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“Housing is the single most important building type in terms of influencing the quality of people’s day to day lives. Skilled design will add value to all housing developments...”

From Placemaking Issues - Housing: Process: The importance of design

**Text: Placemaking Issues - Housing**

This page compiles the Placemaking issues text which appears on the main site, as one downloadable piece. The issues identified have been drawn from project reviews carried out by A+DS, and which we hope can provide positive direction to future projects.

The following text includes points specific to **Housing**, while Key Placemaking Issues, which refer to all project types, can be downloaded separately.

The intention is that the piece below develops over time, and becomes populated with examples of good practice as these emerge in order to form a live and expanding resource. If you are aware of examples of where things referred to have been done well we would be pleased to hear from you at [design.forum@ads.org.uk](mailto:design.forum@ads.org.uk)

**INTRODUCTION**

New housing, whether one-off or procured in volume, has the potential to create benefit to house buyers, residents, neighbouring communities, businesses, and the environment in which it exists. Good design can assist in achieving such benefits and maximising their potential, however certain qualitative aims need to be incorporated from the outset and to inform decisions such as site selection, land acquisition and the commissioning of consultants as well as the more obvious and subsequent matters such as layout or house design.

**PROCESS**

**The importance of design**

Housing is the single most important building type in terms of influencing the quality of people’s day to day lives. Skilled design will add value to all housing developments, whether on urban sites, in areas of high cultural value or simply providing for a new or extended resident community.

### **A collaborative approach to design is key to placemaking**

Collaboration between design disciplines is essential such that, for example, civil engineers do not overly influence street design, nor landscape architects the design of parks and open space, nor architects the plot design. Effective site-specific design requires collaborative working between disciplines, with at its heart the creation of places which enhance the lives of those who will live there and maximise the integration with the existing place.

### **Socio-economic integration**

Community participation in design increasingly informs the form and character of new housing. Participative design should form part of a process of enquiry and testing of design proposals, for example as part of a Pre-application Consultation (PAC), to help ensure that local needs are met, conflicts avoided and best value is gained for the local area in terms of socio-economic regeneration.

## **STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

### **Recognising the value of urban design**

Urban design considerations affect the design of all scales of housing. Concepts of urban design such as permeability, legibility, identity, enclosure, activation and passive surveillance need to be properly understood such that architects, policymakers and developers can apply their relevance to the benefit of those whose lives will be improved by them.

### **Making integrated communities**

We need to learn the lessons from zonal planning and the historic effect of the social segregation of suburban communities. Guidance on provision of tenure blind housing, i.e. providing affordable or social housing that is fully integrated with and preferably indistinguishable from private housing, sets out as its intent the avoidance of segregation, and potential ghettoization, of any part of the community.

### **Mix affects car-dependency**

In order to reduce the outcome of creating a totally car-dependent lifestyle, new housing has the potential either to provide good access to local services and employment and/or to incorporate home offices, small business space or otherwise a mix of uses on site.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Site-specific climatic design**

Each site will have unique characteristics that can influence both the architecture of house types and equally significantly the overall layout and massing of buildings, alignment of streets, orientation of gardens, shelter for community open space and strategic location of woodland.

There needs to be a balance between the climatic design of individual houses and the overall appreciation of the site layout. Solar orientation should be considered for the individual house but also for the layout of inside/outside space, and also the implications for the attractiveness of the street.

### **Energy Performance Standards**

Placemaking, social and economic sustainability criteria and climatic design are part of a wider picture of sustainable housing design that need to be considered in conjunction with Building Standards relating to the energy performance of building fabric, the potential of a site for harvesting renewable energy sources, and the selection of materials with greater longevity or low embodied energy.

For further information, read the **Communities Scotland Sustainable Housing Design Guide**.

## CONTEXT + LAYOUT

### **Analysing and integrating with the surrounding landscape form**

The layout of streets, routes, paths, playgrounds and parks in new housing should be informed by a close analysis of, and response to, the form, visual links, topography, vegetation and other characteristic natural structures of the immediate and wider landscape. This in turn will make the public realm more accessible, more likely to be used, and hence assist with health and sustainable transport objectives.

### **A coherent urban structure**

In order to nurture a sense of identity and hence the development of communities, it is necessary that designers are briefed and enabled to find a suitably coherent form for each site, locality or climatic/topographic condition, beyond the limitations of individual private houses. Rural, suburban or urban housing which has a collective character either forming streets and squares or, for example, by forming sheltered enclosures within the wider landscape, has the capacity to link and integrate to form recognisable and valued places.

### **Avoid backs onto parks**

Layouts which avoid gardens backing onto public space wherever possible, while at the same time providing public space with adequate surveillance by, and interaction with, residents, are most likely to be successful. Where gardens backing on to landscape tracts are unavoidable, robust boundaries such as garden walls or dense planting will assist in defining such boundaries.

### **Parking should not dominate the public realm**

Parking can be integrated with a layout and discreetly handled such that it does not dominate the public realm. This needs to be balanced, however, with the loss of activity which the creation of a secondary infrastructure of rear parking courts or lanes giving access to remote parking, creates. The solution is likely to be found by balancing these factors.

## BUILT FORM

### **Studying and responding to existing built form**

Study and a proper understanding of the form, character, density, scale and material of built form, architecture and morphology of local buildings, townscape or other indigenous built typologies will usefully influence the integration of new housing. This need not lead to a historical pastiche, rather a site-specific architectural language which in turn creates a sense of place, which in turn reinforces communities..

### **Claiming back residential streets for communities**

New forms of street, deriving from common practice in Scandinavian and Dutch neighbourhoods can reclaim residential streets as attractive and liveable pedestrian environments bringing activity and vitality to residential areas with numerous environmental, health and social benefits. The principles are now embedded in Scotland through national urban design and roads policies. These are incorporated in **Designing Places** and **Designing Streets** policy documents

### **Valuing streets as places**

Streets, squares, parks and routes have the capacity to become shared outdoor living spaces, interacting with adjoining houses and consciously designed to be enjoyed. The application of Home Zones and the **Designing Streets** principles have a fundamental influence on previous roads policy and should shape residential streets beyond what was previously possible and towards the potential to create shared spaces which foster a sense of community.

### **Architecture's role in activating streets**

The function of key public spaces, closes, lanes and paths can be supported by interactive architecture, for example windows and doors to the street for passive surveillance, or shopfronts and entrances at local centres and High Streets.

Where activity which includes for example cafes, communal eating or socialising spaces, and children playing out, can spill out onto a properly designed shared-surface street, there is clear potential for community enhancement.

### **Design is the Critical Interface**

The interaction between indoor and outdoor uses and spaces is critical for the attractiveness of the public realm, and hence the likelihood of it becoming a safe and well used place. The floor plans and internal layout of each individual house or house type has a key role in providing for this interaction, as does the proximity of the house type to the street, and the boundary edge treatment between the two.

## Image credits

Image 1: Image: Andrew Lee - Design: Gokay Deveci

Image 2: A+DS



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The above is extracted from the Architecture and Design Scotland website Àite. Content should be read in the context described within the main website: [www.ads.org.uk/designforum/aite](http://www.ads.org.uk/designforum/aite)

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