

*The 2013 RTPI Scotland annual conference **New Context, New Approaches** brought together new thinking and innovative practice from within and beyond Scotland and touched on issues including public service reform, linking infrastructure and development, new approaches to delivering quality placemaking, new models for delivering development, sharing risk and reward, making best use of resources and delivering change. This paper provides a summary overview of the event.*

Opening the conference, **Alistair MacDonald, Convenor of RTPI Scotland** introduced **Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning**, who spoke of the importance of good design and how planning has a central role in making better places. He described the need for efficient, effective processes and a high level of service, along with a strong focus on outcomes. He suggested that planners should become local leaders as part of corporate working; at the heart of partnership working, with support from other sectors. His conclusions stressed: partnership, delivery, aligning policy, improving practice, and delivering change.

An overview of 'Big Picture Issues' was provided by **Pete Daw, Cities Project Developer with Siemens** who described how cities need to plan within the context of mega trends such as an ageing world population with rising life expectancy; the growth of cities or urban areas; globalisation, with global trade doubling in the last 20 years; and, climate change – where human activity has been the main cause of global warming since 1950s, leading to e.g. sea level rise, and increasing numbers and magnitude of extreme weather events. Key issues were summarised:

- Cities need to become more resilient to severe weather events.
- Transport is key to making cities competitive, and working with context is essential to ensure the right response; e.g. Medellin in Colombia is regarded as having installed cable cars to link Favellas on surrounding hillsides with the city and tackle issues of isolation and lack of opportunity, with new hubs developing around cable car stations supporting economic activity.
- Quality of life needs to be maintained and enhanced, with a need to think creatively about how this is achieved, e.g. public open space on tops of buildings; maintenance of the 'hi-line' park in Manhattan by 'friends of hi-line' who work with parks and recreation; etc
- Waste management in cities can support local amenity and offer wider benefits which improve acceptability to local communities; e.g. Copenhagen waste from energy.
- Scale – e.g. London's 'energy from local sources' plan requires developers to consider supply mapped against intense heat usage.

Implications of public service reform were described by **Colin Mair, Chief Executive of Improvement Service** who noted the widening gap between demand for public services and resources - planning is key to proactively tackling the preventable 40% of 'failure demand' which consumes resources in attending to the consequences of 'bad things'.

Striking disparities relating to quality of life and opportunity are evident at a local level, sometimes between adjoining neighbourhoods. It is possible to accurately predict life prospects based on location; too many people go backwards from birth, and failure to address issues perpetuates living patterns that hindered previous generations. We need to target outcomes relating to vulnerable communities and to stop trying to 'do' outcomes to communities. Colin noted links between community planning and spatial planning where 'every child is special and spatial!'

We need to plan for infrastructure that supports communities, and develop a more integrated model of public service reform. The dual considerations of **integration** (acting together to tackle issues affecting the most vulnerable) and **intervention** (stopping bad things happening) are common

to documents relating to public service reform agenda such as the Budget Review and the Christie Commission report. Outcomes based on an understanding of place should read across community and spatial planning, e.g. in SOAs and MIRs.

Colin challenged the audience to consider what are we planning for? There are short, medium and long term tensions between wanting development to happen 'now' as against an understanding of what a long term sustainable future looks like. Planning needs to deliver a demonstrable difference to peoples' lives – there is a good story to tell; and we need to hear it!

Speaking on the subject of 'Doing More with Less', **Malcolm MacLeod, Head of Planning, The Highland Council, and Chair of HOPS** highlighted the need for planning to innovate and adapt to lead the way in cross service working and to provide leadership in terms of collaborative working. Doing more with less means working in new ways to:

- 'Learn from others' - benchmarking and sharing good practice across the different scales and contexts of place in Scotland.
- 'Get it right first time' - emphasising the importance of front-loading the system, through focusing on pre-application engagement and being proportionate about information requests.
- 'Improve customer service' - focusing on making it easier for people: providing a single point of contact, following up information, being visible 'project managers' and learning lessons.
- 'Engage the right people' - in the right way thereby speeding up the process
- 'Manage performance' - being proud of achievements; noting a role for Planning Performance Frameworks; thinking corporately; and recognising opportunities to add quality through process.

Malcolm urged the profession not to lose sight of the need to: deliver outcomes; deliver quality; and, keep learning.

In his session on 'Lessons from Elsewhere' **Steven Tolson, Independent Consultant and Vice Chair of RICS Scotland** noted that planning should be making things happen. This requires leadership and active state participation, but ideological constraints have diluted planning in favour of the market. In consequence, planning has tended to become less project orientated and more regulatory and process driven, with a loss of placemaking and implementation skills.

Steven advocated that the state should be active in shaping and influencing the market through prompting and initiating activity as evident across north Europe where planners are seen as facilitators and are active in project delivery. In a more consensual and collaborative European context, leaders bring vision, guide decision making and deliver planning. He quoted the Dutch VINEX programme (1993 – 2010) which was led by national government and implemented at regional scale, and which focussed on city growth and competition (visionary in 1993!), and integrated public transport connections. Other examples illustrated how state investment in infrastructure helped to provide long term certainty, speed up delivery, led to more interesting developments through a varied mix of developers, and had a stronger commitment to landscape and maintenance.

Major lessons included that to create a place the state needs to get involved in delivery through acting as a visionary leader and enabler; good placemaking requires long term investment to manage assets; we need to get better at making ordinary places through committing to good quality; planners need to be active thinkers and practical doers.

In his session on 'New Approaches in Scotland' **Malcom Fraser, of Malcom Fraser Architects** spoke of six key themes:

1. **Get upstream:** designers are often confronted with demands of having to work at the wrong end of poor decision making e.g. the wrong site, wrong brief, wrong funding for projects. There is a need to get upstream of the process. He contrasted Scotland's Town Centre Review with the Portas Review which was more of a 're-branding' of what was left, as opposed thinking about ways to weave other uses around retail, reinforce the role of town centres and fortify them as places that are accessible for everyone, where creativity and economic enterprise can thrive - true eco-towns.
2. **Belonging:** it is important to feel a sense of belonging to place; and there is a need to balance personal freedoms with personal responsibilities.
3. **Unlandfill:** Malcolm spoke about a need to promote the benefits of seeking new uses for old buildings, and to challenge the notion of 'not fit for purpose'; e.g. old education buildings often have continued potential as great education buildings due to their form, location and role in a community. He described how the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation has received the highest sustainability rating, partly due to its re-use of existing assets and its place in a civic context that supports social activity, rather than being a 'green technological box' in a remote location.
4. **Hustling:** there is value in influencing thinking from a bottom-up approach through stimulating and provoking thinking about alternatives, and Malcolm suggested a potential role for planning authorities in being open to opportunity and enabling such initiatives.
5. **Building for the North:** Scotland has a rich tradition of working with the context and climate and building appropriate to the Scottish context; e.g. coastal towns whose form gives shelter and enclosure. He suggested that Edinburgh's old town environment, which forced a rich social mix of people to live in close proximity, generated conditions which led to the enlightenment.
6. **The Beauty of Utility:** we need to achieve the maximum amount of happiness for the maximum amount of people – e.g. Crail was not intentionally built to be scenic, but for the best utility of its occupants.

Four participants contributed to a debate and discussion that considered the future role of planners:

Mike MacKenzie MSP believed that planning is instrumental in tackling health problems, poverty and other social issues, along with addressing climate change, work / life balance and quality of life factors. At present planning is more often reactive, whereas it needs to develop a proactive compelling vision, and narrative of the future, and demonstrate how value is added.

Dr Andy Inch, University of Sheffield referred to RICS research on 'Changing the Culture of Scottish Planning' which identified goals relating to efficiency, but which has had less influence on a positive vision of what planning is about. Planning should be seen as a legitimate activity which creates and generates value. At present, planning is closely wedded to the notion of growth, and has a 'fragile legitimacy'; "...tolerated so long as it is a useful adjunct to sustainable economic growth". There is a need to tell a positive story of what planning is for, and for a critical re-thinking about how it addresses big societal issues such as inclusion and inequality.

Dr Margaret Bochel, Head of Planning and Sustainable Development, Aberdeen City Council believed that planning has always been about high quality places and is making a demonstrable

difference to peoples' lives, and that we should "carry on doing it!" There is a good story to be told and key considerations for planners are: better leadership, project management, customer focus, increased confidence, understanding planning in the development process; and the support of others as planning can't do it all on its own.

John McNairney, Chief Planner, Scottish Government spoke of a need to be outcomes focussed, with planning's role moving from policy to delivery, and a sharpened focus on climate change, sustainable economic growth and placemaking, whilst also noting strong links with community and services planning. Going forward, planners are well placed to maintain a broad perspective; being responsive, adaptive, reflective, and integrative. New skills will be required, e.g. in relation to tackling climate change issues, and more development planning issues such as integrating CHP. It will be important to stimulate sustainable economic growth through project management, and innovative ways will be needed to deliver development. The profession can be vulnerable to anecdotal evidence, and planning needs to be regarded and promoted as a facilitator of good development, that finds solutions for tough problems, and which joins-up in a coherent way. In this way, planning as a delivery agent has a lead role at the corporate table.

Through his presentation on 'Sharing Risk and Reward' **Dan Macdonald, Chief Executive of Macdonald Estates** provided thoughts from a developer perspective that included a call for the public, private and community sectors to find better ways of working together to create an economy that works for Scotland's people. There was a need to build trust and overcome barriers between the different communities. Dan called for better integrated settlements based on local circumstances and needs. He also promoted place-making opportunities offered through building social capital and having local, reflective, integrated decision making that overcomes silo thinking.

In presenting Savills research around sustainable communities, **Yolande Barnes, Head of global Research at Savills**, identified that 'neighbourhood' is more important to purchasers than 'product' (i.e. 'the house'), and that "sustainable urbanism adds value". Evidence demonstrated a strong correlation between property value and permeable street networks with access to other uses such as retail, etc. Yolande referred to examples of developments such as Fairfield / Aylesbury, Crown Street /Glasgow and Poundbury /Dorchester, where factors such as mixed use, mixed tenure and fine urban grain contributed to higher property values in comparison to equivalent conventional developments.

As developers don't benefit from enhanced values there is therefore little incentive to 'do the right thing'. She noted the relevance of development models that continue to own after the build stage, e.g. the Marquis of Grosvenor, Duke of Westminster in Belgravia; who deliver a quality 'product' and environment, with continued responsibility for stewardship and maintenance across the long term to benefit from increasing returns and growth. This approach suggests a need for new delivery models with extraordinary leaders; and opportunities for new players in the market (e.g. build to let, or self-procurement).

The final session on 'Linking Infrastructure to Development: experience from Australia and Canada' was delivered by **Professor Duncan MacLennan, St Andrews University**, who commented that "it is important to see planning as important!", and that it should be less about how to stop things happening and more about 'how to make things better!' Planning has a connected view of the world that understands spatial connections and links between environmental, social justice, and economic

agendas. The presentation noted that planning needs to be shaping and linking the big agendas in national and local government, and conversations should be focussing on infrastructure planning, investment and delivery.

Whilst noting that placemaking policy is well developed and Scotland should be proud; nevertheless, big infrastructure investment is crucial to connecting cities. Planning for infrastructure should be more strategic, with a clearer approach about extracting and managing public gain; which hasn't been good, particularly in boom years. There needs to be a clearer understanding about where to invest and what the consequences are, and how to measure the economic impact of planning decisions. There is no compelling evidence of this happening at national level, but examples from Australia and Canada demonstrated evidence at city, state, and metropolitan level: it's not how much... but where it's put; there are huge variations in benefit.

National spatial planning for infrastructure needs to connect national to local interest. Instead of talking in rough generalities we need to plan coherently and demonstrate the geography of how and why money is being spent, and how we are planning to deliver positive change. We need to build platforms across public and private, and between national and local governance to foster clear purpose.

Professor MacLennan claimed there is no strategic vision for how Scotland might change, and Parliament has to raise the game. Politics has to be informed and rise above narrow interest, be open and transparent, and take an integrated view on infrastructure. He suggested a need to build on the success of Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to

- Shape an expert board
- Develop technical financial delivery and research support
- Select proposals for ministerial approval
- Align national and local infrastructure
- Assess new metropolitan or city investment plans
- Evaluate 'infrastructure deals'
- Report on outcomes regularly

This approach needs to be replicated at local scale. There must be an investment plan along with any spatial development plan that links with community planning; there needs to be a debate about where capital spend should go and better spatial management of scarce capital. This implies re-defining, re-emphasising role for spatial planning and spatial management involving investment strategy; planning cultures and competences need to change.