Adamstown, Dublin

Delivering Better Places: Visual Case Study 1
INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE CASE STUDIES

Case Studies aim to set out thinking, briefing or possible forward action on a specific topic or question. They provide in-depth information and can outline ways to tackle issues. This Case Study has been prepared by A+DS.

WHAT IS THIS CASE STUDY ABOUT?

This case study has been informed by Delivering Better Places, a collaborative publication from The Scottish Centre for Regeneration, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Scotland and Architecture and Design Scotland, who worked with the University of Glasgow to create a good practice guide. The guide helps public, private and community stakeholders identify good practice and improve their understanding of delivering better places.

This case study provides a visual analysis of the Adamstown development, presenting text from the Delivering Better Places analysis of the development alongside images which illustrate the findings.

The objective of this case study is to provide a visual tool to highlight elements of successful developments from around Europe, to help inspire the delivery of better places for Scotland.

The images within this case study have been selected from the Steve Tiesdell Legacy Collection, which can be accessed in full on flickr.
SUMMARY PROFILE

The Adamstown site was assembled by private interests who anticipated the area becoming ripe for development.

In collaboration with the local authority (South Dublin County Council), Adamstown was designated as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in 2001. A planning scheme for the designated had to be produced within two years of designation. The SDZ is a partnership between public and private sectors, which requires the public sector to support private development with a simplified planning regime, with greater coordination of the public sector agencies and by ensuring the delivery of necessary elements of social infrastructure, such as schools and community facilities. The Planning Scheme specifies that public infrastructure must be delivered for each of the project’s 15 phases.

A development plan was produced to deliver a demonstrable, best practice mixed-use, medium-density alternative to prevailing car-based suburbia. Development consists of terraced houses, flats and maisonettes, based around a permeable grid of streets and boulevards. There are also three schools and a brand new railway station.

Adamstown’s status as an SDZ affords it the privilege of having a specified Delivery Body (SDCC), a Planning Scheme and a simplified planning permission process - these factors all reduce uncertainty. The project shows how the delivery of quality development does not need a special delivery organisation if the local authority take responsibilities for liaising with all other public bodies and a private sector partners takes on a similar umbrella role with private firms.
DISTINCT IDENTITY

Does the place have a distinct identity? Adamstown has a very distinct identity, due both to the design of the streets and buildings, as well as the fact that such a development is clearly unprecedented in Lucan. The eastern entrance to Adamstown has landmark buildings, fountains and large stone signs saying “Adamstown”, clearly visible from the main road.
SAFE AND PLEASANT
Does the place have spaces that are safe and pleasant? Despite the relatively high density of the place, there are plenty of areas of attractive open space. Many of the green spaces have retained mature trees and the main roads through the development are themselves pleasant. There is a large green space in the SE corner of Adamstown Castle with a playground and there are plans for four major parks, the designs for which were subject to an international competition.
Is the place easy to move around (especially on foot) (‘permeable’)? The street layout is quite similar to that at Newhall, albeit on a larger scale. There are very few dead ends; for the most part it is permeable, with good sightlines and plenty of links to its immediate surroundings.
Does the place make visitors feel sense-of-welcome? Adamstown’s distinctiveness and accessibility make it a relatively welcoming place to visit. At the same time, many flats have security gates to inner courtyards, which can make the place seem somewhat formidable. In addition, it can feel quite quiet, with relatively little street activity because the place does not have anything like its designed population.
Will the place adapt easily to changing circumstances (‘robust’)? Adamstown’s resilience has been quite severely tested over the past few years as Ireland’s economic situation has deteriorated. The pace of development has slowed, which could pose trouble for a phased development like this. However, the use of ‘sequential phasing (as opposed to time-based) allows some degree of adaptation to external constraints. Additionally, the Planning Scheme does allow a degree of flexibility. There is a 20% variation on minimum/maximum quanta of dwellings and floorspace as specified as permissible. Resilience may be limited by the extent to which housing units may be adapted in the future.
Does the place make good use of scarce resources (‘sustainable’)? The move away from car-oriented development suggests that, in the environmental field, Adamstown is far superior to neighbouring developments. At present, however, on-site facilities are not yet fully developed and it would, at the moment, be difficult to live there without a car. Buildings appear well-designed, but use conventional materials, particularly concrete. Nonetheless prefabrication has led to high standards of insulation.
Project Information

LOCATION: South of Lucan, 16 km west of Dublin; linked to the N4 expressway and also readily accessible by train from Dublin.

PROJECT CONTEXT: Suburban, urban extension, greenfield

PROJECT TYPE: Growth

RATIONALE: Using new planning instruments to create a high quality major urban extension to Lucan

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The project aims to create a new town of around 10,000 homes, along with schools and other social infrastructure and 125,000 m² of commercial space on a 224 hectare site.

PLACE PROMOTER: South Dublin County Council, working alongside Castlethorn Construction

LAND OWNERSHIP: Privately owned. Majority of site banked by Castlethorn Construction, with minority stakes by Maplewood Homes and Tiera Ltd

DELIVERY METHOD: The project is controlled by the SDZ planning scheme and a detailed masterplan. The main infrastructure is funded upfront by a joint venture between two housebuilders. The housebuilders expect to recoup the cost of infrastructure from serviced land parcel sales which were sub-divided into 15 phases. The public sector provides the social infrastructure in advance of development in accordance with the agreed planning scheme. Design control is exercised in accordance with the planning scheme by SDCC.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME: The site was zoned for development in the Local Area Plan in 1998. SDZ status was granted mid 2001. The first houses were completed in 2006. Development is progressing more slowly than expected, owing to Ireland’s ongoing recession.