



**Architecture &
Design Scotland**

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Architecture and Design Scotland

Business Plan 2026/27

Driving innovation, positive change and growth in the architecture and design sector in Scotland.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
Context.....	4
Our plans for 2026/27	5
Sector Development.....	7
Housing Innovation and Delivery	9
Public Sector Capital Investment.....	12
Digital Innovation	15
Climate.....	16
Outreach and Learning.....	18
Expert Design Panel.....	20
About us	21

Introduction

I am delighted to share our new business plan for 2026/27.

Following a review by Scottish Government, this business plan is the first to reflect our new direction as we put our energies into growing the architecture sector.

Alongside efforts to promote Scotland's architecture sector internationally and increase opportunities at home, the plan responds positively to the review recommendations to provide a strong platform to grow the sector.

Our work this year will show how design can be used to tackle the housing crisis, support better outcomes across public sector capital investment, help Scotland achieve net zero, and enable the sector to embrace digital innovation.

We will promote what we do through our digital channels as well as through the A&DS:SpACE, our new pop-up exhibition and events space in Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI).

In all this work, we will be supported by new partnerships with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), V&A Dundee, and Built Environment – Smarter Transformation (BE-ST).

The challenges our sector faces are significant, but I am encouraged by the support for our mission within government, by the positive reception for our new programme from the sector, and most of all by the commitment and creativity of the team at Architecture and Design Scotland who will make it all happen. Together, I believe we can create the conditions needed to see the sector play its full part in tackling the challenges and realising the benefits to everyone of well-designed buildings and places.

Kirsty Macari, Acting Chair
Architecture and Design Scotland

Context

In 2025, the [Scottish Government published its report](#) into the review of architecture policy delivery in Scotland. The report set out recommendations which have changed our role and focus.

Our role is also informed by [Creating Places](#), the Scottish Government's policy for architecture and place. This establishes us as a champion for good architecture, design, placemaking and planning and requires that we work to help deliver Scottish Ministers' policies and objectives for the built and natural environment for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

More broadly, as a public body our work must contribute to the delivery of the National Performance Framework outcomes and the Scottish Government's public service reform strategy.

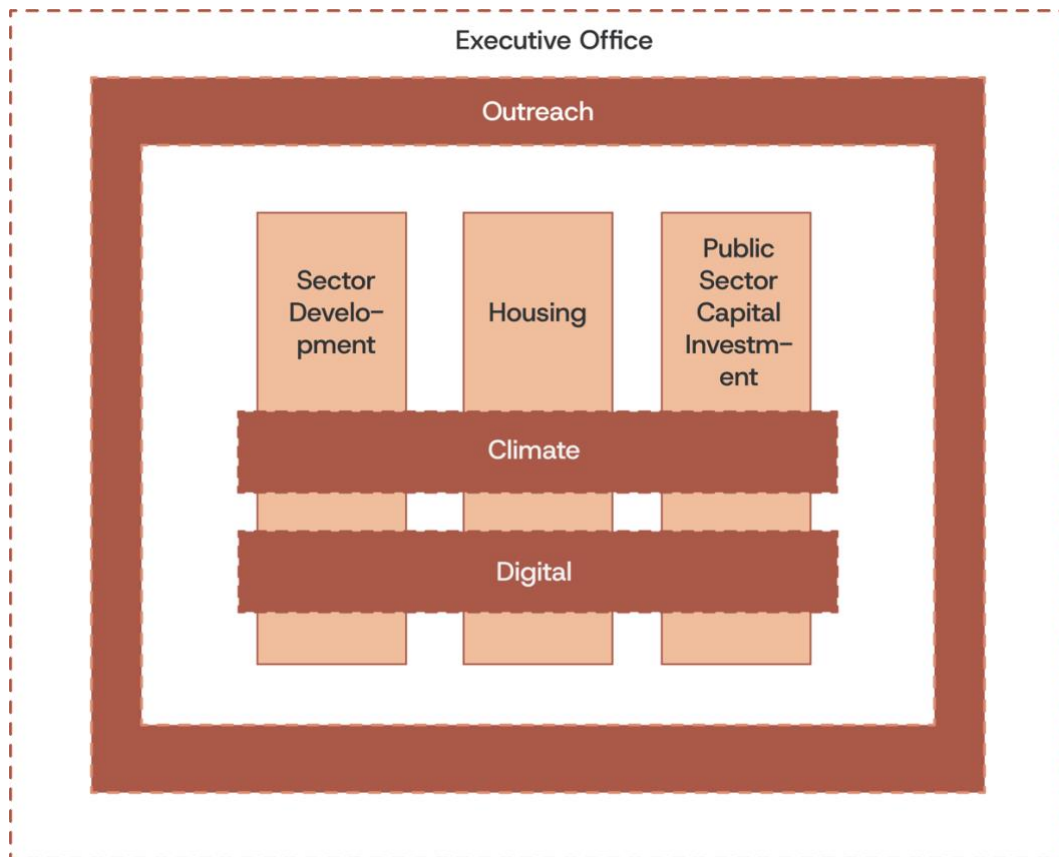
Together, these provide a clear framework for us to operate within, allow us to prioritise our work in ways that will have the greatest impact, and ensure we demonstrate how design and architecture can contribute to wider policy objectives.

Our plans for 2026/27

Our work is organised around three core areas:

- Sector Development
- Housing
- Public Sector Capital Investment

with digital innovation, tackling the climate emergency and outreach woven into all work.



Sector Development

Everything we do is intended to help grow the architecture sector. From helping clients understand the value of design to seeking the removal of systemic barriers to growth, each part of the organisation will be playing its part.

Our work in 2026/27 is the start of a longer-term strategy for growth. As such, much of this year will be focused on establishing and embedding the approaches, networks, and knowledge we will rely on to create the conditions for growth.

Housing

We are committed to working with partners across government and beyond to tackle the housing emergency. Our role will be to bring together those involved in the planning, design, and delivery of housing and explore how design-led approaches and modern methods of

construction can increase and accelerate house building rates whether new build, conversions, or retrofit.

Public Sector Capital Investment

We will continue to provide advice and support to the healthcare and learning estates to help ensure these are well-designed, fit for purpose, and deliver value for money. Building on our experience within these areas, we will also explore opportunities to establish similar approaches in new capital investment streams.

Climate

Across each of the areas above, we will embed work to tackle the climate emergency and support Scotland's just transition to net zero, by supporting evaluation, impact reporting, and ensuring a comprehensive approach to climate and retrofit.

Digital

Similarly, we will ensure that digital innovation is embedded across all our work, by expanding the use of digital technology and data to improve performance and outcomes in design, placemaking and infrastructure across Scotland. Our new Digital Hub will be launched this year, providing a resource for wider practice to use, learn from, and apply in their work.

Outreach

We will provide effective channels to share our learning, resources and support for the sector.

Sector Development

Supporting a strong future for Scotland's architecture and design sector.

Our role

Working with partners to unlock growth, build capacity and create opportunity across Scotland's architecture and design sector.

Why it matters

Through collaboration, advocacy and practical action, we help create the conditions for a more resilient sector – one that delivers high-quality places and better public value.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Removing barriers to growth	<p>Supporting design-led approaches in procurement, capital programmes and planning, so clients can make better decisions and practices can compete, innovate and grow.</p> <p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of a Procurement Improvement Working Group;• Development of evidence-based recommendations working in collaboration with Scottish Government and RIAS;• Targeted engagement with the Scottish Government Planning Hub and Heads of Planning Scotland to strengthen design capability within local authorities;• Delivery of Sector Development events and presentations, showcasing procurement case studies and whole-life costing approaches.	<p>The architecture sector sees that barriers that they perceive within the procurement and planning processes have been reduced or removed as blockages to growth.</p>

Activity	Description	Impact
<p>Growing the sector</p>	<p>Supporting a growing economic and cultural contribution to Scotland by creating the conditions for sustainable growth.</p> <p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted engagement with design practices; • Development of strategic relationships with industry stakeholders; • Coordinated participation in key sector events; • Planning and delivery of domestic and international showcases and trade missions to enhance sector visibility and market access. 	<p>Increased opportunities for SME design practices to explore domestic and international growth.</p>
<p>Building capacity</p>	<p>Strengthen skills, leadership and innovation to support sustainable practice, better public investment outcomes, housing and climate adaptation and digital innovation.</p> <p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of a programme of Sector Development events in A&DS:SpACE at EFI; • Promotion of events and training, including AI, digital integration, and climate-conscious design; • Production of concise, practice-focused “How To” guidance for practitioners. 	<p>The sector has improved access to capacity building for market growth.</p>

Housing Innovation and Delivery

Design-led solutions for better housing outcomes in Scotland.

Our role

By applying design innovation to the housing system in Scotland, we will help our partners deliver more and better housing.

Why it matters

Scotland needs to deliver around 15,000–16,000 affordable homes per year to address the Housing Emergency, yet current delivery is falling well short. Design has a critical role to play in closing this gap – reducing uncertainty, unlocking constrained sites and increasing capacity while maintaining quality.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Housing pilots	<p>We will use early design support to move housing into faster delivery. This will be done through targeted housing pilots to combine upfront design thinking, better use of data and more hands-on design review. This will give SMEs clarity on feasibility, layout and planning at the point it matters most.</p> <p>Work will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying partners and agree pilot sites to test • Undertake design exercises with the partners on these pilot sites • Presenting the findings from the pilot <p>Our focus will be on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brownfield and vacant urban sites • Underused buildings • Small and complex sites • Rural housing areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design-led approaches are better understood as a means to increase housing delivery and overcome systemic barriers. • Stalled, brownfield and underused sites are unlocked, enabling additional homes to be brought forward. • Partners gain earlier clarity and confidence on what can be delivered, supporting faster decision-making. • A wider range of delivery options is applied, including low-carbon solutions, Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and reuse approaches

Activity	Description	Impact
<p>Scotland’s national housing catalogue</p>	<p>Working in collaboration with BE-ST and other strategic partners, our work aims to support system change in how housing is delivered. Our work leads on the design guidance and pattern-book element of the potential Scottish National Housing Catalogue, which aims to front-load quality and approvals. It harnesses Scotland's design talent and supports climate and context-responsive homes that can be delivered at pace through Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).</p> <p>In partnership with BE-ST and other strategic partners we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to Phase 1 of collaborative project to develop a roadmap for Scotland’s National Housing Catalogue • Lead on the design guide element of the project • Convene relevant sector focus groups as needed to inform this work. 	<p>appropriate to each site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Scotland’s design sector to innovate, and more easily make use of Scotland’s MMC capabilities. • Support work opportunities for architects throughout Scotland, while exploring potential models for ongoing economic benefits. • Contribute to efforts to support systemic change in Scotland’s housing delivery system.
<p>Shared housing design hub</p>	<p>Drawing on examples from our own work and that of others, we will create a set of exemplar case studies to show what can be done to encourage wider adoption of best practice.</p> <p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review our previous housing work and gather additional examples from Scotland and UK. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of what works in practice, including why it works and how it can be delivered. • Key delivery partners (local authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are better equipped to

Activity	Description	Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create case-studies to showcase these good practice examples. 	<p>deliver well-designed housing in Scotland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and use of low-carbon delivery approaches, including MMC, bio-based materials and reuse, supporting stronger early-stage decision-making.
<p>Thermal Justice Research</p>	<p>Provide support and input to a multidisciplinary research project, in collaboration with the Universities of Edinburgh, Strathclyde, Oxford and Bath, that aims to strengthen the evidence base on health and long-term performance. This work explores socio-spatial thermal justice and builds knowledge on how housing design can deliver more equitable thermal comfort, improving wellbeing today and the future performance of Scotland’s housing stock.</p> <p>Our role will be to advise on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design sprints • Workshops and exhibition • Testing and evaluation of the Thermal Justice model with key industry stakeholders including Steering Group and professional bodies. 	<p>The design and commissioning sector will have a better understanding of how design can play a role in achieving thermal justice in Scotland’s housing stock.</p>

Public Sector Capital Investment

Designing better public buildings and spaces.

Our role

Evidencing design impact through our work in Healthcare and the Learning Estate to improve delivery and outcomes in the wider public sector capital investment and support Public Service Reform.

Why it matters

Public buildings shape everyday life, from health and learning, to justice, culture and community spaces. Placing users at the heart of design leads to better outcomes, better value and long-term public benefit.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Extending design-led practice across wider public sector capital investment projects	<p>Building on our experience in health and learning estates, we are exploring how user-centred design can be scaled across capital investment. Through this work we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and prioritise potential partner organisations and areas of work • Pilot test design-led and user-centred approaches in selected areas • Gather early insights and implementation feedback • Publish evidence and recommendations for wider adoption 	Other capital investment streams apply design-led, user centred methods to the delivery of new infrastructure.
Better design for better care: NHS Scotland Design Assessment Process (NDAP)	<p>Continue to work with NHSS Assure to implement and further develop the proposed amendments to NDAP as established through the NDAP Review Working Group, using live projects as pathfinders for the new processes wherever practicable.</p> <p>We will also work to develop and deliver an aligned and integrated assurance and assessment service</p>	Design quality is embedded across NHS Scotland’s healthcare estate through the development and application of strategic briefs and Design Quality Indicator (DQI) benchmarks for NHS Boards.

Activity	Description	Impact
<p>Better learning outcomes through design</p>	<p>for NDAP and Key Stage Assurance Review (KSAR).</p> <p>From early briefing to delivery, we support learners, educators and commissioning authorities through design-led engagement, review and shared learning, helping create inclusive, equitable and high-quality learning spaces for all.</p> <p>Learning Estate: LEIP Design Review and support</p> <p>The purpose of this work is to establish a clear design review process for projects within the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP).</p> <p>The project will provide Design Support and Pilot Projects by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing targeted design support to Local Authorities. • Support LEIP briefing pilots and participate in LEIP review workshops with Scottish Futures Trust. <p>Learning Estate: Shared Learning Programme</p> <p>A series of events that provide a platform for design teams and local authorities to showcase their work across Scotland and create connections.</p> <p>Learning Estate: Learning Places Scotland Conference</p> <p>We will continue to contribute to and shape the Learning Places Scotland Conference. We will do this through the following: membership of Conference</p>	<p>LEIP Design Review and support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer methodologies and learning across public sector investment programmes • Create connections and foster partnerships • Embed design thinking into briefing and create a process for design impact to be analysed. • Ensure design quality is embedded into public sector buildings <p>Sharing good practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer networks provide skill development, support and opportunities to showcase good practice. • Clients and designers use good practice examples to improve outcomes in learning estate projects and support service reform.

Activity	Description	Impact
	Advisory Group; Session Chair; presentation of projects or/and facilitation of workshops.	
<p>Strengthening evidence in the healthcare and learning estates: impact analysis</p>	<p>Building an evidence base for healthcare and learning estate design through case studies, publications and a dedicated knowledge hub, strengthening understanding of how design quality improves user experience, wellbeing, learning and operational efficiency.</p> <p>To help evidence this we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create targeted case studies and publications to illustrate how design has improved healthcare settings and learning environments, and outcomes for their users • Work with Health Boards and Local Authorities on Post Occupancy Evaluations • Create a ‘knowledge hub’ of information, resources and links on our website as well as reviewing and developing the existing healthcare ‘Pulse’ resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger evidence on design quality – enabling commissioning bodies to make informed, quality-led decisions and supporting designers to evidence impact and improve delivery. • Clear, shared articulation of design value and best practice – helping clients set higher standards and de-risk investment. • Better alignment between research, policy and delivery – supporting more effective decision-making for clients and helping designers respond to user needs and performance outcomes.

Digital Innovation

Digital innovation to support the architecture and design sector.

Our role

Embedding a culture of digital innovation across the architecture and design sector through events, networks and access to the Digital Hub.

Why it matters

Digital innovation and the emergence of AI provide transformational opportunities for the architecture and design sector. Data-driven innovation will also support our key focus areas, increasing the capacity and impact of our work.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Digital Hub	<p>Develop a digitally enabled collaborative workspace, the 'Digital Hub'. This is a key initiative which supports our new strategic direction, which sees digital innovation as a cross-cutting component of our role as a Centre for Excellence.</p> <p>The Digital Hub will be located at the Edinburgh Futures Institute and will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• leverage the value of digital technology and data to improve performance and outcomes in design, placemaking and infrastructure across Scotland.• act as collaborative hub, a facilitator and centre of expertise for the public sector, communities and the private sector providing access to digital resources and data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SME design practices have opportunities to access data, digital tools and support, that improve design collaboration and outcomes.• Data driven innovation and data insights are used to inform place and infrastructure challenges and opportunities and improved decision-making.

Climate

Using design to respond to the climate emergency.

Our role

To consistently review climate-led design approaches across all focus areas to share learning and identify gaps for future programme of work.

Why it matters

Scotland has declared a Climate Emergency which is underpinned by several Scottish Government policies, targets and initiatives. Designing for the changing climate is a central element of our work.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Acting on the climate emergency	This cross-cutting programme works with other focus areas to support evaluation, impact reporting, and ensure a comprehensive approach to climate and retrofit.	Scotland's built environment reduces its emissions to help achieve national net zero targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce emissions across the Learning Estate, Housing, Health and wider public sector through better design, retrofit, and the adoption of low-carbon approaches.• Improve the performance and resilience of buildings and places in the Learning Estate, Housing through climate-responsive design and best practice.• Strengthen evidence and decision-making across Housing, Health, the Learning Estate and wider public sector investment through

Activity	Description	Impact
		<p>pilots, impact analysis, and the use of data and AI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build skills and drive adoption of best practice across the built environment sector (Sector Development and Outreach) through training, campaigns, and knowledge sharing. • Embed climate leadership and accountability in public sector investment and corporate practice (Wider Public Sector and Corporate) through standards, reporting, and sustainable operations.
<p>Net Zero Public Sector Building Standard</p>	<p>Working in partnership with the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), this project will strengthen the implementation of the Scottish Government’s Net Zero Public Sector Buildings Standard (NZPSBS). The focus is on Objective 1, which sets the strategic intent for investment in inclusive net zero economy outcomes and shapes design approaches across all objectives of the Standard.</p>	<p>Design thinking is embedded as a strategic decision-making tool at the earliest stages of major public investment projects.</p>

Outreach and Learning

Showcasing design excellence and promoting the value of design.

Our role

Effectively communicating Architecture and Design Scotland’s position as a sector development body whilst sharing the learning from our design teams.

Why it matters

Using our channels we will help showcase Scottish design excellence and promote the value of design more widely.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Showcasing design excellence	<p>Through a range of outreach activities – including events, exhibitions and digital channels – we will showcase design excellence in Scotland.</p> <p>Activities in 2026/27 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh website to reflect our new priorities • Provide access to design resources on our website and digital channels • Promote the A&DS and RIAS Student Awards for Architecture • Support the pop-up event and exhibition space – A&DS:SpACE – in the Edinburgh Futures Institute and its varied outreach programme. 	<p>The architecture sector in Scotland is able to promote its work through our refreshed website and will also be able to get access to resources to support their professional practice.</p>
Promoting the value of design	<p>Using our channels to promote the value of design more broadly, including highlighting our work and work from the wider sector.</p> <p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly episodes of the Value of Design Podcast, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision makers and the wider sector can access evidence of the value of design from our channels. • Key stakeholders engage more effectively with us, and we provide a

Activity	Description	Impact
	<p>including content on our focus areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media and press engagement • Monthly newsletters • Support development of design publications and case studies 	<p>platform for the sector to share and gain information about key topics.</p>
<p>A&DS & RIAS Scottish Student Awards for Architecture 2026</p>	<p>Celebrating and promoting the next generation of architects in Scotland through awards, event and exhibition.</p>	<p>Emerging architects are given a platform to showcase their work, and to engage with the wider sector.</p>

Expert Design Panel

Bringing together design expertise.

Our role

Bringing together experts from the architecture and design sector to support projects across Scotland, share experiences and advocate for the value of design.

Why it matters

Design experts can strengthen strategic design advice and extend our capacity and influence across Scotland’s architecture and built environment sectors. This will support our new remit as a Centre for Excellence.

Programme of work

Activity	Description	Impact
Relaunch of design panel	<p>We are re-establishing a network of voluntary experts to strengthen strategic design advice and extend our capacity and influence across Scotland’s architecture and built environment sectors.</p> <p>Refreshing the role and remit of our voluntary design experts will enhance our credibility, help us inform guidance and best practice, and ensure our work addresses real-world issues while contributing to sector development and innovation.</p>	Projects, plans, and policies benefit from high-quality design expertise.

About us

Architecture and Design Scotland is Scotland's national agency driving innovation, positive change and growth in the architecture and design sector in Scotland.

Our vision

A Scotland where the power of design improves lives

Our mission

To grow the architecture sector

Our approach

We lead by example, promote the value of design, connect the sector to new opportunities, share our expertise and provide the sector with the resources it needs to thrive.

How we will make it happen

Drive positive change

Increase digital innovation

- Implement emerging AI, data and digital technologies.

Accelerate quality housing growth

- Apply our design expertise to unlock housing sites to ease the housing emergency for people in Scotland
- Support efforts to increase the use of Scotland's Modern Methods of Construction capabilities

Use design to address the climate emergency

- Support the implementation of policy through design-based approaches
- Champion the power of Scotland's design sector to tackle the climate emergency

Lead by example

Outreach

- Showcasing design excellence
- Promoting the value of design

Grow Scotland's architecture and design sector

- Connect Scotland's design expertise to international markets
- Work to remove barriers to growth within the procurement and planning systems
- Provide resources to help practices to grow

Support investment in public infrastructure

- Continue to provide support for investment in the healthcare and learning estates
- Embed design-led and user-centred approaches in other public sector capital investment programmes

Contact us

info@ads.org.uk

www.ads.org.uk

Follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#) or [Facebook](#). [Sign up for our newsletter](#).