

**Architecture &  
Design Scotland**

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

# Annual Review 2024





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# A year of change and reflection

At Architecture and Design Scotland, we believe design is crucial for navigating issues and creating a more sustainable and equitable Scotland.

Our work is grounded in a core idea: good design, informed by collaboration and understanding of place, improves lives and contributes to a more resilient nation. This publication highlights our activities and commitment to promoting design excellence and its positive impact on Scottish communities.

In 2024, we spotlighted diverse perspectives from across the sector in our Value of Design campaign, supported inclusive and accessible design in Scotland’s health and learning estates, and moved forward pioneering work in digital innovation and ‘PlaceTech’. We engaged with communities, local authorities, and key agencies across the country, fostering collaboration to address the complex and interconnected challenges of climate change, town centre regeneration, sustainable housing, and more.

Throughout the year, we informed national policies such as the Climate Adaptation Strategy and the Flood Resilience Strategy, and through our project work we influenced the design of homes, schools and healthcare facilities across the country. We also relocated to the Edinburgh Futures Institute, a hub for innovation and collaboration. This move strengthens our connections with researchers and cross-sector partners, enhancing our work in design and placemaking.

Recognising the importance of local action through ‘place-based approaches’ was a key theme in 2024. We worked with a range of partners to understand the unique needs, challenges, and aspirations of communities across Scotland, and how these all contribute to the bigger picture. Our local development planning work led the way in supporting collaborative, place-based plan preparation, providing tools and resources for evidence gathering, with learnings shared across the country through workshops and events.

Our Climate Action Towns project demonstrated the power of community-led climate action, providing valuable learning and a toolkit for national rollout.

Through our Place Forum events and new podcast, we explored design’s contribution to nature-based solutions, recognising biodiversity’s vital role in a healthy planet and its importance for national wellbeing.

The need to adapt to a changing climate, protect and restore biodiversity, and build better homes has never been more pressing. With these challenges in mind, in late 2024 we welcomed a series of recommendations from the Scottish Government, following a review of our organisation. These recommendations are pivotal to our future, specifically outlining a sharpened focus on architecture, urban design, and landscape issues. The strategic direction will enhance our ability to proactively address Scotland’s evolving challenges and ensure our work aligns with national priorities.

In 2025, with this renewed focus, we will embark on the next phase of our commitment to design excellence, working more closely with Scotland’s design and architecture sectors and supporting best practice. Until then, this annual review celebrates the many ways that we, alongside our incredible partners and stakeholders, worked to champion design’s value and shape better places and communities across Scotland in 2024. We invite you to read on to discover our stories of design in action.





# Sharing the Value of Design

As Scotland’s champion for architecture and design, our job is to highlight the power and value of design. In 2024, we launched a campaign to do exactly that.

At Architecture and Design Scotland, we believe that the value of design is vast, and that good design can be interpreted in many ways.

In the 2024 phase of this campaign, we asked 21 professionals – architects, designers, urban planners, other industry leaders and our colleagues – to share their examples of good design and what the ‘value of design’ means to them. We also launched our new Value of Design podcast featuring insightful conversations on best practices with leading figures from the worlds of design, architecture and the public sector.

Overall, we heard that good design plays a crucial role in creating vibrant, welcoming, and functional spaces that foster community connections. Experts shared how thoughtful design can transform places into accessible, people-centred environments, such as Glasgow canal’s Claypits Nature Reserve and the outdoor spaces of V&A Dundee. And it’s not just about aesthetics – good design is holistic, addressing practical needs and emotional well-being.

Collaboration was a key theme from the campaign, with contributors highlighting the importance of designers, communities, and experts of other professions coming together to shape inclusive, meaningful spaces that reflect the true needs of the people who use them.

Many interviewees also emphasised the vital role that design plays in addressing environmental impact, with sustainable, climate-conscious designs reducing energy consumption and promoting eco-friendly practices.

Ultimately, design is about creative problem-solving. It is about using innovation and collaboration to solve complex challenges and improve lives. From climate-responsive designs to community-led projects, good design is a powerful tool for transformation.



## Value of Design podcast

In this first episode “Designing for Lasting Benefits”, our Director of Design Heather Claridge, and Director of Landscape Architecture at Land Use Consultancy (LUC) Duncan McLean, explore the Hamiltonhill Claypits Local Nature Reserve in Glasgow.



## Value of Design campaign

Value of Design campaign: how design can improve everyday spaces, buildings and places. Through this series of videos, leading professionals from the architecture and design sector in Scotland share what the value of design means to them.





# Designing for a digital world and place

With digital technology playing an increasing role in planning and placemaking, our work explores how data-driven innovation can support local authorities in making more informed decisions.

In 2024, we engaged in a programme of work aimed at supporting digital innovation in the context of planning and placemaking. This included the Place-Tech Lab project, initiated under the Scottish Government's Digital Planning Strategy 2020.

This coincided with our relocation to the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI), a move which further expanded our opportunity to explore new partnerships and academic links in areas such as data-driven innovation and key National Planning Framework 4(NPF4) policy themes, including 20-Minute Neighbourhoods and Local Living.

In partnership with the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) and infrastructure consultancy Ramboll, a 'Place-Tech' Lab pilot project was commissioned – involving Glasgow City Council, Perth & Kinross Council, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – with the aim of enhancing existing digital tools and processes to assist local authorities in achieving their policy goals.

Three pilot projects experimented by visualising data through a variety of technologies including Geographic Information Systems, 3D visualisation techniques, digital twins and artificial intelligence. For Glasgow City Council, data analytics were used to model future population growth and its impact on social infrastructure in the city centre. Data insights were used to inform the development of a cultural quarter in Perth City Centre following the opening of Perth Museum. Construction pipeline data was brought together to assist in managing a range of infrastructure projects including renewables and port improvements in the Western Isles.

## Place Tech Lab Summary report

We published a report alongside SFT on the pilot project in November 2024. Work in the pipeline includes the development of a 20-Minute Neighbourhood mapping tool, which will combine spatial and data analytics to assess key neighbourhood characteristics. There is also scope to further explore the role of digital innovation in place design and delivery.







## Designing in a changing climate

With extreme weather events affecting our lives more frequently, it is becoming apparent that, even in Scotland, the climate is changing.

Our Climate Action Towns project showed us that the majority of people in our towns are keen to act, but don't know where or how to start. Through a three-year process of co-design, we worked with community groups in nine small towns across Scotland to unlock potential for place-based climate action. In March 2024 we outlined this process in our report and video series, How to embed climate actions in your place.

We learnt how community groups in Campbeltown began to work better together to deliver the climate actions they identified for their Community Led Action Plan; how Stevenston's aspirations to adapt to the changing climate, through addressing coastal erosion and improving biodiversity, brought community groups and the local authority to act at different scales; and how intergenerational discussions and workshops in Blackburn identified climate-focused actions for the Local Place Plan.

In March we also launched the Climate Action Towns toolkit, a collation of the process and tools we used in the Climate Action Towns project. While the toolkit includes some new information, its main focus is to consolidate existing knowledge and expertise, while taking a pragmatic and considered approach to embedding that in a place.

We have been building on the learning from the Climate Action Towns project in our Learning Locally project – exploring how the learning estate can act on the changing climate while representing a sustainable learning setting. Moving forward, we see the topics of sustainable architecture, design and retrofit as integral to how our sector responds to the changing climate.



### Climate Action Town toolkit

This toolkit takes you through the process used in the Climate Action Towns project, breaking it down into manageable steps. You can follow the complete process or jump to a specific stage. The toolkit includes printable tools for you to download and links to other useful resources.

### How to embed Climate Action in your place

This report and series of short videos collates our learning from the Climate Action Towns project. We worked with nine towns across Scotland to co-design priorities, identify opportunities, build capacity, and enable collaborations.



### Taking ownership: Climate Action Towns' ongoing stories

In this blog we caught up with partners in four of the Climate Action Towns – Holytown, Stevenston and Annan and Blackburn. The towns we hear from represent differing scale of climate action and stages of climate action.



# Designing for local living

## Spatial Development Planning: place-based approaches

With new policies shaping the future of planning in Scotland, we explored collaborative, place-based approaches to evidence gathering and local development planning.

In 2024, the Key Agencies Group (KAG) advanced its Collaborative Local Development Plan support, led by Architecture and Design Scotland. This initiative aimed to tackle the challenges and opportunities of implementing the ambitious new policies outlined in the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and Local Development Planning Guidance.

Focusing on a place-based approach to evidence gathering and reporting, we worked with other key agencies and pilot authorities to deliver innovative workshops, marking the first time that council departments and agencies jointly mapped and analysed place-based evidence together.

The year began with a shared learning event, developed in collaboration with the pilot authorities, the Improvement Service and KAG, the event attracted over 200 participants. The event enabled the agencies and authorities to share their experiences on the ‘Place-Based Local Development Plans - Evidence Reporting’ support.

Throughout the year, we collaborated with the pilot local authorities and KAG on area-specific workshops, including sessions for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Barra, Vatersay, South Uist), Dundee Council (Maryfield) and Highland Council (Caithness), with detailed reports shared to all participants.

Towards the end of the year, we further developed Place Skills for Plan Making, a suite of resources designed to help planning teams across Scotland adopt a collaborative, place-based approach to preparing new-style Local Development Plans. The resource guides the reader through basic placemaking principles, practical steps, templates. To wrap up 2024, the team designed an internal reflection session with KAG to review progress made to date and identify lessons learned.



### Place skills for plan-making

This resource is developed to support local authorities. The latest addition, Snapshot 4, sets out how to collectively map local area evidence, as well as how to plan, facilitate and report on workshops to engage others in mapping evidence for key local areas when preparing an evidence report.

### Harnessing the power of design in development planning

Our colleague shares insight into the value design can bring when working collaboratively to gather evidence for Local Development Plans. Supported by key examples, the blog illustrates the value of design as a way of thinking and a powerful problem-solving tool.



### Shared learning event

This event, which aimed to help planning authorities meet national policy ambitions at a local level, focused on the benefits, barriers and challenges of taking a place-based, collaborative approach to Local Development Plan preparations.

## Town centre regeneration

Bringing people back to Scotland’s town centres is key to regeneration. In 2024, we helped to showcase innovative, collaborative projects that drive investment, influence policy, and highlight the role of design in creating vibrant, sustainable places to live.

In early 2024, we hosted a series of Town Centre Living and Investment Roadshows – five events across four locations (Perth, Paisley, Inverness, Falkirk, and an online session focusing on Rural and Island areas). The Roadshows attracted over 200 participants representing councils, community organisations, improvement districts, architects, town planners, and housing associations.

The collaborative events – delivered alongside Scotland’s Towns Partnership, Scottish Futures Trust and the Scottish Land Commission – included study tours, partner presentations, and interactive world café sessions. A wide range of over 25 exemplary town centre living projects and case studies from across Scotland were showcased, with findings from the event reported back to Scottish Ministers via the Town Centre Action Plan Forum.

Post-roadshow, we shared learning on the Town Centre Living agenda through blogs highlighting the value of design in Scotland’s town centre housing regeneration. Additional insights came through a joint study with



Scottish Futures Trust, which further explored private sector engagement through a series of interviews with development industry leaders.

In April we concluded our work with the Scottish Government Digital Place Team, Scottish Futures Trust and Perth & Kinross Council on the PlaceTech Innovation Lab project to enhance Perth's Cultural Quarter with digital solutions. Further information on how this innovative use of data supports improved placemaking can be found in the [‘Digital’ section of this report](#).



### Town Centre Living and Investment Roadshows

The article features selected projects and practitioners from the Town Centre Living and Investment Roadshows conducted in February and March 2024 and led jointly by Architecture and Design Scotland with national partner agencies Scotland’s Towns Partnership, Scottish Futures Trust and Scottish Land Commission.

### Insights from private sector engagement

This study engaged with private sector housing developers to discuss the merits of town centre living, opportunities for growth and the barriers to successful delivery. Carried out on behalf of Scotland’s Town Centre Action Plan (TCAP) Forum the study supports and develops findings from the Town Centre Living Roadshows.



### Place Forum 5: What next for place?



In September, we hosted the forum ‘What Next for Place?’ at Glasgow University. Leading practitioners and academics shared valuable insights on the power that design, creativity and collaboration has to provide positive outcomes for people, the places we inhabit, and the planet. The event, which included interactive walks to three inspirational place-based projects in Glasgow, concluded with a workshop exploring new ways of working that can nurture place meaning, strengthen place partnerships through creativity, and design for lasting benefits.

Photos taken from the What Next for Place? conference at the University of Glasgow.





# Designing for learning

We believe inclusive design and place-based thinking are of national importance when exploring how to maximise opportunities across the Learning Estate.

The focus of our work within Scotland’s Learning Estate this year has been rooted in inclusive and accessible approaches to the design of teaching and learning spaces.

Reflecting on past programmes, we have developed resources and case studies to share best practices, innovative ideas and key design considerations that can help when thinking about educational facilities across Scotland.

Challenging the idea of what learning spaces are beyond the school gates, we launched the Outdoor Learning Hub –a partnership with Queen Margaret University – and developed a new strand of work called Learning Locally. This aims to build on lessons from our Climate Action Towns project and develop methodologies to support the learning estate to be more climate resilient. Starting with a pilot project in West Lothian, we will work with three primary schools that will lead the way in delivering the Scottish Government’s Learning for sustainability policy.

Also in 2024, we have utilised innovative technology by researching how digital planning could help support decisions made when focussing on schools and their proximity to residential areas. Using a wide range of data analytics and scenario planning, we explored various options that will help achieve national policy ambitions locally.

Moving forward, we are building on our research with the Craighalbert Centre in Cumbernauld on inclusive and accessible learning spaces. We are eager to adapt the lessons learnt and design considerations beyond an early years setting, working with partners to achieve a more holistic view of the key issues.



L to R Heather Claridge (Director of Design, A&DS), Graeme Dey MSP (Minister for Higher and Further Education), Patrick Boxall (QMU Education Lecturer) and Karen Morrison (Operations Officer, NatureScot), pictured outside the Howff



**Inclusive learning spaces: lessons from Craighalbert**  
This resource walks you through general scenarios you find in learning spaces and highlights all the ways you can tackle accessibility by being more inclusive in your design from the outset, showcasing how design thinking can enhance children’s experiences. Launching in spring 2025.

**School grounds ideas kit**  
Schools increasingly recognise the benefits of outdoor learning, including improved health, creativity, and academic achievement. Based on learnings from our work with schools and local authorities, we have developed an ideas kit that offers a practical guide to creating engaging and inspiring outdoor learning spaces. Launching in spring 2025.



**Learning Places Scotland Conference**  
We supported the Learning Places Scotland Conference, focusing on maximising learning estate opportunities. The Outdoor Learning Hub project with Queen Margaret University won the ‘Inspiring Learning Spaces’ award at the Learning Places Scotland Conference Awards 2024.

**Shared Learning Events**  
We co-delivered three Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) shared learning events with the Scottish Futures Trust, which were attended by 300 participants, including local authorities and speakers. Highlights included sessions on completed LEIP projects, [construction-embodied carbon](#), and accessible design at the Learning Places Conference.





# Designing for health and wellbeing

We believe that through good design, healthcare environments can enhance patient experience and support improved health outcomes in Scotland.

In 2024, our work supporting Scotland's Health Estate through the NHSScotland Design Assessment Process (NDAP) adapted to significant changes in the healthcare sector. Following the Scottish Government's announcement in December 2023 that all major NHS building projects would be paused until at least 2026, our role shifted to helping NHS Boards conclude projects already in development.

We provided support for NHS Highland and their Caithness service re-design project, as well as NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Radionuclide Dispensary project. We also continued support for NHS Lanarkshire's Monklands Replacement Project (MRP).

We worked closely with NHS Scotland Assure – our co-delivery partners for NDAP – to review the assessment process and identify potential improvements. We are working closely with Scottish Government to ensure this aligns with other updates for healthcare developments, and we hope to pilot a refreshed NDAP approach in 2025.

Beyond NHS projects, we provided further support to Capability Scotland's 'Our Inclusive Community Project,' a proposed specialised care facility at Bertha Park in Perth, which we were initially involved in 2022.

Finally, recognising the long-term impact of good design on healthcare outcomes, we are eager to gather insights from a selection of health projects we have contributed to over the years. These insights will allow us to explore how effective design and collaborative processes can enhance healthcare facilities and outcomes, improve patient experiences and quality of care, optimise operational efficiency, and shape future conversations around design and healthcare.



View of the building at night. NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Radionuclide Department.



## NHSScotland Design Assessment Process (NDAP)

In 2024 we continued in our role in supporting NHS health boards through the NDAP, as well as co-creating a working group with a view to improving the process. Visit our website to learn more about our NDAP support offer.

## Our Inclusive Community Project

In collaboration with architects Anderson Bell + Christie, we co-produced and facilitated a workshop with clients and user groups of Capability Scotland's Bertha Park project, reviewing design proposals against the principles set out in a Design Statement established during our initial involvement in 2022.



## Also in health and wellbeing...



## Place Forum 4: Preventative Design

"How do you create healthy and sustainable places that support people's wellbeing by taking a preventative approach?"

Our Place Forum in June focused on 'preventative design' as a holistic, collaborative, and proactive approach to anticipating challenges and meeting the future needs of sustainable places. This event's key themes of creativity, community wellbeing, sustainability and collaboration were explored through presentations about dementia-friendly housing design; neighbourhoods adapting to residents' evolving needs, and communities with health, the environment and social responsibility at their core.



# Showcasing innovation in architecture and design

(Top) Student submission by Briony Potter and Isabelle Warren. (Bottom) A *Fragile Correspondence* exhibition at V&A Dundee.



In 2024, we continued our strong international connections as part of the Scotland + Venice partnership and by celebrating and supporting emerging talent through the annual A&DS and RIAS Student Awards for Architecture.

## A *Fragile Correspondence*

Scotland + Venice showcases the best of Scottish architecture and design practice at the Venice Architecture Biennale. In 2024, *A Fragile Correspondence* – Scotland’s 2023 submission at the biennale – returned home, opening at the V&A Dundee in November.

The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through three Scottish landscapes. Across the Highlands, Islands and Lowlands, it maps a collection of creative responses by architects, artists and writers. Exploring the relationships between land, architecture and language, the exhibition seeks new ways of working in connection with the land, rather than simply upon it.

Curated by Architecture Fringe, -ism magazine, and /other, *A Fragile Correspondence* was commissioned by the Scotland + Venice partnership as a collateral event for the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2023.



Entrance to the exhibition at V&A Dundee

## A&DS and RIAS Scottish Student Awards for Architecture

The annual awards bring together the five schools of architecture in Scotland, celebrating the continuing high standards of Scottish architecture and ensuring that construction professionals and the public can enjoy the creativity and vision of Scotland’s future architects.

The winning projects were announced in October at the Andy MacMillan Memorial Lecture. They included innovative ideas and beautiful drawings on subjects such as accessible and inclusive urban green spaces, the uses and potential of biomaterials, architecture interventions to provides community spaces, and lots more.



Councillor Holly Bruce in conversation with Jude Barber



## Our year in numbers

**27,500** online video views

**151,300** social media impressions

**138,400** website page views

**23,200** users engaged on website

**27** local authorities engaged

## Designing our future

In 2024, the Scottish Government began a review of architecture policy delivery in Scotland. The recommendations emerging from the review provide an important shift in the future focus and role of our organisation. Most notably, we will deliver a renewed focus on architecture and sector development, with a reshaped remit as a centre for excellence.

Moving into 2025, these recommendations provide an opportunity to refine our purpose, strengthen and expand our position within the sector, and ensure we are providing expertise, leadership and support where it is most needed.

As we shape our new direction and implement the recommendations, our commitment to high-quality design will remain at the heart of what we do. We look forward to sharing more information with you in 2025.

## About us

Architecture and Design Scotland is Scotland's national champion for the design of the built environment. As a public body, we support those who plan, fund, and use Scotland's buildings and places. Our team draws experience and insights from a range of backgrounds and professions. We all believe passionately in the ability of design to transform places.

Sign up to our newsletter to stay up to date with our work.





# Credits and acknowledgements

This publication was produced entirely in-house by Architecture and Design Scotland staff, from the concept and design, to the writing, editing and typesetting.

- Cover**, Glasgow University Campus, Architecture and Design Scotland
- Page 3**, Architecture and Design Scotland
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# Architecture & Design Scotland

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## Get in touch:

[www.ads.org.uk](http://www.ads.org.uk)  
T: 0131 556 6699  
E: [info@ads.org.uk](mailto:info@ads.org.uk)

## Find us on social:

Instagram: @arcdessco  
Linkedin: Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS)  
Facebook: ArcDesSco