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**ISUF 21st International seminar on urban Form
'Our Common Future in Urban Morphology'
University of Porto, Portugal, 2-7 July 2014**

'What can you offer us?' Challenges facing the practical application of urban morphology

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Abstract

Amongst urban morphologists there is a broad consensus that the quality of the urban environment would be considerably enhanced through the application of urban morphological principles in both design and management. However, the obstacles in the path of achieving successful applications remain considerable, not least because of their multi-faceted character. Based on some preliminary findings from an on-going research project in a small conservation area in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, this paper will illustrate some of the problems involved. Based upon analysis of applications for planning permission over a period of 40 years and interviews with key practitioners in both conservation and planning within the area, an attempt will be made to conduct an audit of the extent to which urban morphological principles either are or could be applied. From this experience it will be argued that – before any comprehensive and successful applications of urban morphological principles in urban development can take place – a range of theoretical and practical issues need resolution. These include the precise relationship to other key actors, the specific role to be played, the appropriate point of intervention in any scheme and the sheer complexity relating to the range and nature of morphological components involved. Despite the almost overwhelming character of these problems, it would be wrong to be unduly pessimistic but for urban morphologists to achieve any impact a degree of pragmatism and compromise may be necessary.