



# Reply

## Leave design to the designers

Ben Rogers' description of the essential link between architecture and social purpose ('On beauty', Autumn 2010) is a useful reminder that good design is rooted in reason.

His support for participatory design decision-making is a principle with little credibility, however. Some years ago, the proponents of 'community architecture' had a similar dream, but all this gave us was a dreary, domestic-scaled pastiche of vernacular building. The idea – despite considerable political and professional backing – withered because, at heart, design is a joyous, cerebral skill and not the consequence of listening to those who shout the loudest.

**Malcolm Reading**

## A nudge too far?

The idea that we need to 'nudge' other people towards behaving in the right way is uncomfortably paternalistic ('Nudge plus networks', Autumn 2010). It presupposes that the privileged few (RSA Fellows?) have access to some kind of knowledge about how people should live or how society ought to be organised that entitles them to shape the lives of others. History tells us that this kind of opinionated self-certainty often has disastrous consequences.

**Gary Kitchen**

“ Career politicians inevitably have a conflict between furthering their careers and defending their principles”

## Why career politics won't work

Peter Riddell ('Voter Affection', Autumn 2010) made three proposals designed to change the role of MPs. They are useful reforms but he overlooked the most important change that could be made.

Much of what has gone wrong with politics can be traced to the ascendancy of the career politician. In a democracy, the position of representing a constituency should be a period of public service, not a long-term career choice. Career politicians inevitably have a conflict between furthering their careers and

defending their principles or the interests of their constituents. If they aim to rise in government, they must behave tribally. If politics is their career, they will also expect salaries and benefits that compare favourably with alternative careers, rather than the lower compensation that rightly accompanies public service roles.

This could all be changed, quite simply, by introducing a restriction that any person could only stand for parliament in two elections. This would create a turnover of MPs, bringing fresh ideas, and each MP would be much more independent of their party and their whips, especially during their final term. The same reform would benefit local politics, too.

One possible objection could be that one needs greater experience of parliament to run a government department effectively. The US shows that this is not true: their departments are far larger than those in the UK, yet they are often run by people appointed from industry or academia, with little or no previous political service. It would be difficult to argue convincingly that they do a worse job on average than UK ministers do.

Let's reintroduce democracy and public service into parliament and local government, by introducing the simple reform that 'you can only stand twice'.

**Martyn Thomas**



## Your feedback

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