

Local Authority Urban Design Forum

Chaired by Eily Webster (Moray Council) and Susan Fulton (East Ayrshire Council)

Meeting #14: Market-led Housebuilding | 29th January 2020 | The Lighthouse, Glasgow

The Local Authority Urban Design Forum (LAUDF) is a network to share ideas on current built environment issues. Open to local authority staff, they meet twice a year to learn from each other's experience.

This newsletter covers LAUDF 14, held on the 29th of January, 2020. The theme of **Market-led Housing** was chosen by the steering group and an agenda was then developed by the co-chairs Eily Webster (Moray Council) and Susan Fulton (East Ayrshire Council), with input from Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS). The forum was attended by over 52 professionals representing 22 different local authorities and public bodies.

Our Neighbourhoods

The session began with everyone sharing a feature about the neighbourhood they grew up in. This exercise was intended to give members a chance to reflect over what designing neighbourhoods means to participants as people, before approaching the theme as professionals.

It was important to move away from a detached view of major housing developments. Members highlighted issues with car usage, the need for encouraging spaces for children to play in and rethinking density in suburban areas.

These discussion points were split into four key categories, Playtime, Design, Connectivity and Biodiversity. As set out below, these categories grouped positive and negative features members' experienced in their neighbourhoods and ideas for the future. In summing up, the co-chairs connected this instinctive understanding of what makes a place special with the need to rethink what we demand of our market-led housing developers. The co-chairs highlighted how we are already making those step changes and hope we can collectively work together on making better neighbourhoods.

Playtime

Playing freely - being able to play (ball games!) in the street – too many cars now

Informal play space – no barrier to access, sledging in the village green, freedom to explore

Proximity to parks – easier to play, playing on bikes

Playing outside – overlooked in safe informal places

Sense of community – eyes on the street

Playpark – visits on the way home from the school

Design

"Living in a new town was great"

Low car usage & safe streets
Good social mix

Scottish Special HA – green spaces to the front with access roads to the rear

"Grew up in a council housing estate – no car ownership – so freedom to walk about"

"Former mining town with a mix of early 20th Century miners' cottages high density and newer generic massmarket housing as a result of the proximity to Edinburgh"

Connectivity

Informal paths and former railways – great connectivity between towns

Good transport links

Connectivity to friends and family

Accessible – schools / parks / coast / town centre

Ability to walk to the small village school and shop

All main facilities within 10-15-minute walking distance

Could walk to school

Cul-de-sac – no through route – safe area to play in

Biodiversity

Living on a farm – growing our own vegetables, green space and being close to farm animals

Greenery - mature trees and planting in private gardens

Nature in my garden – pine martens, birds. Grew oranges and cultivated them

Cul-de-sac – no open space!

Individual house designs with large gardens

Acknowledgement of the local context

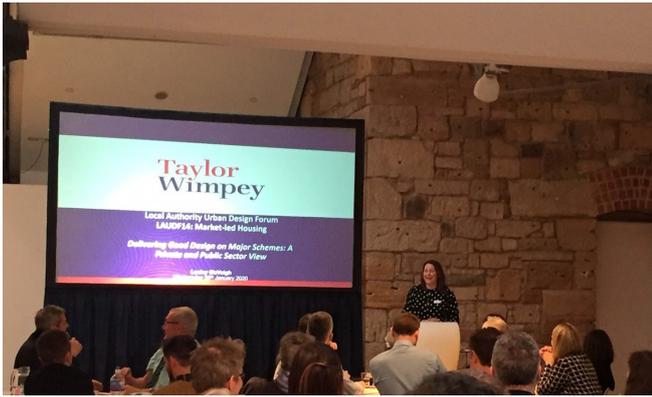
A modern example: The Helix – walkable area and good for young children

Highlights from the group session on good design from their neighbourhoods growing up



Daniel McKendry presenting at A&DS at LAUDF14

PRESENTATIONS



Lesley McVeigh presenting at LAUDF 14



Ediston Homes and Bellway Homes (left , right)

A Private and Public Sector View on Good Design in Housing

Lesley McVeigh – Taylor Wimpey

Lesley has experience working on major housing developments within a local authority setting as well as in her current role at [Taylor Wimpey](#). She discussed design codes, effective developer contributions policy and the effects of the housing crisis on property developers decision making.

Similar organisational governance challenges are found in both the private and public sectors; departments operate in isolation and miscommunication is an issue. She gave five key principles toward a more positive relationship between the public and private sector. Those principles are:

- **Willingness:** Developers and officers should speak to each other more openly to overcome the mutual lack of understanding of each party's concerns. Somewhere between revealing and listening, there is understanding.
- **Trust and mutual respect:** Good relationships are about supporting not carrying.
- **Effective communication:** Protocols, regularity and set roles can be important. Agreeing priorities is important too. Sometimes, she said, the claim is made that 'there's nothing for kids' but this can be the result of local authorities not wanting maintenance burdens whilst developers claim to want to sell properties with overlooked public space. Officers should come out and ask volume builders what they can deliver for the place and community.
- **Empowerment:** There has been a stereotype of 'planner-bashing' since the 1960s. Both the private and public sectors must ask 'how can we help each other deliver good design on major schemes?'

Lesley's talk emphasised the similarities between planners both private and public, and hoped her points could improve decision making around design.

A Joined-Up Approach to Place-based Policies

Grant Baxter – Clackmannanshire Council

[Clackmannanshire Council](#) recently introduced measures to raise design standards in housing development. Grant explained how his small team of planners influenced place quality through a joined-up approach with roads engineers, supported by strong place-based policies and guidance.

The council moved away from 'prescriptive' policymaking for design since the launch of [Designing Streets in 2010](#). The [2015 Local Development Plan](#) and Placemaking Supplementary Guidance gave a local focus to policy. [National Roads Guidance \(2017\)](#) paved the way for fresh approaches to roads design.

Grant shared where policies were applied to tackle recurring design issues, leading to better layouts, streetscapes and landscaping. Changing housing types and materials was harder, but adaptations were achieved in places. Many new developments have narrower roads, driveways to the sides of properties and much higher densities.

Feedback is positive from communities too. A recent survey of residents in two developments used the [Place Standard tool](#). Tellingly, more positive scores and feedback were noted for 'social contact' and 'identity' from the development which emphasised streetscape, landscape and shared public realm.

The remaining challenges with place-led design and achieving site distinctiveness included coordinating with their roads colleagues on flexibility of design

“The layout encourages neighbours to look out for each other”...

“Drivers are more aware of other users and are more cautious”...

Residents of new development.

and gaining certainty on road adoption policy. Seeking upfront involvement of landscape professionals involved as well as better coordination with agencies around greenspace and SuDs were also discussed.

Grant concluded on the part we play as professionals in making decisions with design implications. He stressed thinking beyond our roles and resisting standards led design, creating 'a new kind of generic.'

PRESENTATIONS



A neighbourhood centre at Wantage & Grove



Public open space at Countesswells two years after delivery

The 'Master Developer' Approach to Market-led Housebuilding

Chris Gray – Optimised Environments

Working with two examples of [OPEN's](#) work, Chris set out the 'Master Developer' approach to housebuilding. As 'guardians of placemaking' the master developer treats each site differently. They think long term about maintenance, are proactive with community engagement and control the common areas until estate management structures are properly established.

A flagship of Aberdeen City's masterplan zoning process, [Countesswells](#) was a key example of OPEN's approach. OPEN led public consultations early on and the consultations helped identify major green spaces. Along with SUDs, the majority of greenspaces were then located outside of the development parcels.

Landscape stewardship is important for resident wellbeing as well as profitability. Early residents would benefit from 'complete' greenspaces, and developers report finding it easier to sell the properties.

The smaller site, [Wantage & Grove in Oxfordshire](#), was also covered. Working with the pre-existing mature trees onsite, the developers built public squares around them. These trees made the common spaces pleasant to use from the first day of habitation.

The talk noted shifts within the landscape design sector, pointing to an acknowledgement of the current climate emergency ([Landscape Declare](#)), the need to design for health & wellbeing, and a growing pool of knowledge around housing design in the UK (seen in the findings of the [National Housing Audit for England by Place Alliance](#)).



Open space illustration of Countesswells

The talk finished with the '[ladder of place quality](#)' which gave five principles for local authorities to influence good design outcomes. These were:

1. Getting the basics of good design right: ensuring design values are properly considered in the process and the materials are sensitive to the area context.
2. Having a landscape-led approach which thinks about long term stewardship of the estate.
3. Getting roads team support on the site design early on.
4. Don't be afraid of density – 56 homes per acres were the best quality in Place Alliance's National Housing Audit.
5. Using genuinely site-specific guidance that values the local context.

The 'Master Developer' approach needs professionals who understand design, with a holistic attitude to placemaking and stewardship.



Countesswells aerial view

LEARNING EXCHANGE SESSIONS



Cammo Fields Site Plan



Discussion of Quality Audits

Cammo Fields

Nicola Orr & Elaine Campbell
City of Edinburgh Council

The [650 home development, Cammo Fields](#) took a landscape-led approach with green, blue and active travel infrastructure framing the scheme. Located on a greenfield release site from the [Local Development Plan](#), the site is around 28 hectares and features several existing opportunities and constraints including scheduled monuments, the Airport Development Restriction Zone and Bughtlin Burn, which edges the site.

Led by a consortium of CALA Homes, David Wilson, Barrett Homes, the scheme has benefitted from officer input and three rounds of A&DS Design Advice Panel.

Key features of the development's green infrastructure include two multifunctional transecting linear parks which transect the site. These were principally formed to maintain the views to Cammo Tower and Mauseley Hill to the east, (as protected within the 2016 LDP and site brief). Street trees mark the primary road within the development and along Maybury Road to soften this busy urban edge.

Despite strong encouragement from the Council's Planners and Landscape Officers and biodiversity improvements, Bughtlin Burn was not re-meandered due to land-ownership issues. The burn will remain channelised, but a greater area of open space will now act as the functional floodplain-as a green buffer alongside the development.

Other green, blue and active features included porous paving, rain gardens, growing spaces, cycle paths and sustainable urban drainage areas. The Airport Development Restriction Zone prevented features such as open water or bushes with berries to prevent an increase in birdlife. New and enhanced active travel routes connect the new development with the surrounding communities and across Maybury Road.

The development achieves a density of 36 units per hectare with a mix of housing typologies. Alongside the green and blue infrastructure, non-standard types of housing such as the colony style apartments, proposed by CALA Homes, exhibit good design practice of the site.

Quality Audits

Keith Henderson - Moray Council

The SAQP award-winning [quality auditing process at Moray](#) has improved design and placemaking in new housing developments.

Developed to tackle recurring design issues, efficiently, it scores three broad themes of buildings, movement and open space; using 12 question-based categories and a traffic light scoring system. Audits are facilitated by Development Planning, with participation from Development Management case officers alongside, transport, housing and flooding colleagues and Scottish Natural Heritage. Audits are typically undertaken on developments of ten units or more.

The multidisciplinary approach ensures up-front alignment across departments. The process takes time, but by bringing all corporate interests together early, it reduces time spent otherwise on multiple individual assessments and irons out issues for individual departments upfront. After several years of operation, the approach is well understood by applicants. The audit informs early discussions, helping officers articulate issues and outline actions to mitigate them.

Keith shared several case studies to illustrate the process. Site plans shown after the audit have better embedding of greenspace and landscaping from the outset and improved delivery of landscape, layouts and connections in new development. Impacts on character and identity have been harder to achieve with challenges in getting changes to standard house models and materials.

While applicants and developers are keen to avoid 'red' marks, they are less concerned about an average amber. An adapted version of the Quality Audit will be based on a red or green assessment only, strengthening impact.

Elected members are supportive of the Quality Audit and find the full-colour RAG tables in committee reports useful. This may have contributed to a recent decision to refuse a development with multiple amber ratings.

The process is part of a range of interdepartmental measures Moray uses to promote good placemaking including Placemaking as a principle LDP policy, strategic briefs for housing sites within the LDP and Local Authority lead masterplans for key sites.



GLASGOW'S HOUSING STRATEGY

Glasgow's Housing Strategy for 2017 to 2022

Build to Rent Models of Housing Emma Morton - Glasgow City Council

Emma shared Glasgow City Council's ambition to re-populate the centre and ensure liveable and sustainable neighbourhoods that promote health, wellbeing and social cohesion. Her discussion featured Build-to-rent (BTR), which is a new housing model. Planners are exploring BTR as a method of increasing the residential population in and around the city centre, to grow activity and galvanise the city centre community.

BTR provides a choice of housing types and sizes for different tenants needs and age demographics; provides professionally managed apartments with a high quality of internal amenity and services such as gyms; co-working spaces; cinemas; bars and coffee shops. BTR promotes long term investment and stewardship; supporting regeneration programmes in areas of vacant land.

Emma Morton talked through a range of BTR projects currently in development; looking at the opportunity and challenges posed by this type of housing. At present, there is no specific planning policy on the BTR and therefore it falls under general residential policy and guidance.

The projects coming forward are high density. This approach challenges how we increase density whilst respecting the local character, identity, context; and the building datum's established by the historic context of the city centre. In areas of urban renewal, the challenges are providing the right level of outdoor amenity and reviewing the environmental performance of the architecture and the impact of tall buildings on the public realm, in terms of wind patterns and sunlight. Furthermore, we are considering the design lifespan of the building and the impact on residents if the accommodation was to convert to mainstream residential further down the line.

Members asked questions and discussed issues around green infrastructure, impact on general infrastructure and if the Build-to-Rent model could be used in more suburban settings.



Queen's Quay site illustration

Place and Design Panels Ashley Mullen – West Dunbartonshire Council

Ashley introduced the forum to the new design codes work being undertaken by West Dunbartonshire Place & Design Panel. Focussing on [Queen's Quay in Clydebank](#), Ashley presented the council's design codes for the site, [currently under consultation](#).

[The place and design panel](#) is made up of experts ranging from architects to artists and planners to heritage experts. Every month, and on an ad hoc basis, they meet to advise on key developments and place policies across the council area.

Soon to be open to consultation, the design code set out case studies of good practice, materials guidance and master planning for the site, the codes layout housing, 'node areas' for local services and district heating.

Pragmatically, the codes have been designed so that developers can negotiate on aspects of them, avoiding being too prescriptive. However, learning from recent developments along the Clyde that already look weather-beaten, so strong emphasis has been placed on the building materials.

The design codes were keen to move away from sculptures of the sites industrial past seen in similar regeneration projects, instead focussing on the character of different quarters of the site, while complimenting the Clydebank vernacular. The result has been a site that prioritises sustainable development.

Forum members asked if this approach could be done with planning guidance instead, and Ashley explained how the approach of the codes gave the council a say in the site's stewardship along with 'setting out a stall' for developers.

In advising members how to make sure local design panels were successful, she stressed the importance of getting members onside early on and using a panel monitoring board to keep members accountable.

LEARNING EXCHANGE & MORE INFO



Countesswells Masterplanning



Illustration of Dunbeg Phase 3, where A&DS provided design advice

Masterplanning Process

Nigel McDowell – Aberdeen Council

Aberdeenshire suffered 30,000 job losses with the oil crash in 2015. This means that 'build it and they will sell' is no longer true. A long term approach to stewardship is now prioritised by the council.

[Masterplans are now produced by the developer as part of the pre-application discussions for anything over 50 homes.](#)

The process is similar in idea to Simplified Development Zones (SDZ), Simplified Planning Zones (SPZ), and submitted Planning Permission in Principle (PIP), but far more detailed. The process requires 3D plans, a spatial framework and planning briefs. An average masterplan document is 12 pages long.

The Council and officers adopt these master plans as Supplementary Guidance to be consulted on, with a dedicated officer for the project, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the developer to deliver the site.

Using [Rowett North Conference centre](#) as a case study, the council floated its property on the market at a time when prices were low but this proved successful in bringing in investment. Delivered by Henry Boot, the Council provided an in-house project manager.

It is essentially a large shed with a strong design which is true to the original 2D plan and key images from elsewhere. The development lead with landscape and the urban design of the public realm. The housing element comprises of basic house types with varying elevations.

Elsewhere the [council's transportation plan](#) includes rail halt location, an airport bus link, and 2000 new homes. Coordination is crucial to carrying these developments forward.

Finally, colour is important to design. Barretts have used different 'shades of grey' on their standard house types. This is an improvement on the typical white render facades, commonplace in Aberdeen, and a sustainable alternative to Chinese granite. For Aberdeen, rectifying these historical design issues is important.

Housing Advice

Daniel McKendry – Architecture & Design Scotland

Danny talked about A&DS Pre-Design Advice for Housing Service. A&DS can offer support to local authorities (and housing associations) at the outset of planning housing delivery. The service aims to promote placemaking and build the conditions for better design. Support can include: helping a diverse range of stakeholders to develop a shared brief, help to public sector clients to attract the right partners or skills, and help to develop guidance for a site or organisation. Contact Gillian.Black@ads.org.uk to find out more.

Soapbox Session and Sum up

Members highlighted councils across the UK building innovative housing projects. [Building London Planning Awards](#) shortlisted several key projects, including [Kidbrooke Village](#) and [Bampton Estate in Lewisham](#). The [Stirling Prize winning Goldsmiths Street in Norwich](#), the largest Passivhaus scheme in the UK, was also praised. Good design should consider the mental health of its residents, the play spaces and distinctiveness of a site.

The summary brought back the themes discussed in the icebreaker session and compared them with lessons learned from the day's discussion. Co-chair Eily Webster queried where other members had lodged an appeal on design grounds, and members shared positive cases. Emphasis was placed on the effectiveness of front-loading the design process.

More on LAUDF

Forum members can register with the [LAUDF's KnowledgeHub page](#) to view presentations from all our events. It is your site to contact forum members, start discussions or post information between meetings.

LAUDF is a network for all public sector staff working in urban design. The next full meeting of LAUDF is proposed for winter 2020. Topic suggestions are invited via our [feedback form](#). The steering group meet every quarter basis and are keen to hear from anyone interested in contributing to developing future meetings. Contact Tim.Moss@ads.org.uk with any LAUDF enquiries.