

A photograph of a diverse audience seated in a modern lecture hall, facing towards the right. The audience members are of various ages and are looking attentively in the same direction. The hall features dark wood paneling and large windows in the background.

Architecture &  
Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

# Past, Present & Future

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Annual Review 2025

## About Architecture and Design Scotland

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

## In this Annual Review

Welcome to the Annual Review of 2025 – our publication where we gather highlights of the work we did in the past year.

In 2025, we marked our twentieth anniversary by celebrating our rich history and setting a new direction, guided by a strategic review from the Scottish Government.

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# Our past, present and future

Twenty years ago, the world looked and felt quite different. Tony Blair had just won a third consecutive UK election, the Scottish Parliament building was winning the Stirling Prize, and Jack McConnell was First Minister. And quietly, in April 2005, Architecture and Design Scotland was launched.

Coming as it did on the back of Scotland's first policy for architecture, the success of Glasgow as UK City of Architecture, and the opening of The Lighthouse as Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City, the launch was accompanied by a palpable sense of optimism and possibilities.

Looking back, it needs to be acknowledged that that sense of optimism has shifted over time. However, it is important not to let that overshadow the real achievements made and the increasing recognition there is now of design's power to make a positive difference for people and planet.

Twenty years ago, user-centred design was not at the heart of all major healthcare projects in Scotland but thanks to the efforts of our team and those who supported them, that has changed. As a result, more and more people in Scotland are benefitting from facilities which are designed around their needs and support their wellbeing.

Twenty years ago, the potential of place-based approaches to delivery of services was in its infancy. Now, it is enshrined in government policy through the place principle and thanks in part to our efforts, design plays a key role in realising its ambitions.

Twenty years ago, tackling climate change was not the existential challenge that it is today. Thanks in part to our work on Designing in a Changing Climate and Climate Action Towns, we have shown how design-led approaches can unlock even the trickiest of challenges while creating places that support the wellbeing of people and planet.

All of this and so much more have been made possible thanks to the dedication of our team of architects, landscape architects, designers, and all of those who have supported them at Architecture and Design Scotland. Together, we have shown how design adds value to people's lives while helping to create sustainable, climate friendly places.

Looking ahead, there is still so much to do. Challenges remain to convince everyone of the value of design, to put users at the heart of all decision making, and yes, to reform a procurement process that still places design at its margins.

As we reshape ourselves according to the recommendations of the recently published review, these challenges will be at the forefront of our thinking.

We will continue to advocate for the benefits of good design by focussing on developing the sector, delivering high-quality homes at scale and supporting continued investment in public infrastructure. Alongside our partners, we will also tackle the climate emergency and embrace digital innovation.

Our sector development programme of work aims to create the right conditions for Scotland's world-class design talent to thrive, innovate and grow. This will include working with our partners to design a procurement system that understands and values the contribution of design, providing resources and advice to help practices grow, and developing relationships across the rest of the UK and internationally that open up opportunities.

Our housing work will use design and creative thinking to deliver more and better homes to tackle the current emergency. Embracing the latest developments in data and AI, we will work with developers to show how design can unlock and add value in sites to kick-start delivery, show how this work can also deliver on net zero ambitions, and support decision makers to create 20-minute neighbourhoods that provide everyone with choice and opportunity.

And in our work to support public sector capital investment we will share the lessons from our experience in the healthcare and learning sectors to see the benefits in those areas spread to all areas. This will show how investment in architecture and design can add value by saving money in the long term to deliver facilities that meet users' needs.



Jim MacDonald  
Chief Executive

# Celebrating **two decades** of Architecture and Design Scotland

**We turned 20 this year!**

As we turned twenty in 2025, we ran a social media campaign looking back at our work. Over twenty posts we shared resources, memories and images from our work in the past. As we forge our new direction and focus, it has been inspiring to look at our evolution and the wealth of work that we have delivered over two decades.

The breadth of the work is testament to the many collaborations with individuals and organisations that have come together around various themes and topics. We have explored emerging opportunities in sustainability and climate, revitalising town centres, improving housing and celebrating the talents of Scottish architects and designers.

Posting these memories and reflections has allowed us to hear from previous and current collaborators and has shown that our work in all its forms has been valuable to the architectural sector in Scotland and beyond. We look forward to continuing to build from this position of strength and experience as we launch our new direction in 2026.

- Our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign topics
- September**
  - Reflecting on the opening of the Queensferry Crossing
  - Housing to 2040
  - A Caring Place
  - Stalled Spaces
  - Carbon Conscious Places
  - Climate Action Towns
  - Climate Ready School Grounds**October**
  - A Picture of Health exhibition
  - Place Challenge

- Place Standard
  - Say Hello to Architecture
  - Best of the Best
  - Local Development Plan work
  - Making Places**November**
  - Scotland + Venice programme
  - A&DS and RIAS Student Awards for Architecture
  - Tests of Change
  - Outdoor Learning Hub with Queen Margaret University
  - Health Case Studies
  - Materials and Offsite Construction

**2005**  
**We were founded**

**2010**  
**The Lighthouse and Architecture and Design Scotland join forces**

**2015**  
**A decade of Architecture and Design Scotland**

**2020**  
**A new way of working**

**2025**  
**A new direction**





8

Events hosted

39

Events or conferences  
attended

125,286

Social media  
impressions

119,993

Website visitors

1,174

Total event  
registrations

9,168

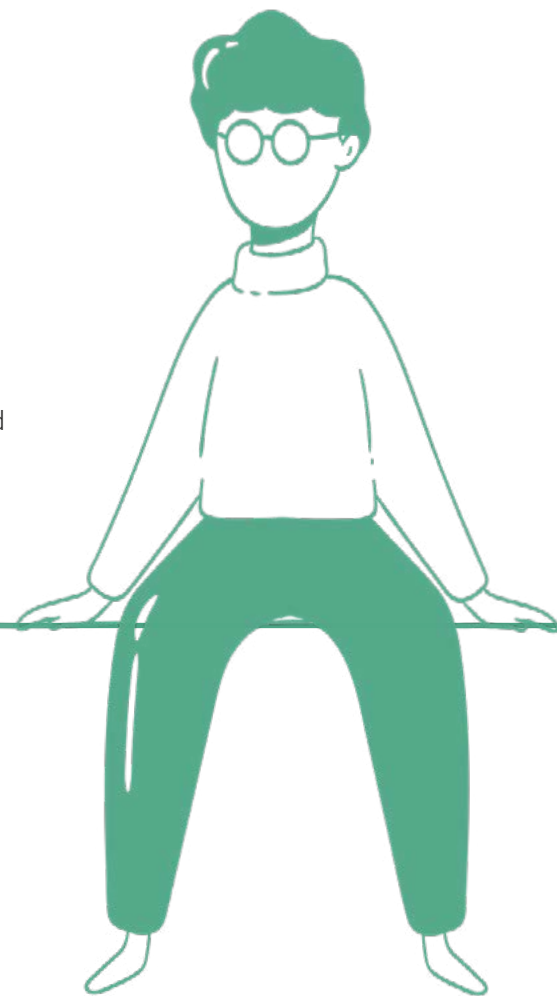
Social media  
followers

2025 in  
numbers



# Highlights of our work

In 2025, we continued to support major projects within the public sector – including the learning estate and major health projects. We were delighted to be able to publish helpful resources on school grounds, and accessible and inclusive learning spaces, as well as continuing to provide guidance on climate smart projects. AI and its impact on our cities became a bigger priority for us, as we contributed to international visits and events and celebrated Scotland's future architects. Over the next few pages, we present a snapshot of our work.

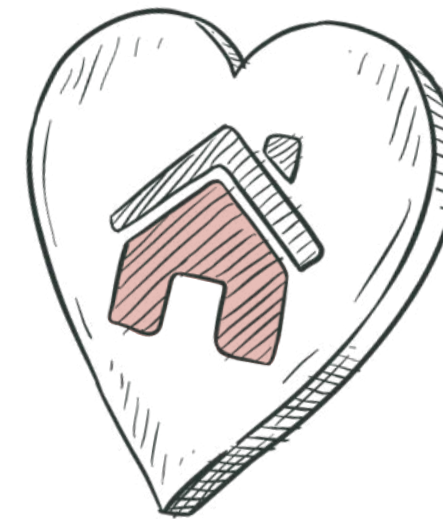


## A&DS and RIAS Scottish Student Awards for Architecture

The annual Architecture and Design Scotland and Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) Scottish Student Awards for Architecture attracted over 70 entries from the five Scottish schools for architecture. Supporting the awards allows us to work with RIAS and others to promote and celebrate the emerging talent of Scotland's architecture sector.

The entries included projects that span various environments including cities, as well as rural and island settings. The submissions this year continue to push the boundaries of how design can contribute to a more sustainable future. The winning projects were announced as part of the annual Andy MacMillan Memorial lecture, held this year at Civic House in Glasgow.

Congratulations to all the shortlisted and winning students!

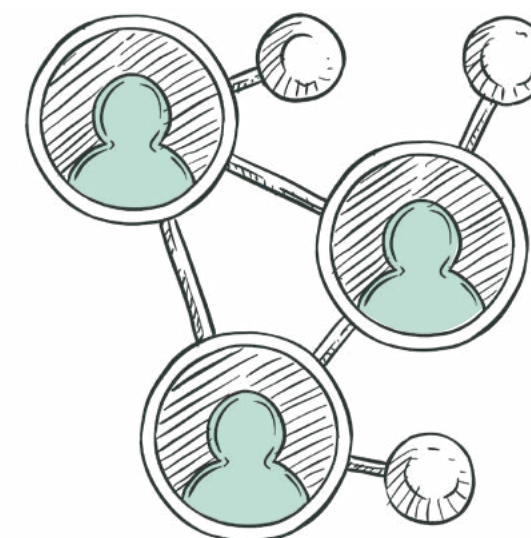


## Homes for Scotland Awards

This year, our Director of Design, Steve Malone, joined the judging panel for the 'Affordable Development of the Year' category at the Homes for Scotland Awards 2025, which attracted 31 entries across Small, Medium, and Large categories. Judging included site visits to shortlisted projects, providing the opportunity to see developments in situ, meet teams, and hear directly from residents about the positive impact of their new homes. The process culminated at the 25th Anniversary Awards event at the EICC, attended by 950 guests, celebrating sector achievements and innovation in delivering homes of all tenures.

## World Design Congress

The biennial World Design Congress – hosted in 2025 by Design Council on behalf of the World Design Organisation at the Barbican Centre in London – brought together the international design community and thought leaders from business, research and education to debate design issues of global importance. Attending the Congress over two intensive days reaffirmed the importance of an outcomes-based approach, collaboration, user-centred design, and of creative thinking to make people's lives and the planet better. For us, this means using our power to champion the benefits to people and planet of good design, to help remove barriers to good design, and to work tirelessly to create more opportunities for designers to thrive.



## Edinburgh Architecture Association

In September, we were delighted to host a meeting of the Edinburgh Architectural Association at our new home in Edinburgh Futures Institute. This event provided us with the opportunity to showcase our work over the years, share details of the review, and invite their members to help us shape our future in ways that most help them.

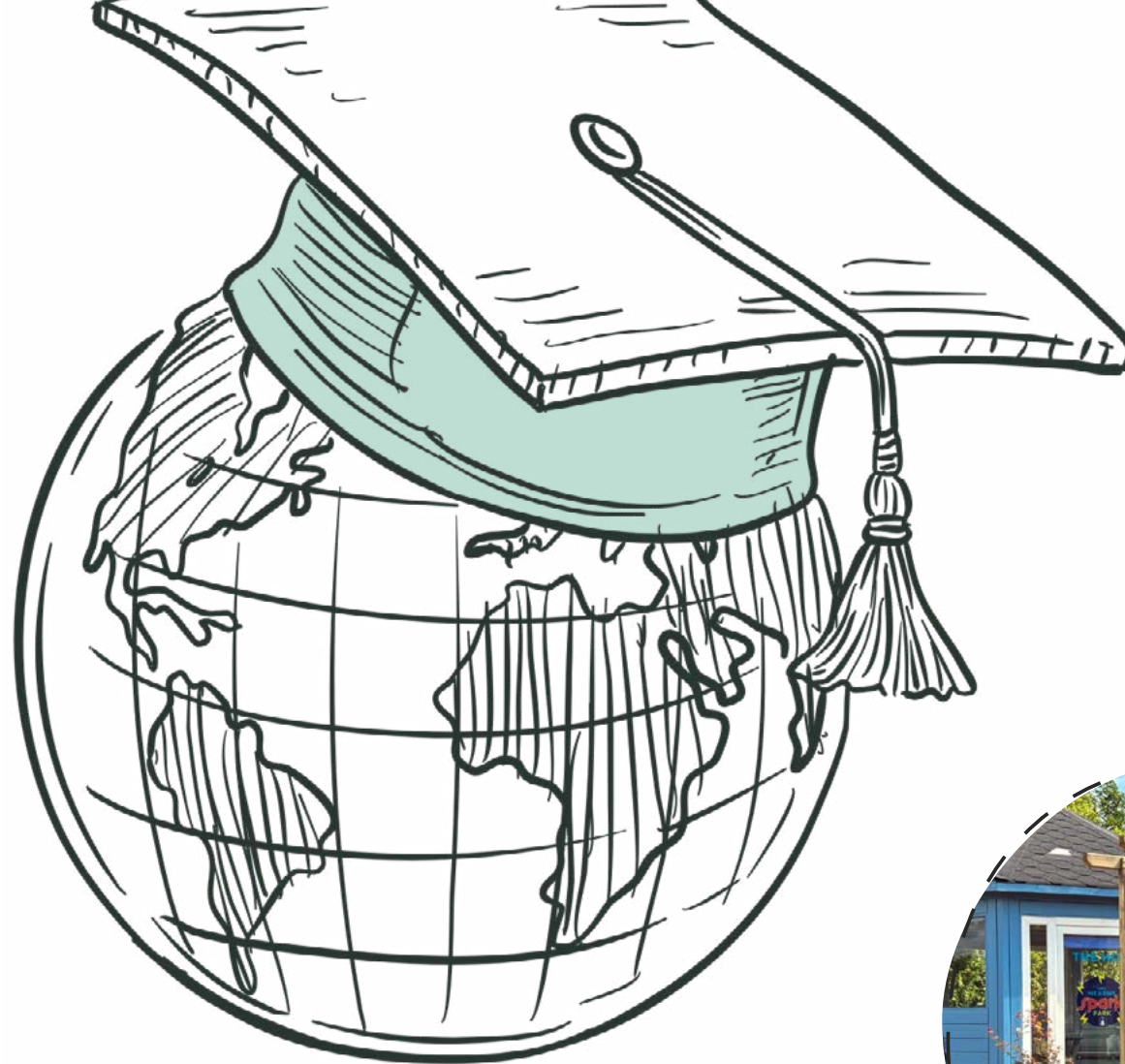
The discussion that followed the presentation covered a range of topics including the need for better engagement with the public, and the place of architecture in the cultural space.



## Designing accessible and inclusive learning environments

Inclusive and accessible design ensures spaces are usable by people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds. Accessible design focuses on user-friendliness for those with additional needs, while inclusive design considers diverse needs to create safe, supportive environments.

These principles apply across public facilities, including Scotland's learning estate, healthcare buildings, and civic spaces, with varying requirements. In 2025, we published online resources to support inclusive and accessible learning environments. Our insights stem from collaboration with The Craighalbert Centre, Fraser/Livingstone Architects, Education Scotland and their National Complex Needs Network.



## Design elements for school grounds

We know there are many benefits of using school grounds for play, learning and wellbeing. Consequently, many schools are looking to improve and better utilise their school grounds to support a broad range of curricular and non-curricular activities. Building on the learning we have developed from working with schools and landscape architects across Scotland we explored design opportunities for outdoor spaces. We have identified creative ways to develop school grounds and published a new online resource in 2025. It offers a wide range of inspirational examples for developing your spaces and helps suggest what steps to take in planning your project – whether it is large or small and regardless of your budget.

### Learning locally

In Armadale, West Lothian, a pilot project supported Scotland's Learning for Sustainability policy by co-designing sustainable learning settings with schools and communities. It helped learners explore climate action locally, leading to stronger school-community links, a student joining the community council, and youth input shaping the local place plan.

The Learning Locally publication shares a replicable framework for educators and planners, offering tools to connect sustainability themes to local contexts. It supports strategic planning and curriculum development, showing how schools can use their grounds and communities to foster meaningful climate learning.



## Shared learning event

In 2025, we co-delivered four Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) Shared Learning Events with Scottish Futures Trust. These thematic webinars focus on key issues pertinent to the delivery of LEIP. The focus of this year's events included energy reporting and monitoring, a 2-part session on Additional Support for Learning (ASL), and lessons learnt from recently delivered LEIP projects.

These sessions offered a vital opportunity to share insights from LEIP projects, explore wider industry trends and foster collaboration and sharing of best practice across all Scotland's Local Authorities. Each event is supported by short summary reports capturing key messaging.



## Mearns Primary Spark Park

This year, our Principal Designer, Lesley Riddell-Robertson attended the launch of The Sparks Park at Mearns Primary School in Glasgow. The park itself was the result of a feasibility study we developed for the school back in 2022 on how to maximise their school grounds to support Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) within the Curriculum for Excellence.

It was incredible to see how closely they stuck to the original design by Urban Pioneers Landscape Architects and how much it became a community project to raise the funds and develop all the zones.

The result of this outdoor learning space is a great example of how to transform outdoor spaces to become real learning zones and is supported by our recently published guide on Design Elements for School Grounds.

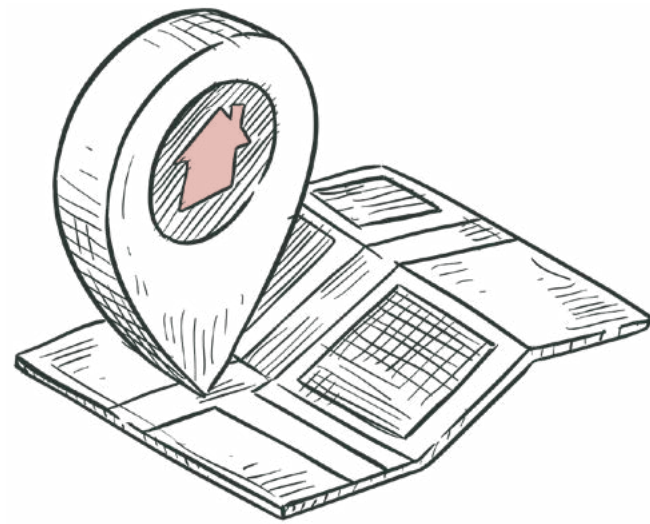
## Learning Places Scotland Conference

This year we continued our support for the Learning Places Scotland Conference, focussing on "Maximising the Learning Experience across the Learning Estate". Steve Malone, our Director of Design, led a dynamic session exploring how school grounds can drive learning, play, climate resilience and community engagement. Lesley Riddell-Robertson, Principal Designer, chaired a discussion on how trauma-informed design can shape educational spaces that foster wellbeing, equity, and engagement.

Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills, delivered the closing keynote where she highlighted the refresh of the Learning Estate Strategy, the launch of the School Premises Regulations consultation and the guidance being developed on Sensory Inclusive Learning Environments – all work which our learning estate team will be supporting and building upon.







## Place skills for plan-making

In 2025, we published snapshots 5 and 6 of “Place skills for plan-making”, which completed the full resource. These new additions show how to design and run workshops for collective analysis of place-based evidence and introduce storyboarding techniques to make evidence reports clear, visual and impactful. Together, they help planners turn complex data into compelling narratives to help drive better decisions.



## AI in the City

In October, this two-part event brought together experts, policymakers and community voices to explore how artificial intelligence is re-shaping urban life. From a satellite seminar to a public forum, participants gained practical insights into AI’s role in transport, connectivity and community engagement, whilst diving into lively debates on ethics, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Delivered in collaboration with the University of Bristol’s AI for Collective Intelligence (AI4CI) hub, Architecture and Design Scotland and the Edinburgh Futures Institute, the event aimed to spark ongoing conversations around AI’s impact on our cities and how we manage data for the collective good in designing Scotland’s future places.



## Data Lab Innovation Challenge

In May, the University of Stirling hosted the Data Lab Academy’s Innovation Challenge – a dynamic three-day event bringing together MSc data students, design experts, and civic leaders to tackle real-world challenges. Partnering with the Scottish Government, our challenge focused on regenerating vacant and derelict land in Scottish town centres through data-driven solutions. Invited as mentors, Ian Gilzean and Steve Malone, guided students toward creative, community-focused ideas. Two standout teams later showcased their work at a University of Edinburgh workshop in September, demonstrating the power of inclusive collaboration to unlock data and shape healthier, more liveable places for Scotland’s future.







## Visits to Copenhagen

In 2025, we were lucky to be able to draw inspiration from two visits to Copenhagen, Denmark.

In June, we joined colleagues from Scottish Government and RIAS, alongside Scottish practices Ann Nisbet Studio, GRAS, Moxon Architects, and Paper Igloo, to visit Copenhagen during the 3 Days of Design Festival. The trip involved meetings with practices in the city and representatives of various government agencies to learn how they use design as a tool for development and regeneration, creating places that enhance wellbeing and foster economic growth.

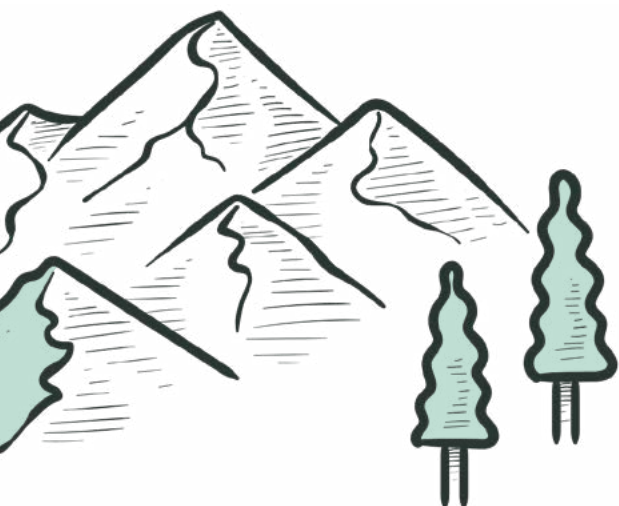
In October, we returned to Copenhagen, to be part of a Scottish delegation to attend the Building Green Copenhagen Conference. The trip's purpose was to build relationships between Danish clients and Scottish practices, to explore how Danish firms develop their work internationally, what challenges they are facing, and what transferable lessons they can offer. An inspiring and informative trip with valuable contacts made with BE-ST, Creative Denmark, architects and other delegates.



## Delivering Scotland's Landscapes

Scotland's Landscape Charter was launched in June 2025, and it highlights the importance of our landscapes to people, place and nature. Architecture and Design Scotland aims to reinforce the importance of good design and the ongoing role of Landscape Architects in delivering for Scotland's landscapes. We participated in the Scotland's Landscape Alliance (SLA) 2025 Event – Delivering for Scotland's Landscapes.

This is also the 25th anniversary of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), and the SLA aims to deliver and reinvigorate Scotland's commitment to the convention by promoting and embedding the charter into everyday landscape action.



## Urban Retrofit Symposium

We spoke at the Urban Retrofit International Symposium in Glasgow, which gathered international experts to discuss how retrofitting can tackle climate, housing, and urban regeneration challenges. At the event we highlighted the role of Architecture and Design Scotland and the leadership of the national design sector in advancing retrofit practice.

The event opened with the launch of the International Evidence Review, setting a global context reflected in sessions on Canadian study tours, Welsh affordable housing strategies, and planning for climate emergencies. A public lecture on "planning without growth" and citywide study tours prompted debate on new urban models. Key themes included community engagement, balancing heritage and sustainability, and effective governance.

## Our new Director of Design

In June, Steve Malone was appointed Director of Design. An architect with over 20 years of experience in the private and public sectors. In his 19 years at Architecture and Design Scotland, Steve has led our work on regeneration and town centre living and has played a central role in providing design advice and support for public sector-driven investments including healthcare, housing and community, as well as public infrastructure investment. As we work to implement the Scottish Government's review recommendations, Steve leads the design advice team through this time of organisational change and development.



## Parkhead Hub

In June 2025, our Director of Design, Steve Malone, welcomed Ivan McKee, MSP, Minister for Public Finance, to the new health and social care Hub at Parkhead in North East Glasgow.

Scotland's first net-zero carbon health centre, Parkhead Hub was supported through the NHSScotland Design Assessment Process (NDAP) over five years and is a showcase of collaborative design driving sustainable public services and reform.

Named Project of the Year at the 2025 Design in Mental Health Awards, the hub goes beyond healthcare – hosting workshops, events, and support groups, alongside the relocated Parkhead Library and a café. Its holistic approach reflects a powerful belief: mental wellbeing thrives through social connection and community engagement.





# A new direction

The findings of the 2024 strategic review set out a new chapter for Architecture and Design Scotland, refocusing our remit to lead sector-wide excellence through collaboration, insight and innovation.

In June 2025 the Scottish Government published a summary of its review into the delivery of architecture policy in Scotland. The review was commissioned to ensure that Scotland's approach to architecture and the built environment remains relevant, effective, and aligned with national priorities.

The findings recognise the important role Architecture and Design Scotland has played in supporting place-based approaches and delivering design advice across Scotland. The report also includes recommendations, setting out a remit for us to refocus our work on architecture and design, positioning the organisation as a centre for excellence that supports sector-wide development through collaboration, insight, and innovation.

This reshaped focus will allow us to promote the value of good design in addressing the challenges facing Scotland's places today – from climate change, housing and health, to learning and digital transformation, as well as supporting the architectural sector to continue to contribute to sustainable, economic growth.

The publication of these recommendations marks the start of a new chapter for Architecture and Design Scotland. The 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. Our programme of activities that reflect this new direction will be rolled out throughout 2026 to allow us to continue to champion design as a powerful force for delivering sustainable, inclusive and thriving communities.





# Credits and acknowledgements

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