“In advance of the creation of development plans and cost modelling, the first questions might be: What kind of place is it? What kind of place should it be?”

From Key Placemaking Issues: Process: Take design and placemaking further upstream in the process

Text: Key Placemaking Issues

This page compiles the Key Placemaking issues text which appears on the main site, as one downloadable piece. The issues identified have been drawn from project reviews carried out by A+DS, and which we hope can provide positive direction to future projects.

The following text includes Key Placemaking Issues, while project type specific points can be downloaded separately.

The intention is that the piece below develops over time, and becomes populated with examples of good practice as these emerge in order to form a live and expanding resource. If you are aware of examples of where things referred to have been done well we would be pleased to hear from you at design.forum@ads.org.uk

INTRODUCTION

Scotland has a tradition of creating distinctive places; derived from a deep understanding of local context and opportunities. The distinctiveness of these places creates the character which allows Scotland’s citizens to feel association with a place that they belong to, and has also created a visual environment that is attractive to visitors from around the globe. In developing new built environment, it is critical that we enhance, rather than detract from the qualities of place that make Scotland what it is.

Creating new and altering existing places within our communities requires design consideration at all levels. The decisions taken throughout the design process – from the strategic choice of site, design team and procurement methods, through to the detailed design, selection of materials and construction – all impact on the resultant quality of the buildings and places we create.

Through analysis of projects seen at Design Forum (previously Design Review), we have sought to draw out a number of specific considerations which apply across project types and which we consider to be Key Placemaking Issues.
PROCESS

Every successful project needs a champion
A project champion is an individual with the ability to communicate with a wide audience and the authority to ensure that the vision for a project is maintained throughout its development.

He or she plays a vital role as part of the team, in realising a project’s potential and in making sure that the aims around client goals, community aspirations, and response to the surrounding fabric do not become diluted in implementation.

The champion needs to be tenacious, to avoid or work around any obstruction to the implementation of the vision, and in that way create something that in the long term will be well used and respected, including, but also beyond, the initial requirements of the immediate functional brief.

Architecture is all about people
Making spaces and buildings for people, as opposed to only the practical processes which go on in buildings, is how the built environment becomes place. It is important not to lose touch with that even when the pressures of brief, budget, and timescale are weighing heavily.

Take design and placemaking further upstream in the process
Design Forum aims to engage at an early stage, as we believe that a brief which ensures that asset management includes creativity and people will have the best chance of success. Only by starting with a priority for design and placemaking will these qualities permeate the process through to the outcome. In advance of the creation of development plans and cost modelling, the first questions might be:

What kind of place is it?
What kind of place should it be?

Seek inspiration from other successful projects
Over time, we hope that this website will start to provide a starting point which shows how some projects might have responded to challenges which are similar to those which other might face. In this way we seek to give credit to those who have achieved, and provide inspiration to those who are at the early stages of a project. Other resource sites include Creating Places and Inspirational Designs.

Encourage multidisciplinary teams
Only by getting the right people with the right skills together can you realise the full potential of a site. A+DS’ experience is that projects in which skilled designers of the appropriate disciplines jointly develop a concept from an early stage in the design process has a positive outcome both in terms of quality of environment created, and in the directness of the design route.

Discourage box-ticking and ready-made solutions
Scotland’s landscape and culture has resulted in very different environments being created across Scotland, these environments being a reflection of our culture and our individuality. Going into the future, it is equally important that each development is treated as part of a community, from national to local, and hence deserves and requires site specific solutions which will embed it in that place.

A good brief and clear vision are vital
Vision and wider aspirations need to be established at the outset, including real understanding of the functional drivers that will secure vitality, economic prosperity and environmental quality. These should underpin the brief, and yet be proportionate to the scale of influence within city, townscape, or rural context.
In addition, places are never static but constantly evolving, and it is important there is a public/civic context to future planning. As surrounding circumstances evolve, development projects have to be robust and flexible to accommodate that change.

**Strategic thinking in placemaking**

Strategic thinking is about considering the wider aspects of development and the qualities which make it specific to where it is, in order not only to provide new living or working environments, but to root these into the fabric of the place. Such rooting includes wayfinding, linkage to existing established routes and places, scale, extension and connection of green spaces, in essence building places that promote quality of life and encourage development of active communities.

*Creating Places*, the Scottish Government policy statement on Architecture and place for Scotland, describes the six qualities of positive placemaking as: Distinctive, Safe and Pleasant, Easy to move around and beyond, Welcoming, Adaptable, Resource Efficient.

**STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

**Encourage diversity and mixed use**

Mixed economies and mixed places encourage interaction, and hence the potential for the influence of serendipity, innovation and creativity coming about through chance meetings. Having been developed as a concept from the sphere of workplace design, this same principle can also be applied to placemaking in the wider built environment.

**Encourage thinking beyond the red line**

Scotland is a plan led system which sets out strategic decisions on, for example, land release, however the system can fail to encourage co-operation beyond masterplan or site red lines. Civic or regional leadership is needed to direct and advise, and to ensure that the right people come together at the right time. A+DS has sought to encourage this type of dialogue.

**The role of Local Authorities**

Local Authorities can assume an active role in development, encouraging thinking beyond site boundaries and also between departments in order to achieve the best possible places for people.

Entrusted with developing a vision and expressing this through local plan policy, the Local Authority’s vision can then be maintained and developed through urban design frameworks, development briefs, and masterplans. Design Forum support Local Authorities in these endeavours, and in particular to the commissioning and ownership of these documents.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**Integrate sustainability from the outset**

What is sustainability? Sustainability includes reducing travel by car by colocation of uses or by providing viable and attractive transport options, longevity of the places created to reduce the waste of frequent redevelopment, and the consideration of both potential reuse of existing fabric and the utilisation of energy efficient technology and materials. It is by its nature inherently difficult to measure, but what is certain is that early design and briefing considerations can have a greater effect on the end outcome than the inclusion late on of features to offset inherently challenging location, uses, orientation, and sense of place. This is a much more difficult concept than reliance on certification to assess success or otherwise, however advice given at Design Forum is to consider holistic sustainability from the outset, and to ensure buy-in from all members of the team from the earliest stages of briefing.

**Longevity – designing for adaptability and refurbishment**

There is an enormous amount of embodied energy that goes in to producing buildings, not to mention the construction waste which can emanate from the process. Designing for adaptability and for economic reuse of building shells can
Reduce this waste at a fundamental level. A useful reference is Design for Deconstruction by SEDA which identifies principles of design to facilitate reuse and recycling.

Refurbishment and reuse of existing buildings
Within our towns and cities there exists a number of redundant buildings, the incidence of which has the potential to rise as institutions seek ever more flexible space with higher servicing requirements. However, refurbishment of buildings serves not only to conserve embodied energy, it also provides for the retention of social and historical capital.

There are clear advantages to existing buildings being reused where possible, and to consideration of new uses which might address either positive or negative social capital in addition to energy and flexibility issues.

Visit these resources for further information:

Material Considerations - A library of sustainable building materials
The Scottish Government on Sustainable Housing
Historic Scotland - Managing Change in the Historic Environment guidance notes

Buildings need to be resource and energy efficient
The document A Low Carbon Economic Strategy for Scotland states that 40% of CO₂ emissions are generated through the heating, lighting and running of buildings, and against that background includes Objective 7: Moving towards a low carbon built environment: Reducing carbon emission, through all phases of the building process, from design to construction, through operation and maintenance, within the new and existing building stock.

There is a significant gap between the design performance of buildings and the actual performance of buildings as built. Closing this gap is becoming increasingly important in moving towards zero carbon buildings.

Health, pollution and comfort
There is an interplay between energy use, comfort and health. Whereas previous models of ‘mean’ thermal comfort were derived from study of sealed environments, on the assumption that all individuals will experience the resultant environment in the same way, adaptive models of thermal comfort allow that the users might influence their environments by opening windows or altering their clothing in order to create the environment that suits their health, comfort and other needs at that time. This flexibility however, brings challenges in terms of efficient energy use, and relies on cooperation between users to avoid waste.

Wellbeing of people and community
Research into movement in cities and buildings confirms that linking planning to public health needs can support better health by creating walkable environments and by supporting “livability” within city centres. Scottish Government policy recognises that people are not designed to live isolated lives, and that building communities is the sustainable route forward, including by empowering people to allow them to take control of their environments. See Isle of Eigg case study by the Homes & Communities Agency.

Adaptability
Sustainable development includes the ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions, economic climate, demographics and other trends, by providing flexible use typologies for changing lifestyles and needs. Such flexibility can bring with it economic benefit as well as more integrated, socially rich, communities.
CONTEXT+LAYOUT

Landscape
Integrating infrastructure into landscapes is an ever increasingly important issue for Scotland, due to the drive for sustainable energy sources and the resultant implication on our uplands and coastal landscapes. In addition, landscape is a critical component of the context and layout of all but very few projects, and specifically in managing the change brought about by development.

A common recommendation at Design Forum is that early consideration of landscape as a source of inspiration; a retreat, a natural and biodiversity resource, and the day to day canvas of our lives, can provide opportunity for development, and assist in rooting proposals into the physical and cultural form of their setting.

Within the Creating Places, landscape is highlighted as shaping "our impressions and experience of place … potentially providing numerous benefits including wellbeing, stimulation of our senses, biodiversity, and opportunities for economic development".

In the absence of a specific landscape policy for Scotland, the policy context is described as the European Landscape Convention, which the Scottish Government signed up to in 2006 and Green Infrastructure, Design and Placemaking produced by the Scottish Government in 2011.

Consider climate and history
How architects respond to context and layout is fundamental, including the specifics of a place, physical, cultural, historical and over time. The revealing of the layers of a place allows an understanding of context, and informs how appropriate proposals might evolve.

All buildings are public – buildings are civic items
All buildings exist in a time context beyond their initial purpose, which purpose might easily evolve and change within the lifespan of the building fabric. Buildings make up the built environment, and hence those commissioning and legislating on buildings have a responsibility to that wider built environment.

A well designed building is not enough
A+DS are interested in individual buildings for the impact that building has on its context, and how the people who use it, walk around it, see it from a distance are impacted by its effect on the environment, rather than as a stand-alone object in its own right. Design Forum does not comment on stylistic issues other than their implication for that context.

Management of places needs continuity
Ownership and management of the space between buildings is critical to the success of place. No matter how well designed the space between buildings is, if there is no plan from the outset how this space will be managed and maintained, it will not deliver the environment intended.

BUILT FORM

Consider the transition between building and public realm
The interface between building and public realm is important in creating a setting appropriate to the building scale, function, activity, nature of users, frequency of use.

An obvious example of this would be the interface between a transport interchange and the surrounding public realm, and the need to accommodate large numbers at specific times, to be welcoming and support way finding, to be safe for a variety of user abilities, to accommodate people moving through, waiting, greeting, in a hurry, in daylight, in darkness, in all weather conditions.
All building types will have their own specific imperatives, but all must deal with the human needs for shelter, direction, safety, and the interface between inside and outside requires both practical and emotional needs to be met. Where there is lots of public activity, such as at entrances to major public buildings, courtyards or canopied space can be beneficial as thresholds to roads and busy streets, creating protected and, preferably sunlit, spaces.

**Activate frontages onto streets**
Active frontages mean people outside buildings being informed by activity inside them and vice versa. It means individuals in both environments being reassured that they are part of a society and community in a place.

Beneficial activities located on street-fronts are important for the success of the public realm, whether city streets, urban closes, mews or rural lane. In an urban context this can include attractions such as cafes, bars, and shopfronts. In a residential context this might simply involve kitchens, offices or front doors onto the street.

This is relevant at any scale from cities to villages. Where there is little public activity, such as in residential streets, windows and doorways located on the street and sized to allow direct access and good views into the street can bring people into the street and bring streets to life. This helps keep the street a safe, lively and attractive place. Where possible parking locations should be such that this important and mutually beneficial relationship is maintained.

**Design for adaptability – consider future uses**
When buildings and structures outlive their original purpose, with the exception of the most specialised of building forms, their design and construction should be strong enough to accommodate new uses. Consideration of the relationship between economic life, design life and construction life will result in a more sustainable proposition and efficient use of resources.

**Block design**
A mix of uses in any location provides 24 hour occupation, helping streets become safer and more attractive places throughout the day, during twilight hours and even at night to support town centres activities. In addition, maximising the positive benefits for passers-by can be achieved by providing shelter, allowing sunlight penetration and keeping views open whilst trying to avoid detrimental climatic effects of building size such as wind funnelling and overshadowing.

Public fronts and private backs of buildings, in residential buildings in particular, must have a suitable interface with the public realm to avoid insecure exposure of private boundaries or private spaces. Secondary schools, sports halls, and supermarkets are examples of building types that must be carefully handled in respect of avoiding long blank frontages to adjoining street and closes, making them less safe and enjoyable places to walk through. Containing areas such as service yards, goods yards and storage facilities in between buildings rather than on the street avoids detrimental impact of these areas on the experience of passers-by.

**Ancillary infrastructure design**
Limited parking in front of buildings can be beneficial to the street, bringing people and activity as in the historic High Street. Where possible, it is beneficial to keep car parking between buildings and within the urban block, avoiding adjoining private boundaries.

Car parks can be designed to be pleasant and attractive places in their own right, with good pedestrian and disabled accessibility, for example by limiting impact of large-scale car parking by breaking it up with landscape. Parking lots, to the USA model, act as a barrier severing neighbourhood streets from people arriving and using large attractions. They tend to cut off local people walking, cycling or arriving by public transport, and hence be detrimental to urban life, minimising the capacity for new investment to contribute to local streets and neighbourhoods. Preventing car parking becoming a barrier can provide vital activity and hence help economic regeneration.
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