

Creating Better Places...

summary note of Fife's Designing Places Supplementary Guidance workshop - Wednesday 26 November 2014

The half day event invited representatives from the design, construction and house building communities to work in teams along with planning colleagues to test and feedback on their experience of working with the draft guidance.

A+DS and SNH have helped to facilitate a workshop for Fife Planning Authority to inform the development of their Designing Places Supplementary Guidance which aims to provide guidance on:

- Applying policies in Fife's Local Development Plan
- A design led process
- Carrying out site appraisals + specialist appraisals of landscape, natural and built heritage and trees
- What information to provide at different stages of the planning process
- Technical information on street design
- How the quality of new development will be assessed against the qualities of successful places
- Requirements for open space, play and sports facilities and public art
- How green networks are expected to be taken into account by new development

An introductory presentation set the context for the event. The guidance is intended to raise the placemaking agenda and be clear and concise; easy to use by applicants and planners; and, deliver improved quality of development on the ground ('the right development in the right place').

A facilitated session initiated an open and frank discussion around three prompts:

- *How do you use design/place supplementary guidance at present?*
Responses were that the use of guidance is variable; people were aware of it, but don't usually look at it much; there are frustrations at inconsistencies about interpretation across Scotland, and even within Councils
- *What information you would expect design guidance to provide?*
We want 'clear rules in supplementary guidance'; welcome a short document, where the rules are made clear; 'detail helps - clear ground rules'; site briefs should provide clarity upfront on site requirements, and be available at the plan stage
- *Are there design policies or supplementary guidance that you have found particularly useful?*
Designing Streets was referred to, but most council's requirements are a 'half-way house'; there is a challenge as every site is unique



It was clear from discussion that a design led process encompasses a wider area than is covered in a guidance document. Guidance cannot replace early dialogue between Council and applicant. The importance of the development plan was clear: it was felt that for a good scheme to be designed the right sites must be promoted in the plan.

Design briefs should be prepared in collaboration; the public sector needs to be clear about what is being asked for. Site and context appraisals are important. There is enthusiasm for meaningful early pre-application discussion; discussions need to be consistent.

The human element is important; there is a desire to get everyone around a table to talk. There appear to be two worlds: a 'statutory' world governed by process, and a 'real' world where development happens. Dialogue is important.



A rapid design exercise invited each of the four groups to produce a quick design for a site, using background planning information (site designation, brief, policy requirements, and contextual information) and attempting to push the envelope of what the draft guidance advised as being acceptable. These 'briefs' were then passed on to an adjacent table who evaluated the 'proposal' against the draft guidance document to establish if the proposed designs met the qualities of successful places and other policy requirements.

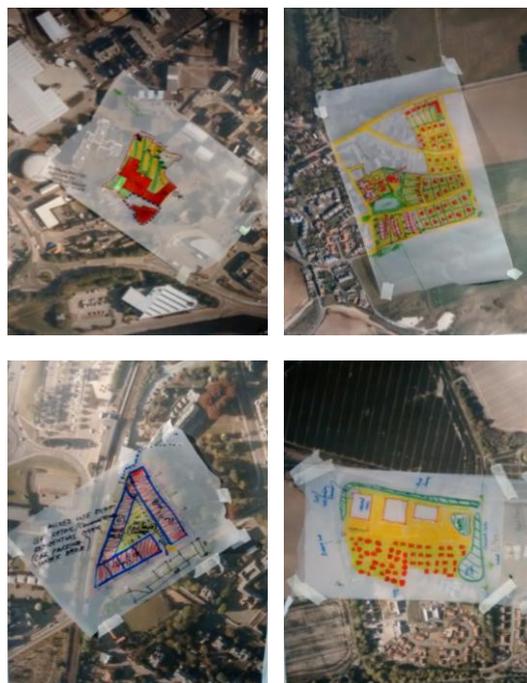
consistency; clarity; reliability; dependability; guidance - the human element : dialogue – talk!

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Key observations were fed back from each table on their experience of using the guidance as an aid to both develop and subsequently assess a proposal. The discussion identified issues such as:

- Can't properly answer most of the guidance prompts through assessing a 2D 'B-plan'. There was a lot of uncertainty and 'question marks' recorded against the guidance. Questions / prompts appear not to offer an appropriate level of detail for this stage in the discussion.
- A particular 'checklist' aspect may be claimed to have been considered, but it may not have led to a creative or satisfactory response.
- How does the evaluation checklist relate to the Design and Access Statement? Is there a possible duplication? Formats are different – could they align more to make it easier for both sides (the applicant and DM case officer)?
- Yes/No evaluation responses can give a misleading impression about how the guidance will be used.
- The SG is more a framework or prompt for a conversation; questions might be best used to inform a pre-application conversation; the industry want early engagement – a conversation where the rules and site requirements are made clear – to provide as much certainty as possible.
- Guidance needs to be clear about what is relevant for a particular development – what are the crucial non-negotiables that need to be satisfied for any given proposal/site?
- Evaluation questions/checklist – is it possible to arrange by type and scale of development?
- Evaluation questions/checklist – possibly too many questions? Duplication between different sections with subtly different wording? Is there a need to streamline? Section summarising questions needed at all?
- Could it be clearer what is required to be submitted at what stage: masterplan; pre-application; PPP; detail?
- The need for a site appraisal, including a wider context appraisal, may be getting lost within the document?



A final reflective discussion covered a number of points:

- Just because a guidance section has been answered doesn't mean it has resulted in a good outcome.
- There is a lot to assimilate: there is a difficulty that the guidance is attempting to anticipate and have a prompt for every scenario and permutation; this isn't possible.
- The guidance is a prompt/framework for a conversation that needs to be bespoke for each unique situation. It is not a 'checklist' – this is the wrong sort of status.
- The guidance is for different audiences: Development Management assessment; designers aiding the design; surveyors to enable financial appraisals; construction industry to gauge certainty about a proposition.
- The importance of the development plan and of site briefs that provide specific proportionate information about key issues.
- A need to be proportionate, focussed and clear about what is important in any given context.
- The importance of partnership working – public and private co-operation. A need for the public sector to provide clear upfront guidance.
- The human element – a desire for early pre-application discussion, and a need for this to recognise the development sector sometimes needs rapid advice.
- Being able to talk: this requires appropriate skills and a need for consistency.

Everyone recognised the value of the event in developing the guidance, and the participation and contributions of the design, construction and house building representatives was greatly appreciated. The Fife Designing Places Supplementary Guidance is being reported to Committee in February 2015 and will thereafter be available for a period of consultation.