

Local Authority Urban Design Forum

MEETING 1: CO-CHAIRLED BY DAVID THOMPSON (FIFE) + KIRSTY MACARI (ANGUS)

15 May 2013 | Lighthouse, Glasgow



INTRO

The Local Authority Urban Design Forum (LAUDF) was initiated to provide the opportunity for Local Authority practitioners with an involvement in urban design to gather regularly with colleagues from across Scotland. The idea is to create a network where practitioners can share ideas on current issues, learn from each other's experience and build up resources that everyone can benefit from.

An initial meeting in November 2012 established support for the forum and consensus around key principles. As a result of the discussions, a steering group of local authority participants developed an initiating document setting out the forum's proposed purpose, structure, objectives and programme.

This report covers the first full meeting of the Local Authority Urban Design Forum, which was attended by over 30 professionals from 23 local authorities and public bodies. Participants came from a range of professional backgrounds including planning, architecture, landscape architecture and urban design.

DESIGNING STREETS: WHAT NEXT?

CONTEXT + BRIEFING

The design of residential development was raised as an early issue that could benefit from group discussion at the November initiating meeting. The group are grateful to Stuart Watson (Senior Architect, Scottish Government), who agreed to update the forum on draft findings of research into the implementation of Designing Streets policy.

Issues arising from the research were presented under four categories: **Guidance:** Consistency of use across Scotland? Ease of access and comprehension. **Process:** Both internal communication between Local Authority departments and external between applicants and planning authorities. **Practice:** Potential for changes to Road Construction Consent processes and need for better understanding of SUDS. **Confidence:** Sharing knowledge. Assessment - How do you know if a scheme is any good?

DESIGNING STREETS: WHAT NEXT?

FACILITATED WORKSHOPS

The presentation was helpful in setting the context for the following workshop. Facilitated by steering group members, small groups of participants worked to draw out key issues from practical experiences of working with Designing Streets.

Using 'live' development proposals brought along by participants, each group discussed what worked well and what could work better about practices and processes followed. Feedback from the individual groups was complemented by wider group discussions. Shared issues are summarised below:

Guidance:

- Not everyone is aware of Designing Streets.
- Language is a barrier - keep it consistent.
- Perception Des Streets is a 'planning' policy (not transport).
- Compliance to guidance doesn't necessarily make good places in itself - needs critical understanding of issues.

Process

- Economic context and the development planning process - eg issues with neighbouring sites.
- Local plans should be more of a placemaking tool.
- Developer and LA interpretation of guidance can differ.
- Timing of consultation with Roads Dept critical.
- Benefits to involving all stakeholders early in process.
- Testing alternative proposals is useful.
- Partnership approach is essential.

Practice

- Encouraging that some developers have shown they can be progressive and RSL's recognised as more receptive.
- Standard housing product limits solutions.
- Lack of site analysis a problem.
- Early collaboration can secure principles.
- Landowner involvement often brings more resources and better solutions.

Confidence

- Confidence needed to advise on what should change.
- Keeping momentum going on new approaches - nb: lack of successful larger scale examples to refer to.



A POLICY ON
ARCHITECTURE AND
PLACEMAKING FOR SCOTLAND
PUBLIC CONSULTATION 2012



ARCHITECTURE POLICY

The group are grateful to Sandy Robinson (Principal Architect, Scottish Government) who presented on issues emerging from the consultation to revise Scotland's Architecture Policy. Some themes explored within his presentation included:

- What difference had the policy made.
- Wider contexts for the revised statement - a renewed emphasis on 'place', outcomes, economic arguments for good design, engagement, carbon reduction, health...
- Promotion of good design – e.g Awards.
- Potential for exemplar projects to promote good practice.
- Embedding design thinking in planning processes e.g charrettes.
- Corporate approach to placemaking within authorities.
- A strong evidence base to help change ways of thinking.

A facilitated discussion explored the following issues:

- Use of the policy in planning. Who uses it & how? *"people get planning consent, not architecture consent"*.
- Relationship with / embedding of design thinking in other associated policy such as SPP.
- the relationship between design and strategic planning - *"planning is design"*.
- Health and carbon reduction as key placemaking drivers - getting people walking and making better transport choices.
- Policy tensions - eg requirement for a *"generous supply of housing land"*, vs the right development in the right places.
- Thinking across local authority / political boundaries.
- Issues around promoting higher densities of development.
- Issues around the interpretation of 'design' - aesthetics vs *"the process by which the architecture occurs"*.
- Design expertise / confidence in planning authorities *"If you are making a judgement you are uncomfortable with, you probably shouldn't be making that judgement"*.
- Planning matters. Needs consistency and to keep raising the game. Design thinking should be advocated through the planning system to steer delivery of positive outcomes.
- On the desired policy impact. *"We'll know we've got there when we're talking about the buildings"*

SHARING EXPERIENCES

This slot is intended to provide participants the opportunity to share good practice examples or experiences.

PROMOTING DESIGN APPROACHES: KIRSTY MACARI

Kirsty shared her first hand experiences with the group of how she acted to communicate learning about 'better briefing' to a range of colleagues within her local authority.

CONTEXT: To communicate learning from Design Skills Symposium and to develop learning within the local authority on delivering charettes.

ACTION: A 1 day workshop was developed to help improve understanding within Angus Council around what a charette is, how it and other design approaches can be used in development proposals and consultations. Representatives from A+DS, Scottish Government, DPT Urban and Gillespies LLP presented.

LEARNING: Collaboration means better decisions, aspects of leadership promoted, changing embedded behaviours, giving confidence to people to try new approaches, participation, and briefing together for a common purpose. A+DS produced a 2 page summary of the workshop.

OUTCOMES: Putting the learning into practice. Angus Council Roads division are considering its use for the Arbroath Flood Preventions Scheme and Community Planning are considering how it might inform the Angus towns visioning process.

SUMMARY

This newsletter reflects the key learning points from the first full LAUDF meeting. The group concluded the meeting with a brief reflection on the afternoon's events and on how to proceed:

- Initial feedback welcomed the informative input from guest speakers.
- Emphasis was put on the value that had come through the rich discussions in the smaller groupwork sessions. More time for any such future discussions would be welcomed
- It was felt the 'show and tell' aspects worked well.
- Future involvement / attendance of government representatives would be welcomed.
- Keen to raise awareness of / for the forum with relevant organisations (eg RTPi, Scottish Planner).
- Appetite to focus on a single design related subject - in depth.
- Potential to raising awareness of key events through network.
- Possible topics for the next meeting included: Design in the development planning process; Design at appeal; Design in Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG); Graphics for Development Plans / SPG; Model Planning Policies.