250+ hectare mixed-use lifestyle destination has public realm at its core. The lessons learned from our creation of a sustainability, health and wellbeing strategy for this project will provide valuable insights for future masterplans.

ASSESSING OUR EXISTING ASSETS AGAINST OUR TEN PUBLIC REALM AMBITIONS

Our experience and research show that active management and maintenance of the public realm are also key to generating value (see Case Studies). It is therefore critical that the ownership structure is designed to provide incentives for long-term management and maintenance. Additionally, community engagement, which is considered a matter of course in Europe and North America, is rarely required by planning regulations in MENA. Developers must take the initiative to engage with local stakeholders and design public realm that is responsive to the needs of the local community. Our Community Engagement Charter and Guidelines are an important tool to enable us to do this. We have also used our Public Realm Ambitions to develop a public realm asset audit template which uses a five-point scale to assess asset performance against questions focused around each ambition. We piloted our audit process at City Centre Deira in 2017. Our auditors gave particularly high ratings for high quality design, disabled access, and active management and maintenance. The assessment also highlighted a few opportunities for improvement to fully realise our Public Realm Ambitions – integrating more natural elements, improving the safety of pedestrian access, providing a range of comfortable seating options, and offering a variety of free events/activities. We have used the process to refine the audit template and found it a useful guide for identifying how we can further improve our public spaces.



NEXT STEPS

Since 2013, we have created a solid foundation for ensuring that we are creating exemplar public realm both within and around our assets. Looking ahead, we have developed a plan for how we will build on that foundation, integrating our Public Realm Ambitions throughout Majid Al Futtaim – Properties’ asset development and management in 2018 and beyond.

OUR PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

-
- Perform public realm assessments across all remaining operational assets
 - Install low cost remediation measures where required
 - Incorporate Public Realm Ambitions from the outset of all development projects
 - Share lessons learned including case studies of outcomes from public realm enhancement
-
- Perform public realm assessments across one-third of all existing assets
 - Approve plans to install low-cost remediation measures where required
 - Incorporate Public Realm Ambitions into all new development sustainability plans

CONCLUSION

We hope that by sharing our research, findings and insights to our processes, we have helped build the business case and introduced the tools for enhancing public realm across the region. There are many challenges to be considered – planning and cultural requirements, transportation systems, extreme climates and community engagement to name a few. We believe that by clearly defining what “exemplar public realm” means to Majid Al Futtaim – Properties’ and translating this approach into our ten Public Realm Ambitions, we will improve our ability to deliver our business vision to create “Great Moments for Everyone, Everyday”. In doing so, we hope to encourage others to take a similar approach and together contribute to developing public spaces that are so critically needed in our region. We look forward to engaging with our peers and other stakeholders on this important issue.





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